

December 24, 1989

Record of Conversation with US Ambassador to the USSR, J. Matlock

Citation:

"Record of Conversation with US Ambassador to the USSR, J. Matlock", December 24, 1989, Wilson Center Digital Archive, Diplomaticeskii vestnik, no. 21/22, November 1994, pp. 74-79. Translated by Vladislav Zubok.
<https://wilson-center-digital-archive.dvincitest.com/document/111575>

Summary:

Record of conversation with US Ambassador to the USSR, J. Matlock regarding the situation in Romania, providing humanitarian aid to Romania, the evacuation of Soviet citizens, and the non-intervention policy by the Soviet Union

Original Language:

Russian

Contents:

Translation - English

From the diary of ABOIMOV I.P.
25 December 1989

Record of conversation
with U.S. Ambassador to the USSR, J. MATLOCK
24 December 1989

I received U.S. Ambassador J. Matlock at his request.

Referring to instructions received from Washington, the Ambassador said that, in the opinion of the American leadership, the Soviet Union and the United States should continue the exchange of opinions with regard to the events in Romania. The situation in Romania still is very uncertain. The American side is very concerned by the fact that warfare between the forces of state security and army units continues, and casualties among the civilian population are mounting. In this regard Matlock referred to the positive significance of the fact that the opinions of the Soviet Union and the United States coincided to the effect that there should be support given to the group that is trying to govern Romania and to fulfill the will of the Romanian people.

Then the American presented the following thought. The United States paid attention to the conviction expressed by the Soviet Union that military intervention is out of question. With equal interest the United States regarded the declaration of the Soviet government about its readiness to give immediate humanitarian assistance to the Romanian people. The American side would be greatly interested to hear the Soviet assessment of the developments in Romania, as well as the opinion of the Soviet side with regard to the most effective ways of supporting the Romanian people and the new leadership of Romania....

I informed the Ambassador that earlier, in addition to the Declaration of the Soviet government, a TASS Declaration was published. This step by our side was necessitated by grave concern over the very tense situation around the house populated by officials of the Soviet trade mission in Bucharest. It turned out to be in the epicenter of combat and for some time was partially seized by the terrorist forces. Only by the end of the day were they dispersed and we could evacuate the inhabitants from the house. I drew the attention of the American to the fact that among them two people were lightly wounded, and not one-as it was earlier reported. Now these people are located on the territory of the Soviet Embassy.

At the present moment the main task is to carry out the evacuation of Soviet citizens from Romania, first of all women and children. I informed the U.S. Ambassador of those options that are under consideration....

We maintain contact with representatives of the new Romanian leadership, if only via telephone. We informed them about our steps directed at giving humanitarian assistance to the Romanian population. Several times we inquired of the new leadership of Romania about what urgent needs they have. We received no clear answer to our question. It looks like the Front's Council still lacks clear ideas on this score.

With regard to the question raised by the American about the most effective approaches to the organization of humanitarian assistance to Romania, I repeated that there is no full clarity about it. The Soviet Union is carrying out measures to prepare such assistance, and its practical implementation, according to its own understanding of Romania's needs.

We informed the new Romanian leadership and also informed the International Red Cross Committee and the International Health Organization that we had set up hospitals in the frontier cities of the Soviet Union to receive wounded from Romania. In Moldavia they are already expecting the first group of 600 wounded.

About the means of assistance. The first load valued at a half million rubles (11 rail-cars) will be sent by rail. Trains in Romania still function. In addition, we gave instruction to the leadership of Moldavia to get in touch with border districts in Romania and clarify two issues. First, what do they need most. Second, to ask for their advice as to the best way to transport the loads.

To finish the exposition of our thoughts on the situation in Romania, I remarked that we are in close contact on these questions with our Warsaw Treaty allies as well as with all other states that approach us. So we take as a positive sign the desire of the American side to exchange opinions. We consider contacts of this kind very useful.

Reacting to our words, Matlock thought that now the United States is seeking optimal ways of cooperation in order to give assistance to Romania. According to Matlock, the United States would be ready to give assistance in medicine and food, as well as in logistics of transporting this assistance. In this context the American ambassador made the following request. If the Soviet side develops some ideas on this score, the American side is very interested in being kept up to date.

I responded that naturally we would be ready at any moment to share our considerations with the American side.

Then Matlock touched on the issue that, apparently, he wanted to raise from the very beginning of the conversation. The Administration, he said, is very interested in knowing if the possibility of military assistance by the Soviet Union to the Romanian National Salvation Front is totally out of question. Matlock suggested the following option: what would the Soviet Union do if an appropriate appeal came from the Front? Simultaneously, the Ambassador hinted at the idea, apparently on instructions from Washington. He let us know that under the present circumstances the military involvement of the Soviet Union in Romanian affairs might not be regarded in the context of "the Brezhnev doctrine."

To this sounding out by the American I gave the entirely clear and unequivocal answer, presenting our principled position. I declared that we did not visualize, even theoretically, such a scenario. We stand against any interference in the domestic affairs of other states and we intend to pursue this line firmly and without deviations. Thus, the American side may consider that "the Brezhnev doctrine" is now theirs as our gift.

Developing this thesis further, as a clarification, I drew the interlocutor's attention to the fact that it was on the basis of these considerations that the Soviet Union was and still is against convening the Security Council (SC) to consider the situation in Romania.

The American, however, immediately inquired what would be the Soviet reaction if the National Salvation Front itself appeals to convene the SC.

I said that we are still not ready to contemplate such a hypothetical possibility.

In the end both sides confirmed the positive evaluation of the exchange of opinions that took place. They expressed support of continuing contacts with regard to the rapidly changing situation in Romania.

Participants of the meeting included deputy head of the Directorate of the USA and Canada I.N. Podrazhanets, third secretary of the DUSAandC [Directorate of USA and Canada in the Soviet Foreign Ministry] N.N. Spassky and first secretary of the U.S. embassy in Moscow J. Shoemaker.

Deputy minister of Foreign Affairs of the USSR I. ABOIMOV