

**October 29, 1990**  
**Record of a Conversation Between M. S. Gorbachev  
and President of France, F. Mitterrand**

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**Summary:**

Record of conversation between Mikhail Gorbachev and Francois Mitterrand, on the subject of Saddam Hussein and his invasion of Kuwait. Both leaders stress the importance of avoiding military conflict and the necessity of a united front for the permanent members of the UN Security Council in order to achieve this. Mitterrand notes his apprehension over the US perception of UN Charter Article 51 and the possibility US initiation of hostilities.

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Russian

**Contents:**

Translation - English

## RECORD OF A CONVERSATION

between M.S. Gorbachev and the President of France, F. Mitterrand

29 October 1990, Rambouie

F. MITTERRAND. Permit me to express my satisfaction in regard to the fact that I am receiving you in a different place than the Elysees palace, which will allow you to look at France from a somewhat different point of view.

M.S. GORBACHEV. This morning at 5 o'clock, a telegram was received from E.M. Primakov. It states that on Sunday, 28 October, he held talks with practically the entire leadership of Iraq, and afterwards for an hour, [had a] one-on-one conversation with Saddam Hussein.

As it follows from the conversation with the Iraqi president, he is still hoping for some sort of division between the permanent members of the UN Security Council.

Primakov told Hussein that he could hardly hope for a "package resolution" to the situation, which has arisen in the region according to the principle of a strict linkage between the Kuwait crisis and the resolution of other problems in the region.

It is curious that at this stage of the conflict in the Persian Gulf, Hussein firmly states that, being devoted to a search for a peaceful way out of the existing situation, he also will not agree to a resolution which involves his capitulation. Moreover, he refuses point-blank to entertain any proposals which might entail his public humiliation in connection with a withdrawal of Iraqi troops from Kuwait.

One gets the impression that Hussein has been seized with his own sort of "idée fixe." He is convinced that a conspiracy has been laid down against Iraq...

[Three pages omitted in the original.]

If the Soviet and French presidents define their positions on the crisis in Kuwait, for instance, in the course of a press-conference it would be natural to mention the hostages. We will have to underscore the desirability of a peaceful settlement, which is also wholly logical. In this way, up to this point we have no differences with the draft put forward by Hussein. But it is obvious that he is proposing these elements with only one goal in mind - to make sure that we agree with the final point of his proposal and condemn the use of force. But we cannot at all agree to that. Our position is unchanged. A settlement will have to take place on the basis of the UN principles.

M.S. GORBACHEV. When Primakov, reacting to the aforementioned proposal, said that he could hardly expect the presidents of the USSR and France to accept such a formulation, the Iraqi interrogators stated: we are ready to discuss any proposals by the Soviet and French presidents and are ready to act in the spirit of openness.

F. MITTERRAND. Talking about the USA's position on this issue, the difference in tone, style, and concrete points in comparison with our approaches should be noted. But on the essentials of the issue, we have no disagreements with the Americans. We believe that one must preserve a kind of activity which, naturally, does not signify servility. Speaking of tone and style, it should be characterized by coolness and calm.

M.S. GORBACHEV. I would agree with such an approach. But that is not for publicity.

F. MITTERRAND. Not at all.

M.S. GORBACHEV. Hussein as before is trying to make use of the special relations between his country and the USSR and France which have been laid down over many years in order to cause a split, a chink in the common front of the permanent member of the UN Security Council. I do not think that that evidences far-sightedness.

You are right: if we are now asked the relevant questions at the press-conference - and I am personally being interrogated by journalists in connection with Primakov's mission, - then we should give primacy to the desirability of joint actions in keeping with the collectively adopted resolutions of the UN Security Council in relation to the Iraqi aggression.

I received a letter from George Bush on the issue of the crisis in the Persian Gulf, as well as a letter from Margaret Thatcher which was given to me yesterday on my return from visiting you in the Elysée palace. Thatcher wrote a short but severe letter. Bush and Thatcher, while not denying the significance of Primakov's mission, at the same time are speaking as if it in some way weakens the unity of the UN Security Council members' collective actions.

That is entirely out of keeping with reality. I always remember that we must not give any pretext for Iraq to hope for the appearance of a split, for any weakening of the unitary position of the UN Security Council in relation to his aggression against Kuwait. Primakov's mission is important in the sense that it made clear the chance for moving in the direction of a political settlement of the crisis, as I said to you yesterday. There can be no other way, since the only alternative to this is war.

You are right that we must show coolness and a maximal sense of responsibility, [must] seriously analyze every option which allows for an avoidance of the military path. The military option would inflict a blow to all of the political processes in international relations and would provoke a huge shock in the region, the resulting wave of which [otrazhennaia volna] would hit all of us, and would cause a deep split between the developed countries and the Arab world. The peoples would not forgive it.

I once again direct your attention to the fact that Hussein's position now is already not the same as it was two or three weeks ago.

F. MITTERRAND. That is evident.

M.S. GORBACHEV. We must act decisively, consistently, and must display unity while striving to avoid a military resolution.

F. MITTERRAND. That possibility is difficult to rule out a priori. We must not create dangerous illusions. As I said yesterday, war is unavoidable if it turns out not to be possible to break Hussein's will and if Bush and Thatcher do not want to listen to anything.

What is to be done? Figuratively speaking, when one must climb up, at first view, a completely smooth wall, one must find some sort of ledge or roughness which one could grab hold of. In other words, the task is to define a correcting [pravitel'naia] tactic.

In my view, we should define a short term and a long term plan.

The discussion and resolution of the entire complex of problems in the Near and Middle East, which would be the culmination of the entire process of settlement, should become a long-term prospect...

[Two pages omitted in the original.]

Unfortunately, so far neither the United States nor Great Britain is ready to agree with the necessity of a transitional phase in the resolution of the Kuwait issue. It is true that I have not spoken with them yet about this. It is necessary to secure agreement between their actions and those of France and the USSR in order to guarantee the unity of the UN Security Council. IN this way, we have room for maneuver. However, I note with concern the recent statements in the USA that from their point of view, Article 51 of the UN Charter justifies the use of force independently, without turning to the Security Council. This article lays out the right of each state "to individual or collective self-defense," that is, to legal self-defense and appeal to another state for aid in this aim. In the given concrete case, one can talk about the use of force by the United States in connection with a request from Saudi Arabia. The conclusion follows that the USA on its own, without an appeal to the UN Security Council, can decide to begin a war. In a manner of speaking, they become the "masters of war." In that case, we lose the trump card I have been speaking of and which would force the USA to turn to the Security Council of the UN to obtain agreement for their actions. In those conditions, understandably, it is difficult to talk about possible territorial concessions, or about any other issues.

M.S. GORBACHEV. Where do our disagreements with the USA and Great Britain begin? Judging from the letters of Bush and Thatcher that I have mentioned, we are united in our assessment of the situation. However, they consider allowing Hussein to save face and avoid humiliation to be unacceptable. Thus two options remain: to try to exclude Hussein from the political arena, which, in my view, is unrealistic for a series of reasons, or to go down the path to war. We must look the truth in the eyes - if we do not give Hussein anything, he will resort to extremes.

For that reason, we must continue to caution Hussein against provoking the use of force, while at the same time working with our partners in the spirit we discussed. Our partners are beginning to get nervous, to lose their cool, and I believe that this is wrong. After all, our actions have already allowed us to win the first battle. We have preserved our unity in the face of this act of banditry. Our steps have already begun to yield definite results and influence Hussein's position.

F. MITTERRAND. You are right.

M.S. GORBACHEV. We should also act in this mode [v etom kliuche] in the future while considering that the chances for a political settlement have begun to take shape, although it is true that so far those chances are very diffuse. We must press the necessity of following that particular with our partners on the Security Council. Hussein must be convinced that he has very little time left, that events can take a path that is much worse for him, that he must rely not on the success of his maneuvers, but must show realism and a desire for a political settlement.

If we assume the possibility of a political settlement, then your thoughts about short-term and long-term plans seem right to me. We must search for different political ways and mechanisms to find a solution. However, the most realistic way seems to be to draw in Arab organizations. A meeting of Arab countries could formulate ideas and demands directed to Hussein, and then all of the problems could

be resolved more easily - both the issue of Kuwait's future and the issue of restoring the authorities there, although...

[Subsequent pages omitted in the original].