

Exchange With Reporters on the Telephone Conversation with Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev

January 11, 1991

Q. Mr. President, what can you tell us about the Gorbachev phone call?

The President. We've had a very interesting morning here and a very interesting phone call with President Gorbachev, Prime Minister Toshiki Kaifu of Japan, and then a meeting with a lot of the Members of the House of Representatives on the Gulf situation. Now we're shifting our gears to this luncheon with two of our new Cabinet-level officers and, obviously, with one existing Cabinet member, Carla Hills, where our conversation will be both domestic and international. So, it's been a full day.

On the Gorbachev phone call, I won't give you the details of it, but it is very important as we move down the path here that we stay in close touch. And I was very pleased—this was his call to me, and it was a discussion of the Gulf situation mainly. We also talked about the internal problems that he's facing. But I think the very fact he called in the true spirit of consultation says a lot not just about the U.S.-Soviet relationship but about the fact that it is not simply Iraq versus the United States; it is Iraq, indeed, versus the whole world. I think that's the symbolism of Mr. Gorbachev's call. And he had some ideas he wanted to discuss with me. And I respect his confidentiality, but it's the best sense of consultation. We are leaving no stone unturned to try to find a peaceful resolution of this question.

Q. TASS [Soviet news agency] said, Mr. President, that the conversation would be continued.

The President. Well, as you may know, I left out one meeting, and that is that I did meet with the Soviet Ambassador here following the Gorbachev call. But whether President Gorbachev and I talk again I'm not—we didn't set a time. Perhaps we will. We've been in touch, and I will continue to stay in touch with him and with other world leaders to see if we cannot resolve this matter peacefully.

I might, as long—take advantage of you all, but to say that I still feel that it would be very helpful to the last step for peace

if the Congress would move and would support the so-called U.N. resolutions that are before the House now and will be before the Senate.

Q. What about the crackdown on the Baltics?

The President. There was not great discussion of that. I did, as you know, make clear in the statement issued by our Press Secretary the fact that the United States feels that the use of force particularly in the Baltics would be counterproductive. There was some discussion of the internal affairs of the Soviet Union when I talked to Mr. Gorbachev. He knows of my position, that we view the Baltics differently. They were not incorporated. We feel that they have a very different standing than other Republics, and I reiterated my position on that.

But it was mainly about the Gulf, although we did talk about this. And, of course, I am very hopeful that they can find a way to resolve these extraordinarily complex problems without resorting to force.

Q. Did he tell you his plans for Lithuania, whether he's going to impose—

The President. We didn't go into any detail.

Q. There was some discussion, Mr. President, that when you and Mr. Gorbachev met in Paris there was a tacit understanding that before we went to war in the Gulf we would clear it with the Soviets.

The President. There was no tacit understanding, but I'll guarantee you I'm going to continue to stay in very close touch with all the key players here—the administration is; I can't do it all alone. But as I say, we talked to the Prime Minister of Japan this morning, and also to President Gorbachev. As you know, I had extensive consultations in the last few days with Prime Minister Major, President Mitterrand, Prime Minister Mulroney, and on and on.

So, there's no agreement. But the Soviet Union is very important in all of this, and they had a strong leadership role in the