

Yeltsin was elected to that position on June 12, 1991. With his support, the Russian Supreme Soviet approved the draft Union Treaty and by mid-July all of the other eight republic Supreme Soviets except the Ukraine had done so, as well as the USSR Supreme Soviet. The Ukraine set its vote for December 1. The draft treaty was published on July 23, and it was announced that signature of the treaty would take place on August 20.

CIA warned us at the White House that once the signing date was set, a deadline of sorts would be established for the conservatives to act. The changes that would follow signature, together with public sentiment, would make action after that date much more difficult. Scowcroft and I had always split Bush's August vacation in Maine, with me taking the first half. Thus it fell to me on August 17 to hand the President his CIA *President's Daily Brief*, which warned of the strong chance that the conservatives would act within the next few days. It said, "The danger is growing that hardliners will precipitate large-scale violence" and described their efforts to prepare for an attempt to seize power. We were sitting on the deck of Bush's house looking out to the Atlantic. He asked me if I thought the situation was serious and if the Agency's warning was valid. I explained the meaning of the August 20 signing ceremony, and said I thought he should take the *PDB* warning quite seriously.

I returned to Washington the next day, a Sunday, and Scowcroft took my place in Kennebunkport. He always stayed up late, and at about 11:30 P.M. called me to say he had heard on CNN about a possible coup in Moscow. Had I heard anything and would I check with CIA? Through the night, we learned more about the house arrest of Gorbachev and the identity of the coup leaders. The leaders of the military, KGB, Interior Ministry, and the party all seemed involved.

Success of the coup seemed assured based on past events in the USSR. By Monday morning, August 19, French President Mitterrand had publicly as much as accepted the coup as a done deal. Bush's first statement, early in the morning, was equivocal but disapproving. The realities of power were (and are) such that there was no point in needlessly antagonizing a new and potentially unstable government with tens of thousands of nuclear warheads. Bush decided to return to Washington.

As the morning progressed, however, our sense in Washington was that something didn't smell right, something was amiss in Moscow. Why were all telephone and fax lines in and out of Moscow