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Mr. President,

The media recently reported that your patience is running out on Lithuania, a threat, so to speak, for Mr Gorbachev to behave himself. As the White House runs a special service to screen the many letters it receives daily, I hope it will let you see these few lines in which I try to bring into perspective why patience, at this juncture, is more than necessary. Indeed you have said so on other occasions.

After the Tienamen massacre of students in Beijing you, Mr President, exerted restraint in your reaction, knowing full well, given your deep personal knowledge of this country, that large scale retaliation measures would be counterproductive. This was sound political judgement, and the statesman-like capacity to resist playing up the Rambo role that U.S. tabloids so cherish, was largely understood and respected. Yet the events in China did not deserve the same degree of sensitivity as those in Russia now do.

Admittedly President Gorbachev has launched perestroika, improved dramatically the human rights environment in his country, initiated serious arms cut initiatives and blessed the liberalization process in Eastern Europe. This is an impressive record by all accounts and public opinion, especially in Western Europe but also in the USA, has recognized this. He certainly has a greater claim to the Nobel Peace Prize, in terms of the effectiveness of his actions, than Henry Kissinger or the Dalai Lama. If Vietnamese troops withdrew from Cambodia, if the Berlin Wall fell, if Ethiopia will soon cease to bomb Eritreans, if Poland recognizes Israel, if spring resurrects in Prague, we can thank Gorbachev. Of course, all this represents the triumph of values which inspired US policy. What is it exactly, Mister President, that you are impatient about ?

His Excellency
Mr. George Bush
President of the United States
The White House
Washington D.C.

(This letter was written the
day Bush changed
his position in favour
of Gorbachev)

O yes, Lithuania! We should expect President Gorbachev to say : "please Lithuania and please Latvia and Estonia, and please Ukraine and Azerbaijan, kindly secede from the Soviet Union because Mr Bush is getting impatient."

I don't think he can do this. But I think that, while you may be short on patience, he is short of time. The changes pressed upon the Soviet society, the party, the army, the bureaucracy are enormous. This process of perestroika deserves the West's support and understanding; not destabilisation. I know you agree, but to consolidate that agreement, please consider the following.

The Chinese do not enjoy being pushed around and neither do the Russians. Ask Charles XII of Sweden, Napoleon and Hitler. When it comes to the territory of the Motherland, the Russians do not compromise. Yes, there are ethnic disparities but this is why the issue is so sensitive and foreigners should not meddle in it. The Baltic republics are, no doubt, a special case. But it must be addressed within the framework of a mutually agreed, gradual constitutional process. "Moscow says that Lithuania can have its independence, but only by following the ground rules laid out in a new secession law enacted early this month." (The New York Times, April 24, 1990).

By forcing the pace of change at a time when President Gorbachev has already so much on his plate, Vilnius is acting foolheartedly. Or, may be, this is a gamble to force your hand. Please, resist the plot: nobody wants people to die for Vilnius. When Eisenhower verbally supported the insurrection, in 1956, he encouraged the Budapest uprising and consequent bloodbath.

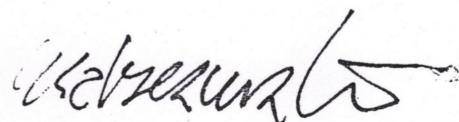
When the Southern States seceded from the Union, Abraham Lincoln did not need, nor did he appreciate, the lectures from the European powers, which, in those days, wished to see a smaller USA. After all, California and Texas had been, once upon a time, Mexican territories. Similarly, if Hawaii would like to secede from the U.S., would you need a sermon from Moscow? The fact is that territorial modifications are such a sensitive issue that they are the old stuff of war and peace. Gorbachev, as a liberal minded reformer, gave away Soviet dominion over Eastern Europe. We cannot reasonably expect him to do the same for territories within the Union on terms that don't meet his country's requirements.

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The overriding concern is to maintain the momentum of East-West cooperation and goodwill for greater freedom and prosperity. At the end of the day, Lithuania would benefit much more. Willingness to progress is there. On April 23, the Kremlin spokesman said: "Yesterday, somebody from Lithuania was saying 'I'd rather die than sacrifice my freedom'. There is no need to sacrifice freedom. There is only how to move in that direction. They want to move yesterday. But you see, it's unrealistic." More than ever perhaps, this is the time when common sense -and not cold war ideology - must inspire U.S. foreign policy.

I hope you could share these views with millions of American who wish the success of Gorbachev's reforms in the USSR.

Accept, Mr. President, the expression of my highest consideration.



Gregoire de Kalbermatten