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MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Bilateral Meeting with President Jacques Chirac of France

PARTICIPANTS: The President
Warren Christopher, Secretary of State
Anthony Lake, Assistant to the President
for National Security Affairs
Pamela Harriman, Ambassador to France
Alexander Vershbow, Senior Director for
European Affairs, NSC Staff, NotetakerFrance
Jacques Chirac, President
Herve De Charette, Foreign Minister
Jacques Andreani, Ambassador to the U.S.
Jean-David Levitte, Diplomatic AdviserDATE, TIME June 14, 1995, 2:45 p.m. - 3:37 p.m.
AND PLACE: Oval Office

President Chirac: Thank you for receiving me. I would like to ask one question. We received information a few hours ago about a massing of Bosnian government troops in Sarajevo. We are worried by that. (C)

The President: You should be worried. Let me tell you what we know. I wanted to raise this in our discussions on Bosnia. The Bosnian government has been improving the strength of its forces. They believe they are quite strong now and are interested in launching an offensive to open the road to Sarajevo. Secretary Christopher has cautioned Prime Minister Silajdzic very strongly about the possible adverse consequences. We have told them that they could lose, that they could put the peacekeepers in more danger, that this could lead to more shelling of Sarajevo, that it could endanger the continued existence of UNPROFOR. We don't know if this message had any impact on Silajdzic or others in his government. They are getting a lot of encouragement here from the new Republicans in Congress who are pushing for a unilateral

- lifting of the arms embargo. They know I intend to veto that and that they cannot override my veto -- at least in the Senate. But we are very concerned about the offensive. We don't know if it will go forward, but we are trying to discourage it, particularly as it could occur during the G-7 Summit. (S)

President Chirac: The situation is very dangerous. If they launch the offensive, the Serbs will counterattack all over the country and the Serbs will win. There are a lots of problems for UNPROFOR and for the United States if the Bosnians are defeated. If what the Senators are saying is true, many here will ask for U.S. help to prevent the defeat of the Bosnians. This will be very dangerous. You should use all your power to avoid such an initiative. I understand you can't order the Bosnians what to do, but you should do as much as possible. (S)

The President: We will do whatever we can. They honestly believe that they can defeat the Serbs and that they can force a lifting of the arms embargo. They believe that if they can get heavy weapons and get trained on them, they could use them before the Bosnian Serbs are able to overwhelm them with their artillery. Our military believes that this is absolutely wrong and we have told them so repeatedly. But right now they are lifted by the fact that they have improved their capability over the past months. (S)

President Chirac: This means that they have been getting arms and that the embargo isn't working. (S)

The President: They are also emboldened by all the talk in Congress about unilateral lift. But we have told them repeatedly that they can't win and that I will veto unilateral lift. We have told them that we support the UN mission and that we are determined to work in partnership with our allies -- especially the UK and France -- to strengthen UNPROFOR. Maybe they believe that they can open the road without any other consequences. Maybe they think that this will speed the day of lifting the arms embargo. But we are doing what we can to discourage this. (S)

President Chirac: They may launch the offensive during the G-7 Summit. (S)

The President: We think they may do this in order to focus the attention of the world on Bosnia, and to put the heat on all of us during the G-7. Of course, it would be good to get the road opened. But if they launch the offensive, the Serbs will not be seen by the Russians and others as in the wrong when they react. (S)

Secretary Christopher: Our latest intelligence is that the Bosnians are not quite ready to launch the offensive and may wait until the 20th or 21st, but they could go earlier than this. I told Silajdzic that if they do, they will be on their own. We will not come to their rescue if they start something and then get a black eye. (S)

The President: If this information is right and they aren't going to be ready during the G-7, it will give us more time to work on them. (S)

President Chirac: We have the same information as you. I was informed that a few hours ago the concentration of forces was getting bigger and bigger as we speak. (S)

The President: I suggest we put the issue of the Bosnian offensive to the side and come back to it later. I would like to talk about the status of the Rapid Reaction Force. I will do all I can to deal with the offensive, but every day more and more members of Congress want to force the unilateral lifting of the arms embargo. You may have had an impact in your discussion with the Senators and Congressmen over lunch. I understand you told them what I have been saying for months. (S)

President Chirac: I doubt I had much effect. (S)

The President: You are there on the ground and have a first-hand appreciation of the situation. (S)

President Chirac: I can only say, before leaving the subject of the offensive, that in the current circumstances it would be good to have the UN Security Council Resolution on the Rapid Reaction Force enacted tomorrow. They are ready in New York. John Major asked me to say that everything is completely ready. The Russians will support it. We just need the "yes" vote of the United States. We should do this before the G-7. It will be a major signal, even though I know you have problems with the Congress. (S)

The President: The main issue with the Congress is the fact that, under the proposal, we would be obliged to fund 30 percent of the Rapid Reaction Force, and Congress would have to appropriate the funds. This new Congress is the most isolationist Congress since the 1930s. Last night I sent them another budget with a clear plan to balance the budget over 10 years. It would provide for cuts in overall spending -- except for defense, retirement and healthcare for the elderly -- by 20% across the board in real dollars (or 40% without inflation). It would hold on to all of our foreign affairs investments and increase spending on education. You must see this issue in that

context. I would vote like this [snapping his fingers] if I didn't have to get the money. If we voted tomorrow, it could undermine our ability to keep the word of the United States on funding of the Rapid Reaction Force, and it could cause more trouble. That is the only issue. (C)

The head of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, Ben Gilman -- a pretty good guy, not a reactionary -- has written to me on this. A lot of people in the Senate are good on foreign affairs and they want to see us maintain our commitments. But we haven't figured out a strategy that would enable us to vote tomorrow in favor of the Rapid Reaction Force. There has been some change in the mission of the force since the original discussion at the Paris meeting. If I could figure out a way not to make things worse with the Congress, I would vote tomorrow. Our request for a delay is so that we can fully brief the Congress on why we support the Force and why the U.S. should finance part of it. Ambassador Harriman knows well that every Senator believes he or she should be President. If we voted for the Rapid Reaction Force without telling them, they would almost certainly deny me the funds. (C)

If you said to me that it would be worth risking the funds, then I would consider voting tomorrow. But if you can give me two days to allow the Congress to beat up on the Secretary and the National Security Adviser, to tell us how terrible Bosnia is, and to make speeches, it would increase the chances that I could fund the force. (C)

But again, if in your judgment, you need the vote tomorrow because something bad could happen, and you are ready to increase the risk that I can't pay, then tell me. You have stuck your neck out time and time again. I support the Rapid Reaction Force and want to do the right thing. If we have an agreement, I want to help. But if we go to a vote tomorrow, it would reduce the chances substantially that I can persuade Congress to fund it. (C)

President Chirac: There are two problems, political and financial. Politically, everyone including the Russians is ready to vote for the resolution. The situation in Bosnia being what it is, I think we should approve the resolution tomorrow -- that is, before the G-7 Summit. On the financial problem, maybe you cannot get the funds from the Congress to pay the U.S. share. We will see. (C)

The President: Ours is a pretty big share -- 31 percent. If we do it, I would like to do it right. (C)

President Chirac: But we are in such a situation that I will take the risk. (C)

The President: So you would choose the political benefit now, even with an increased financial risk? (C)

President Chirac: Yes, I'll take the financial risk, although I know you will do your utmost to get funding. (C)

Secretary Christopher: I think that if we go ahead without consulting the Congress, we risk incurring great outrage on the Hill. I received the most angry letter I have ever received from Gilman. He was outraged that we would go ahead with the resolution without consulting Congress. It will be difficult to get support in the best of circumstances. You helped a lot with your explanation of the Rapid Reaction Force at today's lunch with the Congressional leaders. But if, on top of the normal difficulties we face, we added the discourtesy of failing to consult, it would almost guarantee the failure to secure funding, coupled with the risk of a negative Congressional resolution. (C)

The President: Chris, what consultations are planned on the Hill? (C)

Secretary Christopher: We will talk to all the committee chairmen, the leadership, and the chairmen of the Appropriation and Foreign Affairs Committees. (C)

The President: Is there any chance that we could consult on an emergency basis, building on the discussion at the lunch today? (C)

Secretary Christopher: I would like to assess that recommendation. President Chirac made some progress at lunch with Lugar, Nunn, McCain and others -- many of the key Senators were there. We should see how they feel in the wake of that discussion. I know that President Chirac said that he and John Major don't understand the need for delay. But there has been great confusion engendered by two factors. First, we originally thought that the Rapid Reaction Force would involve national forces; this was our understanding at the Paris Defense Ministers' meeting. Second, there were statements by the UN last weekend -- especially by Akashi -- which drove our Congress up the wall. Those statements spoke of not doing anything without the consent of the Bosnian Serbs. Your conversation with the Congressmen helped clarify that and I understand you will be seeing Dole and Gingrich this afternoon. These two issues have added to our financial problems, so we need to consult carefully and let it settle in. (C)

President Chirac: Dole asked to meet me this afternoon and I will see what I can do. (C)

The President: Very good. From the day I took office, Dole has been encouraging the Bosnian government to ignore what I want to do and pushing for an independent strategy to lift the arms embargo. When you see him, you should tell him your position on the arms embargo. On the issue of the Rapid Reaction Force, you should tell Dole that whatever he may think about the arms embargo and UNPROFOR, we need the Rapid Reaction Force and we should never be in a position where our forces can be taken hostage... (C)

President Chirac: ...or humiliated. (C)

The President: I am going to say that I support President Chirac's efforts and back the Rapid Reaction Force, and that I believe we should pay a partial share of the cost because, as long as our Allies are there, we have to protect our people. We need to separate the Rapid Reaction Force in Dole's mind from his desire to lift the arms embargo. If we play on the national honor issue, on the importance of not having our people captured, we have a chance of persuading him. Gingrich has been generally more supportive of our foreign policy. He is not an isolationist, but he is looking for ways to please his party on certain foreign policy issues. So I would make the same arguments to Gingrich. He will be very moved by the argument regarding protecting the pride of French and British forces... (C)

President Chirac: ...and that of other UNPROFOR contributors... (C)

The President: ...and the integrity of the UN presence, as well as the safety of the troops. This will resonate with them. After your meeting, we will take soundings. When you return to dinner tonight, you can report on your talks and we can assess where we are. Okay? (C)

President Chirac: Okay. (U)

The President: I understand what you are saying about how good it would be to have a vote before the G-7 Summit. (C)

President Chirac: It will be very useful vis-a-vis the Serbs. It will put big pressure on Milosevic. I told him that these people are terrorists -- they took hostages and attacked unarmed people. I said that time is running against them. I told Milosevic that we French weren't anti-Serb, but are becoming

anti-Serb. I think I made a big impression on him. When we decided on the Rapid Reaction Force, I called Milosevic and told him that it wasn't designed to attack anyone, but to protect UNPROFOR. I told him that he must tell the Bosnian Serbs that if they humiliate us as they have done by taking hostages, we are going to react. I explained that this would be bad for him. I said that we had been previously in favor of suspending the sanctions, but now I was less and less in favor of that. This also made a big impression on Milosevic. Mr. Frasure had almost succeeded in getting recognition of Bosnia. This could have been a very important step toward peace but he didn't get there. If the Serbs get the impression that the Americans are dragging their feet on the Rapid Reaction Force, we will only encourage them. We will be sending contradictory signals. (C)

I am under a lot of pressure (as is John Major) to adopt the resolution. We have persuaded Yeltsin to agree. If the U.S. slows the pace at the UN, it will give Yeltsin and Milosevic more oxygen. I understand your problems with the Congress. We could vote tomorrow and then Congress wouldn't fund it. That would be too bad. I understand the argument of Secretary Christopher about the discourtesy and the political consequences of not consulting. Only you can judge the importance of this. If I say to Dole and Gingrich as I did at lunch that their behavior is helping the Serbs and not the Bosnians, maybe this will help. (C)

The President: Yes, say that to Dole. I will call both of them and we can see where we are tonight. Maybe we can do it. If you tell them that if the U.S. isn't able to vote tomorrow for the Rapid Reaction Force (which involves no U.S. ground forces), it will play into the hands of the Serbs, that could help. (C)

Secretary Christopher: They will be very impressed by that argument. (C)

President Chirac: Plus it is true. I have called Milosevic every two days. We have succeeded in getting the release of the hostages because of the pressure all of us put on Milosevic. We should not leave them any escape route. Of course, if the Bosnians attack, that will introduce a new element into the problem. God knows what it will lead to. (C)

The President: We will work on this today. (C)

President Chirac: I know we have little time left and President Santer is waiting around the corner, but I wanted to talk about U.S. disengagement from aid to the developing countries. We are very worried about this. We are talking about countries who need assistance and whose population is increasing fast. If we don't

create the means of keeping their population in their own countries, we will have a real problem. Today the European Union, which has roughly the same GNP as the United States, is making three times the effort in foreign assistance. Our impression is that you are moving backwards based on the present behavior of the Republicans. We find this very worrying and will raise this at Halifax. (C)

There is a question of replenishing the funds for the World Bank's International Development Association (IDA). We should support the resuscitation of the IDA. They do a beautiful job, unlike the United Nations. It would not be moral or acceptable in humanitarian terms to allow people to die of hunger. It would also be politically very dangerous. There too, I know you have problems with the Congress. (C)

The President: I've been trying for months to send a clear message that if the current legislation passes the House, I will veto it. This legislation is very restrictive on foreign assistance. I sent up a budget that would fulfill our obligations to the international financial institutions in full. The new budget, while making larger cuts, will still maintain our commitments. I want you to know that when we come to the end of the process -- in August or September -- I will be very firm in holding on to these programs. In the U.S. there is now no political constituency for foreign aid, but I agree that it is morally and politically the right thing to do. I will be firm and I think it is a battle that I will win. You should hammer anyone you see on Capitol Hill on this. Congress is very short-sighted. The American people want to balance the budget and cut foreign assistance because they believe we spend 15 percent on foreign aid. The reality is that we only spend one-tenth of that amount. (C)

President Chirac: I understand it's 1.5 percent. (C)

The President: It's about one percent of our budget. If you ask the people what we should be spending they say about three percent of the budget. People don't know the facts, and Congress shouldn't be giving in to isolationism. I am determined to fight and believe I will win. You should say exactly what you told me to Congressional leaders. They know it is true. Dole and Gingrich know the importance of this issue. (C)

President Chirac: The cuts would be very bad for the U.S. image in the world. (C)

The President: Dole wants to be President. How does he expect to restore the cuts if he becomes President? But I believe I

will win, although it is good for you to help press on this issue.

President Chirac: There are some other subjects we could discuss. Perhaps we can discuss European security architecture in the meeting with Santer. (C)

Secretary Christopher: There is a danger that Bosnia will hijack the Halifax Summit. The way for us to avoid this is to stay very close together and not allow the press to pull us apart. One of the keys is saying that we have agreed that UNPROFOR should stay and that it would be tragic if UNPROFOR were to leave. We should say that the Rapid Reaction Force is the best insurance that UNPROFOR will stay. (C)

President Chirac: That is absolutely true and it is best to speak the truth. (U)

Secretary Christopher: That's right. We have to keep our stories straight. We also can say that we are continuing to seek a political solution with the new assistance of Carl Bildt. The three points are: UNPROFOR remains, we are strengthening UNPROFOR with the Rapid Reaction Force, and we are seeking a political solution. If we can maintain this consensus, we can keep the Summit from becoming a Bosnian Summit. (C)

President Chirac: I agree completely. If we are humiliated and there is no Rapid Reaction Force, we shall leave. And if we leave, you will have to help us. (C)

The President: Yes, but we do want to help if it becomes necessary. (C)

President Chirac: The Serbs will attack the Bosnians immediately and then they will seek our help. (C)

The President: I support what Secretary Christopher just said. When you won the election, I was very pleased because I believe that you would bring energy and greater unity to the European position. I have done what I could here to move our system to the point that we would be clearly committed if there had to be withdrawal, or if UN forces were isolated and needed our help short of withdrawal. My decisions caused a big stir. I had to make clear we are not offering a taxi service, but that we are morally obligated to help if conditions require assisting our allies. (C)

It is not possible for us to send ground forces, but I can't tell you how important it is that we try to maintain a united front -- not only publicly, but in what our advisers say to the media.

The press is full of stories in which Europeans are saying that the Americans are weak and divided. I am trying to get money for the Rapid Reaction Force and to do what I can so that you will have greater confidence. This task will be harder if there are stories coming out of other governments criticizing our position. Our press is out of step with our people on this issue. They are offended by the fact that there is a horrible problem in the heart of Europe and it is not being solved. Never mind that Northern Ireland took 25 years to solve, and the Middle East was deadlocked for five decades. The press believes that we could just snap our fingers and the Bosnian problem would go away. The press is looking all the time to divide us from our allies. So we need to stay together both officially and on background. (C)

President Chirac: I agree. We never asked the U.S. to come in on the ground except if we were forced to leave. We have decided to send the Rapid Reaction Force precisely in order that we do not have leave. The vulnerable position in which we found ourselves posed a choice: either to leave or to do something to permit us to stay. We chose option two. In speaking to one of the Senators at lunch, he asked whether this force was to permit UNPROFOR to withdraw. I said no, it was precisely the opposite, and he had a complete misunderstanding of our policy. We are sending the Rapid Reaction Force to ensure that we are respected. It is perfectly clear we are not asking the U.S. to come in on the ground. We are asking two things: that we hold off on airstrikes without prior consultation, because airstrikes are not an end in themselves (they must be part of our strategy, but we must have close consultation before carrying them out). Second, we are asking that the UNSC resolution be voted as soon as possible, and we will work on this this afternoon. The aim of the resolution is to put a stranglehold on Milosevic and not give him any more breathing room. I will tell this to Dole and Gingrich. (C)

The President: What are our objectives for our next meeting with Santer? (C)

President Chirac: This is the Euro-American summit. We can have a nice chat. (C)

The President: We want to help with Turkey and the Customs Union. (C)

President Chirac: I am very favorable toward the Turks. I think the Customs Union is under control. This is one reason why the Greeks don't like me. (C)

-- End of Conversation --