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MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: One-on-One Meeting with Chancellor Helmut Kohl of Germany

PARTICIPANTS: The President
Alexander Vershbow, Senior Director for
European Affairs, NSC Staff, Notetaker
Gisela Marcuse, Interpreter

Helmut Kohl, Chancellor
Joachim Bitterlich, National Security Adviser
Dorothee Kaltenbach, Interpreter

DATE, TIME February 9, 1995 10:50 am - 11:30 am
AND PLACE: Oval Office

Chancellor Kohl: Thank you for your warm welcome. I am glad we will have the opportunity for an in-depth conversation. I have a few matters to discuss in our one-on-one. But first let me just say here what I said to you in Germany. If there is anything I can do in the months ahead just ask. You may say something discreetly or publicly and I will support you because you deserve it. I have been in politics for a long time and I know there are ups and downs. When you are at the top, you will always have lots of friends. When you are down, you tend to meet fewer people. We knew that when each of us took public office. It's good when people remain human beings despite the toughness of the job. If we stop being able to do that, we should stop being politicians and open a restaurant or a bar. Then you would just need a good cook and learn how to be friendly to the customers. It wouldn't matter what you thought of those customers. (S)

The question I wanted to raise is what is your thinking about attending the commemorations of the end of World War II on May 7, 8 and 9. Francois Mitterrand seems to be in very bad health. He has undergone chemotherapy, which as you know is very aggressive therapy. It has stopped the development of new cancer, and how long he will last we cannot say. But he has an iron will and has focused on this one date, May 8, which is both the anniversary of the end of the war and the end of his term as President. That

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week will mark his last public appearance as President. On the eve, his successor will have just been chosen by the elections. My betting right now is that it will be Balladur. I don't think Francois is against that, although he would never say it publicly. In any case, he has gone over the hump, and what he says now is in the context of establishing his legacy. On May 7 there is a commemorative event in London. For the commemoration in Paris on May 8, Mitterrand wants to be the person behind it all so that he can say his public farewells formally. This is not just his farewell from office but from life. (X)

I met with Mitterrand Thursday and had a lengthy conversation with him. I didn't even think of inviting him to Germany for our commemoration on May 8th given his poor health, but Francois said he would like to come to Berlin. It was very difficult for me to say that I thought it would be risky for his health. He said that even if he had to sleep on the plane, he wanted to give the message to the German people that we should look ahead and not backwards over the past 50 years. He has a very forward-looking outlook. He is also the last leader who actually experienced the war, as a POW and as a member of the resistance. This is why I am going to reschedule everything. I had wanted to have a very solemn and inward-looking event in Berlin. But now we will have a big ceremony with speeches, and I will invite Mitterrand. The next day he wants to go on to Moscow, obviously on the condition that matters don't deteriorate further in Russia. I haven't committed to anything yet because I wanted to sound you out first. Do you plan to go to London? Or does the Vice President plan to go? (X)

The President: How do you think things will be in Russia at that time? (X)

Chancellor Kohl: About the same as they are today. (X)

The President: If I were to go to any of these events, I would have to go to Russia, or else it would be a terrible slap to Yeltsin. For my part, I would like to do it for Francois Mitterrand, I would like to be there. I will have to determine first whether I am going to Moscow. The Moscow event is a big deal for Yeltsin and he really wants us to attend. I hope things will be in a state that permits me to go. I will have to resolve the Russia question first before deciding on the other places. (X)

Chancellor Kohl: If you were to ask me for my advice, what I would say is that you should at least send the Vice President if you can't go. (X)

The President: You think I should send the Vice President? (X)

Chancellor Kohl: You absolutely have to or else it will be an enormous slap at the French. I would doubt that the situation in Russia would be much different then it is today; but if you go to Moscow, then you have to go to London and to Paris the next day, and then I would hope that you would come to Berlin, where you would only have to spend three hours before going on to Moscow. Again, if you don't plan to go, please send the Vice President. He too would need to go to London and Paris as well as Berlin and Moscow. (Ø)

The President: I haven't discussed it with him yet. (U)

Chancellor Kohl: I would urge the Vice President to do London, Paris and Berlin, and that you tell Major now that he is coming. But let me again assure you I haven't made any decision. I decided to wait after my meeting with Francois to reflect on what he said. Again, I am surprised that even with his poor health, he wants to do this; but he was absolutely adamant, he wants to come to Berlin and demonstrate that France and Germany have a future in Europe. Whoever comes from America would only have to spend three hours in some hall and give a 10-minute speech. If I invite you and no one comes from Washington, things would look very askew. This is a difficult issue because I assume Boris Yeltsin will attend the ceremonies not only in London and Paris, but probably in Berlin too. Anyway, let us sleep on this question and call each other soon. Again, I only ask that if you don't go and the Vice President comes to Europe, he should also come to Berlin. Please put this proposal into your planning. My understanding is that Mitterrand will hold a ceremony at 10 o'clock in the morning on the Champs-Elysee. After that, he will hold a lunch, and my ceremony in Berlin will not begin until 4 or 5 in the afternoon, with a small reception hosted by the President. You could then overnight in Berlin or go on to Moscow the same night. (Ø)

With respect to Moscow I am in the same position as you. What is Yeltsin going to do? Will he put on a big military show? I would advise him not to do that. Mitterrand will not be doing anything in the way of a military exercise, nor will John Major. Moscow will stand out all the more if Yeltsin does this. It will not look good after Chechnya. So in concrete terms, please tell me whether it will be you or the Vice President. If you don't go, the Vice President should. This has nothing to do with the 50th anniversary so much as the end of Francois' term. This is the key psychological factor that's coming into play. Almost all the people I talk to see this not as just as the end of his time in office but as the end of his life. (Ø)

I have an experience to recount which underscores why it is so important to Mitterrand. In 1980, when I was leader of the opposition and chairman of the CDU, I had meeting in Rome and audience with the Pope scheduled. My mother was 88 and near death with cancer in the hospital. I was reluctant to go, fearing she would die while I was in Rome. But the doctor, who had read about my planned trip in the newspapers, said that my mother was a devout Catholic and that she wouldn't die until I came back and reported on my audience with the Pope. So I went to Rome, had my audience with the Pope (whom I knew when he had visited Germany as a Cardinal) and told him about my mother. We prayed together and he gave me a rosary for her. I returned home and went immediately to the hospital, told my mother about the meeting, and gave her the rosary. She was so pleased to have the rosary. As I was leaving, she called me back and said: "put the rosary in my coffin." What could I say? I said that she wasn't going to die yet. But when I went home, the hospital phoned to say that my mother had passed away. I always remember this story. (Ø)

So Mitterrand is in the same frame of mind. At one point, it appears as if he is already gone. But then he says: "Helmut, you have to go on. You are the last one who is convinced that European integration must go on." Bill, you have to see all of these psychological aspects. If Mitterrand lives until May 8, people will look at us and judge whether we have treated him appropriately. The problem is Moscow, not Paris. But please keep a visit to Paris in the back of your mind, not just as a normal anniversary, but as Francois Mitterrand's legacy. The Queen will not attend, but that is not a problem. (Ø)

Again, if you come, please come to Berlin as well. I won't be doing anything big, just a three-hour ceremony with a bit of music. I didn't want to write a letter about this. France and the United States have a specific kind of relationship with many nuances to it. It is not a question of commercial relations -- although you do have a number of problems to fight about -- but the fact that the French see themselves as a *grande nation*. That is what I tell my people. France can afford to do almost anything, whereas Germany cannot. Look at U.S. history. You have the great man Lafayette. Germany only has the diplomat Van Steuben. Very few people remember who he was. (Ø)

The President: When I went to Georgetown University, I used to walk by the oldest building on the campus, the North Building, where Lafayette was formally introduced to Washington, D.C. I would imagine what it would have been like when Lafayette was standing on that spot. Let me ask you a few other things. (Ø)

It is very important that the new Congress not undermine our ability to work together in a deliberate fashion with respect to NATO, Russia, and Bosnia. So far they have been content to make speeches and let me carry out our foreign policy. This may be smart on their part: they can just wait for me to make mistakes, but not be guilty of undermining Presidential authority. I do have some differences with them over issues that cost money. But to the extent that Congress sees the U.S. and Germany as having common policies, they will be more reluctant to interfere. (C)

Chancellor Kohl: I will be meeting with Congressional leaders. My first message is that I work with the President of the United States as the closest possible partner. It is not for me to interfere in U.S. internal affairs, but I must be clear that our guiding principle is that the foreign policy of the United States is that of the President and I am supporting the President. (C)

The President: Good. (U)

Chancellor Kohl: This goes beyond my visit. Anything that might weaken the impression that the U.S. is playing a leadership role in the world would be bad for all of us. That's very clear. I am sorry to interrupt, but we have a very difficult situation in Europe right now. In Italy, the political situation is very confused. Spain is not very stable. France is having the problems of a preelection period, and these will continue even after the election because they are not making big gains in their economy. I don't need to explain the problems in London. John Major has a slim majority, but Margaret is trying to do everything to undermine him. The Labor Party leader has a smiling face, but he has not said what he will do. I think John Major will prevail, but he has been so pushed into a corner that he has no freedom of maneuver right now. (C)

The Belgians have been having one of their little fights over language questions. In the Netherlands there is a new team that isn't bad. They are socialists, but I admit that they are not bad. The Prime Minister, Kok, is a good man. Poland is in a very difficult political situation. One can say that it is even more so in Ukraine and in Russia. So all of a sudden, I find myself in an unenviable position. People are putting all the world's problems at my doorstep. Therefore, I have an immense interest in working with the man who occupies this office -- not only because he is a friend, but because it is the natural thing to do. I will tell this to people on the Hill. It is important that U.S. leadership continue even after the end of the Cold War. (C)

I am very concerned by the rise of Islamic Fundamentalism. The situation in Algeria is absurd. French policy has failed. If

Algeria falls, Tunisia could fall too, and maybe even Morocco. Then the problem could spread to Egypt, and next we will be sitting on the powderkeg of the Middle East, including Israel. So we need to highlight all the good things to our publics, but keep working behind the scenes on these problems. (C)

The President: You should tell them that on the Hill. They are all over the place on foreign policy. So far, they have not put big pressure on me over Chechnya -- a subject on which you and I seem to be more or less on the same position. A number of Congressmen are pushing for the immediate expansion of NATO. That would be a mistake. Europe is not ready for it, and there is the question of Russia as well. The timetable that we set in December is just right. (C)

Chancellor Kohl: I totally agree. (C)

The President: In addition, there is movement in the Senate to lift the arms embargo unilaterally, as if that were all there was to it. Two years ago, lifting the arms embargo might have worked. But for the U.S. to have done it unilaterally at that time or now would weaken the UN, cause strains in NATO, and make the Bosnian government's position worse. I asked Senator Dole what would happen if we lifted the arms embargo and it weakened the Bosnians. Would he want to send U.S. soldiers? He said no, no, no. Well, they can't have it both ways. This is what I have faced. If the UK, France and others are willing to continue with UNPROFOR and it is keeping people alive, then I don't think that the U.S. should lift the arms embargo unilaterally. This is an emotional issue in Washington. I lost a lot of democratic supporters over this issue. Every Jewish member of the Democratic party hears about ethnic cleansing and it makes them feel guilty; they want to do something to prevent another Holocaust. So people that I could normally count on, like Senator Levin and Senator Lieberman, are over the top on this. (C)

Chancellor Kohl: I will try to help. (C)

The President: It is important for them to realize that we are working together. There are lots of delicate questions. They can make their speeches, but there should be limits on what they do. (C)

Chancellor Kohl: I will tell them this. I know that, with respect to the Muslim community, I am condemned to be their closest friend in Europe. They don't have any suspicions about me. But there are several reasons why things are going from bad to worse. The last Secretary of State of the Republican administration (Larry Eagleburger) is not well advised in this

question. He was only concerned about the Serbs, although he changed his tune later. (Ø)

The President: All of them do that. I will say this, however. In other areas, the Republicans are all right. They supported me on Mexico, and we don't have differences on many other parts of the world. But on Bosnia and UN peacekeeping, we will have difficulties. How is your economy? I hear that it is coming back. (Ø)

Chancellor Kohl: Things are going pretty well. (U)

The President: Let's discuss it a bit in our larger meeting. We have problems here too. Our central bank is a bit too nervous about the rate of inflation. Our economy is open. If prices go up, imports will penetrate. Productivity is increasing throughout the developed world, so I hope that the worldwide competition for money plus the traditional reluctance of central banks to hold down inflation will not cut short our recovery. (Ø)

Chancellor Kohl: My thinking goes along the same lines. (U)

The President: The central bankers are fighting the last war. (U)

Chancellor Kohl: I believe that 1995 will be a good year. The signs are very clear in Germany. I hope 1996 is a good year too. (U)

(At this point Chancellor Kohl presented a picture of a saxophone as a gift to the President. After thanking the Chancellor, the President led him to the Cabinet Room for the expanded meeting.) (U)

-- End of Conversation --