

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Plenary Meeting with President Jacques Chirac of France

PARTICIPANTS: The President
The Vice President
Warren Christopher, Secretary of State
Robert Rubin, Secretary of the Treasury
William Perry, Secretary of Defense
Michael Kantor, U.S. Trade Representative
Leon Panetta, Chief of Staff to the President
Anthony Lake, Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs
Laura Tyson, Chairman, Council on Economic Advisors
Leon Fuerth, Assistant to the Vice President for National Security Affairs
Richard Holbrooke, Assistant Secretary of State for European and Canadian Affairs
Pamela Harriman, U.S. Ambassador to France
Alexander Vershbow, NSC Staff, Notetaker

President Jacques Chirac
Herve de Charette, Minister of Foreign Affairs
Charles Millon, Minister of Defense
Yves Galland, Deputy Minister for Finance and International Trade
Francois Bujon de l'Estang, Ambassador to U.S.
Jean-David Levitte, Senior Diplomatic Advisor to the President
Catherine Colonna, Presidential Spokeswoman
Bernard Emie, Diplomatic Advisor to the President
Jacques Blot, Deputy General Secretary, Minister of Foreign Affairs
Alain Rouquie, Under Secretary for American Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Jean-Pierre Landau, Under Secretary for External Economic Relations, Ministry of Economy and Finance

DATE, TIME February 1, 1996, 4:10 - 4:45 p.m.
AND PLACE: Cabinet Room

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The President: We have already discussed a significant number of issues -- the G-7, Bosnia, and NATO. What other issues would you like to discuss? (U)

President Chirac: Mr. President, let me first thank you again along with my colleagues for the way you have received us here. There are a number of areas of common interest we would like to discuss. If you agree, we might begin with the Middle East peace process. Things seem to have gotten off to a good start in the discussions between Israel and Syria. I would like to hear your thoughts and those of Secretary Christopher on the discussions, in particular on an issue of great importance to us, the independence and sovereignty of Lebanon. ~~(C)~~

The President: I would like to call on Secretary Christopher to give you an update on the talks at Wye but first let me make a few general remarks. The progress in the talks continues to be good. The conference on aid to the Palestinians gave a boost to the process and I thank you for your support. Things are also going well with the Jordanians. We are at a moment when the attitudes of Syria and Israel seem to be more open to a genuine agreement than I have seen in three years. There are still many issues to be resolved, but progress is being made. ~~(C)~~

On Lebanon, I have always assumed that we will not get an agreement that assures the independent future of Lebanon until we have an Israeli-Syrian agreement, one that would undermine the basis for Syria to play a dominant role in Lebanon. You mentioned this in the Oval office. I have always felt that the United States has a real obligation not to sacrifice Lebanon in the peace process. We have no intention of doing that, nor has anyone asked us to do that. We will not undermine Lebanon's sovereignty. But again, I continue to assume that we cannot solve Lebanon on a satisfactory basis until we solve the Israeli-Syrian problem. Chris? ~~(C)~~

Secretary Christopher: The death of Rabin opened a new chapter in the peace process. I think President Asad has now recognized that the Israelis have been taking risks for peace and that he will not always have a willing negotiating partner in Israel. Since the assassination, Asad has become more willing to engage in comprehensive negotiations than he has in the past. We suggested the three-way talks at the Wye conference center and have conducted 12 days of negotiations thus far. I have attended on four occasions during these talks. They are making good progress, first in developing close relations among the negotiators, and second in developing a conceptual framework for an agreement of the kind that we have never had before -- i.e. one that explains the meaning of true peace between Israel and Syria, and what would be the elements of a peaceful and

comprehensive solution. The initial talks have focused on the most neuralgic issue, namely, security. There has been some progress but, in all candor, the going is slow given the suspicion between the two countries. Even if we wanted to accelerate the talks, they would not produce an immediate or dramatic result. But there have been no setbacks thus far. ~~(C)~~

These talks have implications for the decision by Peres on whether to hold early elections or wait-until the end of October. Whatever the Israeli decision, we will do our best to keep the talks on track. I think we have a fair chance of achieving an agreement in 1996, whether the elections are held early or in October. ~~(C)~~

To underscore the President's point, when we have made progress on the Syrian track, there could be progress on the Lebanon track. But we firmly uphold UNSC Resolution 245, which affirms the sovereignty and independence of Lebanon. ~~(C)~~

I told your foreign minister this morning that we would be happy to give him special briefings on the negotiations, particularly with respect to Lebanon, given your longstanding involvement and because France could be helpful at the right moment. I noted your statement that security for the Lebanese-Israeli border should not be entrusted to Syrian troops. We agree that this should be handled by a Lebanese force. ~~(C)~~

In conclusion, we value your help -- not just financially, but the influence with Lebanon that you can bring to bear at the right moment. We will establish a special channel to your foreign ministry. ~~(C)~~

The President: Let me add one additional point. France has a special relationship with Lebanon and a special concern about Lebanon. We appreciate that. I am sure you are aware that there are also large numbers of Lebanese-Americans who would not understand if we concluded a peace agreement by walking away from Lebanon. As a practical matter, we need to remove the strategic justification for Syrian involvement in Lebanon by achieving an Israeli-Syrian agreement that restores Lebanon's integrity in a practical way. You can have direct influence. You should remind Asad that if he can help achieve region-wide reconciliation -- including normal relations, trade, and regional water agreements (which is the vision of Prime Minister Peres) -- Syria will benefit enormously. But this will only happen if he cuts the flow of terrorists into Lebanon and ends the training programs in the Bekaa valley. In short, you should tell Asad that he should leave Lebanon to the Lebanese. This will lead to greater security and prosperity for Syria as well. As you will be seeing Asad soon, this message could have a big impact. In sum, we

won't get a solution in Lebanon without an Israeli-Syrian agreement. Anything you can do to help make Asad believe there are benefits at the end of the road would be a good thing. ~~(C)~~

President Chirac: Naturally, there is no way of dealing with the Lebanon problem without first resolving the Syrian problem by achieving an agreement between Israel and Syria.

Parenthetically, however, I would like to make one point. I do not think the Syrians will want to be the first to sign. When an agreement is completely finished with Israel, they will then ask Israel to make an agreement with Lebanon first. They will want Lebanon to sign first and then they will sign. ~~(C)~~

I think it is an important point, one that Syria and Israel both understand, that it would be a serious mistake to allow border security between Lebanon and Israel to be entrusted to Syrian forces. I have had several talks with Peres on this. Peres used to say that, when you have an agreement with Syria, then you have a real guarantee: look at the Golan Heights, where there have been no border incidents. I replied to Peres that Syria did not need to provoke any border incidents on the Golan, but they could produce them on the Lebanon-Israel border. Syria has sent people to South Lebanon that it does not want on its own territory. Syria will never be able to guarantee the security of Lebanon.

~~(C)~~

Asad may see his current policy as a good way of maintaining pressure on Israel, but the Lebanese army today is completely capable of guaranteeing its own border. Lebanon has no interest in problems with Israel but just wants to make money and rebuild its economy. Its army needs some additional equipment, and Europe and perhaps the United States should be prepared to help. But France is perfectly prepared to guarantee the security of Lebanon via the Lebanese army in the framework of the UN, the EU, or any other arrangement. The opposite situation (prolonging the Syrian guarantee) could bring about the immediate resumption of the war in Lebanon. The Christians would not accept it, nor would the Sunni-Muslims or, probably, the Shiites. This is why the Syrians are not especially insistent on that point. I am telling you this because I had difficulty persuading Peres. He said that the American proposal was for the Syrian army to guarantee the Lebanese-Israeli border. I believe that that would be an historic blunder. ~~(C)~~

Secretary Christopher: It is fundamentally important in any Syrian-Israeli agreement that Syria be required to give up its support for Hizbollah and other terrorist groups in South Lebanon. The negotiations have contributed to restraint by Hizbollah (perhaps on signal from Syria). Syria obviously has great influence over Hizbollah and the Israelis will insist that

Syria end its support as well as promising a better situation along the Lebanese-Israeli border. ~~(C)~~

President Chirac: Naturally. If there are other subjects that you would like to raise let me know, but perhaps I could say a few words on Algeria. (U)

The President: Yes, I wanted to hear your comments on Algeria. (U)

President Chirac: I had the occasion a year ago to say that the FIS -- the extremists in Algeria -- had no chance of getting anywhere and that the important thing was not to help them. Why did I say that? In fact, the Algerians are not extremists. They are Sunni-Muslims, moderates, and Malachites. If they threw themselves into the arms of the FIS for a moment, it was not a reflection of a move toward fundamentalism, but a protest against a corrupt and incompetent regime. The regime had made the country destitute. President Zeroual was then elected, clearly in a democratic way. The problem he faces is whether he will be able to assert his independence vis-a-vis the army. He is being very adroit, but he cannot forget the fact that his predecessor was killed by the army. Zeroual is in danger every day. That is why he hardened his position on the Polisario, which stopped business and cost Algeria and Morocco considerable amounts of money. ~~(C)~~

If Zeroual achieves his aim -- that is, free elections in the next nine months -- he will have a democratic majority that will exclude the FIS and produce a stable government. Therefore, I am thoroughly optimistic. The danger now is not from extremism but from the army. The question is the extent to which Zeroual, with a new legislature, will withdraw power from the army in step-by-step fashion. So I am optimistic, but we need to practice very subtle diplomacy in dealing with these kinds of people. ~~(C)~~

The President: Let me ask you about another issue. We have cooperated successfully on a number of issues, such as Bosnia, Rwanda, Burundi and Haiti. We are approaching the point at which the UN mandate in Haiti will expire. The UN will seek an extension and I believe that Canada will take the lead in the extension period. The work that we have done so far in the justice sector has been very important. France contributed 100 gendarmes, and the work they have done is very important. I am concerned that there could be greater chaos in the months ahead because of a lack of the necessary infrastructure. Therefore, I would like to urge that you do what you can to continue working with us in Haiti, especially in the justice sector. There is still a likelihood of great success in Haiti. We are about to witness the first-ever peaceful transfer of power. Investment,

however, has not picked up as much as we had hoped -- partly for domestic political reasons, and partly because of uncertainty about the future. The justice sector still needs help. ~~(C)~~

Anthony Lake: The Haitians are going through two psychological shocks. The first is the beginning of the end of the UN mission, and the second is the change in government. The former military regime is watching to see if they can come back. If we want to help the new government achieve economic progress, there will need to be a secure environment. A missing piece of the puzzle is the leadership of the police. A greater international police presence could help enable the Haitian leaders to do what they need to do. France has about 100 gendarmes now. If you can keep them there or add to the force, it would make a big psychological difference. ~~(C)~~

President Chirac: We totally agree to maintaining or increasing the number of French gendarmes. The change in government will not exactly lead to a change in leaders since the new president was vice president. Moreover, Aristide will still be waiting in the wings, although the fact that he just married someone from outside Haiti was a psychological mistake. ~~(C)~~

The President: But it was an emotional boon to him, in any case. (Laughter.) ~~(C)~~

President Chirac: But it will make him look more like Papa Doc. (Laughter.) In any case, I agree on the police.

The President: As a last item, let me raise Africa. Though we continue to have difficulties in getting Congress to support foreign assistance, we have tried to raise our diplomatic profile in Africa. France has a longer history and greater experience, as well as a remarkably consistent commitment to Africa. We are trying to enable the U.S. to do a better job of promoting stability and growth. To the extent that we can cooperate in Africa, as we did in Rwanda and Burundi, and thereby draw on your guidance and expertise, it would greatly increase our success. We have responsibilities in Africa that have never been fully discharged. If we can work in partnership with France -- having no separate motives of our own -- it would be very positive. ~~(C)~~

President Chirac: I am delighted with that suggestion. We are absolutely prepared to cooperate. We want Africa to prosper. The conditions in Africa are improving according to the experts, but as is so often the case, the experts could be wrong. There has been progress in democracy and the rule of law, in management and increasing the efficiency of the economies (more and more African countries have IMF and World Bank agreements). There has been some greater appreciation of the fact that they need to

organize themselves regionally and practice preventive diplomacy. These three points are essential to building confidence inside and outside of Africa. ~~(C)~~

In short, Africa is on the right track and this is not the time to abandon Africa. The Congressional action to exclude funding for development assistance to Africa is disastrous. How can people who say they are responsible make such untoward statements? But in any case, we are ready to cooperate and we believe that this will be in the interest of the U.S., since Africa could be a huge market. ~~(C)~~

I have one other item that I would like to raise, and on this occasion I am speaking on behalf of Europe as a whole. All the European governments are worried about the draft legislation from Senator D'Amato. If that draft becomes law, then there will be a real crisis and strong retaliation from the Europeans. It is important that I say this. ~~(C)~~

The President: We have been very concerned about this legislation as well. I have worked very hard on the Hill in an effort to get it rewritten. I am trying to ensure that, if passed, it would give me maximum flexibility to avoid taking actions that would be destructive to our relations. We are working to fend off an amendment in the House on Libya. But I have to tell you that this Congress, with the support of both parties, will vote overwhelmingly to enact this legislation. They have more than enough votes to override my veto, given the strong conviction in this country that Iran is the main promoter of terrorism. If the UN Security Council voted to tighten sanctions, then we could head off the legislation. That is why I wrote to you on the issue on oil-related equipment. In this country, while people support greater involvement with Israel and the Middle East peace process, there is a very strongly held view that the Iranians are the biggest threat to stability in the world, given their relentless promotion of terrorism. I believe we absolutely have to take stronger action in the UN on Libya as well. ~~(C)~~

In short, this is a huge issue, and not an easy one to resolve. We are doing all we can to keep the D'Amato bill from getting out of hand. But if we are serious about terrorism, then we need to get serious about the Iranians. They seem almost addicted to promoting terrorist groups. Iran could have much more success if it changed its course, including improved relations with the United States. Iran is a great country, with a great capacity. But we have real differences with their present government. To repeat, we are doing what we can to increase the flexibility in the legislation. But if I were to veto it, my veto would be overridden in a heartbeat, especially given the frustration with

the fact that the UN will not take stronger action against Iran. So please understand the situation that I face. ~~(C)~~

Secretary Christopher: We have ameliorated the legislation as much as we can. We will work with your ambassador and the British ambassador to achieve the best possible result. They understand the political situation here. We will work to maximize the flexibility in the enforcement provisions of the legislation in the event a bill requiring sanctions is passed. Our only choice is to work with the sponsors of the legislation, since we would not win if we tried to defeat the bill. ~~(C)~~

The President: Sometimes the proponents of a bill like this are willing to give me more flexibility at the end of the day. They have the best of all worlds: they get to make their political statement, but they leave me flexibility on implementation. ~~(C)~~

-- End of Conversation --