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THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: President's Meeting with French President
Jacques Chirac

PARTICIPANTS: The President
Madeleine Albright, Secretary of State
Donald Bandler, Chargé d'affaires
Samuel Berger, Assistant to the President
for National Security Affairs
John Podesta, Assistant to the President
and Deputy Chief of Staff
Strobe Talbott, Deputy Secretary of State
Alexander Vershbow, Senior Director for
European Affairs, NSC Staff (Notetaker)
Marcel Bouquet (Interpreter)

Jacques Chirac, President
Herve de Charette, Minister of Foreign
Affairs
Jean-David Levitte, Elysee Diplomatic
Advisor
Francois Bujon de l'Estang, French Ambassador
to the United States
Catherine Colona, Elysee Spokesperson
Francois Delattre, Elysee Strategic
Affairs Director (Notetaker)
Christopher Thiery (Interpreter)

DATE, TIME May 27, 1997, 9:05-9:45 a.m.
AND PLACE: Elysee Palace

President Chirac: It's a great pleasure to receive you here. First, because it is you: you know that I have always had great admiration and friendship for you. Second, the day is interesting in and of itself. A page of history is being turned. I spoke last night with Boris Yeltsin and I found him satisfied and in good humor. I suggested that he come to Madrid, but he is very hesitant. I believe he is on the verge of saying yes, but many of his advisers, for reasons mainly of internal politics, are advising him not to go. We will need to talk to him about this today. (C)

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The President: I think that if he did come to Madrid in the right way, it would be a real coup for him. It would ratify our new vision of NATO's mission and how we and Russia relate to one another. It could be that his attendance would not be portrayed very well at home, even if the meeting went well. Nevertheless, I will also mention it to him. (C)

President Chirac: I told him that the one who is absent loses out. I believe it would be possible to convince him to come. The first day would be a meeting of the 16 allies on NATO reform and our decisions on NATO enlargement. On the second day, Yeltsin could come to have a meeting in the morning of the new NATO-Russia group at the highest level, and then we could sign the NATO agreement with Ukraine with President Kuchma. (That part may not be the most attractive from Yeltsin's point of view.) After that, in the afternoon, we could have a meeting of the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council at the highest level. That would look very good because it would enable the peace to take root. I am glad we see this in the same light. (C)

The President: I think we all are saying that we are trying to create a Europe for the 21st century that is democratic and united for the first time in history. It would be nice if Madrid could be packaged as an expression of the new Euro-Atlantic community. I understand the difficulties for Yeltsin, but I will discuss the subject with him as well. A lot of what we are trying to do is to affect the capacity of ordinary citizens in Russia to imagine a different future. We need to do the same for some people in Europe as well. If you think about the real security threats that we face -- ethnic and religious chaos as in Bosnia, cross-border threats like terrorism, weapons proliferation and narco-trafficking -- we need to bring in Russia if for no other reason than to prepare for the new challenges of the 21st century. The more we can get our publics thinking along these lines -- to imagine a 21st century in which we do not repeat the mistakes of this century -- the closer we will be to our goals. (C)

This is what we hope to achieve at Madrid. But I understand that this will be a huge risk for Yeltsin, whereas it would be no risk at all for us. Perhaps it can be worked out. I agree that the Ukraine part may make the Russians uncomfortable, since they don't want to see themselves on the same level as Ukraine. We might want to think about the timing of that element. Yeltsin will have to make his own calculations of how this would play out at home. Don't you agree, Strobe? (C)

Strobe Talbott: I agree. (U)

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President Chirac: I agree with that. This is what I tried to explain to Boris last night. I think it is possible to change his mind. His instinct, I believe, is to come to Madrid. The problem is his advisers. I met him a week ago in Russia on my way home from China. When I explained the idea, he started by saying it was out of the question. But as we discussed it, he said that perhaps I was right, and that he would think about it. Yesterday, when I raised it again, Primakov was there and again Yeltsin's position was reserved. After some discussion, however, he said it was perhaps possible. (C)

On NATO enlargement, I am very concerned about Romania. I see that the three countries that are most likely to be invited -- Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic -- are favorable toward the inclusion of Romania in the first wave. Yeltsin is indifferent. Helmut Kohl, with whom I dined a few days ago, is now in favor. I think that Romania is a fragile country. It has just done two things that are very important: first, it has started to evolve toward democracy; and second, it has reached historic agreements with Ukraine and Hungary to normalize their relations. What is quite extraordinary is that there are now Hungarian ministers in the Romanian government. Romania will be part of the southern flank of the Alliance. I would not like us to reintroduce a fracture between the North and the South in such a delicate region of Europe. Romanian public opinion knows it will take time for the country to be accepted by the EU for economic reasons. It has become an obsession for them to enter NATO. If they are not accepted, it will make very fragile the position of the Romanian government. I am saying this because it is a very serious issue. I do not see any disadvantages to bringing in Romania, but I see strongly the risks of leaving Romania out. (C)

The President: I agree that what the Romanians are doing to settle their border disputes and to take the path of reform is very impressive. We need to encourage this. Frankly, however, while we have always assumed that we would want to accept Romania sooner or later -- both for geopolitical reasons and for what the Romanians are now doing -- it could raise two problems. First, in spite of the good things that are going on, I wonder if there is enough of a track record for us to be sure that the Romanians could fulfill the essential obligations of Alliance membership. There is no question that Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary could do so. Second, whatever happens to Romania, it is important to have an aggressive program for partnership and follow-up for those countries not in the first group. We cannot afford to let them believe that we are just moving the dividing line eastward and creating a new gray area. They need to have a sense that the partnership will become more vibrant and that there will be another decision on membership. (C)

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In this light, I am concerned that if we take in Romania and it is seen as marginal in terms of its qualifications, other candidates will not believe there will be a second wave. This would cause a lot of trouble around the edges, including in the Baltic states, but not only there. The main thing, is that, if we expand NATO in ways that required an investment by all of us -- and this will fall more heavily on Europe than the United States -- we need to be sure that these countries can meet the obligations we ask them to assume. I have nothing against Romania and I am encouraged by what you have said. I take seriously the larger political implications posed by Romania's history and its strategic location. My question is whether they do, in fact, have the same capacity as the other three candidates to meet the demands of NATO membership. And will the other candidates be more convinced if Romania is accepted that there will not be a second round, even though they are as qualified as Romania? Whatever we do, I hope you agree on the need to have a strategy for those not admitted but who want to be part of the united Europe and have been participating actively in the Partnership for Peace. We cannot appear to consign them to a historic purgatory. (C)

President Chirac: Regarding the two reasons you have cited for your hesitation, I believe Romania can fulfill the requirements of membership; in any case, they have made a commitment to do so. Regarding the credibility of NATO enlargement, this is an important but not an essential question. Everyone knows there will be a continuing process of enlargement, whether or not Romania is in the first group. On the other hand, if Romania is not accepted, it will create a political and psychological trauma in the country after it has just made considerable efforts to support democracy and to settle its external problems. Romania now has very firm economic and financial reform policies, but they know that they will not get into the EU straightaway. Their public opinion, however, is fascinated by the idea of joining NATO. If it did not happen, it would be a genuine trauma with political consequences that would be very serious and destabilizing for the government. Romania has made progress toward a market economy, but it is very difficult and fragile. That is why I wanted to draw your attention to this issue. (C)

The President: I will think about it seriously. (C)

President Chirac: One word on Bosnia. We are very worried. (C)

The President: So are we. (C)

President Chirac: I do not have a very good impression of what is going on. I do not know when you will decide to pull out U.S. forces. But the day that they leave, other troops will leave as

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well. There are more and more arms in the region and I fear that it will turn for the worse. (C)

The President: I believe that the Dayton Peace Agreement, ratified in Paris, provides the structure for Bosnia's future. A peaceful future cannot be achieved unless we make substantially more progress between now and the middle of 1998 in terms of economic reconstruction, political reconciliation and resettlement, and unless we arrest the high-profile war criminals. Otherwise, we will have to find a way to stay longer. The problem is that we do not want to get into the position of occupying the country indefinitely. Moreover, I don't know if I could get the Republican Congress to permit us to stay beyond the middle of next year. (C)

The problem in Bosnia is that we want at least three different things right now that are inconsistent: first, we want the Dayton Agreement to be realized. Second, we want our troops to leave by mid-1998. Third, we do not want to do anything that would further complicate the problems we are having on war criminals and refugee returns. Yet, I cannot see how we can jump-start the political process without doing something about war criminals. So all of these goals are mutually inconsistent. We need to admit this. You have taken the lead, and I think the new British Prime Minister will be active as well. The Dutch will also be forthcoming. We need to put our heads together and decide what we would like to do most -- to decide what is the most important priority. (C)

President Chirac: That is right. (U)

The President: It is conceivable to me that we could draw down the lion's share of our military presence if things demonstrably improve between now and mid-1998. If we cannot do this, we will need to time our withdrawal carefully. The Bosnians might not go back to war, but the Dayton Agreement will clearly not be achieved. I have to say that I am encouraged because there seems to be a coalescing of European opinion around former Spanish Foreign Minister Carlos Westendorp as the successor to Carl Bildt. If he is the one you want, that is okay with us, but we would like to have an American, Jacques Klein, as his principal deputy. We have had another one of Bildt's deputies return to join my staff, so his spot is vacant, and that could go to a European. We need to get a new team in place quickly. Every positive thing that we can accomplish day-by-day can give the people a psychological stake in peace. On war criminals, we have been working, planning and discussing the issue jointly. Pretty soon we will need a serious discussion of that issue. (C)

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President Chirac: I share the same analysis as you. We agree on Westendorp; his is the first name that came up and we have agreed to it. It is perfectly legitimate that Mr. Klein work with him. (C)

(Discussion of war criminals reported separately)

The President: What do you make of the election in Iran? (C)

President Chirac: I posed that question to a number of people, including Boris Yeltsin, who took the decision in Helsinki to stop selling arms to Iran -- a promise he intends to keep. The echoes so far from Iran are positive on the whole. I do not think the election will give rise to fundamental change, but at least now the situation will not get worse. That in itself is good news. I am not an Iran expert, but I believe it was the best -- or the least worst -- result we could have hoped for. (C)

The President: There may be some basis for progress. With such a complex governing structure, however, it is hard for outsiders to assess the significance of the election. Rafsanjani will now move to an advisory council. He and the new president might together create some good, but the Ayatollah Khamenei is still in charge, together with other conservative religious leaders. It appears for now that there may be some domestic relaxation of the fundamentalist regime, but the new president, during the campaign, had to restate the party line on foreign policy, including support for terrorism. (C)

In the aftermath of the Mykonos verdict, the United States and EU have been trying to come to a more common policy. We need to establish benchmarks for evaluating Iranian behavior. It is unlikely that we will succeed if we have different policies. If we are together, we can affect how the Iranians relate to the outside world. After Mykonos, the EU took steps that are more in line with our approach. For our part, we are willing to look at the possibilities of the new regime. (C)

Let me add that all of this is complicated by our ongoing investigation of the bombing of our military personnel in Saudi Arabia at Al Khobar. There is a possibility of high-level Iranian government involvement, although we have not reached a final conclusion; it is a difficult case. The Iranians are pursuing a policy that can only bring them grief, as well as undermining our ability -- the United States and Europe together -- to achieve our shared objectives in the Middle East. (S)

President Chirac: I see things the same way. On the Middle East peace process, we are even more pessimistic. Things have been

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going from bad to worse. Sooner or later there will be an explosion. It is now perfectly clear that the Israeli Prime Minister will not make a move. He is firmly resolved to block the peace process. My number one worry is how other Arab countries view the situation, the Palestinians in particular. A strong gesture could possibly help, such as freezing the construction of settlements at Har Homa, but I don't think that Netanyahu will do this. That is why I am very worried. (C)

The President:

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(b)(1), EO 13526 3.3(b)(6)

President Chirac:

(b)(1)

(b)(1), EO 13526 3.3(b)(6)

I would like to raise one small personnel matter, namely the successor of the Director General of INTELSAT. We have a French candidate of good quality. He is very knowledgeable and did good

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work in privatizing French telecom companies. We would like him to get the job. (C)

The President: We have no candidate and no preference. I would like to hear more about your candidate's views on telecom policy. We have all worked hard to get the global telecommunications agreement. This will be good for the entire world over the next 20 years. I have no interest other than pursuing a policy that makes the most sense for world telecommunications programs. Please give us more information. (C)

President Chirac: Our candidate is at your disposal. I believe you will find him perfectly in line with your interests. (U)

The President: One more thing. I hope we can work together on Iraq. The sanctions are still in effect, including the no-fly zone. The Iraqis have been flying helicopters during the Hajj. This was, strictly speaking, in violation of the no-fly zone, even though it may have been harmless. As a result, we thought that we ought to, on the one hand, recognize the right to have humanitarian flights, while at the same time preserving the integrity of the no-fly zone. Therefore, we suggested to the Iraqis that it would be permissible to carry out humanitarian flights, but they will need to file a flight plan in advance. Because of the continuing effectiveness of the no-fly zone under UN Security Council Resolutions, we would give our explicit authorization as long as they provide an advance notice. The Saudis, Kuwaitis and British have agreed to this approach, believing it is a reasonable solution. It would give the Iraqis a legitimate right to humanitarian flights without undermining the no-fly zone. I think it is important that we work out the details so that we can all be together on this. I would not want another situation like we had last year when we were at odds in enforcing the no-fly zone. I do not need your answer today. (S)

President Chirac: I will ask my experts to study this further and get back to you. Now I must depart in order to greet the other leaders arriving at the NATO-Russia Summit. (C)

-- End of Conversation --

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