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THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: The President's Meeting with French President Jacques Chirac

PARTICIPANTS: The President
Madeleine Albright, Secretary of State
Erskine Bowles, Chief of Staff
Samuel Berger, Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs
Alexander Vershbow, Senior Director for European Affairs, NSC (Notetaker)
Marcel Bouquet, Interpreter

President Jacques Chirac
Hubert Vedrine, Minister of Foreign Affairs
Francois Bujon de l'Estang, Ambassador to the United States
Jean-David Levitte, Diplomatic Advisor to President Chirac
Jean-Claude Poimboeuf, Assistant to the Diplomatic Advisor (Notetaker)
Leda W. Zuckerman, Interpreter

DATE, TIME June 20, 1997, 2:55-3:55 p.m.
AND PLACE: Brown Place Hotel, Denver, Colorado

The President: Let's run through the issues, since we have little time. (U)

President Chirac: I would first like to raise the Middle East peace process. I am terribly concerned. You Americans are giving the impression of being less engaged. The Israelis are not moving. President Mubarak is trying to do his utmost, but he cannot succeed alone. Arafat is becoming more and more discouraged and also feels threatened. There is a risk that terrorism will return. Thus I don't think we can stand still. What is to be done? (C)

At the European Summit, we took the initiative to make a general appeal to the parties, but we don't expect much to come from this. I wonder whether we might not recall what we said at Sharm el-Sheikh a few months ago, by contemplating the possibility of a

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Reason: 1.5 (d)
Declassify On: 6/23/07

Declassified in Part
Per E.O. 13526
VZ 06/03/2019
2015-0775-M (1.23)

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new union of "peace-builders" through a second meeting at Sharm el-Sheikh. I am absolutely convinced that the situation is going to explode. I have had a lot of contacts with Arab leaders, and you can feel it building up. We are at the mercy of the huge, absurd terrorists, and the very first victim will be Arafat. When he goes, the prospects for any serious discussion will decline. [REDACTED] (b)(1)

[REDACTED] (b)(1), EO 13526 3.3(b)(6)

The President: Let me say, first, that I agree with much of your analysis. The situation is quite dangerous. Arafat is increasingly vulnerable. [REDACTED] (b)(1)

[REDACTED] EO 13526 3.3(b)(6)

We believe we need to find a way to reenergize Arafat's security cooperation and to get the Israelis to take specific, substantive, positive steps to strengthen Arafat and thus give some new integrity to the peace process. We have been very frustrated -- as frustrated as you. We want what we do to be effective, but we also don't want to lose our ability to influence Israel. We had a long meeting on this yesterday. I would like our people to do a little work in the region for a few days and then get back in touch with you. We want to restore momentum; otherwise, the situation will deteriorate. There may be things we can do. (C)

Regarding the idea of going back to Sharm el-Sheikh, the Arabs would first want to know what Israel would do. The Israelis would want to know if the Arabs would support Arafat's position if he resumed security cooperation and took a stand against terrorism. It is entirely do-able if the Israelis will make some small moves. You're right that if we wait too long, Arafat's capacity to act will decline. As I said, we are exploring the possibilities, so give us a few days. (C)

I would go to Sharm el-Sheikh if it could have a positive impact. But remember why we came the last time: the Arabs came and condemned terrorism -- this was astonishing. They felt they could do so since the peace process had real integrity. They even tolerated the conduct of operations in Lebanon by the Peres government that they considered outrageous, since they trusted the Israelis' motives. Now they will need to be persuaded that Netanyahu will do things he doesn't like and which show that he is committed to the peace process. (C)

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We have been wracking our brains over what to do. We are not going to withdraw from the process. We want to avoid public statements

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

President Chirac:

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

The President:

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

President Chirac:

(b)(1)

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

The President: Give me a few days. (C)

President Chirac: My second subject is the Madrid NATO Summit. Do you know whether or not Yeltsin will come? (C)

The President: He was just here and said he will not go to Madrid, nor will Primakov. But he said that someone at the level of Deputy Prime Minister would represent Russia. (C)

Mr. Berger: He may have meant Deputy Foreign Minister level. (C)

Secretary Albright: The Russian Ambassador to Spain may be the representative; he is a former Deputy Foreign Minister. (C)

The President: I have been thinking about how to deal with this. I urged him to send someone of a high enough level that people didn't draw the conclusion that Yeltsin wasn't serious about what

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we did in Paris. If you see him, I suggest you make that point.
(C)

President Chirac: I will see him on Saturday. (U)

The President: You should make the same argument. You came to Paris and captured the imagination of Europe and the United States. Everyone was happy that Europe of the 21st century was not going to be divided. Then, if you sent someone anonymous to Madrid, people would ask whether you were just kidding in Paris.
(C)

President Chirac: I already told him the same thing in Moscow two weeks ago. In fact, he was tempted to come, but his senior collaborators convinced him not to go for understandable domestic reasons. (C)

The President: That's right. They convinced him of the need to calm things down after all they have done with NATO. They are also trying to solve their problems with Japan, China and other countries. They don't want to give too much ammunition to the ultra-nationalists while they are working on ratification of START II. But even if they have decided that the President should not come, they should send another senior figure. (C)

President Chirac: Maybe Chernomyrdin. (C)

The President: Yes, perhaps. They need to come up with someone more senior. (C)

President Chirac: I will bring it up again with Yeltsin. On Madrid, we were very disappointed by the position that you took on Romania. (C)

The President: I know. (U)

President Chirac: We learned of this from the newspapers. It was an error in political and moral terms. At Madrid, we will have the opportunity to discuss this further. I have gathered that there is no room for maneuver in the U.S. position. Perhaps you would consider an idea: the three that you support would enter NATO at once, while the two others would enter two years later. If we don't do something like this, we will destabilize Romania. Naturally, I understand that Romania is very far from the United States; but it is very close to France. It is in a very difficult and unstable part of Europe. In Romania, your position will lead to a rejection of the democratic government and have the very negative implications. It will call into question their commitment to solve the question of the Hungarian and Ukrainian minorities and destabilize their democracy.

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The President: The first time you discussed this with me, you were very persuasive. The position that we took was rooted in four considerations, none of which fully undermine your point. First, our military experts believe that Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic are the most ready for membership. Second, we have a big isolationist bloc in the Congress (Madeleine Albright just got Jesse Helms to vote in favor of the UN for the first time in eleven years) and we thought that these three countries were the ones that we could best get confirmed. Third, in political and military terms, Romania has made a lot of encouraging first steps, but extending military guarantees is a grave matter, and Romania needs to do as much as the others. (C)

Fourth, we need to think of how our decision will play out with Yeltsin, the Baltic countries and others like Ukraine who might want to get in the future. We have to keep the door open. We should take in new members as they become qualified. If we did five, there would be immediate pressure to admit the Baltics, since there would be no one else ready for the second wave. After all the work that you and I did with the Russians, our relations could deteriorate. For all these reasons, we took the position in favor of three. If we said there will get in right away and identified the next two at the same time, there would be no substantial difference than if we took five, (C)

I ask you to consider another proposal to assure that we have good relations with Romania. Given all the ethnic problems in Bosnia, we want to reward countries who solve them peacefully. Romania is the next biggest country in the region after Poland. We therefore need to develop a vigorous open-door package at Madrid, one that shows that we will be admitting new members in the short term. (C)

Another idea I had (which you might find off-the-wall) would be for you and me to get on a plane after Madrid and fly to Romania to meet with Romanian leaders. You could tell them that you wanted Romania admitted now; I could say that I had been influenced by the points you had made, and that we consider Romania -- if it continues to perform well -- to be among the strongest candidates for the next wave. We could send the same message to the Romanian public. (C)

President Chirac: I can give your proposal some thought. Something needs to be done. (C)

The President: I don't expect you to answer today. Think about it. (C)

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President Chirac: Yes, I will. In principle, I am favorable toward the idea. (C)

The President: The important thing is to keep Romania's public and its leaders committed to the path of reforms and to prepare for membership. We need to lock in some countries on the southern flank. We could send a similar message to Slovenia (although I don't have the time to go there). (C)

It's very interesting. It appears that even the Austrians are now interested in joining NATO. A significant number of nations in the Partnership for Peace are seeking membership. While the question has still to be resolved, it is possible that we could let in more than two in the second wave. So my point is that we need to find a way to send an open-door message -- especially to Romania -- that they will get in if they stay on course. I would have no problem going there with you and making that statement. (C)

President Chirac: Are you naturally excluding the possibility of having Slovenia in without Romania? (C)

The President: I'm not in favor of that -- unless something goes bad in Romania, it is the second-biggest country in the region and strategically valuable. At a minimum, Romania should be in the second round. (C)

President Chirac: But do you exclude going from three to four in the first round, adding Slovenia but not Romania? (C)

The President: I don't think we should do that. I rule that out, since it would make things worse for Romania. (C)

President Chirac: Good. That would be unacceptable to us. (C)

The President: Prime Minister Prodi may ask me about that, but that would be the same as nailing Romania. Moreover, given those who don't want to expand at all, we need to have at least two good candidates for the next time. If we keep two waiting, it will increase the pressure to do the second round in a timely fashion. (C)

President Chirac: You mentioned President Yeltsin's position. He has no difficulty with the idea of Romania joining NATO. In fact, given the idea of the open door, he would prefer Romania versus the others. So there may be some problems with Yeltsin, but not over Romania. He is against expansion, but if it has to occur, then he does not object to Romania. He knows that it is important to maintain stability in southern Europe, and he knows

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that stability would be threatened by a decision not to admit Romania. (C)

The President: If we go, we will send a message not only to Romania but to Bosnia. You don't need to commit now. But it would be a way to show the partnership between our countries -- just as we worked together on another subject, bringing Russia into the Paris Club. This is a big deal for Yeltsin. We should tell Yeltsin we were glad to do it, but he should up the level of his representation at Madrid. Another area where we are working with the Russians is as co-chairmen of the Minsk Group. We could avoid a lot of headaches if we could get a deal on Nagorno-Karabakh. We have a French-U.S.-Russian framework and now we need to solve it. (C)

(Exchange on Bosnia reported separately)

President Chirac: One little detail. You know how devoted we are to Lebanon. Actually, American citizens are not allowed to travel there. Lebanon has undertaken all the measures the U.S. has requested to get the restriction lifted. I would be very grateful to you if you could lift the ban and allow Americans to travel; this ban shows a lack of confidence. (C)

The President: Secretary Albright should take note. This is a conversation I have had within my own government a half-dozen times after my previous discussions with you on Lebanon. There are a lot of Lebanese-Americans who have also raised it, since they want to travel, and who are concerned that the interests of Lebanon could be sacrificed in the Middle East peace process. There is a review going on now. Secretary Albright has to make the call under our law within the next month. The way the law works is that we have to be able to say that there is not an unreasonable risk of terrorist action. We have had bad experiences in Lebanon, but we would like to do it. We will reexamine the question now that you have raised it. (C)

President Chirac: There is no risk in going to Lebanon. It is far less risky than many other countries. Lebanon is a small country trying to restore harmony, and the process is on track. They feel that the ban on travel by Americans is a limiting factor. Flatter them but don't insult them -- that is the golden rule. (C)

The President: A question on Iraq. The UN has recently had a lot of difficulties. Ekeus just came back and said he had been completely thwarted in exercising his responsibility to inspect for weapons of mass destruction. We would be happy to see more positive developments like passage of resolution 986 permitting the sale of oil. We proposed to change the no-fly zone to allow

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humanitarian flights. The UN needs to say something in light of Ekeus's report. We have proposed a UN Security Council resolution that is fairly modest. Saddam must comply with the requirement for inspections or his senior people cannot travel outside Iraq. We hope you will review the resolution and support it. I would not want to see a French veto. Ekeus is a reasonable and patient man. He feels the Iraqis stiffed him. The resolution seems fairly moderate, yet firm enough. (C)

President Chirac: I don't know where the truth lies regarding Ekeus's mission. One day things look black, the next day they look white, according to Ekeus. Your draft resolution is being discussed. We have a few amendments, but we don't intend to veto it. We can't exclude all people traveling from Iraq. It will be hard to determine whether or not someone is the wife or son of a military authority. (C)

Let me tell you that the embargo policy has never been effective and, one day or another, we will have to change it. It hasn't produced results. Saddam is eating and drinking well. The brunt of the embargo is being borne by the people of Iraq. I have always opposed the embargo because I believe it is deeply immoral. It is having no effect on Iraq's leaders, yet is sending the poorest people into poverty -- children have nothing to eat. It is a barbaric course. We cannot go on creating deplorable conditions for the most defenseless people. It hurts our moral conscience. Why did you stop before Baghdad? (C)

The President: Please be fair. We passed 986, which allows a lot of oil to be sold. (C)

President Chirac: At long last. It took a lot of work. Another problem is that Saddam is sitting there, mad. No one talks to him, not even Tariq Aziz, because if they did, he would kill them off. He is all-powerful. (C)

Our embargo is plunging people into misery. We are a strange people. We keep talking about morality, yet we give short shrift to moral concerns in our policy. This is a paradox. The West always think that it's right -- this is arrogant. It is true of France, Europe and the United States, but it isn't right. In any event, we will not veto the resolution, but we do have amendments. (C)

The President: I'll see you tonight. (U)

President Chirac: We will be discussing Bosnia. I met Carl Bildt three days ago and he was very worried. Will you maintain the G-7 for financial issues? (C)

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The President: Yes, until Russia can qualify. (C)

President Chirac: I agree. (C)

The President: But it is important that we minimize the time
spend among the seven. We don't want to embarrass Russia. (C)

-- End of Conversation --

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