

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Meeting with President Jacques Chirac of France (U)

PARTICIPANTS: The President
Samuel R. Berger, Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs
Stephen Ricchetti, Assistant to the President and Deputy Chief of Staff
Antony Blinken, Special Assistant to the President and Senior Director for European Affairs, NSC Staff, Notetaker

Jacques Chirac, President
Jean-Marc de la Sabliere, National Security Adviser to the President
Francois Bujon de L'Estang, Ambassador to the United States
Gerard Errera, Political Director Ministry of Foreign Affairs
French official [TK]

DATE, TIME September 7, 2000; 6:00 - 6:30 p.m.
AND PLACE: Waldorf Astoria Hotel, New York City

President Chirac: I wanted to talk quickly about the Middle East peace process. Can I go ahead? (U)

The President: Yes, Jacques, please go on. (U)

President Chirac: I think you have an opportunity to find a solution. There's a five-week window before the Knesset comes back. I'm convinced you can succeed. I think that in reality, Camp David was very significant. A very important meeting. And a major success because of the evolution in mentalities. Up until Camp David, in my conversation with Barak, I told him you won't make peace with the Arabs because you have not made peace in your mind. After Camp David, he told me: 'I've made peace

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in my mind.' At Camp David he changed. And Arafat, too -- a bit. In fact, quite a bit. (C)

On territory, security guarantees and refugees, it seems a solution is very close. Arafat and Barak will agree to a solution imposed by you. That's something you can do today, and it will be followed, provided it is just. You're very close. Of course, Jerusalem is the heart of the problem. But who would have thought before Camp David that we would be able to say it is the only outstanding problem. So this is a major achievement. (C)

Now, on Jerusalem, Arafat cannot conclude a deal that is not supported by the other Arabs -- he'd be assassinated without their support. The problem is that the position on sovereignty of Barak and Arafat is out of sync because it is based on two different sovereignties. On the one hand, Israel gets total sovereignty for their piece of Jerusalem versus a lesser sovereignty for the Palestinians over the Mosque esplanade. The Arabs and Muslims cannot accept this. (C)

So what is to be done? I have some thoughts to offer. First, I think we have to reject co-sovereignty, because the Syrians would oppose it, and then so would the Jordanians. For it to work, you have to have peace, but as long as any territory is occupied -- like Golan -- there will not be peace. (C)

So I've discussed with both Barak and Arafat another system that would be as follows:

Over the Jewish quarter and the Jewish part of the Armenian quarter and the Wailing Wall, full Israeli sovereignty.

For the Temple Mount -- and let me say that of course no one is sure the temple is in fact below -- what about full Palestinian sovereignty down to a given depth, say 5 or 10 meters. Below that, you would have divine sovereignty. Barak was not against this idea. Arafat did not react.

The one who counts a lot is Abdullah. When I talked with him about the overall divine sovereignty concept he laughed and asked if it could be extended all the way to the White House. So I think overall divine sovereignty is not very likely.

Anyway, I think you're very close. The solution can only come from you, can only be imposed by you. We will do anything we can to help you. (C)

President Clinton: Well, first, thank you for your good words and support. I basically agree with what you've said. But it's very important that even if Arafat gets what he wants, he still needs support from two key constituencies -- those who are seen as friends of the Palestinians and Muslims. They need to validate that he did not sell out either his own cause or Islam. If these two groups stay with him, we can succeed. Barak wants to do this, he can sell it in Israel with an election or a referendum. He has two big dangers. First, on refugees, if the "right of return" is defined in such a way that it would be perceived as a threat to change the Jewish character of Israel. Second, if it is perceived that he has given up the site of Solomon's temple. For years, Israel didn't talk about this issue or let archeologists dig there because they didn't want to find the temple -- it would open up a can of worms with radical Jews. But if he gives it away, he would be seen as giving away the soul of Judaism. It's the last known place holding the arc with the covenant of the 10 Commandments. (C)

So the Israelis need ambiguity. And that means sovereignty under ground. The Palestinians need the clarity of their sovereignty, and the certainty there won't be digs. In short, they agree on the preservation of the status quo, but they disagree on what's needed to guarantee it over time and what is needed to sell it to a larger constituency -- the Arab and Muslim world for Arafat, Israeli voters for Barak. (C)

President Chirac: This case of the Temple Mount is ambiguous. When Dayan took Jerusalem in 1967, he prohibited Jews from praying there. Just last month in Haaretz, I read a statement by the Sephardic Chief Rabbi who said Jews should not pray there because we cannot be sure the temple is there. And contrary to what Barak says, all the quiet attempts to verify it is there found no proof. So I think it is a myth. But of course, myths are important. (C)

Arafat is prepared to commit to no digs. But he says it is impossible to give the Israelis full sovereignty over their part, but the Palestinians have only half sovereignty over theirs. This is a non-starter. We need to find a way to present both sides as equal, then there will be success. (C)

I had lunch with Barak. He showed me the four possible solutions. In my opinion, none can work. He seemed to think number 3 would. I don't. It's acceptable for Palestinians only if the holy sites are marked. So we need a solution of equal

sovereignties. I'll try to go further in this direction, with this 'geological sovereignty' idea. (e)

The President: It's an interesting concept. We hadn't quite looked at it that way. We were working on having what's on top be Palestinian, and the ground itself Israeli. (e)

President Chirac: That can't work. (e)

The President: Let's think about your concept. You said Palestinian sovereignty down 5 or 10 meters. Now, we know when Solomon's temple was built, when it was destroyed, when the replacement temple was built and destroyed. So it should be possible to determine how far down we would need to go. (e)

Mr. Berger: President Chirac, how would you articulate it? I agree equality is the key issue, but how would we express it? (e)

President Chirac: I admit that's a problem. All we can do is to keep looking for different paths. One will lead out. When I told Barak, he didn't say no. And Arafat didn't react. We need to put our specialists and lawyers on this and come up with a presentation. They've agreed in principle to share Jerusalem. That is remarkable progress. Arafat would have torn my eyes out if I had proposed that months ago. So we just have to keep going and success is possible, of this I am convinced. (e)

-- End of Conversation --