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THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

MEMORANDUM OF TELEPHONE CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Telcon with French President Chirac (U)

PARTICIPANTS: The President
President Chirac

Interpreter: Marcel Bouquet
Notetakers: Bonnie Glick, Joel Schrader,
Liz Rogers, Cindy Lawrence and Lawrence
Butler

DATE, TIME August 8, 1998, 10:57-11:20 a.m. EDT
AND PLACE: Oval Office

The President: Hello, Jacques. (U)

President Chirac: Hello, Bill. How are you? (U)

The President: I'm fine. (U)

President Chirac: I wanted to say that we have been traumatized by the two attacks against Dar es Salaam and Nairobi, and I wanted to tell you how sorry I am and offer all my friendship on this occasion. (U)

The President: Thank you very much. I appreciate that and all the assistance you offered. I think your embassy in Dar es Salaam was damaged as well. (U)

President Chirac: Yes, a little bit. I don't know who these people are. Do you have any idea? (S)

The President: Only suspicions. We have our bomb team there now. I have been amazed at what they can find from tiny pieces about how the bombs were put together and sometimes that offers clues. We have our suspicions, but we still don't know. (S)

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President Chirac: You don't know still? (S)

The President: I think we will find out. (S)

President Chirac: I was very, very sorry and I wrote it to you. But I tell you how sorry I was, and I feel it from the bottom of my heart about the people who were killed from the United States and those two countries. (U)

The President: Thank you. Jacques, first of all, I want to apologize for disturbing your vacation. I hear you are in Mauritius. I called to talk to you about Kosovo. (E)

President Chirac: Bill, do you mind going through an interpreter? As you know, my English is not so good. (U)

The President: Let's go through an interpreter. I called to talk to you about Kosovo because I am very concerned that we are getting close to another humanitarian disaster and am worried that we are on the verge of another Bosnia. The war in Bosnia could not have ended in 1995 without your leadership and determination. (S)

Here is what I believe has happened. I think Milosevic has decided to go for a military victory. But in addition to fighting the armed resistance, he is also cleaning out civilians from their homes and villages and innocent civilians are being hurt because he believes, after talking to Primakov, that there is not a chance of a NATO military response because he thinks they will act only with a UN resolution and Russia will block that. (S)

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I think it would be better with a Security Council resolution. But here is what I think is the problem and why I think we need to make it clear that NATO could act without a Security Council resolution if necessary and let them go ahead with the planning they have begun and in identifying forces that could be brought into play to stop a military offensive in Kosovo. Here is what I believe: if we try to get a UN resolution, we will put Yeltsin in the worst of all positions because if they block it, many people in the world will criticize Russia, and Russia needs friends now because the government is in a bad position and the economy is hanging by a thread. If they back it and let it go through, I think Yeltsin will be in terrible trouble at home with the nationalists in the Duma. In principle, I would like a resolution too, but as a practical matter we may have to keep

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our options open and argue that we can do this if necessary because of the previous actions of Milosevic. (S)

President Chirac: Bill, I perfectly understand that and there is no need for interpretation, but I would like to speak French.

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The President: Well, you know Milosevic believes he'll never have to face NATO. That is why there are 200,000 people driven from their homes. All the past evidence suggests that only when he is under pressure will he negotiate. [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] my impression is that he would get killed in the Duma if he voted for this. (S)

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President Chirac:

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The President: I agree, if we can. (€)

President Chirac:

The President: Here is what I think. I think that first of all, we are clearly better off if we can get it. My problem is I think if we wait to the point where a clear humanitarian disaster is on us this winter, we may be too late to prevent a mass outpouring of refugees and there will be a hell of a lot more people killed by then. (€)

President Chirac:

The President: I understand your situation, but what bothers me is that by then Milosevic may have won his military victory by massive ethnic cleansing. (€)

President Chirac:

The President: What I want to do is avoid the stick, but if he thinks we've got it, he may go back to negotiations. It is the possibility of NATO action without Russian approval that is a

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deterrent. Is that what you are you saying, that we can leave it unstated? I would like the planning to go forward. (€)

President Chirac: Absolutely. (€)

The President: Then we need to tell Yeltsin we do not want this to come to pass. We don't want to have to ask for a UN resolution. It will give him more incentive to try to settle this thing. (€)

President Chirac: Yes. (€)

The President: Believe me he does not want us to ask for a resolution. If there is a resolution, Yeltsin will be weakened at home no matter what he does. (€)

President Chirac:

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The President: He said he would prefer the UN, but he didn't want to put Yeltsin into an impossible position, and in a position where it looks like Russia has a veto over anything NATO wants to do. I think we want to avoid this. Kohl said he wanted to talk to you again and have Sandy Berger meet with Bitterlich and check around and talk again in a couple of days. (€)

President Chirac:

The President: I agree with that. (€)

President Chirac: At the same time, bring all possible pressure to bear in order to find a solution through the Contact Group, which should remain united.

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The President: If that is your position, I think it is important that our public position is that we should try to be silent on the matter and not make a big issue out of the UN mandate one way or the other. Otherwise we will look totally hypocritical. There is a disaster and then a veto and then we have to act. I think we have to keep the public position that we hope we won't have to act, we believe there ought to be a UN resolution, but not close the door. (C)

President Chirac: Yes, I agree completely with you. Don't close the door. No polemics on that. (C)

The President: On the other hand, we will be quiet too. We won't say of course we don't need it. We will say it would be a good thing to have it. (C)

President Chirac: That is good. Please say all my best regards and affection to Hillary. (U)

The President: I will. (U)

President Chirac: Thank you very much, Bill. Goodbye. (U)

The President: Thank you. Goodbye. (U)

-- End of Conversation --

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