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THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON



MEMORANDUM OF TELEPHONE CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Telcon with President Chirac of France

PARTICIPANTS: The President
French President Jacques Chirac

Notetakers: George Chastain, Frank
Jarosinski, Jenny McGee, Jim Smith

DATE, TIME November 4, 1998, 3:08 p.m. - 3:31 p.m.
AND PLACE: Oval Office

The President: Jacques? (U)

President Chirac: Bill? Ah, Bill, congratulations. We are so glad in France for the historic success that you had yesterday. Congratulations. (U)

The President: Thank you. (U)

President Chirac: You cannot imagine how glad we are for you, Hillary, and the United States. The French press is extremely positive. (U)

The President: Good. (U)

President Chirac: It was a great feat. This hasn't been done for a very long time. (U)

The President: That's right, it's been a long time. (U)

President Chirac: That is justice, and I want to tell you from the bottom of my heart. Congratulations and please say the same to Hillary. I'd like to congratulate you also, as I wrote to you in the letter, for the Wye River agreement. We were very glad for your personal success in Wye. (U)

The President: Thank you, Jacques, we're going to have to work hard, all of us. (U)

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President Chirac: I'm going to use a translator now, since my English is not very good. (U)

The President: Your English is wonderful. I know you have to go to a dinner, so I'll be brief. (U)

President Chirac: No problem. (U)

The President: I appreciate the clear message your government has sent to Iraq about UNSCOM -- the public statement, the decision to recall your ambassador -- they helped to underscore the unanimous view of the Security Council. The offer of a comprehensive review, which you took the lead on, gave Saddam a chance to show he intended to meet his obligations. It would have afforded him a real opportunity to move forward, and I can only conclude he wants to force the Council to lift sanctions without giving up his WMD and missile programs. We have been negotiating patiently with Saddam since he suspended cooperation in August. I believe we now have to act promptly to respond to this challenge, because if he can shut down UNSCOM with impunity, there must be a strong response, or the credibility of the Security Council will be damaged. I know you've talked to Tony Blair about this, and I hope we can formalize the approval of the UK draft resolution that is now before the Security Council. And I also think we have to be prepared to use force, and we have to be together on it. (C)

President Chirac: Yes, but Bill, first of all I want to say the UK proposal is a very good one. We concur with it, and I think we will be able to reach agreement for unanimous adoption. Secondly, I'd like to share with you my analysis of Saddam's behavior. Naturally, some of this is just provocation; he can't resist that, and it's naturally directed at the American President and the Security Council. But the real problem is elsewhere. At the present time, the situation with the Iraqi people is deteriorating, so far as Saddam is concerned; in other words, he is beginning to be criticized. The people are suffering more and more in a material sense, and they're beginning to blame Saddam. The way Saddam thinks is the best way to regain control of the people is to pretend to be a martyr. And in the same way, insofar as Arab public opinion is concerned, he doesn't seem to be supported anymore. So as I see it then, what he's trying to do is play the martyrdom card. What he's thinking is that if there is a military strike against him, he'll regain control of those people and public opinion in the Arab world. Furthermore, he hasn't yet sent away the UNSCOM teams. And if there is a military strike, naturally,

they would all be expelled and he'll be able to go about his business as calmly as he likes. So it's clear that we find ourselves in a rather peculiar position. We have nothing to give, nothing to offer. We can't change anything in our position, which must be a position of great firmness. And this time we are unanimous, including the Russians and the Chinese. So there's nothing to negotiate. At the same time, it is in Saddam's interest to be the victim of a military strike. Which is why this time the problem is going to be very hard to resolve. We sent a two-fold message: first, we recalled our ambassador, which is a very strong message. We do it rarely, and we haven't done it here before. Second, we communicated through Tariq Aziz the risk of military action was clear, and that the world was unanimous with respect to sanctions. But in truth I'm afraid we are working here with an unarmed gun. I think it's in his own interest to be bombed. (C)

The President: How is he better off? You think even though it wouldn't help him get the sanctions lifted, the people would in their adversity be more supportive of him? (C)

President Chirac: Yes, naturally, of course. That explains his attitude. (C)

The President: But, on the other hand, that puts us in the position of saying there's no action he can't justify in defiance of the Security Council. It is a difficult problem. (C)

President Chirac: Well, I share that view completely. I'm saying indeed it's a difficult situation. He wants two things today: he wants to regain control of his own people, and look like a martyr in the eyes of Arab public opinion. And secondly, he wants to get rid of UNSCOM once and for all, and the IAEA, and he wants to be able to go about his business as he pleases. And that's why we're in somewhat of a trap here. We have nothing to offer. You know that I've always been in favor of lifting the sanctions. [REDACTED] P1(b)(1)

[REDACTED] P1(b)(1) [REDACTED] P1(b)(1) After the position Saddam has taken, we can't give him anything at all. Unless we want to send Tomahawks, with all the danger and risk that would represent.

The President: It seems to me that if his people see the world is united when we act, they will see him isolated. It would not

help him with his people; it only helps if his strategy is to divide people. (C)

President Chirac: Well, we are not, of course, divided. Perhaps in the past there might have been divisions, but today we are not divided. I am completely certain that public opinion would support him. They'd rally around, and that's why he's doing what he's done. Because otherwise, the initiative he's taken would be stupid. He's a man who doesn't know anything about the outside world, but he knows his own country very well.

(C)
The President: But we still are back to the main question. What happens to countries when they pledge to complete an inspection regime and don't do it? I mean, he was very close to being certified in the atomic area. Why did he do it, because he thought the sanctions would never be lifted, or not soon enough, or perhaps he actually does have some WMD capability?

(C)
President Chirac: His incomprehensible and really stupefying actions can only be explained with regard to the internal situation in Iraq. In any case what's clear is there is nothing more we can give. We should give full powers to Kofi Annan and adopt the UK draft in the Security Council unanimously. We should then authorize Kofi Annan to make one last demarche to attempt to get Saddam to reverse what he's done. I think that then we have to wait and see what Saddam's reaction will be, but I fear very much there won't be any change. What he wants is to regain his influence over his own people, to regain control, and go about rearming. (C)

The President: Well, I think that you have a good grasp of this. I wonder if it would be helpful if Sandy Berger would come over this weekend and discuss it with Levitte. (C)

President Chirac: Bill, I think the plan is for Sandy Berger to come with John Holmes, the advisor to Tony Blair, and the three of them will be able to discuss together. This is already the plan. (C)

The President: That's good. All right, we'll stay in close touch, and we may have to talk again early in the week. (C)

President Chirac: Well, yes, I'm at your entire disposal as far as that is concerned, and I want to tell you in France how very

glad we are for your great success, and tell Hillary how happy we are. And bravo for Wye Plantation. (U)

The President: Thank you, Jacques, I really appreciate the kind words you have said to others, as well, about what happened at the Wye Plantation. If we can get the process kicked off and the final status talks started, then we should be working with the EU as well, to build up the economy of the Palestinians, so they will have every opportunity to keep it going. (U)

President Chirac: Yes, I agree. (U)

The President: Thank you, Jacques. Goodbye, have a good dinner. (U)

President Chirac: Thank you, Bill. I'll talk to you soon on the phone. (U)

The President: Okay, goodbye. (U)

President Chirac: Goodbye. (U)

-- End of Conversation --