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THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

MEMORANDUM OF TELEPHONE CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Telcon with British Prime Minister John Major
(U)

PARTICIPANTS: The President
Prime Minister John Major
Notetakers: Mary Ann Peters, Nelson Drew,
Katherine O'Loughlin, Celina Realuyo, Lyle
Harrison and Kenneth Baldwin

DATE, TIME July 14, 1995, 3:39 - 4:08p.m.
AND PLACE: Oval Office

The President: Hello, John? (U)

Prime Minister Major: Hi Bill. It has been an interesting day. We just had a three-hour meeting on Bosnia and I had a livelier conversation than usual with Chirac. In our assessment, the situation looks awful. Backtracking a little bit - [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]
EO 13526 1.4b, 1.4d

[REDACTED] They are presently attacking Zepa as we speak, and it is one or two days before Zepa falls. The next question is whether they will move down the eastern enclaves from Zepa to Gorazde. We judge they will, but before mounting a proper attack in Gorazde, they will have to regroup and will need at least four to five days. We have some pretty experienced people inside at Gorazde, and they tell us they probably will attack in 4 to 5 days. We expect the Bosnian government forces will defend it. We have 3-400 of our Royal Welsh fusiliers there. The question is what to do militarily and politically? I think you spoke with Chirac? (C)

The President: [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]
EO 13526 1.4d

Prime Minister Major: He seems to have shifted off that somewhat now. (C)

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The President: Now he wants to reinforce Gorazde. (C)

Prime Minister Major: Yes. He wants to reinforce Gorazde, retake Srebrenica and reinforce Sarajevo as well. (C)

The President: We have to do that on Sarajevo anyway. Helmut said that any of these military actions, besides defending Sarajevo or Goradze, would require UNSC action. I hadn't thought about it. He seemed to think so, at least. (C)

Prime Minister Major: They're on a peacekeeping mission. It would have to require a fairly loose interpretation of self defense. As far as Chirac is concerned... (C)

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Prime Minister Major: Sorry, God knows what happened there. (U)

The President: We were talking about the French point of view and the status of things. What is your thinking about it? (C)

Prime Minister Major: Regarding Gorazde, France wants to reinforce it. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] EO 13526 1.4d, 1.4d

[REDACTED] WE MUST EXAMINE THE MILITARY reality to see if it's practical. We expect our Chief of the Defense Staff, General Shalikashvili and Admiral Lanxade to meet over the weekend. (C)

The President: Lanxade asked for helicopters to support it, but they would be sitting ducks without taking out their, the Serbs, ability to shoot them down. (C)

Prime Minister Major: Thank you. Bill. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] EO 13526 1.4b, 1.4d

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EO 13526 1.4b, 1.4d

[redacted] These are the hard problems we'll have to face. Our defense minister is going to Bosnia this weekend to work out what has to be done. (C)

The President: We must stay in close touch. You know, at the time UNPROFOR seemed like the best of all the bad alternatives. (C)

Prime Minister Major: I don't have a shred of doubt that it was right. Let's not forget that the whole of central Bosnia is at peace. There is no ethnic cleansing in central Bosnia. UNPROFOR has saved 150,000 lives. That's not a negligible contribution by UNPROFOR, it's a contribution well worth having. [redacted]

EO 13526 1.4b, 1.4d

The President: [redacted]

EO 13526 1.4d

Prime Minister Major: [redacted]

EO 13526 1.4b, 1.4d

The President: I have been in touch with my military commanders. They were all here in Washington for a military conference, except for Joulwan, who stayed behind in Europe. Actually, Admiral Boorda, EUCOM commander, who was in charge of the whole Bosnia thing before Joulwan, is here in Washington. And General Shalikashvili was there before Joulwan. Yesterday we went over it in great detail. I called Colin Powell too, to make sure of a balanced view. He said if you change the nature of the mission and decide to fight, screwing around is not an option. You must be willing to take casualties, inflict casualties and use air power, which may hurt civilians. You must decide if you think it is a sustainable strategy in the long run and are prepared to enter the war on the side of the Bosnian Muslims. I was moved by the report that 3,000 Bosnian government troops left Srebrenica without fighting -- how can you blame the Dutch? (C)

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Prime Minister Major: The Dutch made a fair showing. They are not to blame at all. [redacted] EO 13526 1.4b, 1.4d

The President: I don't know who said it, but they do it all the time. [redacted]

EO 13526 1.4d

Prime Minister Major: You and I have presses that help, but I have no intention to react because the stakes are higher than that. (C)

The President: I'm just going let it go. Look, I think it is very important, if possible, to hold Gorazde. If it falls, Sarajevo will be more vulnerable. It is psychologically and strategically more important. We have to look at other options. Serbia says they are not cooperating, but they have more sophisticated equipment now to shoot our planes down. (C)

Prime Minister Major: Gorazde won't go down quickly. But there are 5,000 government troops who won't hold out long against 12,000-14,000 Serbs. [redacted]

EO 13526 1.4b, 1.4d

The President: I'm open to provide help, but we don't want to do anything militarily stupid. We have to have an understanding. We can't just kick the can down the road. If there is a consensus on this issue, there must be an understanding with the Bosnians. [redacted] EO 13526 1.4d They do not want UNPROFOR to leave but at the same they have this [redacted] 1.4d idea to urge the U.S. Congress to lift the arms embargo here. They are telling the Congress that that is the only reason that they lost Srebrenica, because they have no heavy equipment. (C)

Prime Minister Major: They're wrong. (C)

The President: Before we make any decisions, they will have to decide what they want! (C)

Prime Minister Major: When is the vote? (C)

The President: Sometime next week. It will be a hell of a vote the first time around; unless I can figure out some alternative (C)

Prime Minister Major: Oh. (U)

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The President: There are two relevant facts that are ignored: the casualty rate has gone way down and central Bosnia is at peace because of contributions made by UNPROFOR. The average TV viewer sees it. He thinks it's as bad or worse than it was in 1992. [redacted] 1.4d Those safe areas were always there at the sufferance of the Serbs, particularly when the Serbs started taking hostages. (C)

Prime Minister Major: [redacted]

EO 13526 1.4b, 1.4d

The President: I remember that well. It is not inconceivable that the lifting of arms embargo will pass by overriding my veto. Izetbegovic and Silajdzic have been lobbying Congress. (C)

Prime Minister Major: [redacted]

EO 13526 1.4b, 1.4d

The President: If they do I'll try to veto it and sustain it. But they are in a dream world over there. What they see is Muslims being split by sexes, ethnic cleansing on TV which they think is just as bad as in '92. There's no telling them it's different. It all helps support the lifting of the embargo movement. They see the UN failure and believe we should give the Muslims guns. They are telling Congress that if they had guns they would be kicking the crap out of them. But if the French and British leave, the American public is not willing to send U.S. troops to Bosnia. They are just kicking the can down the road. No one likes to appear weak but we are at step 10 now, not step 2. I wouldn't be alarmed by that or condition our conduct on it but if it looks like there is a certain resolve and clarity of explanation it would help me to moderate a firestorm. We'll have to act together. It will help. (C)

Prime Minister Major: I see. Let me check the timetable. The Senate votes next week, then the House. The lift wouldn't take effect until September? (C)

The President: The vote can be done in a few days and the override vote a few days after that. They can set an effective time sometime later, or even immediately. They might set a date soon, because of their perception that the UN is routed. The perception is that the U.S. is on the side of the Government and the problem is that UNPROFOR has no mandate to enter into war. (C)

Prime Minister Major: I have a pretty full report of your problems. (C)

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The President: I am not hung up about vetoing it. This issue and a domestic one have me in a fun house. All the press is one way and facts are irrelevant. (U)

Prime Minister Major: I am very familiar with that. (U)

The President: Our citizens have good motives. Compassion and neo-isolationism are leading to support for lifting the arms embargo. They don't want our soldiers there, but they badmouth the UN and want to give them arms. I just want you to know what is going on. The press is playing on popular emotions in the most irresponsible way. (C)

Prime Minister Major: Yes, I understand. (U)

The President: There is a possibility it'll happen quicker than you suggest. It could be the law of our country. (C)

Prime Minister Major: I'll keep my fingers crossed. I sympathize with you about the Whitewater stuff. I'm sorry it keeps coming up. You don't need that sort of rubbish. (U)

The President: I do not understand it. They have now spent \$12 million on the investigation of a land deal I lost \$40,000 on and a \$20,000 campaign contribution. Every report says that neither I nor Hillary did anything wrong. (U)

Prime Minister Major: Yes. (U)

The President: How worried should I be about the violence in Northern Ireland? Senator Mitchell passed on your request that I make a statement that I look forward to visiting a peaceful Ireland. I will do it before the cease-fire anniversary. (U)

Prime Minister Major: There are problems on both sides. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] EO 13526 1.4b, 1.4d

[REDACTED] In the by-election, McCartney is the newly elected independent. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] 1.4b, 1.4d

[REDACTED] There has been no progress on decommissioning. We are in contact and trying to stitch a way forward. We are worried as we get closer to August 31. We are approaching the 12-month deadline. The marching season caused some problems but with less damage than expected. August 31 is the next worry date. I have had good meetings with Bruton and discussions continue. Your visit in November is vital [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] 1.4b, 1.4d

The President: If you need to talk on Bosnia, we'll be in touch. I'll be available. (C)

Prime Minister Major: You probably know by now we have decided to call a conference at the ministerial level next week in London to discuss the Bosnian issue and the UNPROFOR mission. I hope Warren and Perry will attend. We need to get a coordinated look at what is to happen there. (C)

The President: Yes, I will talk to them about going. (C)

Prime Minister Major: Very well. I'll be here to chat anytime. I may call you Monday after we look at the military options. (C)

The President: By the way, thank you for your decision to buy the Apaches. (C)

Prime Minister Major: Oh, yes. That did not add to my conversation with Chirac. Chirac and the French were not particularly happy about it. We felt it was the best helicopter. We made the right choice. I have not a shred of regret about it. (C)

The President: OK then, we'll be in touch. (U)

Prime Minister Major: Good-bye. God bless. (U)

The President: OK. Good-bye. (U)

-- End of Conversation --