

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

DECLASSIFIED
PER E.O. 13526
2013-0517- M (1.07)
KBM 7/16/2019

MEMORANDUM OF TELEPHONE CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Telcon with French President Jacques Chirac

PARTICIPANTS: The President
President Jacques Chirac
Notetaker: Alexander Vershbow and Anthony Gardner

DATE, TIME July 13, 1995, 3:22-3:58 p.m.

AND PLACE: Oval Office

The President: Hello, Jacques? (U)

President Chirac: Hello, Bill. How are you? I will speak in French. I'm very worried about Bosnia and there are things we want you to know. (*Switching to French*) First of all, my congratulations on the strong statement you issued that if we cannot restore the UN mission, then the days of UNPROFOR are numbered and that that causes you concern. Our analysis is the same. The fall of Srebrenica, the probable fall of Zepa tomorrow and the real threat to Gorazde represent a major failure of the UN, NATO and all the democracies. You see what we are seeing on TV, how the Serbs are separating men from women, sending women to be raped and killing men who are old enough to bear arms. In my opinion, we can no longer just stand by and watch this. It is no longer a problem for the UN and NATO, but a problem for all civilized nations opposed to fascism. Therefore we must restore the situation to the way it was guaranteed by the UN. That means restoring the situation in the eastern enclaves. (C)

Therefore, firm and limited military action is called for. France is ready to put all of its forces behind the mission. I don't yet know what the British want to do. They are directly concerned since they are in Gorazde, next door to Srebrenica. I wonder whether or not their intention is to pick up and leave Gorazde just as the Dutch left Srebrenica. I don't want France to be an accomplice to such a situation. Either we agree to carry out a joint military intervention to protect the three enclaves -- to recapture Srebrenica and guarantee the integrity of Gorazde and Zepa, which account for 100,000 Muslims (today 20,000 to 40,000 Muslims are fleeing Srebrenica), and we use military intervention to impose the will of the UN, which can

only come from the U.S., France, the UK and Germany -- and France is prepared to throw all of its forces into the effort to restore the situation in Srebrenica -- or we do nothing. But if the option is to do nothing, then that is exactly the situation we were in in 1939, and France will withdraw -- of course, by agreement with our British friends and the rest of UNPROFOR. So the issue is whether the U.S. is prepared to cooperate in combating ethnic cleansing, or do we sit back and let these people fight each other, and we go home. We cannot allow ourselves to be accomplices! (Ø)

The President: Let me first say that we appreciate the strong stance you have taken and your determination to do something. Obviously, we have been thinking about this a lot. I will take up your specific proposals with my military commanders, but I wanted to speak with you first. I would like you to think about a few things. Gorazde is much more important than Zepa and Srebrenica in terms of its size and psychological impact. The Bosnian Government has 9,000 troops in Gorazde, who are apparently willing to fight. In Srebrenica there were about 3,000 Bosnian troops, but as you know, they left under pressure of shelling. They left without putting up a fight, although I think they could have done so. The British have 300 troops in Gorazde, so I think they will be more inclined to take a stand there. We all know that if something happens to Gorazde, the Bosnian Serb army will feel they have a free hand to move on to Sarajevo. Our military advisers say there are significant hazards in attempting to land a force with helicopters in Srebrenica and that UNPROFOR might be better off securing Gorazde first and then move back eastward due to the inherent difficulty of defending the area there. (Ø)

The other issue I would like to raise with you -- which we discussed in Halifax and here during your visit, and which has become more pressing -- is the necessity of knowing what the rules of engagement are going to be if you take the initiative in Srebrenica, Zepa or Gorazde. You cannot be in a position to fight in Zepa and then ask for NATO support without clear rules of engagement. If there is going to be fighting, it has to be different than in the past. Before we provide air power, we have to know that it would be used and that we could inflict real pain on the Serbs in other areas. Before UNPROFOR gets into a military campaign, we must have a clear sense of what the next move is and what the acceptable military options are under UNPROFOR and NATO. Now that you have told me what you want to do, I will talk to our military advisers, but they are very skeptical about bringing in forces with helicopters, especially if the Bosnians won't fight. I think we should first secure Gorazde and then Sarajevo. I will have conversations with them and get back in touch with you. (Ø)

I would like to make two more points. First, I think your stated intentions to reopen Mount Igman road is very important -- a critical point. Second, we need General Shalikashvili to speak with Admiral Lanxade or have Secretary Christopher speak with your foreign minister to talk in detail about what you have in mind for the enclaves. We need to consider whether the Muslims will return to the enclaves, how we will protect them if they come back and whether it would be under the old UN rules of engagement. Will the Bosnian Serb Army just end their advances? Therefore, I believe we should focus on Gorazde and press for ministerial and military talks. You have given me many things to think about. I would like to have a follow up between the generals and foreign ministers on the details. (C)

President Chirac: Bill, I understand what you said, but permit me to express my own feelings. Gorazde is not more important than Srebrenica or Zepa. It is not a problem of geography, but one of principle. There were "safe areas" guaranteed by the international community. The Serbs have taken the first "safe area" and are about to take the second. In front of the world's TV cameras, they are separating men from women and have started a program of ethnic cleansing. Tomorrow they will be doing the same thing in Gorazde, and the British will not defend themselves more than the Dutch did. The truth is that democracies are good at making speeches but bad at getting others to respect them. (C)

From this point on, we need to take the necessary steps to safeguard international law that is supposed to protect humanitarian principles and that means that the main democracies must go on the ground to defend law and order. I am not asking for air support for French troops. I am asking for French, German, British and American troops on the ground to defend the values on which democracies are based. If the four of us decide not to defend such values, there is no point in staying on the ground to be open to ridicule. The British will evacuate Gorazde without fighting. The Muslims will not fight in Gorazde and everything then will be concentrated on Sarajevo. I don't want to leave the situation like this. If we are not prepared to defend democracy, we should leave and let them fight it out. That means withdrawing UNPROFOR and implementing OPLAN 40104. We cannot day after day be smacked in the face while ethnic cleansing is going on. (C)

The President: We cannot defend democratic values in the abstract. My military advisers tell me the Muslims could have made a hell of a fight in Srebrenica and raised the price of the Serbs' occupation, but they wouldn't do it. We can't fight just because the UN says they are "safe areas." We can't send the Muslims back and commit ourselves to stay forever if they won't

defend themselves. That's the problem with the strategy you suggest. Yesterday we saw the effects of the imbalance in arms. Have you had any second thoughts about lifting the arms embargo? (C)

President Chirac: Lifting the arms embargo would mean the immediate withdrawal of UNPROFOR, which is one of the options. I think that's a bad option since it would mean defeat for the Muslims. They will call on the U.S. to defend them on the ground if the embargo is lifted. If I were an American, I would be terrified about lift. You would face two choices: either to go in on the ground to save the Muslims, which would means 150,000 or 200,000 troops, or allow the Serbs to annihilate the Muslims. That would create a real moral issue for you. But it's for you to judge. (C)

We cannot allow this situation to develop before our eyes. It is a blatant form of ethnic cleansing. We can't allow principles of democracy and humanitarianism to be flouted without doing anything. Either we intervene on the ground as police would do in a civilized society, or we say we're scared of doing that, in which case we should withdraw, lift the arms embargo and let them fight it out. At that point, the problem for the U.S. will be to decide what to do when the Bosnians ask you to rescue them. (C)

The President: If we intervene to regain the enclaves on their behalf and they won't fight, how do we keep them open? UNPROFOR's mission would be completely changed and you would have entered into combat on the side of the Bosnian Government when they don't fight for themselves. I agree the Serbs have made a mockery of the UN. They took Srebrenica and got it for free. We didn't even bomb them. We should raise the price, and even hit Pale. I have argued that we should allow NATO to take tougher action but that was not to be. If we enter the war to defend the Bosnians, they have to be ready to defend themselves. That's what worries me. (C)

President Chirac: When does the Congress vote on lifting the embargo? (C)

The President: Next week. I'm trying to defeat it. I agree with you: I am vehemently opposed to unilateral lift. If they pass it, I will veto it, and they would be obliged to override my veto. (C)

President Chirac: Can Congress override the veto? (C)

The President: Yes, with a two-thirds vote, but I don't think they'll have two thirds. I'm not worried about it. I would like

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

5

to confer with my military advisers and get back in touch on this matter. (C)

President Chirac: OK, I quite agree. I will ask Admiral Lanxade to contact General Shalikashvili as soon as possible. Thank you very much. (C)

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

-- End of Conversation --

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~