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THE WHITE HOUSE
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MEMORANDUM OF TELEPHONE CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Telcon with British Prime Minister Major (U)

PARTICIPANTS: The President
Prime Minister John Major
Notetakers: Mary Ann Peters, Katherine
O'Loughlin, Kenneth Baldwin, Alejandro
Martinez and Andrew Kerr

DATE, TIME: July 19, 1995, 9:15 - 9:50 a.m.
AND PLACE: Oval Office

The President: Hello? (U)

Prime Minister Major: Hello. (U)

The President: Hello. Hey John, how are you? I just had a long talk with Chirac. (U)

Prime Minister Major: What kind of mood is he in today. (U)

The President: He was in a pretty tough mood today. You know, based on Secretary Christopher's conversation with Foreign Secretary Rifkind, exactly where we are going. I need to tell you of my conversation with Chirac. Let me start by saying I am convinced that the only way I can sustain the position we have taken is to work, support and cooperate with UNPROFOR and our allies to take some new action to save Gorazde. I think I can then sustain a veto of unilateral lift. (U)

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

The President: The first vote could be tomorrow in the Senate. Then there's the vote in the House, then the reconciliation. They start rolling me tomorrow. (U)

Prime Minister Major: What is the veto-proof majority? (U)

The President: It is 67 Senate members and 290 some-odd House members. Here's the issue: whatever they pass will pass with a veto-proof majority, but some will fall off if they believe I have an alternative with any chance of working. The arguments

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are that it would Americanize the conflict. It would undermine support for other UN embargoes, on Iran, Iraq and Libya, which they like. We are being killed in the press. All the papers, not just in Washington and New York, but even the local paper in my hometown of Little Rock are saying "Why won't the Americans help us defend ourselves." The whole U.S. press is spinning like that. It appears that the UN cannot defend the Muslims and will not let them defend themselves. We have to do more so I can prevail here and also to try to reestablish the vigor we had in the spring of last year, when we established the safe areas and got the heavy weapons out and achieved diplomatic progress in the peace talks. (C)

Our plan here is to come up with a concentrated UN force and a disproportionate air threat. Proportional response does not work. Chirac is still pushing the idea of flying in 1,000 troops to join your guys. You are worried about retaliation against UK and other troops. I asked him during our conversation, if French troops go in and Serbs attack, would the French plan on shooting back? He said "yes, these will be real soldiers, not blue helmets." Mladic is a smart man, he will retaliate and take hostages if he can. If one U.S. helicopter is shot down, he agrees that we would have to retaliate. So, if that is the end game, why not get the same benefit by establishing the deterrent now? I asked him to work through it. Our common partnership, UN, NATO and the strength of the West, depend on us not showing up Friday without a common position among the UK, France and the U.S. I think Chretien will go along, and I can get the Ukraine to support us. Yeltsin will not like it, but he is not in any position to do anything else. We need to tell him to go back to their position in February 1994. (C)

Prime Minister Major: Did you get a clear view - I'd like to respond to your other points later - of why Chirac is so enthusiastic about flying 1,000 troops into encircled positions just as they did in Dien Bien Phu? If I know my history right, that did not have very happy results. (C)

The President: Exactly. I like Chirac because he is strong and smart and wants to do the right thing, but he is very French; he wants to make the grand gesture. He clearly hopes for psychological impact. (C)

Prime Minister Major: That's the trouble, he is prepared to drive into their guns, which is brave, but where do you go when they fire? (C)

The President: It doesn't help the UK troops to have 1,000 French soldiers without artillery come in on helicopters. (C)

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Prime Minister Major: The reverse! (U)

The President: If we do take aggressive action, we could tip the balance against you. We have to hope the 9,000 Bosnians stay and fight. (C)

Prime Minister Major: On the issue of the 1,000 troops, I don't rule it out entirely, depending on what other decisions we take. Let's turn to Gorazde, where we have 300 Welsh fusiliers and 9,000 government troops who will probably fight, but lose. They may not fight at all like in Srebrenica. But if you fly in 1,000 troops, it is a hazardous operation in itself; they do not add to your ability to defend Gorazde; and there is no way to get in heavy weapons, no landing strip for them; you'd have to fight your way through tunnels, mountains and 100 miles of Serb-held territory. So what you have is another 1,000 lightly armed troops on the ground who are now potential hostages. Chirac says they will be real soldiers. All of them are, but these are fighting soldiers. These soldiers are not UN peacekeepers and under the UN mandate. The minute they fight, they are more likely to be hostages, as will everyone associated with the UN. UNPROFOR would have to hunker down everywhere. We would probably get by with this under international law, but the knock-on impact would be the same. If Gorazde falls, you have another 1,000 hostages and the humiliation of NATO troops unable to make a difference. It will draw NATO closer to all out war. To point out the consequences is not wimpish, and the French Foreign Legion charging in is not necessarily wise. (C)

The wider issue is there is not a shred of doubt that we cannot stay where we are. Ideally, the objective is to deter the Serbs from taking Gorazde. Chirac is gambling that it will send a signal and the Serbs will stop; this is the same rationale the French used to argue for safe areas, but it hasn't worked in Srebrenica or Zepa. Our objectives are to deter the Serb seizure of Gorazde and keep Sarajevo going and to enable the UN to carry out its mission more effectively. The UN will be unable to remain in Bosnia without an effective policy. We need a cohesive U.S./British/French plan and to get others on board. On Gorazde, we need some flexibility; we don't want anyone digging into rigid public positions like last week. (C)

The President: I agree. Militarily, this proposal is not sound; it only makes sense for its psychological value or if you're looking for a pretext, if they shoot down a helicopter, to kick the crap out of them. (C)

Prime Minister Major: It's a gamble if it means making UNPROFOR's situation worse; but at the end of the day, it's Chirac's choice. It's a gamble anyway. Where we are coming from

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4

together is that something has to be done; it is not practical politics to do nothing. Something must be done and it will involve the threat of air power. If it has a chance of being effective, Mladic must believe we mean it. In the past, he has only been slapped on the wrist. We need to give him two messages -- one in public and one in private. The one in private must be very specific on the size and scale of the response so he knows we mean it. The Serbs have to see physical movement of assets, so they see we're not bluffing. If we make the threat, we must be prepared to carry it out in spades. If we do this, several things may follow: hostages may be taken -- civilian and military personnel who are exposed must be hunkered down before Friday. We are dealing with a madman who has a Dutch battalion in his hands. We can't rule out the thought of Mladic's slaughter of the Dutch. (C)

Here's a marginal point that I'm not quite sure of the answer to. If we use Suppression of Enemy Air Defenses or air attacks, arguably that means the end of the UNPROFOR mission. It may be a decision to be taken immediately, or not. But if it is and we must leave, that would involve the NATO plan including U.S. troops. So we're in the process of setting in motion a chain of events leading to committing 50,000 NATO troops in Bosnia to bring out UNPROFOR. I'm happy to consider this as long as we understand the consequences: the impact of an air attack, possible hostages and the need to take UNPROFOR out if necessary. Once they're out, we have to guard against a wider Balkan war. You have assets in Macedonia. We would need to consider putting assets elsewhere to prevent a trans-Balkan war from breaking out if there is trouble in Kosovo or elsewhere. (C)

Regarding the air threat, the threat to Mladic has to be credible. It is debatable, depending on the nature of the situation, whether to go straight to full air attack or if it should be gradual retaliation. We must ensure that UN personnel are in relatively safe places at the time we issue the threat. That's what I think. I hope you, Chirac and I can agree today or tomorrow in time to come up with a position for Friday. (C)

The President: You've thought it through well. Two things need to be done. I do not know the exact position of all the UNPROFOR troops and associated civilians. And I do not know how long it will take them to get into positions that are relatively immune. Secondly, I agree with your analysis that if we had to launch a major air campaign, it might be the end of the UNPROFOR mission. We have to calculate what that means. Can we get multilateral lift? Do we do a NATO lift if Russian blocks multilateral lift in the UN? Does a new international force come in or, do we take all international forces out? Also, depending on the results of the bombing, we must consider the situation under which it could

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bring about a cease-fire or meaningful movement in the peace process. If we are successful, UNPROFOR can stay without fear of hostages being taken; they can continue with humanitarian relief, resume air drops and open the Mt. Igman route. Time is running out on us. If bombing secures our position, we would still have only a few months to juice up the peace effort and reach an agreement. We need to see what we could do to change the dynamics of the process and hasten an agreement. I believe it's possible it would work like it did in 1994 when the safe areas were established. Those decisions bought us a few months. This assumes that you and others want to stay. (C)

Prime Minister Major: Yes, we want to stay. (C)

The President: We still need a fast timeline for this effort or the Serbs will quickly bite us in the rear. (C)

Prime Minister Major: We also have to consider how they will react. They may react savagely or they may be smart. They may not attack but just leave Gorazde bottled up and attack Sarajevo. (C)

The President: Yes. Then we would have to pull out all the stops. If Sarajevo falls, it will be a disaster for all of us. (C)

Prime Minister Major: I think the French will ask if we are ready to add troops in Sarajevo. In principle, we would. We would replace someone else's battalion, because there is not billeting for another unit. We would replace less effective troops with more effective troops. We need cohesion. We need to look at land routes, both summer and winter. For example, in Sarajevo, Mt. Igman is not a winter route without a great deal of policing. We can't forget the back door -- Tudjman. There is a danger of Croatia going after Knin and the Krajina and provoking the Bosnian Serbs and providing them further incentive for war in Central and Eastern Bosnia. I raised this with Kohl. The question is: if we do that, then what about the Muslims? My 300 boys are surrounded by government troops who might not let them out. They could endanger them in two ways: they might inhibit their removal or put them at risk by attacking out from UNPROFOR positions and drawing a Serb response. We have to lean hard on Izetbegovic and make sure if we go down that route, the Muslims don't screw it up. (C)

The President: They're very artful at that. (C)

Prime Minister Major: The Bosnian Foreign Minister is in the U.S. making life difficult for you, stirring things up so the U.S. will come to the rescue. (C)

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The President: They never ask UNPROFOR to leave. They want it all -- the embargo lifted and UNPROFOR there to boot. (C)

Prime Minister Major: I doubt anyone has been keener to keep the UN there than me. If it turns out to be an air offensive, there will be no credible work for the UN, and it will be pointless and risky to leave troops when they could more effectively be stationed in Macedonia or elsewhere. Will the Congress accept contributing U.S. troops to get the UN out? (C)

The President: Yes. Even Dole has acknowledged that we have a moral duty to ensure the safe withdrawal of our allies. (C)

Prime Minister Major: If we go this route, I am prepared to do something dramatic in Gorazde. I don't want to rule out lifting our boys out. (C)

The President: You and I think along the same lines. This may lead to the collapse of UNPROFOR, but it is better to go out with a bang than with a whimper; otherwise we go out with our tail between our legs. (C)

Prime Minister Major: I'm not sure whether the Mladic message should be graduated or the big bang response. I need to run it by my Defense Minister, Chief of Staff and soldiers on the ground. Supposing we go down this route, we have to do something political in tandem. Will you entertain inviting the Pale Serbs to a conference at the foreign minister or head of state level, which could discuss land swaps and political settlement? We may be going down the military route one-legged. (C)

The President: I've had no discussion of the details of this, but if we make a bold military thrust, we should accompany it with a bold diplomatic initiative. We need to find out where Bildt is, whether there is any progress in his talks. Regarding the message to Mladic, I will talk to my people who understand his psychology and his way of operating. (C)

Prime Minister Major: The big question is what happens on the ground. If we issue the ultimatum, if the Serbs take us up and we proceed, the UN comes out. The government troops will begin to be armed but that takes time, and the Serbs will make a great deal of advance initially. There will be lots of genocide and ethnic cleansing. With the UN out, there will be no credible international reason to intervene unless we enter on the side of the government, which would be a de facto declaration of war on Serbia and Milosevic. Yet, could we sit on the bench, say we had done our best and watch on BBC and CNN the slaughter? Or would we be prepared to declare war on the Serbs? (C)

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The President: There is a third option that would have to be done by NATO since Russia would veto a UN resolution. We could consider the use of NATO air power to stabilize the situation on the ground pending the development of some kind of equilibrium in artillery. (S)

Prime Minister Major: I have thought of that, establishing some equilibrium with air power. I'm not sure how to justify it legally, although it is possible militarily. And it raises a big problem especially for the U.S. - the Russian response. They have been dragged through the UN. I don't know how Kozyrev and Yeltsin could defend NATO involvement to their parliament when the UN isn't there. (S)

The President: That is a difficult thing. The effort would have to be carefully circumscribed. The point to make to the Russians would be that they supported the Contact Group plan and the Serbs said no, ignored Russian wishes and screwed them. (S)

Prime Minister Major: The danger would be that Yeltsin would not survive that. Neither would some of the concordats you have reached with them. That might be what is at the end of the yellow brick road. (S)

The President: Yes, we know all of that. But the position we are in is untenable. (S)

Prime Minister Major: I agree. We have tended to look down the road too many times over the past 3-4 years and have crossed our fingers like Dickens' Mr. Micawber, hoping something good would come of it. But like Micawber's benefactor, nothing turned up. Still, we have done what we thought was right. (S)

The President: We bought a year with UNPROFOR in which no one was killed and peace might have been achieved. It wasn't, but it might have been. (S)

Prime Minister Major: We have saved lives. Peace was achieved in central Bosnia. We have nothing to reproach ourselves about. I just want to do the right thing. We may go down this path, the end of which could lead in the direction I have been laying out. (S)

The President: We will work through all the short-term questions -- where the troops are and how long it will take to get them into safer positions; what to say to Mladic -- and the longer-term issues you have been talking about. I suggest we get back in touch in 24 hours. You, I and Chirac need to be together at this meeting on Friday. (S)

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8

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Prime Minister Major: Absolutely. I'm committed to that. I will speak to the French today. (S)

The President: Your analysis of the military wrongheadedness of their proposal is the same as ours, including the potential for failure. I'm not sure it would do any good but it wouldn't make it much worse. And, if they shoot down one helicopter, the bombing starts. I don't want to rule it out. We can't afford to rule out some version of the French proposal. I have to go give an important speech. I'll be available to talk with you after that. Thank you, John. (S)

Prime Minister Major: We all have to give a little. I will talk to you tomorrow or later today. (S)

-- End of Conversation --

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