

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

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MEMORANDUM OF TELEPHONE CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Telcon with French President Chirac (U)

PARTICIPANTS: The President
President Chirac

Interpreter: Marcel Bouquet
Notetakers: Doug Bayley, Frank Jaraosinski,
Miles Murphy and Joel Schrader

DATE, TIME March 21, 1999, 1:18-1:33 p.m. EST
AND PLACE: Residence

President Chirac: Bill how are you? It's a great pleasure to hear your voice. (U)

The President: Fine. Thank you. I just got off the phone with Hillary and Chelsea in Egypt and they are on their way to the museum. (U)

President Chirac: It is wonderful, excursions into antiquity. How long will they stay there? (U)

The President: About three to four days. They are going to see a lot of the country and sites and also go to Tunisia and Morocco. (U)

President Chirac: What a wonderful treat. Tunisia is a beautiful country and Morocco is beautiful also. They have already been in Morocco before? (U)

The President: Yes, once before. (U)

President Chirac: Do you mind if we speak through the interpreter because my English is short? (U)

The President: Certainly. I called to check in with you on Kosovo. Milosevic has agreed to meet with Holbrooke one more time and I am sending him out there tomorrow. There is one

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village evacuated with 13,000 people completely evacuated this morning. (S)

I think we are in a difficult situation but I wanted to call because I believe it is important that NATO be prepared to carry out the first phase of the attacks on short notice and make sure they have the green light tomorrow. And then of course, if he launches an all out offensive against the people or us we have to be prepared to do more. It seems to me if he believes that we are quite firm and resolute about the terms of the peace agreement, we will still have the chance to avoid this. (S)

My main concern outside of Kosovo is the difficulty that it poses to the Russians. We all have to be prepared to work with Yeltsin and Primakov to limit the damage to them, but we can't afford to delay and have to be ready to go. (S)

President Chirac: Bill, first of all, I think that Milosevic has placed himself in a situation where there is no possibility for him to avoid air strikes. Therefore, we will stand-by to be active. In the second case, I understand through the message that I received that Holbrooke would leave tomorrow and give a firm message to Milosevic. I think it's a good initiative and Mrs. Albright also mentioned a trip to Belgrade on Wednesday to Milosevic of Mr. Cook and Mr. Verdine if nothing will happen before then. (S)

Thirdly, I fully understand the technical organization of strikes must be very good and carried out rapidly. That is why I suggested that the first stage, destroying air-to-air defenses, and the second stage, which aims at specific points, be merged and this was what was requested by Headquarters NATO and this must be done with urgency. I'm absolutely in favor of this. (S)

This being said, I consider that I cannot give a general order to take a strike decision to launch without having had a political decision and this is why I don't agree to the fact of entrusting absolute powers to General Clark given it is impossible to know what Holbrooke will say and what will occur in the field. Although we have very rapid contact between ourselves, and at the minimum will be ready to relay to General Clark the strike decision but we cannot abandon the political authority to a General. (S)

This is a problem of conditions and I have much fear that neither Holbrooke nor Cook or Vedrine will get very much if they

go. It will very much depend on Holbrooke. It is important that we are in contact with the three of them if something does happen. Then we need to have intervention immediately and a political decision can be taken in an hour. So I agree with the overall proposal conveyed by Mrs. Albright that subject to the political decision taken between the concerned, the four powers also be in agreement before being implemented by the CINC of NATO. (S)

The President: I am concerned with the evacuation of villages yesterday and that we're going to get into a time bind. If you want to talk again, it is absolutely imperative that we need to be available at anytime in the next forty-eight hours on minimum notice to have necessary conversations so we can talk about this matter. (S)

President Chirac: Bill, it is very easy -- the second problem that we will have the time to call each other. It is an unacceptable initiative being taken by the Serbs, like a strike on a village. Then even if we are not immediately available, there are staff that can take the decision in a quarter of an hour. But as a matter of principle we cannot retreat from political power and cannot withdraw decision power from them. I have great esteem for General Clark, but we want to be able to check what he wants to do to see if he's in the same frame of mind. All the others, not talking about the Russians, understood the military position was not tenable and that they are in no position to have any effective opposition to this. We won't have any problems with the Russians. (S)

The President: Well that is encouraging about the Russians and we will have to work with them. I imagine we will be talking in the next day or two. (S)

President Chirac: Well, I think the latest pressure will yield something. It all depends on Holbrooke. He will do his utmost but I am not optimistic given Milosevic or his army taking the initiative, in which case in one hour we will have a response because we all agree, the Americans, the British and the French, to ensure that we agree together. (S)

The President: Okay, I will be back in touch. (U)

President Chirac: Very well and my love to Hillary and Chelsea and I hope they have the best in Egypt then Tunisia and Morocco. (U)

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The President: Thank you. Bye. (U)

President Chirac: Bye bye. (U)

-- End of Conversation --

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