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THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

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MEMORANDUM OF TELEPHONE CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Telcon With President Mitterrand of France

PARTICIPANTS: The President
President Mitterrand
Interpreter: Marcel Bouquet
Notetaker: E. Anthony Wayne

DATE, TIME May 6, 1993; 2:41 pm - 2:55 pm, EDT
AND PLACE: Oval Office

The President: Hello, Francois. Thank you for taking the call.
(U)

President Mitterrand: Hello. I wanted to greet you to make sure I could hear you. (U)

The President: First, let me thank you for seeing Secretary of State Christopher. He was very pleased with the meeting he had with you and with the Prime Minister and others. With the rejection of the Vance-Owen plan by the Bosnian Serb Assembly, we now have to proceed to find a way to increase pressure on them and to try to stop the total destruction of the Bosnians. As you know, the U.S. believes that the best way to do that is by our ending the arms embargo in a controlled way -- to ensure that rather than getting arms from militant Muslims, the Bosnians get them from Western and East European sources. We also have to find a way to protect French, British and Canadian soldiers there. I want to hear your thoughts on this. (S)

Second, we were reluctant to use our air power unless there is a clearly defined mission, and we know whether we could succeed in achieving our objectives. So we thought that the stand-by availability of air power to prevent the Serbs from overrunning Bosnian towns while arms go in is a good way to use air power to see if we can bring about negotiations. Once the arms are going in and being used, we wouldn't need to continue to use air power. I am very concerned that we don't get dragged in as a combatant on one side of the conflict. Our objectives should be to level the playing field and to get an agreement. (S)

President Mitterrand: Yes, I think this is a good opinion. I think the idea is good in principle. But our government hesitates at lifting the embargo. And I can't blame them because in the days following the announcement the Serbs could take action against the Muslims to block them from receiving the arms, and the situation could become worse. The French idea which is

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now being given to the UN would be to create safe havens protecting certain cities in Bosnia with the authority to conduct air strikes to protect them. In this case, the Serbs would be forced into the offensive if they want to advance, and if they decide to do that, it will be easier vis a vis international opinion. I think this is a very seductive position. It is being discussed right now at the UN Security Council. (S)

The President: Well, I think that has some attractive aspects, but the problem is why should the Serbs care about world opinion now? They haven't cared about world opinion all along. Yesterday, the Bosnian Serbs said they didn't care what Milosevic or Karadzic think. If we have troops on the ground, they will be subject to shelling and bombing. We can bomb, but there are questions about when we would stop, and even then we are likely to have more casualties in the safe havens. We could, however, explore the mechanics, the specifics of safe havens. I hope we can let Secretary of State Christopher finish his mission to see if there is any support for lifting the arms embargo. Perhaps, we could look at the U.S. position of lifting the arms embargo plus air strikes and safe havens -- we could look at both options together. But I keep being drawn back to the arms embargo because the imposition of the embargo gave the Serbs an insurmountable military advantage. It is of concern that we are helping the Serbs -- we aren't neutral -- we're assisting the Serbs by continuing the embargo. Sanctions are hurting the Serbs, but having no impact on the Bosnian Serbs. I want to change the dynamics without getting the U.S., France or anyone else dragged into taking sides in a land war in this conflict. What do you think of that? (S)

President Mitterrand: What would you like to do Mr. President now? (U)

President Clinton: Hello, Mr. President? (U)

President Mitterrand: I hear you Mr. President. Whatever solution we envisage is bad or difficult. I will try to follow closely what is being debated at the Security Council. I am going to ask the French government to consider again what you have just told me now, tonight and tomorrow. Our representative to the Security Council has received instructions which are not favorable to lifting the arms embargo but which favor establishing safe havens. We will work tonight and tomorrow and will be in touch with you. We will keep our representatives in touch. We will call each other if necessary. I think you are right about some of the things at least, and we must review the situation and act in a few days. We will keep in touch and talk if we have to. Here I must keep in touch with the Prime Minister and Foreign Minister about what we can do. At this point, the position of the government of France is against the lifting of the arms embargo. I will talk to the Prime Minister. (S)

The President: Thank you very much. (U)

President Mitterrand: Yes. (U)

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The President: I hope we can work out something pretty soon. I think the Assembly rejected the plan and talked of a referendum because they want to use every day to get more territory -- they believe the West is too divided to take action. (C)

President Mitterrand: Yes, I agree. Thank you. Goodbye. (U)

The President: Thank you. Goodbye. (C)

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