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MEMORANDUM OF TELEPHONE CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Telcon with President Mitterrand of France on
November 23, 1994 (U)

PARTICIPANTS: The President
President Francois Mitterrand
Interpreter: Carol Wolter
Notetakers: Alexander Vershbow/Don Kerrick

DATE, TIME November 23, 1994, 3:55 - 4:00pm
AND PLACE: Oval Office

The President: Francois, hello. (U)

President Mitterrand: Good evening Bill. How are you? (U)

The President: After these last elections, I find myself in the
same position you were in after your first term. (U)

President Mitterrand: Yes, indeed. (U)

The President: I hope to do as well as you did. (U)

President Mitterrand: It is possible. (U)

The President: I am calling about the deteriorating situation in
Bihac. The Bosnian Serbs, with the direct involvement of Krajina
Serb ground forces, are on the brink of overrunning the entire
Bihac region and occupying Bihac city itself. (U)

President Mitterrand: Yes, I have thought about that. (U)

The President: The NATO strikes against the airfield in Croatia
and today's attacks on surface-to-air missile sites were steps in
the right direction, but they have not had a direct effect on the
Serb assault on Bihac. (U)

President Mitterrand: It will be difficult to solve without more
ground troops. (U)

The President: Let me say what my concern is. (U)

President Mitterrand: Yes. (U)

The President: I'm afraid if we don't turn it around, a wider war could break out. I am concerned that if immediate action isn't taken by NATO in concert with the UN, the strategic consequences could be dramatic: A new war in Croatia could break out, since a consolidation of Serb control in Bihac would set back Tudjman's chances of ever recovering the land they've lost. The Bosnian Government may withdraw its support for the Contact Group plan and seek a military solution. That could put pressure on Milosevic to end his break with the Bosnian Serbs. Then the pressures in the U.S. and in the Islamic countries to lift the arms embargo and arm the Bosnians will become even stronger. We've proposed a range of different options at NATO for using air power to halt the Serbs' offensive, but they have all received a cool response. (C)

President Mitterrand: Yes, yes. (U)

The President: I am worried about it unraveling. We favor a demilitarized zone around the city of Bihac requiring both sides to end all military activity in the safe area, with violations punishable by air strikes just as we've done in other places. This could be done in tandem with a cease-fire throughout the Bihac region. (C)

President Mitterrand: But, the combatants must agree. (C)

The President: Yes, of course, but, I'm afraid Bihac may fall within one or two days. (C)

President Mitterrand: Or even before that. (C)

The President: The UN believes a small demilitarized zone could apparently be done with a modest redeployment of UNPROFOR troops from other areas. At any rate, I called because I hoped we could work together quickly to do something so that we can keep the negotiations alive to build a peace based on the Contact Group proposal. (C)

President Mitterrand: Yes, I fully understand, but it is a little bit late. In any case, I will look at what you are talking about. I need a few hours to think about it, especially since the Foreign Minister is in Asia. So I will make a decision but have to wait until tomorrow morning. I feel Bihac will fall within hours. We must take that into account. There is another thing that complicates our relationship. That's lifting the arms embargo. If lifted, we would certainly take our forces out of UNPROFOR. So, all of this complicates matters. We'll have to talk again. (C)

The President: I'm happy to talk to you any time. (U)

President Mitterrand: Would you like us to contact our UN representative? (U)

The President: Yes, and Secretary Christopher talked to Juppe earlier today. (U)

President Mitterrand: I will get all the information, but I do not want to hide that the situation is very difficult. The Serbs know terrain is very difficult for us. They know we won't win the war by air strikes. It is not like a flat Iraq. I will call you back quickly. I need a few hours to consult. (S)

The President: I don't favor lifting the arms embargo. Even the Bosnian Government agreed not to lift until next spring. I also recognize that if UNPROFOR has to withdraw, NATO will have to protect the withdrawal. (S)

President Mitterrand: Yes, that will get us into a more classical war. So, I will think it over and call you back before it's too late in Washington. Good-bye. (S)

The President: Good-bye. (U)

- End of Conversation -