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THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

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PER E.O. 13526

2015-0716-M (1.39)
7/31/2013 KBH

MEMORANDUM OF TELEPHONE CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Telephone Call with Chancellor Helmut Kohl of
Germany (U)

PARTICIPANTS: The President
Chancellor Kohl

Interpreter: Gisela Marcuse
Notetakers: Natalie Johnson, Sean Rice,
Larry Wright, James Smith, John Schmidt,
Alexander Vershbow

DATE, TIME May 22, 1997, 0945-1006 a.m. EDT
AND PLACE: The Oval Office

The President: Hello, Helmut? (U)

Chancellor Kohl: Oh, so you're already on the line Bill? How
are you? (U)

The President: Yes, how are you? (U)

Chancellor Kohl: Well, I have to work a lot. As I am always
saying here, I'm the second biggest idiot in the country for
accepting all this work. I have to find the biggest idiot to do
the work. (U)

The President: I see that you announced for re-election. Now
that you've gone by Adenauer, you're going to blow by Bismarck!
(U)

Chancellor Kohl: I see you have read too many U.S. East-coast
newspapers again, and you always read the wrong ones. I have no
record to set. The only goal I have is to cap European
integration. I am looking forward to seeing you in Paris, also
in The Hague and in Denver. It is like the old couple still
courting each other after all these years. (C)

The President: And aren't you still coming here, to Washington,
in June, and we are going to Filomena's? (C)

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Chancellor Kohl: Yes, that's true. (U)

The President: So we are like an aging couple. We'll have three dates in four months and that's about all you can stand at our age! (U)

Chancellor Kohl: Yes, that's very true. How are you? (U)

The President: I'm fine and I'm very pleased with the negotiations on the NATO-Russia Founding Act. Solana did a good job; he gave Yeltsin what he needs without compromising the status of new NATO members or NATO's military effectiveness. (S)

Chancellor Kohl: I absolutely agree. (U)

The President: I know that you played a key role, and that Yeltsin places enormous importance on his relationship with you. I wanted to ask you about the summit in Madrid. Chirac asked Boris to attend; I had assumed he wouldn't -- is there any chance he will come to Madrid? (S)

Chancellor Kohl: Actually, to me he said neither yes or no, but that he is going to call me. I assume he wants to talk about this. I'll call you, or rather have Bitterlich call one of the members of your staff, to discuss what he said. (S)

The President: Well, it would be a very bold move, but it would reinforce our contention that we're uniting Europe, not dividing it. (S)

Chancellor Kohl: That is exactly what I would say, and that it would do a lot to boost his prestige. (S)

The President: I agree with that, too, and if he handles it right, it could help him at home without complicating our work. (S)

Chancellor Kohl: Yes, exactly. (S)

The President: For us, the challenge at Madrid is to make sure that the countries invited to join NATO can fulfill their obligations, so that it will still be a credible alliance and not purely political. But we also need to have a strong set of measures so that countries not invited still feel a part of the process and not left in a "gray zone" and that the Partnership for Peace still means something. (S)

Chancellor Kohl: Yes, I agree. (S)

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The President: I'm looking forward to The Hague, as well, and I remember what you told me about the meaning of the Marshall Plan to you personally. I think we can use this to unify Europe, Russia and North America in a way that can make sure that the 21st century doesn't turn out like the 20th did. Perhaps I can say something to reinforce what you're trying to do in Europe.

(C)

Chancellor Kohl: I'd welcome that. Maybe I should give you my ideas on how I'd react to your visit, and I'm saying this -- as I'm sure you know -- as your friend. I wouldn't dream of giving you advice. I'll just say a few things. I think it is a great and very important thing that you plan to attend the ceremonies in The Hague. Many people in Washington may not understand that, but the way I see it, you're filling a sort of vacuum that has evolved. What we see in Europe is a certain mood that seems to be spreading -- it may be just rumors, but sometimes this sort of talk becomes political reality. (C)

The people who say these things claim that Washington doesn't appear to be that interested in European matters. They're not really accusing you, they're saying that the Administration thinks the same way as the Congress, and that both the Senate and the House don't seem to care that much. (C)

As you know, previously we had frequent visitors from both the House and Senate over here. But this steady flow seems to have stopped all of a sudden. For instance, the two Republican leaders, the candidates for President, have never come to Germany. This is something that the newspapers and people here have noticed. (C)

At the same time, people have noticed a growing interest in the United States in the Pacific Rim. This is not my opinion, because, as you know, I've always been a keen observer of the American scene, and I note a growing number of American businessmen coming to Germany and to my office. So I think -- if I may say so -- that it would be highly useful for you to pay tribute to President Roosevelt and to Marshall, and I will say this very clearly in the speech that I will give in Washington. So, if you could just mention in your speech that Americans have been in Europe and will continue to be there after the world has changed so significantly -- that with new countries to the east and the collapse of the Soviet Union, we still need a transatlantic bridge. (C)

And perhaps, as in your inaugural speech, you should use the imagery of a bridge to the 21st century, a bridge which Europe and the United States will build together. This would be very

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well received over here. That image would be very effective here. (S)

Again, I'd like to reassure you, on my part, that no matter what your people tell you, it's very important that you attend the ceremony at this point in time. It is very different from any conference you may have to attend. This is a unique historical event, which has some bearing on recent history. One should also remember that two-thirds of the people in Europe today were born after the events of 50 years ago; but the rest of us still retain a living memory. I've given many speeches in recent weeks and months, constantly speaking of events after the war and what the United States did for us, and this is always very well received. I will give this week in the Bundestag what I think you would call a special State of the Nation address to commemorate the Marshall Plan. (S)

The President: Well, I think that's very good advice and I'll take it. I'm bringing five congressional leaders with me on this trip, to reinforce our common interests and reinvigorate Congressional interest in Europe. (S)

I think you may already know this, but we've finally named John Kornblum as Ambassador to Germany yesterday. We're sending a package of ambassadors up to the Hill, but with our divided government, unfortunately, the appointments process has become much more complicated. We'll get him through. I think you know John and that he's a good man. (S)

Chancellor Kohl: Bill, I know well that it's certainly not your fault that Congress acts the way it does. Let me reassure you that the Ambassador is very welcome here. The important thing is that I know he has your support. He enjoys your trust and he'll have mine too. I know him well and look forward to working with him. He'll certainly be welcome here. (S)

The President: Thank you; he's a good man. Let me say that I also have to apologize to you for something a State Department spokesman said yesterday about refugees, which sounded like a criticism of Germany. We have a similar problem here in the United States with Central American refugees who came to the United States during the wars there. Unless I can change the legislation, I will have to send them back so, in our present position, we're in no position to criticize anyone, and I want you to know that I'd never permit public criticism of Germany. I think he was just restating U.S. policy. My partnership with you is as important as anything in the world to me. (S)

Chancellor Kohl: I know, and I value our partnership as much as you do, and I thank you for what you said. (S)

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Chancellor Kohl: Thank you very much for calling and I look forward to seeing you in Paris. Please convey my regards to your wife. (U)

The President: I will. Thank you, friend. (U)

Chancellor Kohl: Thank you. Good-bye. (U)

-- End of Conversation --

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