

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

DECLASSIFIED
PER E.O. 13526
2015-0776-M (1.25)
7/31/2018 KSH

MEMORANDUM OF TELEPHONE CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Telcon with Chancellor Helmut Kohl of Germany
(U)

PARTICIPANTS: The President
Chancellor Helmut Kohl
Notetakers: Alexander Vershbow and Anthony
Gardner

DATE, TIME July 25, 1995, 3:37-4:13 p.m.
AND PLACE: Oval Office

The President: Hello, Helmut? (U)

The Chancellor: Hello, Bill. How are you? (U)

The President: I'm doing fine thanks. I wanted to follow up
with you on where we go from the London Conference. (U)

The Chancellor: I'm pleased to do that. First, are you in good
shape? Has the Senate voted on the embargo? (U)

The President: No, not yet. (U)

The Chancellor: Will it be today? (U)

The President: Today, perhaps tomorrow. (U)

The Chancellor: How will it come out? (U)

The President: It's hard to say. The stories out of London at
first were very good from my point of view, but now they've
turned cloudy and uncertain. In general my position with
Congress has improved. On domestic issues I'm doing better and
the polls are improving. (S)

The Chancellor: Bill, now don't you forget I made a bet on you.
(S)

The President: I know it. I'll try to make good on your bet,
but first we have to solve Bosnia. (S)

The Chancellor: I'm sure you'll win and please pass that to Hillary. (C)

The President: I will, thank you. Let me try to say briefly where we are. (U)

The Chancellor: Don't worry. I have plenty of time. (U)

The President: We need to clarify quickly the concept of operations including the changes needed in order for NATO to provide the sort of air support we agreed on in London. One big dispute remains at the NAC conference as we speak. (C)

The Chancellor: You mean the NATO Council? (U)

The President: Yes, that's correct. Here's the dispute. First we agreed that Admiral Lanxade...I mean General Janvier will pass to local ground commanders the power to call in air support. But the big point of disagreement lies in larger air action in response to a Bosnian Serb attack on Gorazde. (C)

The Chancellor: You're talking about walking across the red line? (C)

The President: Yes. Chirac believes we should let Boutros-Ghali approve the decision for big air strikes even though in London we agreed that, if Gorazde is attacked, we could hit other targets throughout the country. This is a point of disagreement in NATO. Chirac argues that NATO attacks on military targets in other parts of the country would affect UN troops of other countries, not only those of the British and French and that Boutros-Ghali should therefore give his approval. However, in this country that would be viewed by the Congress and the press as another decision by the UN to retreat and to let the Serbs continue their actions. This would increase the [chances] that Dole's amendment will pass the Senate with enough support to override a veto. (C)

The Chancellor: How does John Major feel? (U)

The President: So far the British have supported our position at the London Conference and agreed that if Gorazde is attacked, then we would have the option to strike the Serbs anywhere. Of course, he is worried about it too but if we look into the past, the only time we bought peace was in early 1994 when the Serbs thought we would take strong action: that led to the creation of "safe areas" and collection points. As soon as it was clear that we wouldn't do this, the situation deteriorated, with the absence of progress on the political front. (C)

The Chancellor: Have you spoken with Chirac? (U)

The President: Yes, I had a long talk with him yesterday, and I may do so again today. The problem is that because he has troops and heavy artillery there and fought off an attack on the Mount Igman road over the weekend, he thinks that is enough. He thinks ground troops will turn the situation around. I don't agree this would work. It doesn't solve anything. (S)

The Chancellor: Your opinion is that if we get more troops on the ground they will get wrapped up in a general war. (S)

The President: Yes, and they are more likely to be taken hostage. I want to talk about three other things and then let you comment. We must think of how we will resolve this. First, there is, as you know, a massive offensive in Bihac involving the Croats. We have urged the Croats to limit their action to the defense of Bihac and to be disciplined and careful, since there is a risk it may spread. Should we strengthen the previous UN commitment to protect Bihac, so the war won't spread there? (S)

Second, on Russia, I assume you have talked to Yeltsin. I think I should call him. Kozyrev and Grachev indicated flexibility to us and said the right things about condemning Bosnian Serb attacks on the safe areas and putting pressure on Karadzic and Milosevic. I don't know if they can. I sent Yeltsin a letter last Friday and I expect a response soon. Perhaps I should call him. What are your thoughts on Yeltsin? (S)

Third, I want to get your ideas on what we can do to increase the chances of achieving a negotiated settlement. Our past strategy of working through Milosevic to put pressure on the Bosnian Serbs and saying no one should talk to the Serbs until they agree to the 51/49 per cent division of territory proposed by the Contact Group has not worked. Do you have any ideas on the diplomatic front? If there is no agreement soon, things are going to end very badly whether or not UNPROFOR withdraws. (S)

The Chancellor: Thank you, Bill. Let me go down the list. First of all, I think we have the possibility of influencing Tudjman. Whenever we deal with Tudjman, we must realize that he is only a mirror, a reflection of Milosevic and Karadzic. If we could deal with him alone, there would be no problem. I will check that out tomorrow and let you know. I think only two people have influence on Tudjman, just you and I, not Paris and London. They have less influence. True or not, the Croats say that Paris and London only want to support the Serbs. The only people he will listen to are you and me. I think we have to talk with him and tell him we don't want oil poured on the fire. (S)

On Russia, I spoke with Yeltsin on Friday for about an hour and said I would call back on Thursday or Friday. I think it's a good idea if you call him tomorrow or Thursday. Psychologically it would be good for him. I'm not a physician and I only heard his voice on the phone, but listening to his voice I said to him: "You had a serious blow." He didn't try to talk me out of it. He said he was feeling much better and could leave the hospital to go to a sanitarium. He wants to be in a sanitarium for two to three weeks and then take a vacation. He'd be happy to hear from you. It wouldn't be a mistake to call him, not just about Bosnia but in general. I have urged him to do something and told him that his personal reputation is at stake. I told him: "You must understand, Boris, the impression in the West that you are providing cover for the criminal policy of the Serbs." I told him that they are criminals and that they will not deviate from their criminal behavior. I told him how I view the situation between Karadzic and Milosevic and the generals, though I don't know for sure who holds power over the Bosnian Serbs. I suppose no one really knows. I told Yeltsin my opinion that Karadzic and the military leaders have burned their bridges behind them and have slipped into a bunker mentality. Karadzic is now under public accusation of being a war criminal. (X)

My Dutch friend, Wim Kok, has told me that the Bosnian Serbs have committed outrageous atrocities which have not yet reached the public. But in the next three to four weeks the details of that behavior will reach the world and the public will be influenced by that. My impression is, regarding Karadzic, that the only role he sees open for him is to increase the brutality of the war, since this would make the West more likely to withdraw. And when I say Karadzic, I always mean the military leaders as well. I think he hopes that he can keep the territory and that this will allow him to link up with Serbia proper. A Greater Serbia is the ultimate objective. If this should take place, he could then claim to be the hero that brought it about and will replace Milosevic. I wouldn't be surprised if he had Milosevic assassinated. I said that to Yeltsin. I also said that, with this kind of crowd, one shouldn't be seen with them by day or by night. He told me that the Bosnian Serbs want to buy arms from him. He has refused. I told him: "You, Boris, are the only one who can influence him [Milosevic]." I think Yeltsin needs to test Milosevic to see whether he is playing a game or means what he says. Of course, he would have less influence on Karadzic, but the two of them have not really tried very hard. (X)

So, Bill, what I did was to urge him hard, really hard. I told him it is not only a question concerning Russia, but also Boris Yeltsin. I told that I'm aware there are traditional Serb-Russian relations and Orthodox Church ties between the two countries. But I told him that that is not what matters but

rather what the world sees. He promised me two things. First, that he will think it over. And second, that he would take personal action. I will call him on Friday and remind him of this. When you speak with him, without reference to me, you should push him in that direction. I don't think he is keen to be seen in the vicinity of Karadzic. (X)

As for what we can do in diplomacy: first, I think it is totally out of the question to think we could conduct a war there and win. We would need several hundreds of thousands of troops and no one wants to make that kind of commitment. There is no domestic support for it in the West. Second, I agree with the basic concept that if you want to be successful in negotiations, you have to hold on to the "safe areas" if that is all that can be held; therefore, drawing a red line around Gorazde is not a bad idea. Now that the Rapid Reaction Force is stationed on the mountain, it is less likely that the Serbs will intervene. (X)

Third, this is the time to test Milosevic about whether he wants to be helpful or not. We must find a way to see if he is for real. This may not sound convincing, but the world's public opinion is watching. We have 400,000 refugees from there in my country. That is more than twice as many as in all of the rest of Europe. And now a new wave will be arriving. I don't know how many will come in the new wave, but I can't let them perish. None of my European colleagues wants to take them in. I admit that we should be doing more than the others because we do not have ground troops there. But it's difficult and this puts me in a bad position. These people are in terrible shape. And there is another complication: I am seeing a greater suspicion and sharper interest taking place in the Islamic world. We can't take the situation and developments seriously enough. If you want, you can talk to me on Friday night. I will be easily reachable in Austria. (X)

The President: I will give it a couple days of thought and may call you back. (U)

The Chancellor: Do you think you understood what I said? (U)

The President: Yes, quite clearly. But my situation is complicated because the British and the French say that we don't have any troops there. I couldn't under the present rules of engagement. There would be an uproar in Congress and my position is eroding in the Islamic world because they don't think I'm doing enough to lift the arms embargo. I'm concerned about what this is doing to the ability of the U.S. to promote peace in the world. (X)

The Chancellor: Bill, that's totally wrong. Don't put anyone on the ground. (C)

The President: I agree, but this gives the British and the French the excuse to oppose anything I want to do. It would only make it worse if we were there. (C)

The Chancellor: I don't think it would work. (U)

The President: No. (U)

The Chancellor: Let me recall history. Between 1941 and 1944, we had 500,000 German soldiers there. These were highly trained combat soldiers. For example, our first paratroop division: they were at Monte Cassino. You know the caliber of the troops I'm talking about. They couldn't do the job. That's what history teaches us. (C)

The President: I'm going to work on this. I may call you on Friday. (U)

The Chancellor: About 8 o'clock our time, 2 o'clock your time, would be good. Give my best to Hillary. (U)

The President: I will. Good-bye, Helmut. (U)

-- End of Conversation --