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MEMORANDUM OF TELEPHONE CONVERSATION

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

PARTICIPANTS: The President
Chancellor Helmut Kohl

Interpreter: Harry Obst
Notetakers: Bonnie Glick, Sean Tarver,
Cindy Lawrence, Nick Dowling, Greg Schulte,
Robert Ford, Tony Campanella, Doug Bayley,
and Mariana Papadimitriou

DATE, TIME August 7, 1998, 2:32 p.m.-2:55 p.m. EDT
AND PLACE: Oval Office

The President: Helmut? (U)

Chancellor Kohl: Bill, guten tag. (U)

The President: Guten tag, I'm happy to hear your voice. (U)

Chancellor Kohl: I am happy to hear your voice too. I thought about your problem these days and there are all kinds of things going on. (U)

The President: Things are going well with our country, but it is terrible what happened in our African embassies today. I really appreciate the assistance we received from your people. I think your embassy in Tanzania was damaged a little bit. (U)

Chancellor Kohl: Fortunately, our embassy wasn't damaged that badly, I'm very sorry about your people and please give my condolences to the families. Do you have a clear idea of how many people got killed? (U)

The President: In Kenya there were seven Americans killed, and seven are still missing in the rubble. There were over 100

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Kenyans killed, it could be in the hundreds. Now in Tanzania, there were fewer people killed and no Americans, but the spouse of an American and five Tanzanians who work in the embassy were killed. (U)

Chancellor Kohl: Is there anything known about the people who did it? (U)

The President: All we have now are suspicions. Once we get in and determine what kind of bomb it was, what markings there were, how it was made, we'll have a better idea and we will know more. We have our suspicions, but we don't know anything right now for sure. (C)

Chancellor Kohl: It's just terrible. (U)

The President: I'm afraid that we're going to have more such incidents like this in the years ahead with groups with criminal and terrorist elements, independent groups, and people who are not connected. I think you'll see more of it in the years ahead and we have to do better to prepare for it. (U)

Chancellor Kohl: You're right about that. (U)

The President: I wanted to talk to you about Kosovo. The Serb security forces are suppressing Albanian militants. They are also engaged in a systematic campaign of violence and repression. We are getting close to a humanitarian disaster that I think could spark another major outpouring of refugees from the Balkans. What provoked this is that Milosevic believes he is safe from any kind of NATO reprisal. He believes NATO will only act with a Security Council resolution and he thinks Primakov has told him that Russia will block it. Now I know that Chirac strongly supports this position. Tony Blair disagrees, and of course I disagree. (C)

But I think restoring the credibility of the NATO military option is important just to convince Milosevic to stop. I believe we need to finalize planning and identify forces, and we need to make clear that NATO can and will act without a Security Council resolution if necessary. Now I know Klaus Kinkel disagrees with this and others disagree, but if we go to the UN, we will put Yeltsin in the worst possible position. (C)

The reason I say that is that if we bring a resolution to the UN and Yeltsin vetoes it, and if Russia vetoes it, it will weaken his position in the international community at the very time

Russia needs all the support it can get. Assuming Milosevic is doing terrible things at the time, at a time when Russia needs financial support from the international community, if we bring a resolution to the UN and Yeltsin instructs his ambassador to abstain, then he will be attacked at home by the ultra-nationalists. So, that's where we are. I'm very worried that we're going to have a big refugee problem this winter. There are 200,000 people who are hiding in the mountains. If they can't settle down before the winter, they may try to leave the country. If we permit Milosevic to pursue a military solution that looks like another round of ethnic cleansing, then I believe we will have another big Bosnia problem on our hands.

(C)

I hate to bother you with this on your vacation and during your elections, and I know you are doing better, but I have to talk to you about it and we have to make a decision very quickly.

(U)

Chancellor Kohl: Unfortunately, Bill, my vacation has come to an end and in the next few days I'm more available. But now to speak to the point, I'm now going to get busy with my election campaign that is running better in my favor. I am pretty sure that I'm going to make it, but we can of course talk any time.

(U)

Let me come to the topic you raised. What's going on in Kosovo is a catastrophe in two respects. And that is what the big problem is. We'll have to talk about what Milosevic is like, he is a gangster. But the other problem is even worse and may be that the radicals in Kosovo have taken control. In other words, reasoning with him becomes more and more difficult. And you are absolutely right that the suffering of the civilian population gets worse and worse as we approach winter. (C)

I can feel this worse than my European neighbors. The refugee stream is moving again in our direction, we hear a lot of fancy promises from the others, but where are the deeds? I saw the latest figures today and there is a steep increase. As far as the 350,000 that were in Bosnia are concerned, these things are moving in the right direction. 200,000 have returned, and the remainders slowly are going home, but in Kosovo we have over 100,000 and the number is going up steeply. (C)

Despite the burden this puts on my country, that doesn't change our basic attitude vis-a-vis human rights. This is a time where we need to cooperate very closely. Bitterlich told me today

that your security adviser will call him this weekend. Maybe it might be better if the two could meet somewhere in the next three days so they can talk in total secrecy and that when they are done with their talks, we'll get back on the telephone. At the same time you and I have to think what we can do to steer Yeltsin in the right direction. (S)

The President: We've either got to do that or we have got to change Chirac's mind. (S)

Chancellor Kohl: Yes, and that should be another option that we should include to reprogram Chirac, and I am for that. (S)

The President: For Yeltsin, this is a bad situation. He can't win because of the situation in Chechnya, the Slavic connection, and the political situation at home. But out of the three bad alternatives, being able to complain that NATO is doing this might be better than having to veto the resolution or having to abstain and let it pass. (S)

Chancellor Kohl: That's exactly the kind of topic we need to discuss, that's why I think these two gentlemen should get together as soon as possible. (S)

The President: We will follow up and we'll talk again in a few days. (S)

Chancellor Kohl: That will be just fine. We have to keep both options open. And to me, the Moscow situation with Yeltsin doesn't seem lost as far as I'm concerned. I see some hope and I think we need to provide Boris some kind of escape hatch. (S)

The President: If he knows that we would stay with the position that Kosovo would stay autonomous but not independent, the way it used to be, then we will get him out of the Chechnya problem. (S)

Chancellor Kohl: That is absolutely why we have to follow this line. (S)

The President: I'll have Sandy get in touch with Bitterlich. I'm glad that you're having a good vacation and that you are out there fighting. I'm telling all the experts not to count you out. You're the best politician I know. (S)

Chancellor Kohl: I will give them a surprise. Bye bye now.
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The President: Goodbye. (U)

-- End of Conversation --

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