

THE WHITE HOUSE

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MEMORANDUM OF TELEPHONE CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Telcon with German Chancellor Schroeder (U)

PARTICIPANTS: The President
Chancellor Schroeder

Interpreter: Gisela Marcuse
Notetakers: Liz Rogers, Tom Crowell,
Roger Merletti, James Smith and
Lawrence Butler

DATE, TIME May 24, 1999, 12:18 - 12:30 p.m. EDT
AND PLACE: Oval Office

The President: How are you? (U)

Chancellor Schroeder: Thank you, I am fine. (U)

The President: I just wanted to call and check in with you. I think in the last week we have had some encouraging news in Serbia, with demonstrations and desertions and some indications that Milosevic is looking for a way to meet the conditions NATO has laid out -- without appearing to meet them. We are getting closer and I think it is important to sustain the air campaign, as you have said. (C)

Chancellor Schroeder: I see things exactly the way you do, and there is no reason to change NATO's strategy, because it is beginning to show some effect. (C)

The President: I think there are two problems. One is the NATO commanders say they need to update the KFOR plan and generate some additional forces above the original plan, so we can move quickly into Kosovo when Milosevic accepts the conditions. And I understand for you this means you have to go back to the Bundestag for approval, and I hate that, but I understand they have to continue to update that plan. (C)

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Chancellor Schroeder: Yes, that is the way it is. (X)

The President: Beyond that is the question whether there are any circumstances in which we would deploy a force without Belgrade's consent. Obviously, that is a much tougher issue. (X)

Chancellor Schroeder: That is exactly correct. And we Germans could not participate as we'd get no permission from either the coalition or the opposition for ground combat troops. As Kohl told you, the Bundestag would not agree to combat troops for anyone. If this particular decision were to be made, Germany would not be able to participate. (X)

The President: Yes, I understand that. Let me tell you what I think about this. There are several reasons why we should avoid this if at all possible. First, because it would be impossible to maintain total Allied unity. Second, because it would put real strains on relations with the Russians at a time when we are trying to make them better by involving the Russians in all this. (X)

Chancellor Schroeder: That is exactly my analysis, as well. These are the two problems we face, unity within NATO and relations with Russia, which are too important to risk. (X)

The President: There is a third issue which should be considered. We pledged at the NATO Summit that Europe and the United States would help to rebuild all of southeast Europe and integrate them into the institutions of the West. It costs a whole lot more to invade than to send in a peacekeeping force. I'm afraid the money for executing an invasion would make it even more difficult to get the money after the conflict is over to rebuild. (X)

Chancellor Schroeder: Yes. (X)

The President: Having said that, the only place where I differ from you is that I have explicitly said I didn't want to take any option off the table, because there may come a time when the price of defeat for NATO is greater than the price for a ground campaign. I think we need to talk about our commitment to intensify the air campaign and diplomacy and have our people quietly working on what it would take to go in when this thing

is resolved. I think if we can have less public discussion about what we're not doing and more about what we are doing, that would be better since it avoids what Milosevic is trying to do, which is to divide us. (X)

Chancellor Schroeder: Well, I think that is exactly the right approach. There is this one problem: when I talked about ground forces, I had to do it because there was an ongoing discussion in Britain, which was proceeding to spread to Germany. It sounded as if Great Britain really wanted to realize the ground forces option. Whenever someone talks about ground forces, I am forced to say no publicly, and to reject it. I fully agree with you, discussion of this should not be done in public. We should avoid that and instead focus on the strategy, which is to keep up air strikes and diplomacy, and of course the military planners will be planning, because that is their business, to provide us with options which we need to make decisions, but public discussion serves no purpose. Every open discussion about ground troops forces me to reiterate that Germany cannot commit ground forces. Even though I don't want to keep repeating it, I have no choice whenever somebody brings it up. (X)

The President: Yes. (X)

Chancellor Schroeder: You know my political situation is one in which the conservatives criticize me for being too pro-NATO, telling me to distance myself. I don't want that intensified. I want to keep with this strategy and have it be successful as I'm sure it will be. (X)

The President: I had a very difficult discussion last week with the British about this. I think they understand the political situation in a lot of other countries is very different and these discussions have to be held in private. (X)

Chancellor Schroeder: I told the same to Tony Blair and I think he understands. (X)

The President: Yes, I think it is better now. There is only one other thing, we have also got planning going on to prepare all these camps for the winter and if, God forbid, we don't prevail in the short run. We can't let anything happen to these people. We have to be ready for winter, if it happens. (X)

Chancellor Schroeder: That is going to be a very important task, and one for which we need to get funding and in which Germany will participate fully. (C)

The President: Okay. Thank you, Gerhard. (U)

Chancellor Schroeder: Thank you for calling, good-bye. (U)

-- End of Conversation --