

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

MEMORANDUM OF TELEPHONE CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Telcon with President Jacques Chirac of France

PARTICIPANTS: The President
President Chirac

Interpreter: Marcel Bouquet
Notetaker: James Smith, Cindy Lawrence,
Jeff Rathke, Robert Ford, David Higgins,
Nancy McEldowney, and Rexon Ryu

DATE, TIME: February 19, 1998, 9:36 - 9:58 a.m. EST
AND PLACE: Oval Office

The President: Hello, Jacques? (U)

President Chirac: Hello? (U)

The President: Good morning, Jacques. (U)

President Chirac: Bill, how are you? (U)

The President: I'm fine, thank you. (U)

President Chirac: How is Hillary? (U)

The President: She is doing great. She said to send you regards. She was pleased when I told her that you said she has the support of 100 percent of the people in France. (U)

President Chirac: That's still right. Please send her my greetings. (U)

The President: I'll do it. (U)

President Chirac: Do you mind if we speak through an interpreter? (U)

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

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The President: All right. (U)

President Chirac: Okay, I'll give her the phone. (U)

The President: First, let me say that I thought your comments after your meeting with the Iraqi Foreign Minister on Tuesday about time running out were very helpful. It is important to keep the pressure on. I think what we are clearly working for is a principled diplomatic solution, and I am glad we worked together on the P-5 advice for Kofi Annan's trip. He can now go to Baghdad with a firm position on Iraq's requirements from the international community. The advice we agreed to protects our core principles: that UNSCOM has access everywhere and that the integrity of UNSCOM as a group of expert inspectors is protected. (C)

I think if we stay together as Kofi takes his trip, we really have a chance to get a diplomatic solution. But, Jacques, if he can't get an acceptable agreement, we have to stand together in response. If the diplomatic string runs out, we have to seriously consider the use of military force. If we can't get a diplomatic solution, I hope that France will support the use of force. It seems to me that the key to our efforts on Presidential palaces is to get Saddam to back down. He has done it in the past when confronted with the threat of force and international backing, and he will do so again, but only if we are clear and firm, and he knows we are not bluffing. (C)

I think, in a way, we have all been at a disadvantage in the last few weeks, because everybody has been thinking of how to please him and give him a way out. But, now we are offering him a different approach, and he should be thinking about how he can comply with the rules of the international community which he has already agreed to follow. (C)

President Chirac: I still think we can hope for a diplomatic solution, Bill, and I have the feeling that Saddam Hussein is ready to accept the strict application of the resolutions at the request of Kofi Annan. So we should not really fail for reasons related to form or detail, if it is clear that inspection of all the sites as often as necessary is a necessity, and I think this is something that is not negotiable. Regarding the manner of the visits, I think we could adopt certain forms or modalities--I am talking about the residences--and this because they are sensitive to the question of security of Saddam Hussein and also a question of dignity. This doesn't put into question the

principle or modality of inspections, it means to do it politely. (C)

The President: I agree with that. (U)

President Chirac: I continue to hope that on this basis Saddam Hussein will accept the conditions put forward by Kofi Annan. I wish this very strongly because a military strike has a lot of drawbacks. First of all, dead people. It is always the weakest and most vulnerable who become victims, and we will have to bear the responsibility for this, all of us. And also, Arab public opinion. According to all the information I have, they will condemn us very strongly. Finally, and this is something which is very essential, this would be the end of UNSCOM inspections. The end of UNSCOM controls would be absolutely disastrous because Saddam would be able to reconstruct whatever he wants. So, maybe a military strike could be justified, but what do we do next? Well, the reason I might understand a military strike is if Saddam were to say no to what he is asked. So long as there is still a chance, and Kofi will see this in Baghdad, so long as there is still a chance to get what we want regarding the substance, I think we should not strike. (C)

The President: I agree with that. The question of what happens to UNSCOM inspections if there is a military strike is important, but they are in effect already out of business now anyway. And, the sites he put off limits are so large that he could rebuild his capability within them even if he permitted inspections in the rest of the country. As to the palaces themselves and his personal security in them, I understand that is why we have agreed to diplomatic groups to accompany the inspectors. But, keep in mind, these inspectors are not really experts on how he protects his personal security. They are experts on the chemical and biological programs going on, so they can't really threaten his security. It is not like they could go back and report to someone on how to conduct a guerilla attack on his palace. At any rate, I think you have it formulated correctly: if we can preserve the integrity of the inspectors, we can put a political arm around it to make it polite, as you say, so long as the integrity of the inspection system itself is preserved. You know, if they have operational control over what they are trying to do, the inspectors, I think that is fine. (C)

President Chirac: Bill, I agree with what you just said, except regarding one point. Earlier on you said that UNSCOM and the inspectors are already out of business. I don't think this is

quite the case. Today, there are 160 members of UNSCOM controlling 300 sites of military production or storage, and they inspect them without any notice with 120 cameras. UNSCOM has dismantled Iraq's nuclear activity virtually completely and has destroyed about 500,000 liters of chemical agents and several dozens of thousands of such munitions. Now, if we were not to have any UNSCOM, which would be the result of a military strike, then Saddam would be able to start rearming himself, which, I believe, at present he is not able to do. And, I also know, for example, and this is a good sign, that the experts sent by Kofi Annan to map out the topography of the sites were able to work in full security and freedom. (C)

The President: I agree with part of what you said, but if he can rule some sites off limits--one of which has a land area equal to that of Washington, D.C.--he has more than enough space to restart his chemical and biological programs, which I think is the biggest threat to the region over the next 20 years. That is why there can't be any safe havens. It doesn't take that much space to do so. Look, I agree with you, the best result is to keep the inspection system and have it work over the whole country. The inspection system has worked well. So, in that sense, we have agreement. However, the inspectors still believe he retains a modest chemical and biological program within the sites not yet inspected, and he has the capacity to quickly expand within those sites. That is why I think it is important that we get to those sites. (C)

President Chirac: I fully agree with you on this. Yes, I fully agree with the fact that we must obtain access to all the sites without exception, present sites and what could become future sites. Well, the only thing I am saying is that in certain special sites, which are personal residences, inspections should be carried out with a certain tact and politeness. I think Saddam would accept this. (C)

The President: I certainly hope so. We will just have to keep working on it. As long as the key is that expertise is preserved with full access and the ability to go back and monitor, if necessary. If this is so, then I think we can get a diplomatic solution. We all have to work for this with whatever we can and hope that it will be achieved. (C)

President Chirac: I fully agree with this. (C)

The President: Thank you very much Jacques. We will be in touch. (U)

President Chirac: It was a great pleasure to talk to you, Bill. I would like to express my great friendship to you and give my regards to Hillary. (U)

The President: Thank you very much, Jacques. Goodbye. (U)

President Chirac: Thank you, Bill. Goodbye. (U)

-- End of Conversation --