

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

MEMORANDUM OF TELEPHONE CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Telcon with President Chirac of France (U)

PARTICIPANTS: The President
President Chirac

Interpreter: Marcel Bouquet
Notetakers: James Smith, Pat O'Shaughnessy,
Tom Crowell, Bonnie Glick, Jeff Rathke,
Nancy McEldowney and Rexon Ryu

DATE, TIME February 23, 1998, 12:52 - 1:35 p.m. EST
AND PLACE: The Oval Office

The President: Hi, Jacques. (U)

President Chirac: Hello, Bill. How are you? (U)

The President: I'm fine, how are you? (U)

President Chirac: I'm fine. Congratulations, because frankly you were proven correct in taking a very firm position on the Iraq affair. I think we can say publicly that what we were all trying to achieve has been achieved. Of course we have to look into the details. But the important thing is the inspection of all the presidential sites, as often as we wish and as long as we wish. I recognize that exerting pressure has proved fruitful. (S)

The President: Thank you. I think the combined efforts of the threat of force and the diplomatic efforts you and Boris Yeltsin made, where you were firm in private, though opposed force publicly, worked out together. Now I'd like to talk to you about the proposed agreement, if you have the time. (S)

President Chirac: Very good, I'm listening. (S)

~~SECRET~~

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The President: I have now had a chance to review this agreement and I think it is potentially adequate and quite faithful to the Perm Five position that Kofi Annan took to Baghdad. (S)

President Chirac: Yes, that is also my impression. (S)

The President: Do you have a copy of the memorandum of understanding before you? (S)

President Chirac: No, I have not yet gotten a copy of the agreement. The French Ambassador to the UN in New York just telephoned me and told me of its contents, and I expect a copy very soon. (S)

The President: Let me just tell you what my concerns are, very briefly. In paragraph 4 of the agreement, the memorandum of understanding, there is language dealing with the inspection of presidential sites. It says there will be a special group to inspect them, established by the Secretary General in consultation with Mr. Butler and the Director General of IAEA and that the group will be headed by a commissioner appointed by the Secretary General. It says the group will operate under the established procedures of UNSCOM and the IAEA and specific detailed procedures to be developed, given the special nature of the presidential sites, but they will be consistent with the relevant UNSC resolutions. (S)

Now, my observation is, the commissioner should be a person with recognized technical expertise so we don't raise a question of this becoming a political rather than a technical inquiry. Also, whatever detailed procedures are adopted must still allow genuine inspections. (S)

Paragraph 5 of the memorandum is very good from my point of view. It says that the UN and the Government of Iraq agree that all other facilities, equipment, records and means of transportation are subject to existing UNSCOM procedures. (S)

President Chirac: Yes, on our part, we had insisted strongly on that particular point. (S)

The President: And that's very good, because some of these sites UNSCOM had been denied access to are not presidential sites. The most important is the Ministry of Defense, probably, but there are several sites that UNSCOM has been denied access to that were not presidential sites, so that is very important. Here's why I mentioned that. The introductory part of this memo

says the Government of Iraq undertakes to accord to UNSCOM immediate, unconditional and unrestricted access, but in the performance of its mandate, UNSCOM will respect Iraq's national security, sovereignty and dignity. My concern is simply this: I don't believe that language should lead to another round of negotiations with Iraq over the status of nonpresidential sites and I don't believe that Kofi working on procedures should lead to another round of negotiations. We don't need further delay here, and I hope you could support that. ~~(S)~~

President Chirac: Yes, I entirely agree with you. ~~(S)~~

The President: Okay. Two other issues I wanted to raise with you. First, I strongly believe that we have to avoid similar problems in the future -- we have done this twice in the last year and the United States cannot afford -- and I don't believe the international community can afford -- another incident where we have to move a carrier group into the Gulf. It is expensive, economically and politically. It would be very helpful if we could get a Security Council resolution that says if this agreement is violated it is a material breach and serious consequences will follow. That way, we don't have to do this all over again. ~~(S)~~

President Chirac: Was that your last point, Bill? ~~(S)~~

The President: No, my last point is simply this. I believe we need to have an early test of this. We shouldn't have a lengthy delay. All of us should encourage Kofi and Butler to move quickly and start to activate the agreement as quickly as possible. I understand Butler has problems, he can't just send people to Iraq overnight, but I think we need to test this agreement quickly. ~~(S)~~

President Chirac: Bill, I would like to make one or two remarks, if I may. ~~(S)~~

The President: Yes. (U)

President Chirac: First of all, Saddam Hussein thought he could cheat on this. He was subjected to maximum U.S. pressure, and he had to give in. Bill, I think we can say that the whole of the international community and particularly the Arab world completely understood the sense and importance of American pressure. So from there on, Saddam Hussein, faced with all these pressures, military and political pressures, got the message that he was wrong. And thanks to Kofi Annan being

adroit in this, I think Saddam Hussein finally accepted almost everything we were trying to get. (S)

The main point being that all sites can be visited as often as UNSCOM wants. I think this is a major victory for the United States and for the international community. We should make it known as quickly as possible that there is agreement. I am a little worried about the upsurge of negative attitude by Arab public opinion against the West. I think we should reach agreement on this very quickly. (S)

On the various points you raised, with exception of automaticity, which I will go back to in a moment, on all the other points I quite agree with you. I don't think we could have expected to get anything better, and with this UNSCOM will be able to go about its work as it wishes to. Especially as the people who have been doing the measuring on behalf of the UN have realized that the actual surface areas of these sites are not as extensive as they originally thought. So in order to stop the negative attitude on the part of the Arab world and to prevent that from developing, it's important that the Security Council should make up its mind quickly. (S)

Beyond this I see two problems. The first I would call the details or technicalities that may have to be improved. My view is that we should say we agree in general with the results achieved by Kofi Annan and, as far as the details are concerned, they can be sorted out as they arise. The second problem, far more important, is what you call material breach. Obviously, it is very difficult to talk about something being automatic, it is something that world public opinion has trouble accepting. But our British friends have made a proposal which I thought was very interesting. Instead of talking about material breach, they had phraseology that says the same thing but in more diplomatic terms. I think the British proposal talked about "the most serious consequences" I think it would be far easier to get agreement from the 15 Security Council members on that British phraseology, bearing in mind it means the same thing but is more diplomatic. Especially after the victory won over Saddam. (S)

The President: The only thing that bothers me is that I simply cannot afford to do this again. Twice in the past year to get him to comply, I've had to move the U.S. Navy into the Persian Gulf. It cost a lot of money, and political and military effort as well. He has to know in no uncertain terms we can't go through this a third time, or whenever he wants to jerk the

world community around. The material breach is unambiguous, and I would have thought the Brits favored that. The next time I have to act. I am looking for something to maximize the chances there won't be a next time, to maximize deterrence, so I won't have to do anything. ~~(S)~~

Let me also say that I'm under the impression that Tony Blair agrees with us. I just talked to him and will talk to him again. The other point is the stronger language, the material breach language, would make it easier to be more flexible on the proposed package. It has an impact on the overall package. ~~(S)~~

President Chirac: Bill, I just picked up the British proposal made a few days ago in the Security Council, and their suggestion was to have instead of the words "material breach," the words "the most serious consequences." In the last message I sent to Saddam Hussein, making it quite clear there was nothing to negotiate and that he had to accept what he was asked to do, I indicated that whatever the wording was, "material breach" or "serious consequences," it meant exactly the same thing -- it meant he would have to comply fully, otherwise a strike would take place. But my feeling is the British wording is more diplomatic. It doesn't change reality at all -- and this point must be made perfectly clear -- it means exactly the same thing, but is a politer way to say it. ~~(S)~~

The President: Well, how would we go about saying it means the same thing? ~~(S)~~

President Chirac: Simply by explaining what I just said, which is what I already said to Saddam Hussein: whatever the wording is, the meaning is exactly the same and the first thing he does out of line will lead to a military strike. It is a question of polite diplomacy or diplomatic phrasing, but the point must be made that it means exactly the same thing. ~~(S)~~

The President: Well, let me make a suggestion. Would you also discuss this with Tony Blair, and then we can talk again. Actually, let me ask you two things: one is to talk to Tony Blair and secondly, would you be willing to say what you just said publicly? ~~(S)~~

President Chirac: Yes, no problem. I entirely agree I can say this publicly. I am prepared to say this alone or with the four other members of the Security Council, under any format you would prefer. ~~(S)~~

The President: I think if you say it separately it is more powerful. People view you as an independent voice on this. (S)

President Chirac: I am perfectly prepared to say this, write it, and confirm it in writing to Saddam. (S)

The President: Thank you. You talk to Tony. (S)

President Chirac: Yes, I am calling Tony right now. (S)

The President: Great and we'll get back together on this. Goodbye. (S)

President Chirac: Goodbye. (U)

-- End of Conversation --