

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

MEMORANDUM OF TELEPHONE CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Telcon with French President Jacques Chirac
(U)

PARTICIPANTS: The President
President Jacques Chirac
Notetakers: Alexander Vershbow and Anthony Gardner

DATE, TIME July 24, 1995, 2:04-2:27 p.m.
AND PLACE: Oval Office

The President: Hello, Jacques? (U)

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

The President: Fine. I wanted to talk to you about a few things. First, I wanted to extend my condolences for the loss of your brave soldiers in Sarajevo over the weekend. (U)

President Chirac: Bill, wait a minute, I prefer to have an interpreter. [*Chirac listens to consecutive translation*] (U)

The President: I continue to be outraged by Bosnian Serb behavior. It shows once again the need to send a strong deterrent message. In that regard, I want to thank you for your leadership and flexibility in dealing with the London Conference on Friday. You made it possible to send a strong and categorical message to Karadzic and Mladic. The key now is expeditious action at NATO. I had hoped we could have had a NAC decision today. It didn't happen, and now I hope tomorrow we will show clear decisiveness. We have to have a clear and firm decision on our concept of operations based on the London agreement that would permit extended air operations over a wide area and a wide variety of targets, but would be limited to that necessary to stop a Serb attack. I know you have reservations about a massive air campaign, but we must send a clear and unambiguous signal to the Bosnian Serbs. If we hesitate now, after having issued an ultimatum, it would send an opposite signal and invite disaster. Already, because the NAC didn't act today, there are stories that we are backing off again. I also believe we should stick to the

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agreement in London to change the previous dual-key arrangement by delegating the authority to General Smith to carry out air strikes. This is the normal level for effective military operations -- ground commander to air commander. This is what General Shalikashvili believes we should do. We have to convince the American people and Congress that this is normal and accords with sound military practice. I understand we had some disagreements over these points among our delegations in Brussels. But we had an agreement in London, and we can't go against it. It would be terrible to back away. I hope you can agree to move forward together and that you will help convince Boutros-Ghali to go along. ~~(C)~~

President Chirac: Yes, Bill. I would like to say that there is no disagreement on the dual-key problem. There is first the question of close air support, which is called point number one. Then there is a larger question, called point number two. The decision for these two points should be taken on the ground and not with the approval of Boutros-Ghali and Akashi. In principle, I agree with that; it is what we said in London. But I did not agree to Rupert Smith, who is number two, but to Janvier, who is number one. This is a normal command system. I agree that the decision should be made without the dual-key, but this can only be by the ground commander, who is Janvier.

The third point is big air strikes. It can't be decided without a green light from the UN. This will take a long time to decide in any case; it is not a question of a few minutes, but of one to two days. We can't do air strikes without talking to the nations which have troops on the ground. It is normal to respect the wish of the other countries with troops on the ground to have Boutros-Ghali's approval. How can you ask the Ukrainians and Canadians to accept decisions made without any discussion with them? It is not possible. ~~(C)~~

Let me repeat. The decisions on points number one and two on close air support and larger air strikes at Gorazde is OK. The decision could be given to Janvier; he is the boss, not Smith. He could sub-delegate the decision to the commanders in the field. Close air support must be decided in minutes, not hours. If you have a tank coming, you need to have the sub-delegation to the field for an immediate response in an emergency. For the third phase, to do airstrikes everywhere, this should be decided by the UN. We can't avoid it out of respect for the others. You know, Bill, it won't work long for us to decide everything without the others. ~~(C)~~

The President: I agree. Let me make two more points. It was the threat of larger air action at the beginning of 1994 that allowed us to create safe areas and have the Serbs turn in their

weapons to collection points. This bought us one year of relative peace and tranquility, fewer deaths and one year of negotiations. Unfortunately, it didn't lead to a peace settlement. As soon as the Serbs realized that we didn't mean it, they took their weapons back, shelled Sarajevo, took Srebrenica, you know what's going on in Zepa and now Bihac. But I believe this approach still works. I was told that when the Serbs attacked your troops on the Mount Igman road, your commander threatened air strikes and they backed off. ~~(C)~~

President Chirac: No, Bill, that's not right. It was during the night, and we never asked for air support. We immediately responded with artillery and gave orders to respond immediately on the Serb barracks. When we were attacked, we responded with 90 120-millimeter shells in two places. This is very important. Probably many people were injured and killed because it was heavy artillery. That's why they stopped. It is more efficient than air strikes, which never quite hit their target. ~~(C)~~

The President: On the question of the command structure, General Shalikashvili said General Janvier is responsible for all the forces -- Bosnia, Croatia and Macedonia -- whereas Smith is in charge of the field of operations. ~~(C)~~

President Chirac: We respect Rupert Smith; he is a good officer. But he is at the wrong level. For close air support, or larger air support, you have to react quickly and Smith is too high up and too far away. The decision must be sub-delegated to the commanders in Gorazde, Sarajevo and the others. They are the only ones who can decide if air support is necessary. You can't ask in the Army for a decision except from the boss, General Janvier, who can sub-delegate. ~~(C)~~

The President: That makes a lot of sense. (U)

President Chirac: It's only for the third phase of large and heavy bombing that we need Boutros-Ghali's approval out of respect for the others on the ground. You can't ask them to take the risk without having any say. If I were a Canadian or Ukrainian, I would withdraw. We must respect them. ~~(C)~~

The President: I agree we need to respect their concerns, but the Serbs will laugh, and we will be right back where we started. There will never be air strikes. ~~(C)~~

President Chirac: That is not true. If we want a real, general air strike, it will not be done in a few hours. It will take a few days. We will be talking about real war, a real attack, real aggression that needs preparation and the green light from the

UN. We might as well say the three of us have declared war on the Serbs. ~~(C)~~

The President: I don't think that would be the case. It is the Serbs' aggression which has caused all of this. What we are saying is that if they do this, then this is our response. If we go back to the dual-key, we will be backing off from the London agreement. We told the Serbs we would carry out air strikes. ~~(C)~~

President Chirac: Yes, Bill. But think about it. If you do that, the Russians will oppose this. You can't tell them that you have the right if you don't have UN approval. If you have the UN green light, you can say you're in the logic of the UN. It is more efficient to take into account the others and have Boutros-Ghali give the green light. Boutros-Ghali will, of course, give the green light in five minutes. Then the others can't say anything. If it is just the three of us, the others would say we are operating outside the law. The Russians are angry at us; they will make difficulties. If we have their approval, the Russians won't have any excuse to attack us. ~~(C)~~

The President: I see the problem in the reverse. If we asked Boutros-Ghali, he would consult with the Russians. ~~(C)~~

President Chirac: He won't decide to consult. He has the right to do this himself. I called him today. He said that, of course, if asked, he will give the green light. Then we would be in the right and not outside the law. We need discussions with the Chiefs of Staff to find a compromise. But believe me, the way to command, if we want to crush the Serbs, is to have a UN green light. It is better if we want to avoid a reaction from the Russians, Ukrainians, Canadians, even the Greeks. If we want to have air support, light or heavy, the decision should be taken on the ground by the local commanders. The green light should be given to General Janvier who then will sub-delegate to the local commander, the only one who can judge when air support is necessary. ~~(C)~~

The President: I agree that makes a lot of sense. Let me discuss this with my people. Then I will be back in touch. ~~(C)~~

President Chirac: When you want. If you are busy, we can talk with Tony Lake. No problem. Good-bye. ~~(C)~~

The President: Good-bye. (U)

-- End of Conversation --