

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

MEMORANDUM OF TELEPHONE CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Telcon with French President Chirac

PARTICIPANTS: The President  
Jacques Chirac

Interpreter: Marcel Bouquet  
Notetakers: Ralph Sigler, Elaine Florio,  
Steve Brennan and Larry Wright

DATE, TIME September 2, 1996; 1432-1455  
AND PLACE: Green Bay, Wisconsin

The President: Jacques? (U)

President Chirac: Congratulations on your convention which was beautiful; it was seen here in France. How are you? (U)

The President: I am all right, I am in Green Bay, Wisconsin.  
(U)

President Chirac: Hillary was beautiful, and Chelsea was beautiful too. (U)

The President: Thank you. We had a great week, we have another two months to fight it through. (U)

President Chirac: There is no danger. (U)

The President: Thank you for taking my call. (U)

President Chirac: I prefer to speak through an interpreter. (U)

The President: I know we have had some differences on this issue, but I wanted to talk to you and ask for all the support you can offer. We have no evidence to support Iraqi claims that they are withdrawing the deployments. On the contrary, his actions even suggest he is considering other attacks deeper into Kurdish territory. Our cooperation in defeating and containing Saddam since 1990 is something we are both proud of. It made a real difference in the peace and security of an area in which we

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both have vital interests. We know how Saddam works, he tests and then waits to see if there is a reaction. If there isn't, he just tests again. And we know the consequences get more serious each time. This is the way he has worked for years now. I am very concerned that we have to send him a strong, clear message that he can't use force and get away with it. I feel so strongly about it that, if I have to, I am prepared to go it alone to make that point. We have always been together, France and the United States. Despite our differences through the years, I hope we can have a common position on this. It would be good for both of us, and for regional peace and security, to be together on this. If you don't feel you can support this position, I hope at a minimum, you will not criticize us in public, and after a period of silence about associated strikes on air defense systems, I hope France will continue to fly in the expanded No Fly Zones. To me that is the most important thing. ~~(C)~~

President Chirac: Well, Bill, naturally, I just want to say from the outset, I am not going to be a poor friend; although I am extremely shocked by this whole affair. I fully understand that it is solely an American electoral issue. I think in fact it would be a disservice to the United States and the image of America would be impaired. You know one day we are going to have an international campaign about the genocide of the Iraqi people. We will have to contend with that. ~~(C)~~

From my side, from a political standpoint, first of all, the failure of the rapprochement of the two Kurdish factions led in fact to obvious interference by the Iranian side. It is the Iranians who are supporting Talabani, which in turn inevitably led Barzani to seek assistance from Iraq. In fact, our aerial photography shows an Iraqi battalion, which isn't all that much really. I should add by the way, we are going to be in a position of supporting Iran in its struggle to gain control of the Kurdistan region. What you have is inconsistent here, and I understand the Iranians, who have played their hand very skillfully in this matter, are extremely pleased at the idea that you will lash out at the Iraqis. This in turn, would justify and warrant their claims regarding Kurdistan, which is going to stir up the anger of the Arab world against the United States and the whole Western world. Now, you see, the Arabs don't dare to tell this to you directly, but I think it is eminently clear that is what they are thinking, even if they don't say it out loud. ~~(C)~~

Let's look at the legal side, Resolution 688 doesn't in fact prohibit military intervention by the Iraqi army on its own territory. If you look at this from the standpoint of international law, this is an Iraqi internal affair. In fact, any justification for intervention would in fact be against Iranian intervention. In fact, any intervention against the

missile batteries and air defense in the southern part of the country would make it appear that the allies are in de facto solidarity with Iran. Within the framework of the civil war taking place among the Kurds in northern Iraq, if you look at the Security Council, within the Council, no country is actually challenging allied actions because the allied actions appear to be a logical conclusion of the Gulf War. But bear in mind nonetheless, that the No Fly Zones have no legal basis whatsoever. So if you expand the southern zone and create a passage toward the west, this will make apparent the fragility of our position within the legal environment within the Security Council. The result of that would be to undermine the very legitimacy of the whole allied coalition. (C)

This policy, which is not a foreign policy, but an electorally motivated policy, is extremely bothersome for those implicated in such an action. All the more so because we are worried about international opinion becoming more concerned about the extreme poverty of the Iraqi people. (C)

Now having said that, I repeat that I don't want to be an unworthy or bad friend to you. So I will give you satisfaction, because I am fond of you and Hillary, but I repeat this is a mistake. If there is a military intervention, we will not be a part of that military action, but we will refrain from making any comments that will imply any distance from our position with the United States. But after your election, I think I should tell you now, I will withdraw our French aircraft. This will remain absolutely confidential, only our interpreters will be aware. But I don't want to find myself involved again in an affair of this sort. But as I said, we will refrain from any public comment that would discomfort you in any way, but only because you are in the midst of an electoral campaign. (C)

The President: First of all, I agree this situation is complicated by the fact that one Kurdish faction wanted Saddam to do what he did. But the fact remains, that when he began massing troops, there were voices throughout the world who told him not to do this and the UN resolution states he cannot repress the people that live within Iraq's borders, clearly including the Kurds. No one has ever challenged the No Fly Zones because they were a reasonable response to specific situations in which Saddam used force. The only reason to take out the air defenses is to protect our pilots and to remind him that he can't go back to the way it used to be. If the world community wants him to go back to those ways and be able to repress his own people, then that is one thing, but that's not the way it is now, and that is not what the UN resolution says. Anyway, I respect your position, and thank you for what you said, and I appreciate the fact that we

had the chance to talk, and I appreciate the fact that you won't say anything against this. ~~(C)~~

President Chirac: Well, naturally, I won't say anything. I want to say once again, that the arguments they have given you, are purely electoral and from any other grounds, they are baseless. We must oppose Iranian expansion. It is in our interest to avoid running into Iran. The fact remains Iran will be the only winner in this and it will be extremely unpleasant if Iran overruns Kurdistan. There will be a responsibility to be faced and it is in our interest to oppose Iran and we should not sanction Iraq. ~~(C)~~

The President: Well, we just have an honest disagreement on this, but I appreciate your honesty and candor in dealing with this. ~~(C)~~

President Chirac: Okay, Bill. I hope the best for you in the election, which I do not doubt for a minute. Be careful with Iraq, believe me, and be careful with Iran, which is going to win on this one. But I won't say anything on this, I promise you. ~~(C)~~

The President: Thank you, good bye. (U)

President Chirac: Good bye. (U)

-- End of Conversation --