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THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

MEMORANDUM OF TELEPHONE CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Telcon with President Jacques Chirac of France
(U)

PARTICIPANTS: The President
President Chirac

Notetakers: Bonnie Glick, Joel Schrader,
Elizabeth Rogers, Philip Gordon and Greg Schulte
Interpreter: Carol Wolter

DATE/TIME September 13, 1998, 12:33 - 12:59 p.m. EDT
AND PLACE: Oval Office

The President: Hello? (U)

President Chirac: Hello Bill? I'm glad to hear you. (U)

The President: Hello Jacques. (U)

President Chirac: Bill, I'm very glad to hear you. It's a great pleasure. Bill, thank you for accepting my call. Do you mind if I ask my interpreter to translate? First of all, I want to tell you from the bottom of my heart of my friendship in the personal ordeal that you are going through. Nobody in Europe or France in particular understands this. If there were to be a referendum or opinion poll in France today, you would get 95 percent of the vote. The press and the media in France are unanimous in this respect and rightly feel that in the U.S. we are witnessing a dangerous drift of democracy. And I would like to tell you in this delicate moment that this won't last. I and all your friends are by your side and by the side of Hillary and your daughter. (U)

The President: Thank you so much. (U)

President Chirac: Second Bill, now we had been talking about having a meeting with your officials, and I would be very glad to go to Washington in November if you can find an opportunity for us to meet -- to have this important meeting. (U)

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The President: You could come in November? (U)

President Chirac: Well, whenever would suit you in November, so I suggest that our officials work out a date that would suit you. (U)

The President: Thank you. Let's have our staffs work on that. I had just a couple of things I wanted to mention to you. First of all, on the personal matter, since you were kind enough to mention it, I think it is going to blow over. But if you were willing to do it, if you could put out some kind of statement saying that we have many challenges to confront together and the world wants the United States to get on with business. That would be very useful. (C)

President Chirac: Well, this is precisely my intention. This is why I wanted to have this talk with you today. It was the occasion and opportunity to do that to the international media. And I'm going to do that within the next 30 minutes. (C)

The President: Thank you. Also, let me just mention a couple of other questions. I think we did the right thing on Iraq last week in the UN. Now we have information, which has already been in the French press, saying that Saddam Hussein is going to throw the UNSCOM observers out of Iraq this week. Do you think there is anything we can do about this? (C)

President Chirac: I think that your information is not complete. Today, 3-4 hours ago, the ambassadors of France, China, and Russia were solemnly received by Tariq Aziz in order to express their strong wish that Iraq resume full cooperation with UNSCOM. And I got the outcome of that meeting two hours ago, and Tariq Aziz showed himself conciliatory. The Iraqi parliament is to meet tomorrow, and they will recommend the decision of breaking off cooperation. But from past experience, we have seen the parliament speak out very loudly, but it doesn't mean that Saddam Hussein will do the same thing. And the impression of the three ambassadors of France, China, and Russia is rather positive after meeting with Tariq Aziz. In my opinion, everything will depend on the meeting that is scheduled in New York next week between the ambassadors of the five permanent members and Kofi Annan. And the five ambassadors of the permanent countries and Kofi Annan should work together in order to launch the work on the comprehensive review. And I think that in front of the media, our ambassadors must be firm regarding the principle and obligation of Iraq to start immediate work with UNSCOM. But at the same time, they must adopt a presentation that will not close off the door completely, while fully respecting the resolutions of the UN so that there might be a possibility for Iraq of

finding a way of going ahead. And I think it ought to take place normally. ~~(C)~~

The President: That is very good news. I have tried to be very restrained during this period, and I am a little perplexed because we were almost at a point where we could have transferred their nuclear program from the inspection to the monitoring phase. And I have shown good faith here and, as you may know, was attacked in the American press by this man Ritter who said we weren't tough enough with Iraq. I want to defend the integrity of UNSCOM, but we need to make sure that there are no chemical or biological weapons programs going on there. I think we can work through this if he will deal in good faith. ~~(C)~~

President Chirac: Yes, I think that we ought to be able to get out of this deadlock. Well, in any case we are exerting maximum pressure on Saddam Hussein to get him to understand that it is in his interest to resume normal work with UNSCOM. ~~(C)~~

The President: Thanks. I think it is very important because throwing them all out would be a big slap in the face of Kofi Annan and the work of the UN. I wanted to say a word on Kosovo too. There has been some movement on the negotiating track with Milosevic agreeing at least to the concept of an interim agreement, but I don't know if Milosevic is ready to return to the concept of autonomy for Kosovo if he thinks there is a chance of a military option. And I am concerned about the possibility that Rugova may not be able to convince the combatants to end the violence. It seems to me that the situation is becoming increasingly urgent as winter approaches. There are 50-100,000 refugees in the mountains who could die of freezing or starvation. And I think we have to get some sort of political solution. If we have to go in there in the winter with a humanitarian mission we could have a repeat of Bosnia. We can't do it if we're not all together. Yeltsin issued a strong statement on it. I think Milosevic has to believe that with people starving, NATO will act, even without UN approval. We have to find a way to turn up the heat a little. The British have proposed a resolution, a draft resolution, to the UN, and I don't know if the Russians will be willing to accept it, but I believe even they are concerned about this winter. ~~(C)~~

President Chirac: Well, I make the same analysis. I think that the time has come to adopt a resolution in New York. We fully support the British draft, and I think that the Russians will either vote in favor or abstain but they will not vote against. They have enough difficulties of their own for the moment, not to add a conflict with the West on the subject. I am in favor of having a resolution in New York, in fact voting for the British draft resolution. But it seems to me that there is something

else that is necessary. The Contact Group hasn't met in quite a while and I think this is a psychological error vis-à-vis the Russians in particular and also vis-à-vis the Europeans. I think that we ought to use the week of 21 September when all the foreign ministers will be in New York to have a meeting of the Contact Group there in New York. (C)

The President: I agree with that. We just have to keep working on it. I just want to point out that if winter comes on, we could be in a bad situation like we were in Bosnia. (C)

President Chirac: That's true. (C)

The President: The last thing I wanted to mention briefly is Russia. I went to Russia and I talked to Yeltsin again yesterday. I think that it would be useful, if you haven't already spoken with him, for you to call him and say there has to be a credible economic program to restore the confidence of investors. That's the only way to keep the money from going right out of the country if we were to invest more. (C)

President Chirac: Yes. I am going to do this as well, but tomorrow there is a meeting of the relevant directors of the G-7 with the Russians. (C)

The President: Yes. I know. (U)

President Chirac: But I am going to ring Yeltsin. (C)

The President: Thank you Jacques, and thank you very much for this call. It means more than you could possibly know. (U)

President Chirac: Bill, you know that you have my fullest friendship and my fullest esteem, and also my affection to be shared with Hillary. And I have the fullest confidence. This is the sort of crisis that you get, a sort of McCarthy type of crisis, but the American public has proved that it is reasonable and normal. (C)

The President: Thank you. Yes, if they stay with me, I'll be alright. (C)

President Chirac: Well, Bill, I think they have gone too far against you. It's really a form of lynching, and I think public opinion will stay with you, just like international opinion is with you. You have my fullest confidence and you will have your friends by your side. (C)

The President: Thanks man. (U)

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President Chirac: Bye-bye Bill, it was of great interest to me, and I'm going to make a comment to the press immediately. (C)

The President: Thank you so much. (U)

President Chirac: Bye-bye Bill. (U)

-- End of Conversation --

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