

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

MEMORANDUM OF TELEPHONE CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Telcon with French President Chirac (U)

PARTICIPANTS: The President
President Chirac

Interpreter: Marcel Bouquet
Notetakers: David Higgins, Marianna
Papadimitriou, James Smith, Larry Wright,
Pat O'Shaughnessy, Nancy McEldowney

DATE, TIME November 15, 1997, 8:25 - 8:58 p.m. EST
AND PLACE: Malibu, California

The President: Jacques? (U)

President Chirac: Bill, is that you? (U)

The President: Yes. (U)

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

The President: Fine. (U)

President Chirac: I'm in Hanoi, in Vietnam, for the
Francophonie. We have a meeting with 49 countries here. (U)

The President: Well, good. (U)

President Chirac: You wanted to talk to me? (U)

The President: I did. I wanted to talk to you about Iraq. I'm
glad you are in Vietnam. (U)

President Chirac: You have a very nice Ambassador; he was a
prisoner here? (U)

The President: He was a prisoner for six and a half years. (U)

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

Reason: 1.5(b,d)

Declassify on: 11/17/07

DECLASSIFIED
E.O. 13526, Sec. 3.5 (b)
White House Guidelines, September 11, 2006
By VZ NARA, Date 4/3/2019
2015-0775-W (1.27)

President Chirac: I know this. He is very well known here, and is friends with everyone. (U)

The President: Yes, they like him. He helped me to normalize relations with Vietnam. I have a lot of confidence in him. (U)

President Chirac: The evolution in Vietnam is very good. The leadership wants to reform the economy and to expand human rights. I have a very good impression of the new leadership. Bill, to talk about Iraq is complicated, and my English is a bit weak; do you mind if I give the phone to my interpreter? (U)

The President: That would be fine. (U)

President Chirac: I speak in French, you speak in English. (U)

The President: That's good. I will just go through my points, and then you can respond. (U)

President Chirac: How is Hillary? (U)

The President: She is wonderful. You know she has been in Central Asia -- Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan. (U)

President Chirac: It's a very nice treat for her. (U)

The President: Absolutely. She'll be home Tuesday. (U)

President Chirac: Tuesday? Give her my best regards. Ok, I'm listening. (U)

The President: Okay. Iraq's actions are a very serious challenge to the UN and the UN Security Council and, I believe, the security of the Persian Gulf. I want to make it clear that the issue is not allowing Saddam to rebuild his weapons of mass destruction. UNSCOM weapons inspectors have discovered and destroyed more weapons of mass destruction potential in the last six years than during the entire Gulf War. We will be dealing with the whole issue of chemical and biological weapons for years to come, so we can't afford not to find a solution now to restore the inspection regime. We support Ambassador Butler's decision to withdraw UNSCOM personnel from Iraq. Since Saddam challenged us on October 29, we have tried to work through diplomatic means to respond. Our efforts on the UNSC resolution and on the Presidential statement produced clear statements about the need for Iraq to step back. I know you've also tried

hard to persuade them, and I hope that you will do everything to convince Saddam to reverse his decision and let UNSCOM back in.

(C)

I want you to know that yesterday I announced the movement of our aircraft carrier, the USS George Washington, to the region. It is a prudent measure, and I may announce further force movements as necessary. But I remain focused on diplomatic efforts. We have to stay unified and I hope we can make clear to Saddam that there is not a lot of daylight between us. (C)

I also want to say, in response to some things I understand were in the French press about my comments yesterday, that I am well aware that the Iraqi people are suffering because of the deprivations they've endured. It is not my intention that sanctions would remain forever, but we must have compliance with the UN resolutions before they can be modified. I have some ideas on this, which Madeleine Albright will be in touch with Vedrine about. I don't think we can rule out the use of force because people all over the world are interested in how far Iraq can go with chemical and biological agents. There is a growing market for them, organized crime is interested, especially in biological and chemical weapons. That's my concern. I'm not interested in a replay of the Gulf War or a face-off. I want to restore the UNSCOM inspections, especially since we know he'll use them; he used them on the Iraqis, on the Kurds. I'm well aware that he wants us to strike him, because he thinks it would divide the coalition, but it would be a major mistake to rule out the strike option. That's all I have to say, Jacques; I would like to hear your thoughts. (C)

President Chirac: Bill, thank you very much for this information. I would like to say a couple of things. First of all, I condemn without reservation the attitude of Saddam Hussein. I have a personal appreciation of the situation regarding the crisis and the cause of the crisis. But I would like to say that since we are in a crisis, France will have solidarity with the United States. If the United States decides to send, for example, a U-2, France is ready to take part in this, we will send our aircraft along in order to express its solidarity with the United States in this crisis. Even so, we are not in favor of a military strike. (C)

The whole issue now is to get out of the crisis. UNSCOM has done good work; according to its report and according to its Chairman, it has obtained the destruction of almost the totality of nuclear and ballistic missile capacity, and has made progress

on chemical and biological weapons. Even if there is still a lot of work to be done, the progress itself is a major success for the UN and the Security Council. Today there is a crisis -- why? Let me repeat, we are in full solidarity in this crisis, but one might wonder why there is a crisis. I believe Saddam thought that whatever happens, if he were to accept the staying on of the Commission, and it said it had finally settled everything, there would still not be a lifting of the embargo. Faced with this certainty, the problem is not one of arms control, but of his very presence in Baghdad. He doesn't have a solution, an open door to get out of the crisis. And if he doesn't want both controls and embargo, he rejects controls and will start again making weapons. This is extraordinarily dangerous. (C)

So the question is how to get Saddam Hussein to cooperate again with UNSCOM. Of course there is the stick, the military threat, but a carrot is needed as well. In other words, the day the Commission notes officially that there are no longer any dangerous weapons, the embargo should be lifted. This will lead to a higher opinion in Iraq vis-à-vis westerners, and also Arab popular opinion also will improve. Incidentally, today there is a big difference between the opinion of the Arab people and their leaders, which the leaders don't express today, and this is dangerous. (C)

If we accept the principle of lifting the embargo on the day the Commission completes its work, the day they say all dangerous weapons have been destroyed, then we will have a door to take us out of the crisis. If the Americans feel that the sanctions will stay as long as Saddam is there, then this will lead us straight to the rearming of Iraq. If the sanctions are linked to weapons of mass destruction, then we have an exit out of the crisis. Then some countries can exert very strong pressure on Saddam Hussein, the Arab countries, the Russians and the French. I'm not sure they can have success, but it's possible. If we attempt to link the embargo to the total destruction of weapons, then the three of us can think it over, the Americans, the French, and the English -- the British, in order to work out a scenario to lead us out of the crisis, then as the second step, we can consult the Russians on this scenario. We could have two stages or even three. (C)

In the first stage, we can have a meeting of the 21 members of the Special Commission. This meeting could take stock of the work already done, state what work is to be done, state what means need to be implemented in Iraq and identify the time

framework needed for the total elimination of weapons, assuming the full cooperation of Iraq. (C)

In the second stage, the report of the Special Commission will be presented to the Security Council. If the Security Council approves this report, Iraq will have to be told expressly that it will have to cooperate with the Commission on the basis defined in the Commission report. In the third stage, telling Iraq expressly to obey could be accompanied by very energetic representations in Baghdad by all countries with the means to be heard in Baghdad, especially the Arab countries, Russia and France. Well, this is a proposal, which can be modified, discussed and amended. In her last talk with Vedrine, Madeleine Albright seemed to be a little open to this solution. This is the way I see it. (C)

To conclude: in this crisis, France is in full solidarity with the United States, and will accompany American actions, but not participate in strikes. What I mean is, if you ask that our aircraft accompany the U-2, they will. Secondly, the only question we have to ask is whether the embargo is linked to weapons, or linked to the presence of Saddam Hussein in Baghdad. In the first case, there is possibly a door to exit out of the crisis and disarm Iraq with the approval of Arab public opinion and leaders. In the second case, if the embargo is linked to the presence of Saddam, there is no door to take us out of the crisis. Then Saddam is going to rearm himself; this is very dangerous. This is what I wanted to say. (C)

The President: Well, let me thank you. It is obvious that you have thought a lot about this. I want to make some general observations. I'd like to give a report to Madeleine and Sandy Berger and offer them specific ideas to get back to Vedrine. This is an open line, so we have to be somewhat cautious. How we get out of this crisis counts a lot: whatever changes both sides make, we have to be clear that we are not accepting noncompliance with the UN. I believe there is a way to do that. But let me say again, I have never said that I wanted sanctions to remain for as long as Saddam is in power. Our position is he should comply with UN resolutions. Of course, some resolutions don't concern weapons, but on the other hand, not all sanctions are economic in nature, but political, so there are a lot of possibilities. I would like to discuss your conversation with our people, and I would like to feel that we could talk even if it is an inconvenient hour for us both because you and Tony Blair and I have to stay in as close contact as possible. I agree that we need to bring Yeltsin in.

We have to work out a proposal to try to get the Russians to sign onto. Also, I think with all you and I are trying to do to integrate China into the world community, and because it's one of the P-5, that we should try to get President Jiang to go in. He won't be interested in the details of it, but it shows respect on our part, and is a signal that we're trying to establish the right kind of relationship with China. (C)

President Chirac: I agree. I gave you my feelings, and of course my feelings are known to and accepted by the French Government. I am at your disposal to talk about this again whenever you want, but I wanted you to know that we are in solidarity with you and my analysis of how we can exit out of this crisis. I am ready to talk about this at any time with you and with Tony Blair. And you are right that Boris Yeltsin has to be associated with this. In parallel, I'd like to congratulate you on your visit with Jiang Zemin. It was a beautiful success, and I welcome this, because I like China a lot, and I think Jiang Zemin is a man of culture with whom we can work. I think he appreciated the success of his visit. (C)

The President: Thank you. If I could just mention one thing very briefly. I want very much to build a working partnership with you and Tony Blair on a broad range of things. While, as you noted, I can't be in a position to rule out some sort of unilateral action, but my preference is to work together in a framework of a broad alliance on many things. In this vein, we have been working very hard on a proposal for a continuing presence in Bosnia. We hope to get in touch with you shortly, and I hope we can agree on a course to stay there. (C)

President Chirac: Bill, for Bosnia, there have been discussions among our people, and we are exactly on the same line in feeling that it's very important. (C)

The President: I'm glad. The only other thing is: I think you are right about Arab public opinion, but I think it is sympathetic to the people of Iraq and their situation. I think Arab leaders are also sympathetic to the people of Iraq, it's just that they don't like Saddam. I know as well that it's complicated by how slowly the Middle East Peace Process is going. The problem is our responsibility, because of our relationship with Israel, but I think it's very important these governments understand the concerns with both Iraq and Iran. Iraq hit them with Scuds in the Gulf War. Israel should understand that their failure to pursue the peace process makes it more difficult for all their friends. I know your views are

well known, and you've made it clear to Mr. Netanyahu and his Government, but it's worth pointing out that the ability of the West to deal with threats to Israeli security and the security of the region is severely compromised by their failure to go forward with the Middle East Peace Process. We need to change attitudes a bit in Jerusalem, and I am certainly willing to make the most of that in this regard. (C)

President Chirac: I share this feeling. But I believe that in the relations between Israel and the Palestinians, Netanyahu is not going to move. He might, as part of some small gesture on the Gaza airport and harbor, but basically he will not change because he is held by his extremists. Perhaps on the other hand, we could move ahead on a topic that is less impassioned and more technical, and linked to security. The relationship between Israel and Syria -- there are less strong feelings there, and I think if we could make some progress, it would be something. (C)

I would like to go back and make a point on Iraq. I think we should not put into question 986, the oil-for-food resolution, because there would be a firestorm in Arab public opinion. (C)

The President: I fully agree. I supported 986, I don't want it to change and I want it to work better. No one wants the Iraqi people to suffer. This is one of the things Madeleine wants to talk to Vedrine about. (C)

President Chirac: No problem. We are fully at your disposal. I'm quite ready to discuss this. (C)

The President: Great, I will be back in touch. (U)

President Chirac: Good day, and my affectionate tribute to Hillary. (U)

The President: Thank you, and please give my regards to the Vietnamese officials there. (U)

President Chirac: I will do that in five minutes time. (U)

The President: Thank you. (U)

President Chirac: Good-bye. (U)

The President: Good-bye. (U)

-- End of Conversation --