

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

CD
//

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Telephone Conversation between President Bush and President Mitterrand of France (Ø)

PARTICIPANTS: The President
President Mitterrand of France

DATE, TIME AND PLACE: April 17, 1989, 4:35 p.m to 4:55 p.m.
Oval Office

President Mitterrand said that he hoped that he was not interrupting at an inconvenient time. (Ø)

The President said not at all; he was sorry he had not been able to talk in the morning, since he was in Michigan giving a speech. (Ø)

President Mitterrand said that he would be talking at greater length next month, since President Bush was kind enough to be receiving him in his home. (Ø)

The President said that he and Mrs. Bush were looking forward to the visit. (Ø)

President Mitterrand said that he saw no solution in view for Lebanon. Instead, he foresaw the danger of prolonged warfare and a real massacre. He saw no institution other than the U.N. which could play a role, although he was aware of how difficult it was to do anything through the Security Council. However, he had contacted Secretary General de Cuellar, who had agreed to take on a "mission of information" to Lebanon and Syria if he were given such a mandate by the Security Council. This could be done without a vote. (Ø)

President Mitterrand said that if de Cuellar took on this mission it would lead to a ceasefire on the part of the belligerents, which could be longer than the usual ceasefires. This would provide time for the powers to reflect on a course of action. This solution was not humiliating for anyone. It would not offend Syria, provided that Assad does not view Lebanon as his

DECLASSIFIED
PER E.O. 12958,
AS AMENDED
2000-0429-F
Jc 8/21/09

"private hunting preserve" where no one else has a right to step in. But he should not feel that way if it is the U.N. French Foreign Minister Dumas had discussed this with de Cuellar when he was recently in Paris and he had agreed with the proviso that the Permanent Members would have to approve. (Ø)

President Mitterrand repeated that the proposed course of action would not require a vote but, instead, it would be a mission of information and conciliation. He had wanted to discuss this with President Bush before pursuing it further with de Cuellar, who would be in Luxembourg the next day. He repeated that if this mission were to be known, the result would be a ceasefire. Otherwise, he could only foresee continued warfare and continued occupation of the entire country by Syria, except in the Israeli-controlled zone of Lebanon. Lebanon would thus become the first state to be wiped off the face of the map. (Ø)

President Mitterrand said that he had lunch with King Hussein earlier in the day and the King shared his feelings. President Mitterrand wanted to inform President Bush of his initiative in order to avoid a surprise, and because he was conscious of the weight that the U.S. could provide in helping to seek a truce in a country being torn apart by war, with 40-50 people dying per day. He added that this approach does not lend itself to the impression of taking sides as between the Christians and the Moslems. France has been involved in Lebanon for 50 years, knows the country well and can vouch for the urgency of finding a solution. (Ø)

The President replied by thanking President Mitterrand for bringing this proposal to his attention and by asking for confirmation that this approach required acquiescence, but no action, by the 5 Permanent Members. (Ø)

President Mitterrand said that this was correct, but there was a requirement not to vote against it. On this basis, we could secure de Cuellar's consent. (Ø)

The President responded that it would be a pleasant surprise if the announcement of such a mission led to a ceasefire. He respected President Mitterrand's judgment. Although he was not optimistic, we had no better plan. (Ø)

President Mitterrand said that he was no more certain than was President Bush of the success of this approach, but he saw no alternative. (Ø)

President Bush agreed. He said he would talk with Secretary Baker and General Scowcroft, but the U.S. would support this approach. (Ø)

President Mitterrand said that he had talked with the Kuwaiti chairman of the Arab League's Action Committee and asked whether the Arab League opposed this approach. The Kuwaiti had said absolutely not, to the contrary, he approved of it. (Ø)

The President said that this was good. The situation was very complex and heartbreaking. He respected the French position, and wished the Secretary General well. (Ø)

President Mitterrand said that King Hussein would also be discussing the issue with the President directly when he visited Washington, however, Hussein had told him that there are many Arab countries which do not want to see Lebanon disappear. (Ø)

President Mitterrand ended by saying that he was not an enemy of Syria. He did not want to fight Syria -- but this was a question of the disappearance of a country recognized by the international community. These were his feelings and thoughts, and he had wanted to share them directly with the President. (Ø)

President Bush ended by expressing his appreciation for the call and saying that he looked forward to President Mitterrand's visit in May. (Ø)