

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Telephone Conversation with the Pope,
August 1, 1989; 4:13-4:25 p.m.

PARTICIPANTS: The President
The Pope
Notetaker: Sandra Charles

DATE, TIME August 1, 1989, 4:13 p.m. - 4:25 p.m.
AND PLACE: The Oval Office

The President began the conversation by apologizing for calling His Holiness so late and saying that he wanted to discuss the situation in Lebanon and the hostages. He stated that the United States was in a state of shock and sadness over the death of Colonel Higgins, who was serving with the United Nations in Lebanon but in fact was a U.S. citizen. The American people were shocked to the core. (U)

The President then suggested a statement or a word from the Vatican would encourage those who did it to return his body. Since the Pope was well respected and committed to peace, the President thought his intervention in this regard would be helpful with Hizbollah. (U)

The Pope indicated that his first concern was the suffering in Lebanon. (U)

The President acknowledged that but said if the Vatican could join with the UN to ask that the body be returned to the family, it would mean a lot to the American people. He noted that the UN Secretary General had just sent an envoy to get the body returned. (U)

The President said that it was the question of the body, of when he was killed, and the pictures of the hanging that were so horrible for the loved ones who had no one to lay to rest. The President felt that a Vatican call for the body's return would be well received. (U)

The Pope said he had spoken to the UN Secretary General saying that it was necessary perhaps to reunite the UN Security Council on Lebanon. The Secretary General said he would try but perhaps, the Pope speculated, this situation and the recent provocation made it a good reason for this reunion. (U)

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The President agreed that on the big picture that might be possible, but he noted we had two problems. First, there was the short-term focus on the death of our hostage and the threats against Terry Waite and Joe Cicippio which dominate our concerns. Second, the President continued, there was the Pope's overall concern on Lebanon. The President then mentioned that he was aware that our Charge' had met with the Vatican Foreign Minister, Monsignor Tauran, who had shared the Pope's concerns with us. The President reiterated to the Pope that we share that concern. (Ø)

The Pope acknowledged there was also the matter of Higgins which was a big provocation from the Shiites. (Ø)

The President then turned to the overall situation in Lebanon, stating that he wished the Arab League Foreign Ministers had had more success, but it appeared they had run into a brick wall. However, the President said he was prepared to try to revive the Arab League effort by speaking to the three Heads of State and the UN Secretary General. He continued saying that we were thinking hard and hoping to find a way to help. (Ø)

The Pope commented that Arab League intervention was not enough. (Ø)

The President agreed, but said that he wanted to try to get it going again. He indicated that he would try to encourage them to continue their efforts. He noted the United States had little influence over the parties in the area. The President told the Pope that he wanted him to know that he was aware of the readout of Monsignor Tauran's meeting regarding the Pope's concerns about Lebanon, and he also recalled them from their previous discussions. (Ø)

The Pope said that he would see the Monsignor tomorrow and speak with him to attempt another try. (U)

The President encouraged him to also discuss with the Monsignor the return of the body to the family. He said that he would appreciate any thoughts either the Pope or the Monsignor had on getting the Arab League going again. (U)

The Pope then added there was the question of the hostages. (Ø)

The President acknowledged this, saying this worried the U.S. He noted that we had indications that the executions of Waite and Cicippio would be postponed for now. The deadline had been today, but it was delayed. The President stated that this was very cruel for the families and for the world. (Ø)

The Pope agreed, noting that the whole attitude of these people is one of cruelty that was destroying Beirut. The Muslims are behind the Syrians and Iran. (Ø)

The President mentioned that we were trying to work with the Syrians to have them get Iran to stop supporting Hizbollah. (Ø)

The Pope expressed his concern about their attitude of destruction against the Maronite Christians and democratic western institutions. (Ø)

The President noted that they are antagonistic against everything, but assured the Pope that we would keep trying, saying he respected the Pope's leadership and that we would help where we could. (Ø)

The Pope then stated that it was also necessary to save the hostages. (Ø)

The President agreed, saying he appreciated the Pope's taking his call, which he wished could have been more cheerful. He again stressed two specific points to the Pope: that he respected the Pope's concern about Lebanon and that anything the Vatican could do to encourage the killers to return Higgins' body would be appreciated. (Ø)

The Pope responded that we should continue the same line to save Lebanon and all the hostages and persons involved in this troubled spot. (Ø)

In conclusion, the President thanked the Pope for taking his call so late and offered his respects. (U)

The call concluded at 4:25 p.m.