

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

President Bush's Telephone Call to King Hassan II
1:02pm - 1:19pm, August 2, 1989

Participants: The President
King Hassan II of Morocco
Location: Oval Office
Stenographer: Patty Daniel
Interpreter: Alec Toumayan
Notetaker: Ralph Sigler

After initial pleasantries, the President told King Hassan that he was calling to discuss both the situation in Lebanon, and the Higgins' case, which had shaken America to the core. The President noted that he had issued a statement condemning all hostage-taking and abductions and calling for the immediate release of all hostages being held by any party.

The President said he had talked to a number of world leaders concerning this problem, and was appealing to the world to use whatever influence anyone has to obtain the return of the body of Colonel Higgins. He also said he had appealed to the Iranians, but was not hopeful of any help in view of the state of relations between the US and Iran. He also noted the UN Secretary General had been helpful and had sent a special emissary to the area.

King Hassan said he fully shared the President's indignation and emotions and said he would help wherever possible.

The President expressed his appreciation and asked if he could turn to the situation in Lebanon.

King Hassan interrupted, saying he wanted to say a few more words on the hostage problem. He noted that the Arab leaders gathered at Casablanca had discussed the need for withdrawal of the Iranian Hizballah faction from Lebanon. He said Syrian President Assad "behind closed doors" had given his personal pledge to the other heads of state that this was Syria's problem and he would take care of it.

The President acknowledged Hassan's statement and noted that the US had seen some evidence of Syrian efforts to be helpful.

King Hassan reminded the President, however, that in this business, Syria often takes with one hand what it gives with the other.

The President expressed appreciation for anything King Hassan might be able to do. He then moved to the problem of Lebanon and the Arab initiative, saying he did not know exactly what the US might be able to do to be helpful, but he was willing to try if the King had any suggestions. The President said he had talked with the Pope yesterday and with King Fahd and Mrs. Thatcher and would be talking to President Bendjedid later today.

King Hassan said that when the mandate from the Summit was first received, all involved had agreed they would be given every facility in order to operate in Lebanon to solve the problem. Secondly, they also had agreed that should they find themselves in an insoluble situation, they would reserve the right to point the finger at the party responsible for the failure. He said the council, including Syria, had unanimously given the group carte blanche for reaching a ceasefire and for undertaking any effort to reestablish Lebanese sovereignty. Unfortunately, they had reached a dead-end street.

King Hassan said the leaders had drafted a lengthy letter to the Arab chiefs of state, informing them that their efforts had been fruitless as a direct result of Syria's failure to respect the rules.

King Hassan said a communique was released yesterday and that a lengthy letter was being signed by King Fahd and Bendjedid, and that he (Hassan) would be receiving it tomorrow and would give it to all the ambassadors. He noted that the letter was very lengthy because it outlines the entire history of the Arab initiative.

The President said he respected what King Hassan and the others were trying to do, and said he was sorry to hear that they had reached a dead end. He told King Hassan to not hesitate to pick up the phone and call him if there was anything we could do to help.

King Hassan expressed his appreciation for the President's offer. He added that some Arab leaders were calling for an extraordinary Summit to address the issue. He thought, however, that such a summit would not be fruitful. Instead, King Hassan said he believed it was now up to the UN Security Council to act. He added that his personal advice to the President, given the combination of the hostage situation and the Lebanese failure, was that the Security Council is now responsible.

The President noted that if Hassan thought the US could be helpful regarding the Security Council, he would be interested in cooperating.

King Hassan said he thought France and the Soviet Union were setting up something along these lines.

The President thanked King Hassan and observed that Admiral Crowe and Alec (the interpreter) had certainly enjoyed being there on King Hassan's special day.

King Hassan said he could not have been more pleased, and described Admiral Crowe as a "wonderful person."

Thank yous were exchanged and the call concluded at 1:19 pm.