

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTONDECLASSIFIED
PER E.O. 12958,
AS AMENDED
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JL 8/21/09

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Telephone Conversation with Mr. Cornelio Sommaruga, International Commission - Red Cross

PARTICIPANTS: The President
Mr. Cornelio Sommaruga
Notetaker: Sandra Charles

DATE, TIME, AND PLACE: August 4, 1989, 4:00 p.m. - 4:10 p.m.
The Oval Office

The President began, saying he was calling to say that he had seen references to the Red Cross involving a possible useful role for that organization on the hostage question. He said there were some references coming out of Iran and he didn't know if Mr. Sommaruga had seen them or if there was a useful role for the organization. He wanted to bring them to his attention and encourage him to look into it, if it was something he felt comfortable with. (Ø)

Mr. Sommaruga responded, first by expressing his sympathy for LTC Higgins and all those suffering in these moments. He said the ICRC would be interested and would respond if they were certain all parties concerned requested them to work as a neutral intermediary. That was not the case now. He acknowledged there were some signals from the press that they might play a role and he assured the President that they would do so as soon as they were requested to. (Ø)

The President was pleased, noting his "statesmanlike position." He said as far as the U.S. was concerned, we would like this to be our formal request. He continued that he didn't know what the Iranian reference to the Red Cross meant. He noted that this was of such great human interest and concern here that we would support any effort that he might care to undertake. The President also understood Mr. Sommaruga's wanting to hear from the parties themselves. But inasmuch as there were American lives involved and inasmuch as one had been killed and one might be killed, and since there was no discussion about returning the body, the President said that we would deeply appreciate it if the Red Cross mission was narrowed to just returning the remains of LTC Higgins. (Ø)

Mr. Sommaruga replied that any help they could give on LTC Higgins, large or small, would be given. He was pleased to have the President's request for them to do that. (U)

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The President responded that he should consider this a request to do anything he might feel comfortable doing. He recommended Mr. Sommaruga contact him, our Secretary of State, or our Ambassador in Geneva if he needed any information from the American side. (S)

Mr. Sommaruga suggested that the President might nominate a special officer or he would communicate with him using normal channels through our Ambassador in Geneva. (U)

The President noted there was a man here at the National Security Council, if the matter was of a confidential nature, named Dick Haass. If it was a matter of a routine nature or if he was seeking information, the President thought our Ambassador in Geneva, Morris Abrams, who was a personal friend of his, would be good to talk to. (U)

Mr. Sommaruga noted that he had met him a few days ago and would contact him. (U)

The President concluded, saying we would let Ambassador Abrams know that they had had this conversation. He regretted that until the remains of LTC Higgins were returned to his family, we would not continue our business in a relaxed way, and he thanked Mr. Sommaruga for his compassionate interest. (S)

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