

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

MEMORANDUM OF TELEPHONE CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Telephone Call to Pope John Paul II (U)

PARTICIPANTS: The President
Pope John Paul II
Notetaker: Robert Hutchings

DATE, TIME: October 24, 1989, 8:40 - 8:52 a.m. EDT
AND PLACE: The Oval Office 9:41 -

The President initiated the call. (U)

The President: Your Holiness, I am calling about the situation in Lebanon. (U)

Pope John Paul II: It seems to be improving. (U)

The President: We hope that the agreement worked out in Taif by the King of Saudi Arabia will hold and that General Aoun will accept this approach. (Ø)

Pope John Paul II: A substantial question is also the independence and sovereignty of Lebanon. That is connected with the presence of the Syrian army. It is a very delicate problem. Sovereignty means that the Lebanese can decide to elect a new President. Now this is not possible. The reunion of the Parliament in Taif has prepared the possibilities, but to realize those possibilities Lebanese independence and democratic identity must be assured. That is the key question. We shall see. The cease fire is an improvement, as is the reunion of the Parliament abroad, in Saudi Arabia. Now the task is to facilitate the next step, to convince Syria and President Assad to give Lebanon the possibility of being independent. (Ø)

The President: I have two suggestions. First, with your great influence, I would ask you to speak to the Maronite Patriarch to ask him to show his support for this peaceful path. Second, we have little influence with General Aoun, but he listens to you and respects you. He would respect your appeal to give the national reconciliation process a chance to work. I talked to President Mitterrand, who will also call General Aoun. My purpose is to ask you to place calls to the Patriarch and to Aoun. I would welcome any advice you might have about what the U.S. could do. (Ø)

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2000-0429-F
JL 8/21/09

Pope John Paul II: It seems to me that the Patriarch and Aoun belong to the subjective part of the process. The objective part is also important. Aoun fights for the true independence of Lebanon. So do the Patriarch and the Lebanese people. I do not know Aoun. I do know the Patriarch and have spoken with him several times, including at the beginning of October. We prayed together for a peaceful solution. We shall see. For the moment, the principal aspect is the objective situation: the true conditions for the independence of Lebanon. (Ø)

The President: That is true, but there is a difference between the Patriarch and Aoun. Aoun has said negative things about Taif. It would be helpful if the Patriarch could persuade Aoun to help. I agree that we have to get Syria to remove its troops. If Aoun can give more support for a political solution, and if the Saudis continue to press Syria, Lebanon has a chance for such a solution. (Ø)

Pope John Paul II: I shall talk with our collaborators about what is possible. I have not engaged myself in the issue in a political role. Up to now, I have shown the moral importance of the question. We shall start to see what is possible now, at this moment. I shall call my collaborators, and we shall discuss the matter. I feel also that Syria's position is very intransigent. The normal reaction would be to withdraw its troops and give Lebanon the possibility to be independent. (Ø)

The President: I agree. The Saudis feel the Syrians have agreed to withdraw. I understand your views, not wanting to be active on the political side. But if the French and others can work on the political side, we may be able to realize our common dream of a peaceful and independent Lebanon. I appreciate very much our discussion, and I appreciate your position. We stand ready to help in any way we can. (Ø)

Pope John Paul II: We shall start to see what possibilities there are. I am grateful for your call. (U)

The President: I am grateful to you and am inspired by your leadership. I hope to see you again soon. I fondly remember our meeting in May. (U)

Pope John Paul II: Every day I pray for the United States of America. You have my best wishes. (U)

-- End of Conversation --