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PER E.O. 13526
201-0813-112
ES 51113

MEMORANDUM OF TELEPHONE CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Telephone Conversation with President Francois Mitterrand of France (U)

PARTICIPANTS: The President
Francois Mitterrand, President
Robert Hutchings, NSC Staff (Notetaker)
Eliza Burnham (Interpreter)

DATE, TIME AND PLACE: November 30, 1989, 9:40 - 9:55 a.m. EST
The Oval Office

The President initiated the call. (U)

The President: Hello! Bon jour! Francois, I'm calling on a couple of things. (U)

President Mitterrand: I'm listening. (U)

The President: First, I want to solicit any last-minute thoughts before I go to Malta and, second, raise with you an area you know so well -- Lebanon. First, I think I understand the concerns Gorbachev has about premature reunification. I want to tell you we are going to go in a forward-leaning position. We hope to make progress on the economic side. We will also discuss arms control, but I think he knows I cannot commit the Alliance to some dramatic proposal. I feel comfortable on our approach, which will be forward-leaning. (U)

President Mitterrand: Don't worry. We are in full confidence. I know that you appreciate very well what is required. I am not at all concerned about the meeting. You are engaging in explorations that will be useful. (U)

The President: It is a nice thing: when we meet in the Caribbean we can discuss all this in a relaxed setting. I am very, very pleased that our meeting will take place. (U)

President Mitterrand: I'm not one who has been concerned. We'll be able to discuss it as early as Monday in Brussels and then discuss it in greater depth. As far as France is concerned, there is no problem. I just want to resolve problems. I am perfectly in concert with you. (U)

The President: Do you have any thoughts on Lebanon? I am troubled. (U)

President Mitterrand: Of course we are very disturbed by the assassination. He was an independent man -- a Christian accepted by the Syrians without being under their control. I had sent a letter before his death expressing my support. I also sent a letter to General Aoun asking him to espouse legality. I also sent a message for the President's funeral. It seems that the new President is more tied to the Syrians than his predecessor. I shan't dwell on this today, but all our efforts -- yours, mine, others -- should be to prevent military action by Syria. We must speak out clearly that President Hraoui has legality on his side and that Aoun is in the illegal position. This is an internal matter for Lebanon. We don't want civil war to turn into international war. We need time for diplomatic efforts to be engaged so as to prevent Hraoui or the Syrians from mounting a large-scale offensive. We have talked about the rule of law. I will use all my influence with Aoun to make clear he is outside the law. But with fanatics such efforts are often in vain. I sent a ship -- not a combat ship -- to save the lives of French nationals at the Embassy. It was not a carrier of military equipment that might be misinterpreted. But I cannot leave many French nationals without help. I must let Aoun know that France does not support him in his attempts at rebellion. It is acceptable to French public opinion only so long as there is no big Syrian involvement. (P)

The President: Does opinion favor Aoun if there is no Syrian move? (P)

President Mitterrand: Yes. If the Syrians moved, we would have a massive reaction in France. Therefore, as for Lebanon my position is clear and well understood. If Syrians give arms to Hraoui, that is another matter. But direct and massive intervention by Syria would put us in a very difficult position. I could send you the letter I sent to Aoun. Contrary to what has been said, there have been no arms shipments to Aoun. If smugglers have done so, it was against my desires and intentions. We must apply pressure on Hraoui so that there will be no international war. I intend to do so. (P)

The President: I totally agree with what you have said. We will contact the new President and repeat what you said. It is a good time to reiterate our concern about military action. If you have any other ideas, I would appreciate hearing from you. (P)

President Mitterrand: What's important is that Syrians are well disposed toward the U.S. for now. They shouldn't feel they're benefitting from a tacit agreement. The point is not supporting Hraoui but preventing war. (P)

The President: That is very helpful. (U)

President Mitterrand: As to Malta, I trust your judgment. (U)

The President: I look forward to seeing you in Brussels. (U)

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President Mitterrand: I think we will have to talk about the German issue. (Ø)

The President: Yes. And in the Caribbean we will solve all the problems of the world. (U)

-- End of Conversation --

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