

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Telephone Call to President Mitterrand of France (U)

PARTICIPANTS: The President
Francois Mitterrand, President
Robert Hutchings, NSC Staff (Notetaker)
Alec Toumayan (Interpreter)

DATE, TIME August 3, 1990, 4:32 - 4:57 p.m.
AND PLACE: The Oval Office (U)

The President: I am calling you because I thought it important to touch base on this serious, deteriorating situation in the Gulf. I have talked with a number of leaders about the outrageous invasion of Kuwait. We agree the status quo is totally unacceptable. It presents a grave threat to our vital interests and our friends' security in the region. (P)

President Mitterrand: Yes. That's what I think. (U)

The President: I find it hard to believe that Saddam will stop with Kuwait. Even if he did, he now controls enough oil and financial assets to totally alter the geostrategic picture, affecting oil supplies and prices. So our goal must be to get the Iraqis out and restore the legitimate government of Kuwait. We believe that major economic pressure -- a complete cutoff of oil, water, and arms -- would help. I hope I can count on you to support a Chapter 7 sanctions resolution at the UN. Frankly, I'm very pleased with Soviet cooperation, which makes our efforts much easier than in the past. (P)

We are also considering closing down his oil pipelines or an embargo. A lot of thought by a lot of countries has been given to that. But I am worried that economic pressure alone will not force Saddam to withdraw. I have talked with Fahd and Hussein and Mubarak and Saleh of Yemen. They are pursuing a diplomatic strategy, hoping in the next 48 hours to get Iraqi troop withdrawals and the restoration of the Kuwaiti government. But I must confess I am somewhat skeptical. Saddam lied before. King Fahd told me that if he did not succeed, the only other option in his view would be to use force. (P)

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I spoke with Thatcher and President Ozal, and we agreed that whatever actions we took -- diplomatic, economic, or military -- we would have to act quickly, decisively, and collectively, and do whatever it takes. During the Gulf War we did cooperate, but it seems to me there are more vital interests at stake from a more serious threat. I certainly appreciate the deployment of your two warships. As you know, we have increased our ship presence in the Gulf, and a carrier will arrive in two days. We are also talking with the Saudis about doing what is needed to deter Iraqi aggression and to get Saddam to withdraw from Kuwait. At some point, we should begin serious military talks, with you and members of the Atlantic Alliance. But now I'd like to have your views on all this. (Ø)

President Mitterrand: Thank you. My impressions are the same as yours. To see Saddam Hussein continue his offensive would be to secure his hegemony over the Arab world. I don't know what he wants to do with Saudi Arabia, but this is a very serious area. Perhaps he thinks if no one reacts to what he has done in Kuwait, three months from now he can do something else. I gave instructions similar to yours regarding the freezing of Iraqi assets and no sales of weapons. And our representatives are working together at the Security Council. Our representatives will speak in the same manner at the meeting of the twelve members of the EC. (Ø)

If we do take measures like an oil blockade, it has to succeed. Otherwise there will be a tremendous loss of face for all Western countries. We must be careful not to create a solidarity among members of the Arab world. That, it seems to me, is the most difficult aspect. The Arabs don't have much solidarity. They are fearful but don't take courageous public stands. Pressures could also increase against Israel. The Arab countries, given their hostility toward Israel, would not break ranks with Iraq. This would encourage Saddam Hussein to take aggressive steps against Israel. (Ø)

I believe the key to the next step is Saudi Arabia. If Saudi Arabia takes a courageous stand against the annexation of Kuwait, this would bring along others. The next question is, what will the Soviet Union do? Up to now there has been solidarity, but how far can it go? I ask you, President Bush, because you may be able to shed more light, you are more enlightened on this. (Ø)

The President: The Soviet Union just joined us in a tough statement that Secretary Baker and Shevardnadze made in Moscow. Shevardnadze announced that Saddam Hussein had told him Iraq would pull out soon, but they nonetheless condemned Iraq and cut off all arms sales. Jim Baker gets back tonight and will meet with me in the morning. Anything we consider with the Allies, we will have to convince the Soviets the nothing is directed at the Soviet Union. I think that will be fairly easy to do. (Ø)

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President Mitterrand: Let's talk about retaliation or reprisals. I believe that is an indispensable aspect. They must stay in place -- we must hold to them. If not, it is a victory for him. In the second place, if we are talking about military measures, which military measures? If we do take military measures, it will result in a break in relations. If it remains just a Platonic threat, it will not have much affect. So, how far are you going in your own thinking? (S)

The President: First, to interdict the oil, and at the same time to guarantee the security of Saudi Arabia. If Saddam Hussein keeps going he could overrun Saudi oil fields, which are in the eastern part of Saudi Arabia, very easily. So far, Saudi Arabia has not requested American or, to my knowledge, any other troops or aircraft. But serious actions would include interdiction at sea of tankers, Turkey and Saudi Arabia closing down those two pipelines, and enough force on the ground in Saudi Arabia to guarantee that an Iraqi invasion would not succeed. (S)

President Mitterrand: We really have to talk about this very seriously to gather all these efforts. (S)

The President: Exactly. The logistics are very complicated. We first need to hear from Saudi Arabia and see if others will back them up. (S)

President Mitterrand: Yes. The Saudis must be absolutely convinced of our support. (S)

The President: I am not sure they are. I had good talks with their Ambassador and assured him of U.S. support, but so far they haven't requested anything. They seem to be hoping those talks will succeed. Francois, from the American side, we will know a lot more by close of business tomorrow. We should stay in close touch through our people, or you and I if necessary. But I wanted to make this call so you will know our thinking. (S)

President Mitterrand: Thank you. It is really easy to reach me. I, too, wish for keeping this contact between us. But I want you to know right away that I agree with you on all the points you have mentioned. (S)

The President: Thank you. The Saudi King is very, very concerned. He equated Saddam Hussein with Hitler and called him a liar. So he is concerned. But let's stay in touch on all of this. (S)

President Mitterrand: We have to remain in close touch because very often the problem lies in the modalities, the details, of a the solution. France is in full solidarity on economic sanctions, and I think very soon we may have to discuss security measures. Saddam Hussein's progress must be stopped. (S)

The President: Certainly. (U)

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President Mitterrand: Thank you very, very much. (U)

The President: I value these conversations and consultations and pledge to stay in close contact. (U)

President Mitterrand: Yes. It is very necessary. (U)

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