

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Telecon with President al-Assad of Syria

PARTICIPANTS: The President
President Hafiz al-Assad

Interpreter: Shukran Kamal
Notetaker: David Welch, NSC

DATE, TIME August 12, 1990, 6:13 - 6:28 a.m. EST
AND PLACE: Kennebunkport

President Bush initiated the call. President Assad exchanged greetings in English, but worked through the translator for the substantive exchange.

The President: Good morning, Mr. President, how are you? (U)

President Assad: (In English) Good morning, sir, how are you? (U)

The President: I wanted to call to tell you how pleased I am at the outcome of the Arab League Summit. I am pleased that Syria took a very appropriate and strong leadership role in trying to undo the injustice done by Saddam Hussein. I wanted to assure you as I have other leaders in the area that the United States wants to implement UN sanctions and restore the rightful leaders to Kuwait to bring peace to that part of the Gulf. I would be very interested, sir, to have your views on how this situation looks now. (Ø)

President Assad: (In Arabic) Thank you Mr. President. Actually, we were shocked at what happened to Kuwait. We know nations do have different views and opinions about things in the world; sometimes these can be sharp. But it is not right or permissible as a result of these differences -- regardless of who might be right or wrong -- that a nation should attack with arms and result in a country going out of existence. And especially at this time in world history, one nation cannot remove or eliminate another nation with force of arms, against the will of the people. That is why we emphasized our views since the first day. Kuwait is a member of the United Nations and the Arab League; it is an independent, sovereign state. Iraqi troops must be withdrawn and the legitimate government must be restored. No one else can change Kuwait's government. That is an internal matter, up to the Kuwaitis. Our position is based on principle, regardless of our bilateral relations with either Iraq or Kuwait. That was the basis for our position at the Arab League Summit in Cairo. The outcome of the Summit was positive. (Ø)

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President Bush: Very positive. I wonder this will make Saddam feel more isolated, or will it result in some other tactic, something more drastic? (Ø)

President Assad: Yes, there will be an effect, but it is difficult to define the effect, its size, and its depth. But it is an appropriate step. (Ø)

President Bush: The Arab League's decision is the single most significant step since the invasion of Kuwait. Because even though the United States had responded to the legitimate appeal from King Fahd, the worst thing would be to make this an Arab versus United States issue. But now other Arabs have pitched in -- Egypt, Morocco, and yourselves -- so now it is the world versus Saddam Hussein. (Ø)

President Assad: Our fellow Arabs discussed this at the Summit. Some took that position at the Arab League Summit; others took another position similar to your interpretation. This is based on the view that Saudi Arabia is a sovereign state and legally has the right to request assistance if in danger and need of defending itself. (Ø)

The President: I agree with that. Well, I wanted to call and wish you well. I am pleased that we are of the same view on this. Be assured that the United States will stand by the UN sanctions. I hope this means that down the road we will be working closer together. (Ø)

President Assad: Thank you very much. I too am pleased that we had this exchange. (Ø)

The President: We will talk again in the future. (U)

President Assad: (In English) I wish you good health. (U)

President Bush: Thank you and good luck. (U)

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