

THE WHITE HOUSE

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MEMORANDUM OF TELEPHONE CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Telephone Call to Francois Mitterrand,
President of France

PARTICIPANTS: The President
Francois Mitterrand, President
Notetaker: Adrian Basora, NSC Staff
Interpreter: Alex Toumayan

DATE, TIME September 11, 1990, 1:34 - 1:43 p.m.
PLACE: Oval Office

The President: Francois, comment allez vous? (U)

President Mitterrand: Good evening, dear George. (U)

The President: I would like to tell you about my meeting in Helsinki. I am sure you have seen the communique. I think the meeting was nothing short of historic. It sent a powerful signal. Saddam Hussein knows he cannot play off the U.S. against the Soviet Union. (S)

Gorbachev was in a good frame of mind and we were in agreement on the general approach to take in this crisis. Gorbachev is wary of the use of force, however. (S)

President Mitterrand: Undoubtedly. (U)

The President: Regarding the economic sanctions, Gorbachev agrees that food itself should be embargoed. However, if people are truly starving, especially children, then there should be a mechanism to get food to them. There were no side deals at Helsinki nor any request on my part for the Soviets to intervene militarily. (S)

Gorbachev was embarrassed by the fact that the press tried to tie his policies toward Iraq with the Soviets' need for economic assistance. It was the way the question was phrased. (S)

Thank you for the meetings that Nick Brady had with your top finance people. We are close together on that issue. (S)

I have spoken to King Fahd. Like the others in the region, he says that the sanctions are already working. Fahd is too optimistic; he says Saddam Hussein will need to make some

decisions in the next two weeks. Gorbachev also thought that the sanctions were working. (S)

President Mitterrand: Thank you for informing me. It is important to remain in touch. You understand Gorbachev's personality well: he doesn't want to stay alone in his corner. (S)

I think that Gorbachev is personally in agreement with us, but he has so many other forces to contend with inside the Soviet Union. The fact that you took the trouble to go to Helsinki, which is so far away, was a good thing. (S)

Now we must assess Saddam Hussein's ability to withstand the economic sanctions. A UN committee exists and should be asked to oversee them. (S)

The President: Yes, but aren't they already at work? (S)

President Mitterrand: It is important that we take a hard line in order for the embargo to succeed. (S)

The President: I agree totally. Some countries want all food shipments let into Iraq. (S)

President Mitterrand: I don't want to be cruel, but the most genuine cruelty is war, and that is what we want to avoid. (S)

The President: King Fahd says that there are many defections from the Iraqi military and that the defectors tell of shortages. (S)

President Mitterrand: We have to stay in touch; circumstances require it. The risk remains high and we must therefore remain vigilant. (S)

The President: Yes, indeed. (U)

President Mitterrand: Until soon. (U)

-- End of Conversation --