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THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

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MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Meeting with President Hussain Muhammad Ershad of Bangladesh (S)

PARTICIPANTS: The President
James A. Baker, III, Secretary of State
Brent Scowcroft, Assistant to the President
for National Security Affairs
John H. Kelly, Assistant Secretary of State
for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs
Nancy Bearg Dyke, NSC Staff (Notetaker)

Hussain Muhammad Ershad, President
Anisul Islam Mahmud, Minister of Foreign
Affairs
Ataul Karim, Ambassador to the United States
Ambassador Mohiudiz
Iftehkar Ahmed Chowdhury (Notetaker)

DATE, TIME October 1, 1990, 5:00 - 5:40 p.m.
AND PLACE: Bilateral Suite, Waldorf Astoria Hotel,
New York City

The President: I want to thank you for your steadfast support in the Persian Gulf. I am hopeful there can be a peaceful resolution. I am constantly concerned about a provocation from Saddam Hussein. He is unpredictable. (S)

President Ershad: We have underway a six-nation Asian-Muslim peace initiative that will be a positive element and will put 400 million Muslims in those six countries on record against Iraq. It is a joint declaration by Bangladesh, Pakistan, Maldives, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Brunei demanding: 1) unconditional Iraqi withdrawal from Kuwait; 2) restoration of the legal government of Kuwait; only after that would be 3) discussion of the differences that led to the tensions between Iraq and Kuwait. (S)

The President: Are you optimistic about Muslim solidarity? Can he break it? (S)

President Ershad: No, he can't break it. (S)

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I know Saddam Hussein very well; he is a good friend of mine. I have been to Iraq many times. We have a good relationship. Today he has given an indication that he is ready to talk to us. He is taking a chance. They don't say anything against him in Iraq. He has a one million man Army, and he may have chemical weapons; but it is not an Army that can fight against the Army you have put against him. He is a modern man and knows what he is doing. He may have miscalculated. (S)

The President: Do you think he miscalculated on the world response to his aggression? (C)

President Ershad: Yes. He did not think the whole world would go against him. (C)

The President: What do you think he might do as a provocation? Terrorism? He uses a lot of rhetoric. We are watching closely. I was concerned in the early days for the safety of Saudi Arabia. He said, "I'm leaving Kuwait," but there was one truck going north and everyone else was going south. When he saw the forces going into Saudi Arabia, he realized he couldn't take the next step. What will he do? He's just hoping American public opinion will turn against this action like happened with Vietnam. I don't think so. What might he do militarily? (S)

President Ershad: King Fahd told me. . . Saddam Hussein has 99 names, such as Saddam the Creator, Saddam the Great. He's gone mad. (S)

The President: If there is a clear provocation and he doesn't get a response, he will keep doing it. It could be one of several acts and I don't know what he is apt to do. We want a peaceful solution. If there is clear provocation, we can't just sit there. We have a heck of a lot of air power. (S)

President Ershad: If he just quits with his army intact, no one will be safe in the region. We have to monitor his buildup or he will do the same thing again. (S)

The President: That is a very, very important point. (C)

President Ershad: He has become a hero in his country. (C)

The President: Will he pull out? Mubarak told me he can't pull out. (C)

President Ershad: Mubarak is right about that. He won't be able to sustain himself then. But, if he survives, he will be an absolute terror in the region, with his chemical weapons. (S)

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Secretary Baker: What direction is Arab opinion going? (S)

President Ershad: He may do something to get public opinion totally on his side. (S)

The President: Attack Israel? (S)

President Ershad: Yes, he could. (U)

The President: Suppose I call you up and say he has launched three Scud missiles into Jerusalem. What would you suggest we do? (S)

President Ershad: It must be a military response. (S)

The President: Just the US, or Israel? (S)

President Ershad: The US must retaliate. (S)

The President: We want better relations with Iran. I agree with you. If provoked, we have to do something with the other countries. (S)

Foreign Minister Mahmud: Your United Nations speech dealt with that. You said there is more after the Gulf crisis. (S)

The President: We wanted it to be a separate point. (S)

Foreign Minister Mahmud: Yes, it was. You brought it up but not as part of this crisis. We hope we can help with the six-nation initiative. (S)

The President: I would like to get your advice on India/Pakistan. We are not trying to manipulate the situation, but General Scowcroft and I have been talking about it and we are worried. (S)

President Ershad: I don't think there will be war. I talked to the Indian Prime Minister and he thought Bhutto wouldn't last. I doubt very much there will be war. (S)

Foreign Minister Mahmud: Pakistan cannot win. (S)

The President: One of the charges Saddam Hussein makes is that we are violating the sacred places. We're miles away and only intend to respect the holy places. Does he think he can turn all Muslims against us? (S)

President Ershad: No, everyone knows it is propaganda. You are 1000 km. away. (S)

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The President: I also put in my speech today that I want every single American out as soon as our mission is complete. Iran thinks we are trying to get a foothold. What do the Muslims think? (S)

President Ershad: They know. (U)

The President: What about Chadli Benjadid? Is he more supportive now? (S)

President Ershad: He hesitates to act. (S)

The President: Saddam Hussein will sit with his chemical potential, including biological. The status quo ante is not reassuring to those in the area. He's ravaging Kuwait: raping the women, spilling babies out of incubators, etc. (S)

President Ershad: He may be giving us a signal that he is going to eventually leave. It may mean he is preparing to leave because he is taking everything. But I have my doubts he will vacate. (S)

The President: My understanding is that before he always fought with short supply lines and controlling the air. What if he can't control the air? We have lots of air power there. (S)

President Ershad: If you don't strike first and get his chemical weapons, he may use them. (S)

The President: On the military assessment, if he got pounded in the air and his armor was attacked by air and in large part destroyed, what then? (S)

President Ershad: Then he has to kill himself. (S)

The President: Or someone else might do it. The people turned on Ceausescu. It depends on how he is seen, if he is seen as evil. This is a rare occasion to talk with someone who knows Saddam Hussein well. (S)

President Ershad: I've been to Faw. Thirty to forty thousand people were lost there. Ten million shells were expended. One hundred forty thousand casualties. He won't leave Faw. (S)

The President: Why in that war was he unable to knock out Kharq Island? (S)

President Ershad: He didn't use his air force. He used his armor as a defensive line not as an offensive force. No military

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commander can disagree with him. He won't listen. He didn't utilize his air force at all. (S)

The President: Why? (U)

President Ershad: He was cautious. He is not a military man himself. (S)

The President: This is a fascinating conversation; very valuable. I hope the sanctions take effect. But, I don't think they will make him give up. Are they hurting him? (S)

President Ershad: Yes. (U)

The President: Do you think the sanctions by themselves will drive him out? (S)

President Ershad: No. (U)

The President: The sanctions won't drive him out? (S)

President Ershad: No, but if he suffers a defeat, the population may turn against him. (S)

The President: There is an interesting article in the New York Times Sunday Magazine (September 30, 1990) about Saddam Hussein. It's a tough article. I recommend you read it. We will send it to you. (S)

The President: This has been so fruitful and interesting. I welcome any thoughts from you. I really would welcome them. We're in this together. A Bangladeshi life is just as precious as a US life. (S)

Farewells. (U)

-- End of Conversation --

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