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WASHINGTON

MEMORANDUM OF TELEPHONE CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Telcon with Prime Minister Ruud Lubbers of
the Netherlands (U)

PARTICIPANTS: The President
Ruud Lubbers, Prime Minister
Notetaker: Robert Hutchings, NSC Staff

DATE, TIME February 9, 1991, 6:56 - 7:13 a.m.
AND PLACE: Camp David

The President initiated the call. (U)

The President: Ruud, how are you? (U)

Prime Minister Lubbers: Good. How are you, George? (U)

The President: I am sorry to bother you on a weekend, but I
hadn't talked to you for a while and wanted to give you an
update. I had a good visit with Hans. (U)

The air campaign is going well. There has been no decision to
launch a ground offensive, and we are in no rush. On the other
hand, I sent Cheney and Powell over there and will be anxious to
talk with them when they get back on Monday. I am not sure that
air power alone will do it; we may have to start a ground
operation. In any case, we will decide, and we will set the
timing ourselves. (S)

I am worried about his propoganda campaign that we are targeting
the civilian population and going after the destruction of Iraq.
Our air missions have been carefully targeted to minimize
civilian loss of life. Of course there have been some civilian
casualties, but that is not our aim. For example, there are
Scuds placed under the Baghdad highway. Similarly, down south we
have gone after bridges, but only those with real military value
as supply routes for Republican Guard units. But the Iraqi
propoganda has been strong. A British correspondent reported
that soldiers who had been killed were then made to look like
civilians. (S)

I am still outraged by the treatment of POWs. We have more than
1,000 Iraqis, who are being treated properly, while coalition
POWs are brutalized. I am also concerned about terrorism,
including urban terrorism, and the attacks on Riyadh, Tel Aviv,

and Haifa. Right across from the Rashid hotel there is an anti-aircraft gun on the roof of an office building, but we are not taking it out because of the risk of civilian casualties. So I worry about his propaganda, but I am not going to be deterred by it. (S)

On the battle itself, we are making real progress -- punishing the Republican Guards and going after his air force. On the aircraft sent to Iran, the Iranians keep low-balling the numbers. I don't know why, because we know how many there are. I believe them when they say they will keep them impounded, but we are watching carefully. Those are some of the main points. I am also starting to look at how we might use the opportunities after the war to build peace and stability. We don't want to dismember or destroy Iraq, because that would lead to instability in the region. Iraq without Saddam Hussein could play a constructive, stabilizing role. I think the remarkable coalition that has been assembled -- Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Syria, and others -- can work afterwards for a peaceful settlement. And I think the U.S. can play a role in getting at the Palestinian issue. My last point: we believe that in a ground campaign there will not be as many casualties as many have estimated. The number of air casualties has been less than we estimated beforehand. That's my rundown. I would welcome your thoughts. (S)

Prime Minister Lubbers: Listen, George, what you have been telling me about propaganda is making no impression in the Netherlands. I don't think it is making any impression in the neighboring countries, either. Maybe it is having a stronger impact in the U.S. than in Europe. (S)

The President: Cuellar raised it when I talked to him. So did Perez in Venezuela. It's not a big issue in the U.S. (S)

Prime Minister Lubbers: We Europeans hope that, although a ground attack may be needed, we go on as long as possible with the air campaign. Every day we diminish his ground potential is a good day, because that means it will be weakened further on. A ground attack will be divisive if people conclude that it was launched too early, so it is important to show that we have gone the extra mile. From a political point of view, this is more important than the propaganda campaign of Saddam Hussein. (S)

The President: That's a good point. The question militarily is how much good we are doing. At some point, the law of diminishing returns sets in. (S)

Prime Minister Lubbers: I don't think air power alone will do the job, but from the political point of view it is better to start a ground attack later. (S)

The President: Yes. That's a good point. I guarantee we will not use ground power unless we are convinced that it will be quick, with low allied casualties. He wants a protracted ground war in the desert, but I believe he can't achieve that. (S)

Prime Minister Lubbers: That's the point: he will become nervous if this goes on and on. (Ø)

The President: My point is different. He will keep his propaganda going, but we are doing enough damage that he is miscalculating how his forces would stand up. We won't play into his hand. We are talking not weeks, but a very, very fast campaign. Powell and Cheney will be coming back to discuss these points. (Ø)

Prime Minister Lubbers: I can't judge the military rationale, but politically the propaganda is having no effect. And those who worry about casualties from the air campaign would surely worry about a ground war, too. (Ø)

The President: We think a cease fire would be a very bad mistake. (Ø)

Prime Minister Lubbers: Yes. I agree. (U)

The President: Anyway, it is very interesting that you think the propaganda is not having an effect. (Ø)

Prime Minister Lubbers: No. Forget the propaganda; it is unimportant. (Ø)

The President: Right. That's the way to look at it. The coalition is holding up very well. In any event, I am glad to talk to you. If ever you have a question or comment, just call. We are very grateful to you for standing side-by-side with us. I told Hans how grateful we are for Dutch support. (U)

-- End of Conversation --