

NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20506

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Tunisian Ambassador's Credentials Ceremony (U)

PARTICIPANTS: The President
Ambassador Ismail Khelil
Brent Scowcroft
DAS Vreeland, State
Sandra Charles, NSC

DATE, TIME AND PLACE: April 11, 1991; 3:30-3:45 p.m.;
The Gold Room

The President: We have lots of work to do. And I know from your background and your experience that you are just the man to do it. I recognize there was some stress between us during the war, but it was not bilateral in that sense. The President veered toward the opposition toward those who were our opponents. We weren't particularly happy about that. But we have had a longstanding relationship and you are the guy to build on it here. Please tell your President that that's what we want to do. I know from where he is he must be wondering if the United States is upset. Well, we do wish he had done thing differently, but I don't think he attacked us personally. I understand it. We have a base to build on here. (C)

The Ambassador: We have had a special relationship over the years. For 35 years there has been cooperation between us. The President is eager to maintain with you and your country the best relations. (C)

The President: Let me ask you is there a lot of pressure on the government from the fundamentalists for change? (C)

The Ambassador: Yes, and they took advantage of the situation and used the situation. But we managed the crisis. On the substance we always condemned the invasion of Kuwait and told the Iraqis. We emphasized that we wanted them to withdraw. The President has been tough with Iraq. On this objective we have been in full agreement. At the August 3 Arab League meeting I was there and helped draft the resolution condemning the invasion, and said that we needed to recognize all the consequences of it. Tunisia was one of the countries that spoke out strongly. Our Embassy in Kuwait was among the last to withdraw. Iraq was not happy with how long we kept our Ambassador there. (C)

The President: I have a question: when some of the people who opposed us in favor of Saddam, some who were to the left of the President, when they see these refugees now, what are these critics of ours saying now that he is killing his own people? Do they see it as an internal matter? That goes for Jordan too. I'd like to know what Jordan has said. (C)

The Ambassador: These people realized that he shouldn't have stayed in Kuwait to his last man. He had many chances to withdraw. Now this situation is seen as a sad situation. We are sympathetic with what you are doing. You don't want to interfere in Iraqi's internal affairs, and on the other hand, you can't watch it continue. We are filled with admiration for what you are doing. It is the best thing. (C)

The President: What would help is for the people running Iraq to get him out. We have said we can't have normal relations with him. I know Mitterrand, who I spoke to about an hour ago, feels that way. And John Major, and the EC Prime Minister De Lors and Santer. We don't want to hurt the Iraqi people; we want to save the Kurds and the people in the south. But there can't be relations with us with him especially with what he is doing to the Kurds. I'm being criticized on the right and the left about not shooting down the helicopters. We are trying to stay within the UN mandate. It would be wonderful if the Baathis, and the military would say it was time to get him out and reconcile with the south. (C)

The Ambassador: I hope there will be a solution in the Middle East as well. (C)

The President: We are following up on that now. (U)

The Ambassador: There is an opportunity it seems to find a resolution. (C)

The President: We are working hard for it. The odd thing is that there seems to be a chance now with Israel and the Arab states. We want to follow through on it. We will be working it hard. (C)

-- End of Conversation --