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THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

## MEMORANDUM OF TELEPHONE CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Telephone Conversation with President Francois Mitterrand of France

PARTICIPANTS: The President  
President Mitterrand  
Alex Toumayan, Interpreter  
Christopher Thierry, Interpreter  
Adrian Basora, NSC Staff (Notetaker)

DATE, TIME April 11, 1991, 1:45-2:00 p.m.  
AND PLACE: The Oval Office

The President: Francois, it's nice to talk to you again. (U)

President Mitterrand: I am also very happy to talk to you. Much has been going on since we last talked. (U)

The President: The Gulf War now seems calm compared to the Kurdish refugee problem! (S)

President Mitterrand: Yes, it is very difficult, but we need to be present there. (S)

The President: Francois, if you have a few minutes I would like to go over some points with you and then ask for your views. (S)

President Mitterrand: Yes, go ahead. (U)

The President: I appreciate your efforts in focusing the world's attention on the refugee problem in northern Iraq. And I believe our joint airlift with you, the British and others has helped to get international support for the refugees. (S)

President Mitterrand: Yes. (U)

The President: Now it is important for the UN to get this relief effort organized on the ground in Turkey and northern and southern Iraq as quickly as possible. Specifically, we want the UN to get some people on the ground in the camps both in Turkey and Iraq. We think that they have the authority to do that under UNSC Resolution 688 and I have talked to the Secretary General on this, and I think he agrees with me. (S)

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We also want a logistics network put in place on the ground using trucks and trains in Turkey, and crossborder into Iraq, to replace this airlift operation at some point. Our people have suggested working with the Turks to set up a hub near the border from which supplies can be transported to the camps in Turkey and also inside of Iraq. And we will be discussing this with both the Turks and the UN. (S)

One reason I called was to mention the conversation John Major and I had yesterday about his original proposal for safe havens in northern and southern Iraq. I was very anxious to get your views. But first, he and I agreed that it is important that there be no daylight between us on this issue. I just finished a meeting with Jacques Santer and Jacques Delors and we are in close proximity with them as well. (S)

Our primary objective should be getting humanitarian support to the refugees safely without Iraqi interference, and we agreed the UN has the authority to do that under 688. (S)

We believe the presence of UN and other relief agencies conducting relief operations should continue to deter the Iraqi military actions, and therefore provide the necessary safety for these operations and for the displaced populations in both northern and southern Iraq. (S)

President Mitterrand: I fully agree. (U)

The President: So, for all intents and purposes, north of the 36th parallel and south within 10 km of the DMZ have already become safe havens. It is our feeling that we should accept them de facto and not try to formalize them further. My worry about formalizing them is that we will have difficulties with some members of the Security Council, like China or the Soviet Union. I would hate to go and get vetoed. (S)

We have said to the Iraqis "do not interfere north of the 36th parallel". And we have intelligence reports showing that they have been honoring this warning from the moment it was given until now. (S)

I am going increasingly public with my policy that we don't intend to use U.S. military forces to try to settle a civil war that has been going on for several years. But we will do what is necessary on humanitarian assistance. And if the Iraqis attack a convoy, we should attack Iraq with force. (S)

President Mitterrand: Indeed. (U)

The President: That is my view, but I would like to hear your thoughts. (S)

President Mitterrand: We have both a moral duty -- but also a political requirement -- to protect these people against this man who was militarily defeated. Not to do anything would ruin the

moral credit that we have acquired by our victory in the Gulf, by virtue of the magnificent American intervention. We have to stop him, but how to do it and what to do? (S)

I think the safe haven concept is a good one. We are not detracting from the sovereignty of the state involved by removing territories. Very simply, we are acting because we must forestall genocide. We are facing a specific circumstance not a long-term<sup>de</sup>jure situation. These people must not be punished for believing in our victory. Their needs are huge in scope and, with the powerful pictures that are being seen around the world, there must not be the perception that our victory did not help alleviate their suffering. (S)

Then the first question, if I understand it, is how we should go about this. What we need is not zones that are legally established as safe havens, but instead zones that are protected in fact from Iraqi repression. (S)

The President: Exactly. (U)

President Mitterrand: In practical terms if there is the presence of NGO's and international organizations, and of doctors, in the form of the airdrop of food and other supplies, then we have a solution -- but not in terms of military repression. So now we should determine together -- France and U.S., the English and others acting jointly -- how to keep Saddam Hussein from killing and starving these people. (S)

I fully appreciate the legal difficulty of our position. But at the same time if we do nothing we will risk worrying other countries where there are minority groups -- and they are everywhere. Very simply, we have to say we are coming to the rescue of people who are being persecuted. That's all. We are endowed with a special right; we won the war. We could have gone on with the war for two more weeks but we did not. (S)

If we do it like this, no resolution is needed. If we are criticized, we can just say what we are doing is extending protection. We can not let him strafe these people with machine guns. (S)

The President: Exactly: We should stay in close touch and keep doing what we are doing. We should treat this as a human rights case and not worry about the legal niceties. We should just do what we must do. Our warning will be enforced. I expect others will do the same if he attacks the relief effort. Let's be in touch. (S)

President Mitterrand: I am ready to discuss the modalities with you whenever you would like. I am not moving; I will be in Paris for the next week. I think we are doing the right thing and we need to keep getting supplies in there. (S)

The President: I am glad we agree. (U)

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President Mitterrand: We are working together and we will go on doing so. Goodbye, dear George. (C)

The President: Au revoir, mon ami. (U)

-- End of Conversation --

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