

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

MEMORANDUM OF TELEPHONE CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Telcon with Chancellor Kohl of Germany (U)

PARTICIPANTS: The President
Helmut Kohl, Chancellor
Notetaker: Robert Hutchings, NSC Staff
Interpreter: Harry Obst

DATE, TIME: April 16, 1991, 8:42 - 8:59 a.m.
AND PLACE: The Oval Office

The President: Helmut! How are you? (U)

Chancellor Kohl: Good, George. How are you? (U)

The President: Good. What's up? (U)

Chancellor Kohl: The economy is moving fairly well in the old Laender, but there are problems in the new Laender to the east. This is a transitional phase we have to overcome in the next few years. (U)

The reason I am calling is the Kurdish question. I wanted to discuss it with you. It has created a lot of emotion, not only here but also in the U.S. The images on television are terrible. We would like to do everything we can to lend these people support and humanitarian aid. We decided today, in consultation with your people, how we want to bring about distribution, especially to those in Iran. We will build up an airlift in the area and also establish an airlink of helicopters from the airfield to the camps. We have earmarked DM 250 million for this purpose. Obviously, it is not the solution for the long term. We now have to assure that these people may return in safety to their homes without repression by this criminal regime. (Ø)

The President: Exactly. (U)

Chancellor Kohl: I wonder if we might launch a joint initiative to help them find homes. (Ø)

The President: We agree, Helmut. We want them to go home. The French have a proposal for monitors to be located in their home towns to report on conditions there. We have launched a major refugee effort along the Turkish border. I am delighted to know

about your initiative on the Iranian border. So far, it seems that Saddam Hussein won't interfere, but we are not sure. I think we must stay in very close touch to facilitate the return of these people to their cities. We are trying to do all we can. We have delivered an enormous amount of food and supplies and are trying to get the refugees to move from the mountains down to the flat areas of Turkey and Iraq. I have made it quite clear that we don't want to involve our troops in a civil war. However, if he interferes north of the 36th parallel, all bets are off and we will be forced to take action. What is your view? (S)

Chancellor Kohl: George, you know we are very close. Let me be frank. I am concerned that the prestige of the U.S., which you so courageously won, and the prestige that the President of the U.S. won, not be prejudiced by what is happening right now. This is why we should think about a new kind of leadership, beyond humanitarian relief, because what is happening is exactly what Saddam Hussein wants -- the Kurds leaving his country. So perhaps we should think of how to further expand the French program. (S)

The President: We are like-minded on that. I would like to do it. I agree that we don't want the U.S. tarnished by failing to do anything, but I would be very wary of committing U.S. ground troops for military operations. This civil war has been going on for decades. We could expand the French proposal, as you say, but I would be very reluctant to commit U.S. forces. (S)

Chancellor Kohl: Exactly. I completely agree. I would never give you that kind of advice. But couldn't we think about a short-term way in order to expand the French initiative and supplement it by instituting an international monitoring body? (S)

The President: We would be all for it. The question is, can you get the Soviet Union and China to go along in the UN Security Council? (S)

Chancellor Kohl: That is true, but it wouldn't be necessary to gain support. It would be enough if they would abstain. (S)

The President: True, but I read a Reuter dispatch today that China was opposing setting up a safety zone because it would be a violation of Iraqi sovereignty. Getting UN support could be quite difficult now, because we are up against a very sacrosanct principle as far as China, and I think the Soviet Union, goes. We will be working this, and you will, too. I would like to stay in touch, because we must find a way to get these people back into their cities. (S)

Chancellor Kohl: I will try, George, to get in touch with Gorbachev once he is back from Japan. (S)

The President: Very good. That would be very useful. I would be very interested to know what happens. (S)

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Chancellor Kohl: I do think if we can achieve a situation where the Soviets go along, it will be difficult for China to veto. (S)

The President: Exactly, exactly. It is worth a real effort. I will send you a personal cable today, telling you what has been done to help the refugees. I don't think public opinion in Germany or the U.S. knows how much has already been done. (S)

Chancellor Kohl: I would be most grateful. I would suggest the following: I will wait for your cable, then I will try to get in touch with Mikhail Gorbachev and then get back to you. (S)

The President: Okay. In the cable I will also include some new ideas regarding enclaves or safe havens for refugees in Iraq. (S)

Chancellor Kohl: Okay, very good. (U)

The President: Thanks. It is a terrible thing, but I am delighted to know what Germany is doing. It is wonderful. (U)

Chancellor Kohl: Let me say I am always willing and ready to try to mobilize the EC, because this is a very terrible, sad situation. (S)

The President: Yes. Thanks for your call. (U)

-- End of Conversation --

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