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THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Meeting with Sadako Ogata, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)

PARTICIPANTS: The President  
James A. Baker, III, Secretary of State  
John H. Sununu, Chief of Staff  
Marlin Fitzwater, Assistant to the President and Press Secretary  
Brent Scowcroft, Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs  
Robert M. Gates, Assistant to the President and Deputy for National Security Affairs  
Jewel Lafontant-Mankarious, US Coordinator for Refugee Affairs  
Princeton Lyman, Director, State Department Bureau for Refugee Programs  
Nancy Bearg Dyke, Director for International Programs and Public Diplomacy, NSC Staff  
  
Sadako Ogata, UNHCR  
Soren Jessen-Petersen, Executive Assistant  
John McCallin, UNHCR Representative to the United States

DATE, TIME June 24, 1991, 11:05 - 11:25 a.m. EST  
AND PLACE: The Oval Office

The President: Welcome. UNHCR is doing a superb job. (U)

Mrs. Ogata: I wanted to talk to you about Iraq and the Horn of Africa. (U)

The President: Thank you for your work. I want to hear from you on those two subjects. On Iraq, it is no secret that the US wants to get out. Our participation in terms of standing up versus aggression was proper and going in to save lives of the Kurds was proper. But, it's not proper to stay there indefinitely. (U)

Mrs. Ogata: The primary responsibility of a society is to take care of its own people. But sometimes others must help. Secretary Baker went to the refugee camp in Turkey and saw the needs. Once you brought the refugees down from the mountains, we could take over the relief effort, which we did as of June 9. The political situation is still precarious. The Kurds and Iraq Government are still negotiating. If US forces leave now, I am not sure the people won't leave again. That would be the worst

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situation. One million have gone back. There are still 500,000 in Iran. (Ø)

The President: Will they stay in Iran even if there is a Kurd-Iraq deal? (U)

Mrs. Ogata: Some will. It depends on their long-term history and where they came from. We are preparing for long-term camps. The return has been the fastest in history. We must endeavor to keep up the momentum. I am very glad you have decided to wait longer and see what happens and not take all your troops out now. One month can be very helpful. (Ø)

The President: But I want to convey to all that we cannot leave troops there forever. This is partly for reasons of hegemony. We diverted some of our troops on their way home from the Gulf to Bangladesh for a humanitarian mission and to Turkey. We must recognize that we are at some point no longer saving lives and instead seeking hegemony. There are lots of problems if it seems open-ended. We will have a stick we keep in our hand. We will have assets we keep near and Saddam Hussein will know about it. We want to see more UN people there -- more blue helmets. It is not a US problem -- it is a world and UN problem. (Ø)

Mrs. Ogata: We have 300 there now, which is as much as we can deploy. (Ø)

The President: Are they afraid? (U)

Mrs. Ogata: No. We will be there until all the refugees go back. (U)

The President: Are there any hopes for the Kurd-Iraq agreement? (Ø)

Mrs. Ogata: It is vital. (U)

The President: If Saddam Hussein violates the Kurds again, he will have a major world problem. It will cast him again as what he is. (U)

Mrs. Ogata: The US role in Iraq is very much taken as a humanitarian role, not hegemonic. Our humanitarian workers worked closely with the US military; it has been very rewarding for them. (U)

The President: I am so pleased. These are young people who care. (U)

Mrs. Ogata: I want to thank you and say things are still precarious. (Ø)

Secretary Baker: We have briefed our allies on steps and warnings. The President will be warning the Iraqis when we phase out. There will be very clear red lines. (Ø)

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The President: Saddam Hussein hasn't learned anything. He is diverting food. What do we do? It is going on in a lot of ways. (Ø)

Mrs. Ogata: Ethiopia. Food is the most important and access to food. We have started airlifting and I hope we can be quick. I know your government has been very helpful. Political-military intervention is extremely important. (Ø)

General Scowcroft: We know access to the ports is important. (U)

Mrs. Ogata: We have much work to do. (U)

The President: You do the Lord's work. I hope we can be responsive. (U)

Mrs. Ogata: We want to know where to ask for immediate standby forces to come in for humanitarian emergencies. Seventy-five Nordics came in this time (Iraq). We want to strengthen humanitarian response. Coordination is important. (U)

Ambassador Lafontant-Mankarious: We were able in the Gulf to help until the UN got there. (U)

The President: I know it is not easy. I wanted to say thank you. I am going to talk to Chancellor Kohl on the phone now on another subject. (U)

Mrs. Ogata: Some of the European countries are worried about migration. (U)

-- End of Conversation --

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