

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Meeting with President Ilyas Hrawi of Lebanon

PARTICIPANTS: The President
James A. Baker, III, Secretary of State
Andy Card, Assistant to the President and
Deputy Chief of Staff
Brent Scowcroft, Assistant to the President
for National Security Affairs
John Kelly, Assistant Secretary for South
Asian Affairs
Ryan Crocker, U.S. Ambassador to Lebanon
Douglas Paal, Notetaker
Helal Gamal, Interpreter

President Ilyas Hrawi
Omar Karami, Prime Minister
Fares Bouez, Foreign Minister
Souheil Chammas, Secretary General of Foreign
Ministry
Hussein Husseini, Speaker of the Parliament
Khalih Makkawi, Ambassador to the United
Nations

DATE, TIME September 24, 1991 3:32 to 4:02 EDT
AND PLACE: Waldorf Astoria, New York

President Hrawi: Good afternoon, Mr. President. How are you?
(U)

The President: I am very well. I do not think we have met
before. (U)

President Hrawi: No, it is the first time. (U)

The President: I am pleased to welcome you on your visit here.
(U)

President Hrawi: You are the President of the whole world. (U)

The President: All of us feel a great affinity. We all want to
see a lasting peace without outside influence. I have been there
when Lebanon was at peace. I would like to see it that way
again. (U)

President Hrawi: Mr. President, I wish to thank you for your
direct interest and for your reference to a visit to my country

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~
Declassify on: OADR

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

DECLASSIFIED
PER E.O. 12958,
AS AMENDED 8/21/09
2000-04297 UD

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

2

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

when you were the Vice President. My good friends who were there remember. Thank you for your support for Lebanon. I hope to see you in Lebanon soon, after your reelection. (U)

The President: After we finish this photo op, I am anxious to hear your views. (U)

President Hrawi: Our conversations here are most important. And the most important are here with you, Mr. President. (U)

The President: As you know, we want to support Lebanon. We have made known to Syria privately and publicly, that any bilateral agreements should be according to the Taif Accords. I took that woman's questions, and backed into it. The Arab States clearly have a lot to gain from your reconstruction. We surely will consider your request for funds. I will be glad to mention your request to Japan, for example, to Prime Minister Kaifu. As you know, Congress will require that any aid be bilateral between us. I want to try to help. That is what I am saying. I would also like to say a word on the peace process. We understand your need for assurances. We will try to provide a letter to be helpful before you return to Lebanon. (C)

President Hrawi: Mr. President, I have lots of questions to raise with you, only you have preempted my questions by what you have just said. I will be brief. I wish to make reference to Secretary Baker's visits to the region. I know why he cannot travel to Lebanon, and I understand. But I hope he will come soon. May I raise some issues that I raised with the Reagan Administration in 1985? (C)

We need training for our officers in the U.S. Certain weapons that we have require training. Certain commercial air activities; certain officers cannot travel to the U.S. I refer now to hostages. Lebanon is not responsible for taking hostages. Nor do we accept or agree to taking hostages. Lebanon is itself a hostage. It is not in our tradition to take them. Recently, the Foreign Minister went to Tehran and raised the question in detail. We hope some solution will be found for them. The President just heard that Jackie Mann was just released today. (C)

The President: We have heard the wire reports. It is very good. It is an emotional concern with America for the hostages and for Col. Higgins, an American officer who was killed and whose body has not been returned. Oddly enough, I do not think people blame Lebanon here in this country, but my request to you is to do everything possible to get these people released. You asked about restraints on the airlines and on trade. We will take a look at these in light of the possible changes coming about. (C)

I would like to raise South Lebanon. We would like to see contact between you and the surrogates of Israel in South Lebanon. We want Israel and Syria to accept the expansion of Lebanon's legitimate authority. The disarming of Hizbollah would

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

be a great step in this direction. We have told Israel it would be time to begin the withdrawals after six months of peace. (C)

President Hrawi: As a follow-up to the point you just asked me, Mr. President, I was going to raise Resolution 425 and speak of its contents in some detail. But now you have said what you have said, and there is no need. You understand our position. (C)

There is a need to expand Lebanon's authority. The army has begun to expand south. May I refer, too, to power sharing in Lebanon? Now we have unified the government. We work in unity and harmony together. We, as a government, are unified in our stance and when we put a request for Resolution 425, we make a commitment. We expect that the northern Israeli borders will be kept quiet. We will make efforts to keep our commitments. We make this point to you, Mr. President. (C)

The other resolutions (UNSC Resolutions 242 and 338) are subject to negotiations. They are not directly or immediately our concerns, but, due to the presence of 100,000 Palestinians in Lebanon, we take a serious interest in discussion of these issues. (C)

I wish to thank you for the letter you have referred to on assurances, and we are grateful for that. There is understanding among our friends concerning it, I wish to inform you. I have one wish to express to you, Mr. President. Knowing the time is short, I cannot dwell in depth and at great length (on issues). This expressed wish is for you to assign someone to meet with us, the speaker and others, to pursue with us in depth these issues. (C)

The President: I have great confidence in Secretary Kelly. He works with the White House and Secretary Baker. He has enough expertise to understand the issues, unlike me. (C)

President Hrawi: It is up to you. (U)

The President: We are very interested in that. Let me make one more appeal on behalf of the hostages. I can think of nothing the American people would be more affected by than if you were to effect the release of hostages. In this country, the Lebanese government is not blamed for the hostages. Different groups grabbed these Americans, and Iran gets a lot of the blame. You have said that taking hostages is against your traditions. There is no reason to contradict you. I believe you completely. But, someone out there must know the details, if we are to get them released. (C)

Secretary Baker: I would like to ask, Mr. President, of the likelihood of your ability to disarm Hizbollah. That would assist our efforts to implement 425 and to persuade Israel to withdraw to its territories. (C)

President Hrawi: I cannot easily answer that question now. We have to establish some contact. What may shape action on the

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

CONFIDENTIAL

4

part of the Lebanese government is for the U.S. and Israel to get the release, in the hostage context, of prisoners, including Sheikh Obeid. As a matter of fact, the visit of the Foreign Minister to Iran has two main objectives. One was the hostages, and the other was disarming Hizbollah. That was the purpose, to move events in that direction. (C)

The President: May I mention one more point? I do not want to demonstrate that I am only interested in hostages. Americans do not see Sheikh Obeid as related to the hostages. The American people see them as related to the U.S. only. I tell you how the Americans and the American President see it. There is nothing to do with these issues. I think you are right, if Sheikh Obeid and other were released, it might lead to release of the hostages. Innocent Americans had nothing to do with the age-old conflicts. We would like them to be released on their own and not released in a linkage to some other issue. There is no deal or equation about innocent Americans. (C)

President Hrawi: Mr. President, I beg you not to misunderstand about Sheikh Obeid. Nothing is tied together. No bargaining. With the release of Sheikh Obeid, the Lebanese government can proceed with disarming the Hizbollah. (C)

The President: There is no misunderstanding on that. (U)

President Hrawi: I would like to allow the Speaker of the House to have a few words. (U)

Speaker Husseini: We want you to appreciate that the taking of hostages is an offensive act. Whether they are Americans or not Americans. Likewise, the kidnapping of Sheikh Obeid is offensive to us. But in my view, when President Bush's weight is applied to the Israelis, it helps immensely with the resolution of our problem. Maybe these steps will eventually facilitate the release of the hostages. That is why when we consider when President Bush of the United States, who is such a distinguished President, if he supports a Resolution of No. 425, it will really help with the Hizbollah. (C)

Secretary Baker: We cannot tell you that we can be helpful on 425 until you say you can disarm the Hizbollah. That will open up 425, we think. (C)

Speaker Husseini: I want to be clear on one specific point. We, as a government, will unite. We have taken the decision. It is clear. We have decided to disarm all factions including Hizbollah. It is a question of time. President Bush has endorsed the Taif Agreement. The Taif Agreement provides precisely that. (C)

The President: I am sorry, the time has run out. But it has been a very good meeting. Secretary Kelly will follow-up. Lest we close on the hostages, let me raise one point. I am absolutely convinced, all of us in this room are, that if you could do something to help the hostages, you would do it. I want to say

CONFIDENTIAL

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

5

CONFIDENTIAL

that if anybody knows or can do anything to help, I hope they will do so. (C)

President Hrawi: Thank you for now.

END OF CONVERSATION

CONFIDENTIAL

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~