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MEMORANDUM OF TELEPHONE CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Telcon with Prime Minister John Major of the UK

PARTICIPANTS: The President
Prime Minister John Major
Notetaker: Barry F. Lowenkron

DATE, TIME AND PLACE: September 27, 1991, 7:45 - 7:57 am EDT
Situation Room

The President: I'm calling to see whether you received my letter on the speech that I'll be giving. (S)

Prime Minister Major: I got it 40 minutes ago. It is very bold and decisive. I have a wet towel over my head to absorb the ramifications. It's a very momentous statement. (S)

The President: There are several points that I would like to make. I could not and would not lock British forces into the old argument that they have to be included in our proposals. We will support the difference in these forces. We suggest that you have to do something. (S)

Prime Minister Major: I'm grateful. There are two "knot throughs" that I want to raise with you. The first has to do with nuclear weapons on our ships. The second has to do with present difficulties in Europe on discussions of a common European defense posture, but I must say that your proposal is a good thing. It will be well received in the Alliance, and it will get a warm reception around the world. (S)

The President: We want to capitalize on the changes in the Soviet Union. Some of these ideas are dependent on the Soviets responding to our challenge, but we will be sensitive to your two problems. On the problem of nuclear weapons on your ships I can see you coming in for some unilateral pressure. On the second problem you raised, we will of course consult. (S)

Prime Minister Major: I appreciate that. One or two additional things I would like to raise. Your proposal comes smack on the eve of the Labor Party Conference. This five day conference will have heavy antinuclear tones. I would appreciate it if you would share with us the text of your speech and when exactly you will be delivering it so that we can get our response exactly right. (S)

The President: I'm inclined to give the speech tonight from the Oval office. It is a prime time slot. I think it will be well received in the United States because it will show that we are not locked into old ideas. We will have a new text in about one hour and then we could get it over to you. But I would ask you to please protect the contents. The Washington Post already has revealed some of my proposals but not all. I would prefer that the speech be closely held. (S)

Prime Minister Major: Indeed it will. I will talk to Steven Wall, and let me assure you that a maximum of only 5 of us will know of the speech. It would also be most helpful if you could say in your statement that we consulted. (S)

The President: Absolutely, I will do anything required to help you. It would be a shame if the Labor Party capitalizes on my initiative. Have Steven Wall call Brent when you get the text. Do not be modest or hesitant about making suggestions. (S)

Prime Minister Major: That is immensely helpful in heading off the Labor attack on nuclear weapons. There can be no political capital out of denuclearization. The problem is, the greater the denuclearization the less danger that the British public perceives in voting for labor. (S)

The President: Do you anticipate getting any problems from predictable sources on the right? (S)

Prime Minister Major: No. The proposals do not affect TRIDENT. There are several sensitive points we would want to look at in detail. One is the issue of a short-range air delivery missile. It would be helpful if NATO would maintain an effective air delivered missile, updated as necessary. I know that the Germans and Belgians have been keen to ax this. (S)

The President: We can consult on that and see if my draft text does not touch sufficiently on that. If not, let us know. (S)

Prime Minister Major: Another issue is your proposal for you and the Soviets to take steps to deploy a limited ABM system. We would want to look carefully at it. (S)

The President: Such a system would be used against Third World countries. It's a limited form of SDI, but if you have concerns please shoot us your comments on the draft. (S)

Prime Minister Major: We will be very happy to do that. (U)

The President: We will get it off to you right away. (S)

Prime Minister Major: What time will you be giving your speech?
(U)

The President: Either 7 o'clock or 9 pm tonight. Nine is prime time on the West Coast. I was going to do it at Ft. McNair but

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that is up in the air. When we send you the text, we will tell you the time. (S)

Prime Minister Major: That is fine but 7 your time will be too late to make the European press. (S)

The President. I know but if I give the speech in the afternoon here it will get print coverage but not much television exposure. I want you to know that I am sensitive to your considerations. We want to do nothing to complicate politics in the UK. (S)

Prime Minister Major: I am grateful. This is a momentous proposal. (S)

-- End of Conversation --

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