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THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

DECLASSIFIED
PER E.O. 13526
2012-2388-MA
10/14/2015 MM

MEMORANDUM OF TELEPHONE CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Telcon with John Major of the United Kingdom

PARTICIPANTS: The President
John Major, Prime Minister
Interpreter: none
Notetaker: Tony Wayne, NSC Staff

DATE, TIME: March 6, 1992, 9:02 - 9:19 a.m.
AND PLACE: White House

The President: How are you? Its been a long time since we last talked. (U)

Prime Minister Major: Yes, I'm absolutely delighted to have this chance to chat. How are things with you? I know you are in the midst of campaigning. (U)

The President: Well I am doing well, though I think the weather is better in Washington D.C. than out here. You know there are a lot of crazy columnists running around these days slamming everything that I do. There is not much focus on foreign policy. All the press coverage and all the press wants to ask about is our economy. You know its been very sluggish, but most people think the economy is on the way to improvement. I just have to keep my focus on winning primaries and then the general election. How about your situation? (U)

Prime Minister Major: We've had some pretty rough economic news. The opinion polls are absolutely neck and neck. That means we will get home with a small majority because of the way the voters are divided up. Unless there is something extraordinary which happens in the next few days, I will ask the Queen to dissolve parliament. We have most of our work done, the budget and other things. Waiting any longer would be counter-productive. So I believe we will be off and running next week. (U)

The President: Well listen, best of luck to you. Obviously we're rooting for you, and it's very important that you win. Your ahead of Kinnock in the polls, right? That should help. (U)

Prime Minister Major: I'm less ahead than I was, but I'm still somewhat ahead of him. The recession is hurting. But he is still very much disliked by many. We're watching your campaign with the greatest of interest. It still seems unimaginable from this side of the water that it can be anything other than a clear victory for you. (U)

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The President: Thanks. What about the rest of the world? (Ø)

Prime Minister Major: Personally I was very grateful for the way you responded to our concerns about GPALS. I was very grateful for the way Brent dealt with Stephen on this. It was tremendously helpful. (Ø)

The President: I'm delighted it was, and we must work together on this. (Ø)

Prime Minister Major: I had a long conversation in the middle of the week with Helmut Kohl, particularly about GATT. Kohl had some interesting things to say about it. He said GATT has been taking a lot of his time and that he had been in close touch with Mitterrand. He is trying to persuade the French to agree. (Ø)

You know Mitterrand faces regional elections later this month, and Kohl seems to think there may be more room for him to move after that. We are quite familiar with those pressures, but after that there will be an opening for him and Delors to persuade Mitterrand to move. Kohl's view was that just isolating Mitterrand is not sufficient. Mitterrand needs U.S. movement on cereal substitutes. Mitterrand retains sufficient support in the EC to prevent him from being voted down, Kohl thinks. Rather he needs something he can present before the French public. (Ø)

I just wanted to let you know that Kohl will tell you that he needs something on cereal substitutes. Mitterrand will then present it to the French public and may well be able to accept the package. I thought you might like an advance warning of that. Of course, we don't have a particular interest in rebalancing, but it is important for others in the EC. (Ø)

The President: Well, I will talk to our people about rebalancing. I think we've got something working on the safe box that I think would help with French. But rebalancing is a tough one for us. Let me talk to my people in advance of the Kohl visit to see if there is some flexibility that we haven't uncovered. (Ø)

Prime Minister Major: That would be nice I'll be in close touch with you. I think that is the way to go, but it will have to be a political decision in the end. (Ø)

The President: I agree with that, and John unless there is more on GATT round lets go on to Iraq. I like what Douglas Hurd is saying on this. We are standing firm about the need to have the UN destroy these weapons facilities. We should stay in the closest contact. We don't think we need further Security Council resolutions to undertake military action, if it is needed. (Ø)

Prime Minister Major: We cannot exclude a military response. The view that we have taken here is that we should build up pressure gradually. But if we need to act, military action is something that we would be perfectly prepared to be involved in. I'm not sure how you see politics of it. (Ø)

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The President: The politics of it would be that without any preparation, a military strike on Iraq would be seen as Bush using this to refurbish his sagging popularity. But if indeed the facts are clear and we have exhausted the mechanisms for consultation, we would find support. That's the politics. But the reality is I would be prepared to do whatever is necessary militarily to stop him from going ahead with his program. Yes, we need to be trying to get a peaceful settlement before we act militarily. But there could be something that could compel us to move quicker than an orderly preparation. So I just want you to know that we are ready to stay in touch on this, and we would be prepared to act if need be to destroy these facilities so that they would not be able to produce missiles and other weapons. (C)

Prime Minister Major: Yes, there is nothing more important. That's how strongly we feel about it. (C)

The President: On Pan Am 103 and Libya, what's your latest view? (C)

Prime Minister Major: Libya's decision to take it to the ICJ is a very bizarre proposition. (Major began breaking up here and the following is based on reconstruction from other British and U.S. participants). I think we should also agree that Libyan suspects could only be handed over to third countries if there is absolute agreement that this will only be for transit to the U.S. of Scotland where they will stand trial. (C)

The President: Yes, I agree (on third country involvement). On the UN, the view that we have here is that after our consultations this week in New York we agree that the Libyans have not complied with the first UN resolution. I think the next step is that we have to go to a second sanctions resolution, though it may well be tough going to get a good majority in the Council. I'm not sure about Mitterrand's attitude. He's been grumpy recently and I haven't spoken to him on the phone for a while. (C)

Prime Minister Major: I agree that we should go ahead in the UN. (Call was disrupted at this point. When notetaker was reconnected the President and Major were having a jovial discussion of somebody visiting Number 10 Downing street.) (C)

The President: What else have we got? (C)

Prime Minister Major: I see a real mess coming in Yugoslavia. The UN has asked us to put in field ambulances. We will probably have to do it, but it won't be popular here, given our troops in Cyprus and that I just had to send more troops to Northern Ireland. Our people will be there under the protection of non-British, non-American troops. But in the end, we'll have to say yes. (C)

On South Africa, I hope de Klerk wins his referendum. (C)

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The President: So do I, so do I. (e)

Prime Minister Major: I saw him here recently. We went to watch a game of rugby. He was in good spirits. (e)

The President: How was that received, watching a game of rugby with him, by British people? (e)

Prime Minister Major: A few years ago there would have been demonstrations. But this time there was no difficulty at all, only a tiny demonstration. And it was hardly noticeable at the end of Downing street. The press was utterly relaxed. (e)

The President: I understand Jim Baker is going to talk to the EC on Yugoslavia. We are trying to do this in accordance with what UN is asking us, and I think it useful to coordinate closely. We have been getting some pressure on recognition and from the UN. But you know the situation in Yugoslavia remains very confusing. (e)

Prime Minister Major: Yes, it is pretty confusing. Bosnia-Hecegovina could be a real mess. This could be a real snarl-up which would keep UN troops tied up for a long time. We are very chary. (e)

The President: Well, I think that is our feeling too. Great talking to you. Best of luck and best wishes for your re-election. (e)

-- End of Conversation --

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