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MEMORANDUM OF TELEPHONE CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Telcon with Francois Mitterrand, President of France on February 19, 1991

PARTICIPANTS: The President
President Francois Mitterrand
Adrian Basora, NSC Staff (Notetaker)
Eliza Burnham (Interpreter)

DATE, TIME February 19, 1991, 3:24 - 3:47 p.m.
PLACE: The Oval Office



The President: Francois, can you hear me OK? (U)

President Mitterrand: Yes, I hear you well. (U)

The President: I just wanted to touch base and compare notes on the Soviet initiative. (S)

President Mitterrand: I understand. I feel a great need to know your views on this. (S)

The President: I have already written to Gorbachev emphasizing the importance that there be a prompt and unconditional withdrawal from Kuwait. I said that I have problems with an unspecified length of time, and that 96 hours should suffice -- it only took the Iraqis 48 hours to go into Kuwait. After this, we have to keep the pressure on. (S)

President Mitterrand: Yes. (U)

The President: I stressed that Saddam Hussein would have to comply with all of the UN conditions. I am planning to send a second letter pinning down more details such as the need for an immediate exchange of POWs and the principle that there can be no cease fire until a credible withdrawal has begun. This will not be a problem for Gorbachev, but I question whether it will be acceptable to the Iraqis. (S)

We will not attack the departing forces. The POW exchange must occur within the first 24 hours. We have a lot of their prisoners, approximately 1,200. They have very few of ours, but they are very important to us. (S)

The Soviet initiative, in its totality, is not acceptable. But this does not mean that we have entirely closed it off. However, we cannot be drawn into negotiating the terms of the Iraqi withdrawal. The UN has established those terms. There can be no pause. It is military pressure that has brought us this far with Saddam Hussein, and this military pressure has to continue. (S)

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would very much like to know your views. (S)

President Mitterrand: [REDACTED]

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The President: No, what are they? (U)

President Mitterrand: [REDACTED]

b1

The President: Exactly. (U)

President Mitterrand: [REDACTED]

b1

The President: What would be your prediction as to Saddam Hussein's reaction? You know him. (S)

President Mitterrand: [REDACTED]

b1

The President: I agree. (U)

President Mitterrand: [REDACTED]

b1

The President: I agree. We are not commenting on any of the specifics of the Soviet proposal as Gorbachev has requested. It is important to respect his request, although we must not let public opinion get out ahead of us, believing that peace is at hand and then having their hopes dashed. (S)

I have not yet talked to John Major although I have had a written message from him. You are the first person I have called. Have you spoken to John Major? I agree that we must stay in close touch. (S)

President Mitterrand: [REDACTED]

b1

The President: [REDACTED] (S)

b1

President Mitterrand: [REDACTED]

b1

The President: Good, that is very important. I have not talked to anyone yet. This is the first call I have made. (S)

President Mitterrand: [REDACTED]

b1

The President: Yes, that is true and it would not be productive at this stage. The Soviets have made a statement at the UN although I don't know the details of it. However, they have not revealed the details of their plan. (S)

The Soviets would clearly like a piece of the action. I see no problem in that, but they should not make the decisions. I don't think that they should carry the ball. They want to play a role, but they must not have too big a role and they cannot be the sole broker. The UN has a position, and the coalition has a position. I don't think we need the Soviets to negotiate for us. (S)

President Mitterrand: [REDACTED]

b1

[REDACTED]

The President: Yes, but if Saddam Hussein comes back with new conditions, we must strive ahead with the war. (S) b1

President Mitterrand: [REDACTED] (S) b1

The President: I am asking Brent to see if we have anything further from Bessmertnyhk with whom Baker was talking if you can hold on just for a minute. No, the call is just starting and it will take a while before we have any readout. Perhaps Brent can call Admiral Lanxade. (S) b1

President Mitterrand: [REDACTED] (S) b1

The President: Yes. Thank you for the call and we will remain in close touch. (S)

President Mitterrand: Yes, indeed. Have a good day -- and this is the moment to say so. (S)

The President: Goodbye, Francois. (U)

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