

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

MEMORANDUM OF TELEPHONE CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Telephone Conversation with President Francois Mitterrand of France

PARTICIPANTS: The President
President Francois Mitterrand
Notetaker: Adrian Basora, NSC Staff

DATE, TIME September 6, 1990, 7:23 - 7:43 a.m.
Oval Office

President Mitterrand: Good day how are you? I am happy to hear you. (U)

The President: Bonjour. (U)

President Mitterrand: I received your letter and saw that you would like to talk before your meeting in Helsinki. I am glad of an opportunity to do so. (S)

The President: Yes, I would like to hear your views. (S)

President Mitterrand: I spoke with President Gorbachev by phone and I wanted to tell you about it. He is very cautious about any movement toward open warfare, but he emphasized the need to maintain a common front regarding the Kuwait situation. I found him in a very positive frame of mind. He said he had a very difficult visit with Aziz. (S)

The President: So you spoke with Gorbachev after the Aziz visit? (S)

President Mitterrand: Yes, and Gorbachev said that we should keep up our common front and that there should be no weakening. He is concerned that we succeed. France has specific concerns because of our hostages, but this does not alter our policy. On the contrary, this irritates us and strengthens our resolve. (S)

The President: We cannot allow our policies to be changed because of the hostages. (S)

President Mitterrand: Absolutely. Saddam Hussein is making things more difficult. I told Gorbachev that no diplomatic solution is possible unless the UN resolutions are applied. What

~~SECRET~~

Declassify on: OADR

~~SECRET~~

DECLASSIFIED
PER E.O. 12958,
AS AMENDED
31 8/21/2009

~~SECRET~~

~~SECRET~~

do you think? (S)

The President: I think that this must be the case, but I am worried about a weakening of the sanctions. King Hussein is asking for interpretations of humanitarian assistance. Any broadening of the definition of humanitarian aid would be a bad thing. (S)

President Mitterrand: We must use common sense in setting the criteria. (S)

The President: Yes, the image of children dying of starvation would not be good. (S)

President Mitterrand: Yes, certainly, so we must use judgment. (S)

The President: Did Gorbachev raise the question of his military advisors in Iraq? This worries me. (S)

President Mitterrand: He did not raise it, nor did I. How many military advisors are there in Iraq? (S)

The President: We understand there are about 2,000, and that the Soviets plan to leave them there until their contracts expire. I plan to raise the issue at Helsinki. (S)

President Mitterrand: Gorbachev insisted that our common front should show solidarity, so I feel that he will be favorably disposed if you raise the issue. (S)

The President: Thank you. I will raise it. I also want to make it clear that this meeting is not an attempt by the U.S. and the Soviet Union to get together and dictate how the Iraq crisis will be managed. (S)

President Mitterrand: I am not at all concerned about that. (S)

The President: The idea is to show a common front with the Soviets, just as your telephone call with Gorbachev shows solidarity. (S)

President Mitterrand: The call was at Gorbachev's initiative. (S)

The President: That is interesting. What do you think his reaction would be if we took military action to enforce the embargo? (S)

President Mitterrand: This would be within the framework of UN resolution 665. If it is necessary to fire on an Iraq vessel, it must be done. But I don't think that, with Saddam Hussein's current posture, it will be necessary. (S)

The President: I hope this is the case. (S)

~~SECRET~~

~~SECRET~~

President Mitterrand: I believe your sizeable deployment will prevent any aggression against Saudi Arabia, unless the embargo makes Saddam Hussein desperate. (S)

The President: Do you think the embargo will work? (S)

President Mitterrand: It is already two-thirds effective. Iraq is in a bad situation geographically. It is not like the sanctions against South Africa where anyone can reach there by sea. Iraq is land-locked except for Jordan. Iran is a question mark, and the Iranians may try to fool all sides. But Iraq is very dependent on oil and therefore very vulnerable. The embargo must be severe. As for humanitarian assistance, the UN Embargo Committee can assess the level of food assistance that is required. (S)

The President: What are your thoughts on King Hussein? (S)

President Mitterrand: I just saw him a couple of days ago. It was an interesting meeting. He says he is joining the embargo -- I didn't know that he was doing so. His peace plan is interesting; it is similar to the Tunisian plan. He proposes an Arab peace-keeping force under a UN mandate, provided that Iraqi troops withdraw from Kuwait. Perhaps the Arabs could reconcile the differences between themselves at least for this purpose. But Hussein said that this would only be possible if Saddam evacuates Kuwait. He is taking a more reasonable approach now. (S)

The President: I worry about the reestablishment of the status quo ante, even if Saddam does withdraw from Kuwait. (S)

President Mitterrand: Yes, but we must be clear about what we are trying to achieve. The primary goal is Iraq departure from Kuwait. (S)

The President: I hear disturbing reports that Saddam Hussein is dismantling Kuwait, taking whole factories back to Iraq and leaving Kuwait a wasteland. (S)

President Mitterrand: In that case we would have to move quickly. I understand that Saddam has already taken \$2 billion from Kuwait. In a way, his "hold-up" has already succeeded. If he evacuates Kuwait there must be international safeguards to prevent a reoccurrence. (S)

The President: I will let you know about my meeting with Gorbachev. I am very encouraged by the positive attitude that Gorbachev conveyed to you in your phone conversation. I appreciate your phone call, and we will stay in touch. (S)

President Mitterrand: I would like to repeat that Gorbachev is concerned, but he does not conclude any weakening is justified. Rather, he is open to a common, united front by the signatories of the UN resolutions. You will see for yourself, but I wanted

~~SECRET~~

~~SECRET~~

to tell you directly about my phone conversation. (S)

The President: Thank you for the "heads up," as we say. Let's stay in touch. (S)

- End of Conversation -

~~SECRET~~

~~SECRET~~



This document is from the holdings of:

The National Security Archive

Suite 701, Gelman Library, The George Washington University

2130 H Street, NW, Washington, D.C., 20037

Phone: 202/994-7000, Fax: 202/994-7005, nsarchiv@gwu.edu

[Read related article:](#)

**Inside the Gorbachev-Bush “Partnership” on the
First Gulf War 1990**

2020-09-09