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THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON



MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Meeting with Francois Mitterrand,
President of France

PARTICIPANTS: The President
James A. Baker, III, Secretary of State
John H. Sununu, Chief of Staff
Brent Scowcroft, Assistant to the President
for National Security Affairs
Robert D. Blackwill, Special Assistant to the
President for National Security Affairs
Walter J. P. Curley, Ambassador

Francois Mitterrand, President
Roland Dumas, Minister of State for Foreign
Affairs
Jacques Attali, Special Counselor to the
President
Jean Musitelli, Foreign Policy Adviser to
the President
Hubert Vedrine, Press Spokesman

DATE, TIME May 20, 1989, 12:35 - 2:00 pm EDT
AND PLACE: Kennebunkport, Maine

President Mitterrand opened with the statement that the Syrians wish to run Lebanon; it was as simple as that. He had met several years back in his home with Jumblatt's father, then leader of the Druze. Jumblatt's father had shown him a map and with a pencil pointed out how Christians and Moslems had fought and had partitioned Lebanon in the 12th Century. Jumblatt said those who were fighting now were fighting in the same way. A few months later he was assassinated. His son does not wish to suffer the same fate, and therefore does not wish to offend the Syrians.

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Syria's occupation of Lebanon and Israel's invasions have reawakened these passions of the past, and the factions in Lebanon fight but cannot decide their future. France would like to help the Christians but they tend to fight among themselves and take extremist positions, which any community does under threat. Meanwhile, the institutions of Lebanon are being destroyed, and the factions are not likely to ever settle the Lebanon problem themselves. (S)

The President inquired whether President Mitterrand had met General Aoun. (S)

President Mitterrand replied he had not, but Aoun was a patriot and he was right to try to expel the Syrians. However, his actions had produced the constant bombardment of the Christian community. The Russians do not hold sway over Assad; still, they are the only external support of Assad. The Arabs -- Mubarak, Iraq, Hussein -- detest Assad, so Syria is isolated. Syria should consider itself as a keeper of internal peace in Lebanon, and help end the bombardment. The continuous open sore in Lebanon should not continue. There had been progress in Afghanistan and in Africa; the armed conflict in Lebanon should be ended; the U.S., the Soviet Union, France and the UK should - say enough is enough. All should bring economic pressure to bear on Syria to make them more responsible and get them to withdraw, but this would also require Israeli withdrawal or else Syria would have a perfect excuse to stay in Lebanon. Unless this happens, the prospect is for the obliteration of Christian forces in Lebanon. This is a terrible responsibility for all. (S)

The President agreed, but said the U.S. had little leverage with the Syrians. However, he would be willing to try to see if the U.S. could influence them. He was interested that President Mitterrand believed the Soviets might be willing to push Assad toward moderation. He added that Aoun seems to be a firebrand and asked if he wasn't stirring up Christian criticism of the United States. (S)

President Mitterrand said that France and the U.S. could influence Aoun. He asked whether out of this meeting the U.S. and France could call on him to do something. (S)

The President replied that this would have to be a discreet approach. (S)

Minister Dumas said that he had urged Aoun to accept the Arab League approach. Aoun can be reached, but he will fight if he thinks Christian interests are being sold out. (S)

Secretary Baker said the U.S. had issued a joint statement with the USSR the previous week calling for a cease-fire and backing the Arab League initiative. He thought the Soviets would like to use their influence on Syria to accomplish a cease-fire. This

recent exchange of action had been triggered by Aoun's closing of Moslem ports. It was necessary to get both Aoun and the Syrians to agree to the Arab League cease-fire proposal. (§)

President Mitterrand said that when he had called Gorbachev he had agreed that the independence of Lebanon must be preserved and said that he had made a demarche too. President Mitterrand asked rhetorically whether Gorbachev was saying this just to be nice. He opined that Gorbachev was better disposed on this issue than he had thought. He added that, recently, 2000 fanatics had arrived in the Bekaa Valley to penetrate into the Christian redoubt; this would not simply be a bombardment, but an invasion. If this were to happen, there would be a massacre. This Iranian intervention was a very worrying development; this bloody conflict had to be stopped. (§)

The President replied that it was hard to know if the Iranians openly did this. It was not clear what action should be taken. (§)

President Mitterrand said that if the Christian minority were massacred, it would be a catastrophic moral situation for the West. We were on the eve of some kind of genocide. (§) -

Minister Dumas asked whether there shouldn't be consultations to plan for Christian evacuation. (§)

The President responded that it was necessary to stay in close touch. Perhaps there could be more high level contact with Syria and with Aoun. (§)

Secretary Baker added that we could also call on Iraq to slow down weapons deliveries to Aoun. He must be able to defend himself, but those latest Iraqi shipments had precipitated the latest flare-up. (§)

President Mitterrand replied that Aoun had to protect himself. (§)

Secretary Baker agreed, but said that before there could be any hope of succeeding with Syria, one had to make sure that General Aoun was willing to abide by a cease-fire. (§)

President Mitterrand replied that the French would sound out Aoun; he owed France something. But he is a Christian hero who may think he can be President of Lebanon. (§)

Secretary Baker said he thought that was exactly what Aoun was trying to do by eliminating all his opposition. (§)

President Mitterrand responded that Aoun could stand up against the Syrians. Perhaps it was easiest for France to approach Aoun and the U.S. to approach the Syrians. (§)

The President suggested that both might appeal to both. (§)

President Mitterrand agreed and said this should be done, energetically, in concert with the Soviet Union. (§)

The President suggested that the U.S. might be able to step up its interaction with the Soviets on this matter. Now might be a good time to do this. (§)

Governor Sununu commented that it was interesting that President Mitterrand thought the U.S. had more influence over Assad than did France. (§)

President Mitterrand confirmed that this was his view. (§)

Secretary Baker said the U.S. did not have good relations with Syria. (§)

President Mitterrand stated that Assad had a big problem with his economic situation. If he believed the U.S., U.S.S.R., France and the United Kingdom would tighten the economic screws, he might see the light. (§)

Secretary Baker said he was not sure what move the U.S. could make economically. The U.S. had classified Syria as a terrorist state. He was not sure what else could be done. (§)

The President commented that people who have dealt with Assad believe he is very smart. (§)

President Mitterrand then turned to Cambodia, saying that the Khmer Rouge had military might, but Sihanouk had political force. We must try to work with the latter. (§)

Minister Dumas asserted that the Chinese held the key because they are helping both Sihanouk and the Khmer Rouge. They would like both in a coalition. The rapprochement between Hun Sen and Sihanouk was because both fear the Khmer Rouge. Relative to Sihanouk, the Khmer Rouge is stronger: 45,000 men under arms supplied by the Chinese. It may be necessary to leave the Khmer Rouge out of the first roundtable. It is close to decision-making time on how to organize the process, which should include the four parties, plus the five members of the U.N. Security Council, plus ASEAN, Japan and Vietnam in an international conference. Sihanouk and Hun Sen will be in France in July. (§)

The President said he realized Sihanouk was the best hope, but he was not very optimistic about his stability. He remembered him in Beijing in 1975: he would scream; he was not a stable man. Nevertheless, he is the best hope. (§)

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President Mitterrand said there was no other possibility except to support Sihanouk. One should not forget that his family was massacred by the Khmer Rouge and thus he would not come to terms with them. (S)

The President confirmed one could not come to terms with the Khmer Rouge. (S)

President Mitterrand commented that they were really horrible types. (S)

The President said that Sihanouk's son had visited the other day; he was attractive. He wanted more military support. (S)

President Mitterrand said that this problem could not be solved on the battlefield. (S)

Secretary Baker said it was interesting that the Sino-Soviet summit did not produce progress in Cambodia. (S)

The President commented that today's China was embarrassed by the Khmer Rouge. (S)

President Mitterrand said that the Chinese were never in a hurry. (S)

Minister Dumas said that, concerning the elections, there were two schools of thought regarding international control. Cambodia doesn't want the UN; neither does Vietnam. Hun Sen prefers something like Geneva in 1954, with neutral observers such as the Swedes and the Pakistanis. There are no major divergences and there is a will to move towards a solution. One hopes that the four factions will resolve this and call for an international conference. Hun Sen no longer challenges Sihanouk as head of state; Sihanouk no longer insists on a Republic. The gap is narrowing. Both sides have agreed to international control of the elections. One hopes Sihanouk will be elected unopposed. He would be the head of state, not the head of government. (S)

The President said that the relationship between the head of state and the head of government would be tricky to arrange. (S)

President Mitterrand replied that this could perhaps be defined at the international conference. Sihanouk wants to come back to power under one form or other. Hun Sen is a young man and would like to succeed Sihanouk. (S)

The President asked how President Mitterrand felt about assistance to the non-Communist resistance. (S)

President Mitterrand said France had provided some but could not do much. (S).

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Minister Dumas added that this kind of operation must be run

1.4(b); 1.4(d); 3.3(b)(6)

(S)

The President asked whether U.S. assistance of this sort was productive to the peace process. (S)

Minister Dumas responded that it was difficult to answer. Diplomacy, not weapons should resolve this situation. (S)

The President then turned toward the Middle East and suggested they get that subject out of the way before dinner.

President Mitterrand said that the Lebanese had to stop killing each other. With respect to Israel he was only the witness of the wedding of Mr. Shamir, just holding the wedding candle. (S)

The President commented that Shamir was a bit more flexible than he had expected. He had wanted the visit to go well and gave lip service to elections on the West Bank. The President had made it clear that a sham election would be unacceptable to the world and that continued new settlements were unacceptable. But he was not optimistic about progress. He had told Shamir he was not happy about the state of violence on the West Bank. Because of the changed views in the U.S. Jewish community, Shamir was somewhat more flexible than he otherwise might have been. Meanwhile, Hussein was more upbeat than in some time. The U.S. had discussed an international conference with the Israelis and they were worried about Soviet influence in the Middle East. (S)

Secretary Baker added that elections must not be an end in themselves; they must lead to a final settlement. He understood this, but Shamir was moving out well ahead of some of his party on the modalities of elections. He thought there was something there to work with. It would be helpful if European countries made clear to the PLO that this is worth the effort and that they should allow PLO sympathizers in the occupied territories to participate. Israel needs the fiction that it is not dealing with the PLO. (S)

President Mitterrand said that, between friends, he did not believe in elections. But, when he had spoken to Arafat, he had urged him to go ahead with elections if the army was in its barracks and there was international supervision from Arab countries. However, personally he believed elections would lead nowhere. (S)

The President asked why President Mitterrand was against the concept of elections. (S)

President Mitterrand replied that France had experimented with this in Algeria for several years; it was a dismal failure as

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long as France had tried to avoid final status issues. Elections in revolutionary circumstances won't work. As to the President's comment that Shamir was moving, Shamir reminded one of a man paralyzed for three months who moves one toe and we say it's a miracle. (S)

Secretary Baker commented that the man's resuscitation had to begin with the movement of one toe. (S)

President Mitterrand replied that Shamir only wanted to move one toe, and only one toe, and never any more than one toe. (S)

The President said the U.S. was not naive about this, but he could not think of any other way to proceed. (S)

President Mitterrand wished the U.S. good luck with the elections, but personally he was skeptical. (S)

The President concluded that a phony election with no international supervision would be worse than nothing at all, and he was worried about that. But fair elections could move things forward. (S)

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