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THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Meeting with Prime Minister Salim al-Huss of Lebanon (U)

PARTICIPANTS: The President
James A. Baker, Secretary of State
Brent Scowcroft, Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs
John H. Kelly, Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs
Robert L. Hutchings, Director for European Political Affairs, NSC Staff

Salim al-Huss, Prime Minister
Suhail Shammas, Secretary General of Foreign Affairs
Nasib Lahoud, Ambassador to the U.S.
Khalil Makkawi, Ambassador to the U.N.

DATE, TIME September 29, 1990, 5:00 - 5:20 p.m.
AND PLACE: Waldorf Astoria Hotel, New York City

The President: It is personally frustrating for me, because of my personal contacts with your very peaceful country, that we cannot do more to bring an end to the conflict there. We have supported the Secretary General and have urged the Pope to help, but I must confess that we feel we haven't facilitated peace in your country. I would be interested in your views. First, let me say that we have a major problem in the Gulf which affects every country in the world. We are working with Syria, which is very, very important if we are to contain Saddam Hussein's aggression. But you should know that nothing in our contacts with Syria will be in any way detrimental to Lebanon. I don't want anyone in Lebanon to feel that way. (U)

Prime Minister al-Huss: Thank you, Mr. President. We know how you feel about Lebanon. Thank you for this chance to talk. I appreciate the sentiments you have expressed, and how you have supported the legitimate government in Lebanon. Your love for Lebanon is very well known to us. I remember the very nice gesture at the White House a short while ago. (U)

The President: It is interesting that you as Prime Minister would know about that. I am pleased and flattered that you mentioned it -- even that you were aware of it. (U)

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Prime Minister al-Huss: As our time is short, I will limit my remarks to the most salient features of our crisis. We have one problem that is moving to a climax with the approval in our parliament of draft legislation which will make our reforms constitutional. This marks progress. It is the first significant amendment of the constitution since our independence in 1943. We are starting a new constitution; our President calls it the Second Republic. We have been achieving progress slowly.
(C)

We are very concerned about Iraq. We are among the hardest hit by the Gulf crisis. Our currency has devalued. The rate of exchange has gone from 600 to 1200 Lebanese pounds to the dollar. That affects everything. Oil prices are going up, and petroleum products are up fourfold. We do support all the sanctions, but they have aggravated the situation in our country. We have acute social and economic problems and have had to revise our policies.
(C)

We have also had to direct ourselves again to a mutiny in East Beirut led by General Aoun. We are at the point where we must resolve the situation. Otherwise there will be no progress. We have invited him to join the process of reconciliation. We have been dealing with this problem for eleven months, and we have been able to do so until this setback. He is threatening the unity of our country and the legitimacy of our government. We have had to call on Syria. We hope we do not reach the point where action by those troops is required. We hope the massing of forces will persuade him to pull back. (S)

The President: What is his position? Does he simply want to be number one? (C)

Prime Minister al-Huss: Yes, exactly that. (U)

Secretary Baker: How many men are under his control? (C)

Prime Minister al-Huss: Around two to three thousand combat soldiers.

The President: Is this a force that believes in him? (C)

Prime Minister al-Huss: Not so much any more. It is now too obvious that he is a rebel without a cause. So we are at a crossroads, a very critical moment. (C)

The President: Let me ask a hypothetical question. If you had the Aoun question solved, would there then be a peaceful, relatively united Lebanon? (C)

Prime Minister al-Huss: Except in the south, which is occupied by the Israelis. (C)

The President: What about the continued presence of the Syrians?
(C)

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Prime Minister al-Huss: We would have to come to some agreement.
(S)

The President: Could it be negotiated, so long as troops in the south get out? (S)

Prime Minister al-Huss: Regarding the problem in the south, in 1978 UN Resolution 425 was adopted, but it has not been implemented. There were attempts to send Lebanese units there, with the agreement of the UN Secretary General, but they were fired on by the Israelis. There was one attempt in 1978 and one in 1979. So we must implement Resolution 425. (S)

Once we finish with Aoun, I think the country would score great progress. According to the Taif agreement, six months from the constitutional amendments forces would have to be dismantled. But we cannot so long as Aoun continues. We cannot liquidate Lebanese forces and leave Aoun's intact. So he is a stumbling block in the way of dismantling these forces. (S)

Secretary Baker: Where does he get his equipment and supplies?
(S)

Prime Minister al-Huss: It is an enigma. For a long time he got them from the Iraqis and the PLO, but I'm not sure he is getting that much from them now. On March 11, we announced our initiative calling for Aoun to join the reconciliation process, but he rejected the offer. We learned from inside his entourage that he wouldn't respond positively because he thought that beginning August 15 something big will happen in the Middle East. So it seemed to us that Iraq told him about this in advance. (S)

The President: That's very interesting. Can I ask a question before we have to conclude? I have on my mind our hostages. Do you have any thoughts on how to get these people out? This is of great human interest to our people. If you have any thoughts, I really would appreciate knowing them. (S)

Prime Minister al-Huss: We know very little. I know how vital this is for you, and if we learn anything we will certainly let you know. Finally, a vital point for us: we have been hard hit from the Gulf crisis and wish something could be done for us.
(S)

The President: Haven't the Saudis been helpful? (S)

Mr. Kelly: The Saudis have given \$100 million and the Kuwaitis, \$50 million. (S)

Secretary Baker: Have you applied for help under Article 50?
(U)

Prime Minister al-Huss: Yes, we have already done so. (U)

-- End of Conversation --

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