

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Telephone Conversation with Helmut Kohl of
the Federal Republic of Germany

PARTICIPANTS: U.S.
The President
Philip Zelikow, NSC Staff (notetaker)
Gisela Marcuse, State (interpreter)

Federal Republic of Germany
Chancellor Helmut Kohl
Mrs. Weber (interpreter)

DATE, TIME April 21, 1989, 8:24 a.m. - 8:39 a.m.
AND PLACE: Oval Office

Chancellor Kohl opened the conversation by apologizing for his unavailability the previous day, noting that he had been in Paris settling questions involving the European Community. The coalition had worked on the SNF problem last night and had sent up an agreed paper on the issue. The Chancellor promised that a copy of the paper would be sent to Washington within the hour.

Continuing, the Chancellor proposed that Defense Minister Stoltenberg and Foreign Minister Genscher come to see the President on Monday. They would stay for a day, or even less than a day, and talk to the President's officials about the SNF issue. In this way both countries could consult before the Chancellor delivered his declaration on SNF next Thursday and allow him to say that the FRG was consulting with its friends on the subject. There was no need to cast a final vote on SNF next Thursday; the Chancellor could explain that he could not say anything final while he was still discussing the issue with his allied colleagues. In summary, he hoped that appropriate U.S. officials could meet with Genscher and Stoltenberg on Monday or Tuesday.

The President said he was glad the Ministers were coming. He had anxiously awaited such a dialogue from the beginning. Although the President understood the Chancellor's internal political situation and did not wish to meddle in it, he stressed that the FRG must discuss the SNF issue with the U.S. before decisions were made and made public. The President was most concerned with the need for appropriate consultations to maintain Alliance solidarity.

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2000-0429-F
Jr 8/21/09

The President added that, although he would be on the West Coast on Monday, his key officials would be available in Washington for talks. He urged the Chancellor not to present the U.S. with a 'fait accompli.' Real consultations are needed.

Chancellor Kohl asked what the President meant by a fait accompli.

The President said he meant a unilateral position that the U.S. had been unable to discuss with the F.R.G., with no opportunity for each side to persuade the other which way it should go.

The Chancellor said he should explain one problem he had, which was constant indiscretion, disclosures of government information.

The President said he had that problem too.

The Chancellor replied that his problem was different, since a three party coalition left much more room for such disclosures than work within one party. He added that he would, of course, also have to talk with other allies, such as the British and the French. The Ministers would be coming with a paper that would form a basis (Grundlage) for their discussions, but there was no way to prevent people from disclosing the contents of the paper here in Bonn. The Ministers would be coming in order to talk over these issues.

The President said that was exactly what he had in mind.

The Chancellor said that one cannot prevent any debate from becoming a public debate.

The President said that was a problem in Washington too, but that a firm F.R.G. position for the Alliance should not be taken in advance. Our hope was that, when the Ministers come, there would still be some openness to work on a mutually agreed position. The President wanted to get this problem out of the way immediately so that we could have a successful NATO Summit meeting without any wedges driven into what, now, is very good Allied solidarity.

The Chancellor said that was precisely his view. His aim was a strong NATO. There was no doubt that he, the Chancellor, had linked his political existence to this goal. The SNF paper had amalgamated "all the points" and was being sent to the President today. The President would agree with part of the paper and would disagree with part of the paper; that is what negotiations are about.

Good, the President said.

The Chancellor promised to tell his representatives to come as

friends, as partners. The problem would be that the paper they would bring could not be kept under cover in Bonn. Too many people were involved. But his government needed to have procedures underway that were fair to the President as well. The Chancellor wanted to extend their friendship, not hamper it.

The President said he understood, but noted that the problem is that leaks tend to lock people into a position. It was a problem for for the U.S. too. He was pleased the Ministers would be coming in a spirit for negotiation.

Concluding, the Chancellor said his two Ministers would be coming to Washington. Then, if necessary, the Chancellor could talk with the President again on the telephone.

The President said that was good. Another conversation might not be necessary, but he hoped that both he and the Chancellor would be able to talk to each other at any time.

Finally, the President expressed his gratitude for the Chancellor's note passing his condolences for the loss of life in the accident aboard the battleship Iowa. The President observed that this was the third largest loss of life that the military had suffered in a single peacetime incident and that the disaster had caused much grief. The Chancellor's letter meant a great deal to the President and to the American people.

Originally Processed With FOIA(s):
2000-0429-F

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Record Group/Collection: George H.W. Bush Presidential Records
Collection/Office of Origin: National Security Council
Series: Presidential Telcon Files
Subseries:

OA/ID Number: CF01731
Folder ID Number: CF01731-004

Folder Title:
[Memorandum of Telephone Conversations (Telcons) - January 1989-July 1989]: April 1989
