

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

MEMORANDUM OF TELEPHONE CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Telephone Conversation with Prime Minister John Major of England on April 16, 1991

PARTICIPANTS: The President
John Major, Prime Minister
Nicholas Burns, NSC Staff (Notetaker)

DATE, TIME: April 16, 1991, 12:25 - 12:40 p.m.
AND PLACE: The Oval Office

Prime Minister Major: There's been a fair amount of fuss over here one way or another. ~~(C)~~

The President: What do they want you to do that we are not doing? ~~(C)~~

Prime Minister Major: I know what they would like us to have done -- magically, without invading or killing Saddam, have him replaced by a nice, gentle democrat. ~~(S)~~

The President: That's about the same criticism that we're getting here. Ours is focused more that I personally made a mistake. Maybe it was by not shooting down the helicopters. But the main thing is where do we go from here and I've got a couple of ideas I'll run by. If you like I'll go ahead or you can lead off. ~~(S)~~

Prime Minister Major: I think we have to move ahead. We produced proposals earlier in the week. They may or may not be the way. It seems there are so many Kurds running loose and we need to ensure they are first, fed, and, secondly, protected from attack. I doubt the problem will go away until we grasp that. ~~(S)~~

The President: Here's what we're thinking. Let me run down this. In the first place, I talked to Ozal yesterday and he thinks he can keep 40-50,000 refugees but he thinks another 240-400,000 need to get to what he called the flat areas. Indeed, that is what we want to do. So his view is one that our military and relief organizations fully subscribe to. No one is arguing about getting them down there. There is a security problem and I

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don't think, based on talking to our experts, that Saddam Hussein would interfere and I think he has to be publicly warned not to. But we will only get these people to move out of the mountains and down to the flat areas if they are confident that they will be safe. We got a further UN resolution problem, as you know. It was reinforced by the Chinese statement respecting Iraq's sovereignty so we wouldn't get a UN resolution probably but should build on 688. I think you and we believe implicitly that it gives us authorization to help settle these people. ~~(S)~~

Prime Minister Major: We've always thought that 688 was that authorization. ~~(S)~~

The President: What I'm talking about is to get the Kurds to return home safely. The French have ideas that make sense. You had this safehaven idea in the beginning. We want to build on that idea. We have got to get them to go home and we think that our own military -- I'm talking U.S. not collective, but welcoming all support -- is best suited, given the logistics, to build temporary shelters in Iraq in a hurry. We will work with the Turks in creating a supply train to get into this area. ~~(S)~~

On the security -U.S. air forces are operating out of southern Turkey and we can enhance this with helicopter gunships which are somewhere that we can bring in and provide cover and protection. But we have concluded, and here's the point I need to talk about, that we need a ground presence. Its not because we think they will be attacked but to reassure the Kurds that they can move into Iraq without fear. I'm afraid that just promises by Saddam will not get the job done. The original idea was that we would provide logistics and air cover and the construction units and that UK and France would supply some troops. If that is complicated, we could put some troops in there as well. I'm in a dilemma because I keep saying we're not going to get involved in their civil war, just the humanitarian refugee effort. We're flexible in addition to logistics and troops that we put in -- troops to help others defend. I think air power is essential. The last point is that it would be essential to get the UN involved in running these camps and, like you, I feel it is consistent with 688. We've informally sounded out Perez de Cuellar. He seems positive. But its moving so damn slow. I'll phone him later today to see if we can get the bureaucracy moving. That's our approach and I would love to have your feeling. I haven't talked to Mitterrand though I think Brent Scowcroft has talked to his new Chief of Staff. ~~(S)~~

Prime Minister Major: I would react very warmly to those ideas. They are very much in line with what we had in mind earlier in the week. I think we would certainly welcome... we would be happy to play our part in it. I'm not sure of how many camps we would need, how many troops we would need. Or whether it would be wholly credible without U.S. ground troops. I'm not sure. The other question that arises immediately is how long is it likely to be for because at the moment it is difficult to judge

whether it will be short term or quite lengthy. We have to do something like this. We are convinced here. ~~(S)~~

The President: We're thinking 5 or 6 camps would be required and we don't yet have a thought on the number of troops. Obviously, the fewer, the better. I don't want to look like an occupation army and you are as concerned as I am about permanence. I'll get with our defense people and find out if they have estimates of the numbers. I don't think it requires a lot. I think what should go with this is a proclamation to Saddam not to interfere. And so far I assume your fellows agree. There have not been violations when we say "don't do this" in terms of the 36th parallel. They've been pretty good and I expect, given world opinion, they would not harass our camps. But the Kurds that had fled don't agree, obviously. ~~(S)~~

Prime Minister Major: I would be surprised if we made a proclamation if he did interfere. And if he did, a certain set of circumstances would arise. I think he would be ill advised to do so and don't think he would. Would the troops be under UN cover or international? ~~(S)~~

The President: I don't think under UN unless there is another resolution. ~~(S)~~

Prime Minister Major: Even under 688? ~~(S)~~

The President: Maybe we could say that. I assumed we had to have it as coalition forces, but ... (S)

Prime Minister Major: If they're there wearing blue berets rather than U.S. uniforms, it will be easier for Iraq to bear and more difficult to attack. I think we might get more international support. ~~(S)~~

The President: That would be best. (U)

Prime Minister Major: If we're about to do this under 688 I would very much personally like to persuade Perez de Cuellar. They can be our people wearing UN hats. If we can't, we can't. ~~(S)~~

The President: I agree with you and I think that's best. I had planned --and I think its scheduled -- to talk to him this afternoon. And, of course, any talks you have with him would be fine. I think we ought to get international sanction, whether it needs specific UN creation of peace keeping force to go into this specific area. I can't remember the rules. In any event, we'll try and if it doesn't work, we'll have to go forward. ~~(S)~~

Prime Minister Major: I believe so. When will it be announced? ~~(C)~~

The President: I've got to talk to Francois and then de Cuellar -- the sooner, the better and we would coordinate the

announcement. We hope to get something today. I know the timing is not too good for you, but we may not be far enough along. ~~(S)~~

Prime Minister Major: I wouldn't worry about timing for us. Its important to get it announced. ~~(S)~~

The President: Why don't we make a couple of more calls and then we'll get back to you? ~~(S)~~

Prime Minister Major: Marvelous. (U)

The President: I have a kind of personal question. Is Margaret giving you grief publicly? ~~(S)~~

Prime Minister Major: Yes, semi-publicly. What she is doing is talking extremely recklessly to some people who are then spreading the word. She hasn't remotely come to grips with the fact that she's not the prime minister anymore. The press is giving enormous amounts of difficulty. ~~(S)~~

The President: Is there anything we can do to help. I'm afraid I'm a part of your problem. ~~(S)~~

Prime Minister Major: To be absolutely frank, when she was prime minister she used to sit down and denounce colleagues in the same way. From the press' point of view, it's a good story. She tends to do this when she's abroad. She did a bit of it in the U.S. a couple of days ago. In a curious way, she doesn't realize what she's doing. Its caused a lot of resentment over here in the party. ~~(S)~~

The President: I didn't know she was here. I don't think it got picked up over here. ~~(C)~~

Prime Minister Major: It blew back. -- dinner table discussions. The press use it and they don't quote her. ~~(S)~~

The President: Well, if you want any support, we feel you've been up front on this. I'm catching a hell of a lot of grief. None of the sources want to say send in the 82nd airborne. They just criticize but don't have any answers. It is a complex problem. The refugee problem has a lot of potential for grief if its not handled right. The critics know that but they have a free shot. ~~(S)~~

Prime Minister Major: I agree. A very cheap shot, but it causes a lot of difficulties. ~~(C)~~

The President: There are some but they are manageable. We'll call back. I think we have something to build on. ~~(C)~~

-- End of Conversation --