

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

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MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION


SUBJECT: France-U.S. Coordination Against Libya

U.S. PARTICIPANTS: Ambassador Walters
Howard R. Teicher
William Barraclough, DCM

FRENCH PARTICIPANTS: President Mitterrand
Secretary General Jean-Louis Bianco
General Forray
Jacques Attali (preliminary portion of
meeting)

DATE, TIME AND PLACE: February 23, 1986,
3:50 - 4:55 p.m., Elysee Palace

In a preliminary 15-minute meeting with Bianco, Attali and Forray, Ambassador Walters presented his talking points focusing on the opportunity for Franco-American coordination against Libya. In response, Bianco emphasized Qadhafi's ability to draw strength in the Arab and third-worlds from American rhetorical attack. Furthermore, Bianco noted that while Qadhafi has internal problems they do not now appear to be decisive. Forray and Bianco emphasized the build up of equipment and continuing preparations for a GUNT attack possibly to include Libyan forces directly behind GUNT forces. The French perceive an effort by the GUNT and Libya to prepare for both offensive and defensive operations.



At this point the group joined President Mitterrand in his office. President Mitterrand appeared relaxed and confident. Ambassador Walters repeated the main points of his earlier presentation to Bianco stressing first the USG belief that the situation in Libya can only improve through fundamental changes brought about by external and internal pressures, and second, that the USG is interested in devising a political framework for military contingency planning with France for action against Qadhafi.

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BY CH NARA DATE 5/21/08

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Walters described the two options which we envisaged for cooperation: close coordination of French action in Chad with U.S. activities in the Gulf of Sidra or joint operations in the Gulf of Sidra and/or against Libyan targets on the mainland.

President Mitterrand opened his presentation by describing the political gains which Qadhafi had been able to achieve by appealing to Arab solidarity. He noted that even Bourguiba of Tunisia had to toe the Arab line. Following some give and take with Walters on the political realities of the Arab world and the Arab focus on the Gulf War, Mitterrand turned to the situation in Chad. He argued that Qadhafi has the ability to strike once but if he is not successful a second effort would not succeed.

[REDACTED]

Mitterrand opined that sufficient French action would contain any invasion of southern Chad. "The U.S. can help with surveillance but it must be done discreetly. We do not want to commit psychological mistakes with adverse consequences for French or American interests in the third world."

[REDACTED] He added that the U.S. could also provide heavy transport assistance.

Walters mentioned two shipments of U.S. aid to Habre, noting that we recognized France's primary role in support of Habre but we wanted to coordinate resupply to avoid negative competition. But Mitterrand repeated several times the importance of not conveying an impression of a superpower and another major power beating up on Libya. Walters noted "don't you mean the third nuclear power?" Mitterrand agreed with a smile.


Turning to the issue of the naval challenge, Mitterrand noted that while Qadhafi is a fanatical Arab he is not irrational. He has never placed his regime or his life at risk. But Mitterrand believes that Qadhafi would react if America tests him on his own territory. Walters and Teicher summarized the rules of engagement that would govern U.S. military action if hostilities took place. Mitterrand advised that U.S. forces be careful not to exercise in Libyan territorial waters but only in disputed international waters.

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Mitterrand added that France had considered deploying one of its aircraft carriers off Libya but it would not have done anything. It would have represented more of a weakness than a strength. There would be "overkill with no kill."



Walters returned the discussion to the operational issues of coordination, asking how we should best proceed. Mitterrand said that General Forray would serve as the point of contact. As an Elysee official, he could coordinate the necessary people, affect liaison with U.S. planners, develop efficient plans and "bring them directly to me." Saulnier would be brought in if the use of force is needed. Forray will be ready to meet with American planners.

In following up separately with Bianco and Forray, Teicher expressed our interest in French views on timing of our naval challenge. They agreed to follow up with Mitterrand and speak to Walters before he departs France later in the week.

Drafted by Howard R. Teicher

Cleared by Vernon Walters

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February 28, 1986
2:15 p.m.

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ADDENDUM TO MEMCON

Ambassador Walters called on secure to brief on follow up with Mitterrand to the February 25 meeting. Mitterrand said that he had thought about the timing of the U.S. naval challenge. He said, "It was not important whether it was done sooner or later; the important thing is to do it successfully." [REDACTED]

Referring back to his Tuesday comment regarding destabilization of Qadhafi he reiterated that he would not mind a U.S. effort to bring Qadhafi down or to humiliate him, but all must be done very "skillfully."

Based on [REDACTED] possible offensive operations by Habre north of the 16th parallel, Walters asked Mitterrand whether he would "authorize" such actions by Habre. Mitterrand replied that authorize is a strong word. Walters said, "We are speaking frankly here and he is extremely interested in your attitude." Mitterrand said, "If Habre went on his own, he would probably fail and I would have to bail him out." Walters interpreted this to mean that Mitterrand is unlikely to authorize Habre to act now, but might in the context of our naval challenge.

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INTRODUCTION

- We share a common commitment to counter Qadhafi's support of international terrorism and all his activities in violation of accepted norms of civilized behavior.
- Over past several years, worked hard to deter Libyan-backed terrorism and aggression and to inhibit Qadhafi's ability to coerce and subvert neighbors.
- Continuing our effort to isolate him and impose costs for his behavior. Current political-economic effort was outlined by Whitehead. He noted that we should consider what we can do together in a more active way to respond militarily to Qadhafi's aggression.
- But we see no sign that Qadhafi is prepared to alter his behavior. Indeed, as evidenced by SA-5 deployments and growing conventional arsenal, he is likely to grow bolder and more difficult to counter or overcome.

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- The U.S.G. believes that the situation in Libya can improve only through fundamental changes inside Libya brought about by internal and external pressures.

- Does the Government of France share this perception of the need for fundamental change? Perhaps we can cooperate in this area as well.

- I would like to discuss the political framework for such action as well as military contingency planning against Qadhafi, solicit your ideas, and, if you agree, discuss how we can move quickly to detailed joint contingency planning.

MILITARY ACTIONS AND INTENTIONS

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- Outline short-term U.S. intentions to ratchet up military and other pressure through additional operations in FIR and naval challenge below 32/30 sometime in March.

- We have two carrier battle groups in the Mediterranean. They have carried out flight exercises in international waters, above the Libya claimed Gulf of Sidra closure line, but within the Libyan flight information region.

- We are preparing to conduct naval exercises in the near future below the closure line in the Libyan claimed area of the Gulf of Sidra.

- Our assessment is that Libya is likely to respond militarily to such exercise. If it does, we will respond with appropriate force, possibly to include targets on land (to be decided by President).

- U.S. will persist in pressuring Qadhafi through these means.

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FRENCH ACTIVITIES

- We admire your firm stand in support of Chad and the recent military actions you took to show that Qadhafi cannot move with impunity in Chad.

- We both know that the threat to Chad continues, and that France will continue to play the key role in helping Chad repel Libyan aggression.

OPPORTUNITY FOR U.S.-FRENCH COOPERATION

- President Mitterrand correctly pointed out to John Whitehead that France is the only Western country which has confronted Qadhafi militarily. We want to join you in that effort.

- We see two theoretical possibilities for joint cooperation against Qadhafi - either, (1) close coordination of your action in Chad with our activities in the Gulf of Sidra, or (2) joint operations in the Gulf of Sidra [REDACTED]

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- In our view, the second option, if successful, would have the most dramatic effect and be a strong sign that responsible nations must act together against international outlaws.

- However, that option poses major challenges in terms of operational coordination, target selection, command and control and related issues.

- The first option would be much easier to plan and coordinate. It would also show our mutual determination to act in unison against the most notorious supporter of international terrorism.

- If we pursue the first option, we would need to have detailed discussions leading to specific plans to ensure full cooperation on the timing of our actions, how we treat them publicly, and how we consult with Allies and friends in the region.

- Such joint planning would ensure maximum effectiveness of our respective policies and eliminate potential for mistiming of operations, lost opportunities, or accidents.

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NEXT STEPS

- If you agree, I suggest that we arrange urgently for a small close-hold group of military planners from both sides to get together and prepare plans under both options for consideration at the political level.

- I believe that our emphasis should be on option one - close coordination of your actions in Chad with ours in the Gulf of Sidra.

- Nevertheless, to be prudent and complete we should also look at the possibility of joint operations in the Gulf of Sidra
[REDACTED] These plans will have to address the form such joint operations could take, the scope of assets to be used, the Rules of Engagement, command and control authority, and target lists.

- For both options, our teams should be tasked to provide very detailed plans for higher-level consideration by March 7.

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- In addition to sending military representative to France to conduct joint planning, we believe it would be useful to establish operational channel from EUCOM to French General Staff.



- I would appreciate your reaction to the above.

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