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THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

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MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Meeting with President Francesco Cossiga of Italy (S)

PARTICIPANTS: U.S.
The President
John Sununu, Chief of Staff
Brent Scowcroft, Assistant to the President
for National Security Affairs
Marlin Fitzwater, Assistant to the President
for Press Relations
James A. Kelly, NSC, Notetaker

Italy
President Francesco Cossiga
Gilberto Bonalumi, Minister of State
Ambassador Sergio Berlinguer, Secretary
General
Giovanni Dominedo, Counsellor to the
President
Ludovico Ortona, Press Spokesman
Carla Lonigro, Interpreter

DATE, TIME February 24, 1989, 6:06 p.m. - 6:22 p.m.
AND PLACE: American Ambassador's residence, Tokyo, Japan

President Cossiga opened the exchange by explaining the change in leadership that had just occurred in the Italian Christian Democratic Party. He believed the international press had not understood what had happened. Cossiga said it is not a tradition in Italy that a change in party leadership would force a change in the government. Prime Minister Da Mita had been both Secretary-General of the party and Prime Minister, and he could continue to be Prime Minister even though some other person was now Secretary-General of the party. (S)

President Bush asked if this affected the Prime Minister's ability to lead. (S)

President Cossiga responded that it should not have such an effect, that European political life had certain uncertainties but that there was no change in Italian leadership now. (S)

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Moreover, the Conference of the Christian Democratic Party had caused no change whatsoever in Italy's foreign policy, economic policy, or domestic policy, but that it was merely a fact of domestic politics that had caused the change in party leadership. (Ø)

The President responded with comments that whatever changes occurred in modern Italy, common to each of these governments' situations was a strong relationship with the United States. The President said there is a particular admiration for Italy's steadfastness, and we are very grateful for the cooperation we have had with Italy. (U)

President Cossiga recalled two extremely difficult decisions for Italy, both of which he had been involved in -- the 1979 decision to accept intermediate nuclear forces (INF) and the decision a couple of years later to actually deploy these forces to Comiso in Italy. (Ø)

President Bush commented that the current government had accepted the transfer of a wing of F-16s from Spain, a strong and courageous effort which the U.S. appreciates very much. He asked if it was more difficult than the earlier matter of the INF. (Ø)

President Cossiga responded that 1979 was much worse and much more difficult, partly because of internal politics and because the pressures of the Soviet Union were then very strong. The influence of the Soviet party on the Italian Communist Party had been quite serious at the time. (Ø)

The President recalled meeting a woman Communist legislator who was the Speaker of the Italian Parliament. He had found her dynamic, and not doctrinaire. (Ø)

President Cossiga responded that she is called "the lady," and although a Communist is very balanced. (Ø)

President Cossiga expressed formal congratulations on the beginning of the President's stewardship. He indicated that there were great tasks ahead, global problems of the East-West, that these were helped because the President had "nothing to learn" on such matters. (Ø)

The President disagreed that there was nothing more for him to learn but he guaranteed that the Italian-U.S. relationship could only grow stronger and not weaker during his presidency. He understands Italy and he understands the importance of Italy. (U)

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The President then commented on the ongoing U.S. arms control and Soviet Union policy review. He said the U.S. would fully consult with allies and that he intended to see that Gorbachev did not achieve dominance of public opinion in Europe. (S)

President Cossiga commented on the importance of this approach to policy, particularly to Germany which was more exposed to short-range missiles. He said that Germany was also most exposed to the psychological offensives of Gorbachev and the effect was compounded by the frailty caused by German division. But when the time comes to decide, said President Cossiga, Germany is always faithful. (S)

The President agreed that we must take into effect the political situation of our allies. He said that Gorbachev knows that the U.S. needs time for its review. The U.S. will not miss opportunities, and the review is not just to upstage Gorbachev, for there are serious matters that have to be decided. Indeed, we want Gorbachev to succeed, but will proceed with caution. (S)

President Cossiga agreed that it was very important for public opinion to understand this point, that an attitude must be maintained on Gorbachev based on realism and prudence. (S)

The President responded with thanks for this position. (U)

President Cossiga commented on the Middle East and his visit to Israel at the time of the breakout of the "Intifada." He noted that he was first representative of a western country to meet with Shamir at that time. He had talked to him as a friend, and recalled Italy's significant role in the migration of Jews in the late '40s to Israel, but told Shamir, "you cannot continue this way." It will damage the image of Israel and there can be no military solution in the occupied territories. (S)

The President commented that perhaps Shamir thinks that by now. (S)

President Cossiga then complimented the President for accepting the first steps from the PLO and entering a dialogue. (S)

The President said the requirements met by the PLO had been important. (S)

President Cossiga said that the movement would give strength to the moderate wing of the PLO, and others such as Egypt. It has increased the prestige of such moderate players, and that is

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important for the equilibrium of North Africa and the Middle East. (S)

The President then expressed some optimism but urged caution on Italy in dealing with Qadaffy of Libya. He said some in Italy see the American attitude as paranoia, but the unstable nature of the Libyan leader is a fact. (S)

President Cossiga acknowledged the point and the meeting concluded. (U)

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