

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

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

PARTICIPANTS: The President
Brent Scowcroft, Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs (Notetaker)

Francesco Cossiga, President
Sergio Berlinguer, Secretary General of the Presidency

DATE, TIME AND PLACE: October 11, 1989, 10:45 - 11:05 a.m. EDT
The Oval Office

Following the arrival ceremony for President Cossiga's State Visit, the President and President Cossiga proceeded to the Oval Office for a one-on-one meeting. (U)

The President: Let me welcome you once again to the White House. I am pleased to say that our relationship is excellent, with no nagging special problems. (U)

President Cossiga: I am especially pleased to be here. There is a particular reason for my pleasure. Nine years ago, after we decided to deploy cruise missiles, I came here as Prime Minister. It was a very troubled time, and it was important to send the Soviets a signal that they could not divide us. We made the cruise missile decision with the peace of mind that it was the right thing to do. We wanted the Soviet Union to understand what was really happening -- that they could not divide us and should negotiate. Brezhnev's reaction was strong, and Schmidt and I paid a political price for it, but you will forgive me for being proud of our decision. (U)

The President: You should be proud. The danger now is there are many who see no reason for defense. We cannot go too far now and base Alliance policy on our hopes. (U)

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President Cossiga: The action of Congress on the 401st -- despite the fact that it was an Alliance decision -- is puzzling. I do not know why the Congress is objecting. One Congresswoman in particular is likening this to the construction of the cruise missile bases. Supposedly useless expenditures can prove very valuable. If CFE makes it unnecessary to transfer the 401st, that event would be great, but it would be better to have negotiated a balance of forces that includes a transfer of the 401st. (e)

The President: You should tell this to the Congress. (e)

President Cossiga: I am not known as a warmonger. (C)

The President: Those who said cruise missile deployment was a provocation were wrong. They should admit it. (U)

President Cossiga: An Italian correspondent of a Warsaw Pact country interviewed me for an hour and a half. I told him that prudence and courage were the right approach to take with the Soviet Union. The fact that we remain united on arms control is useful to demonstrate that the old way of overpowering and dividing us is wrong and will not work. (U)

The President: Prudence is sometimes taken as timidity, as in the reaction to our policy in Panama. (U)

President Cossiga: Even a proper action is perceived as proper only if it succeeds. The Panamanian affair is not viewed as negatively in Europe as it seems to be here. (U)

The President: We are taking flack now, but I am confident that our actions are correct and will eventually be vindicated. (U)

-- End of Conversation --