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THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

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MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Meeting with President Denis Sassou-Nguesso of
People's Republic of the Congo (U)

PARTICIPANTS: The President
John Ordway, NSC Director for Africa (notetaker)
Alec Toumayan, Interpreter

President Sassou
Basile Ikouebe, Minister, Director of the
Presidential Cabinet (notetaker)

DATE, TIME February 12, 1990, 10:40 a.m. - 11:00 a.m.
AND PLACE: The Oval Office

The President: We'll sit here for a minute, and see if you have any subject you'd like to bring up in private. I have only one thing to mention -- my deep appreciation for your very constructive role in the Angola question. I know you have the respect of the people in UNITA and the other leaders, but of President dos Santos as well. We can talk more about this with our top people, but I want you to know that the U.S. wants a peaceful reconciliation in Angola. We think your helpfulness is a step toward that. If you see dos Santos tell him that there is no personal hostility toward him, that I have a certain respect for him, and find him more reasonable than some of the people around him. (S)

We need talks and reconciliation in Angola. I worry about the military offensive, which will make it more difficult for talks. We want to do anything we can do to get a peaceful resolution of the war. I wrote to dos Santos to urge him to pull his troops back. But I think you have more standing with him. We assist UNITA -- not to impose them as the government, but rather to get reconciliation and negotiations. Under the current circumstances, it would be very hard to improve relations with Angola, but in the longer run we want improved relations with Angola very much. That is a subject we can talk about in more detail in the larger meeting. I felt a little more optimistic about Angola a little while ago, but now feel a little more pessimistic. (S)

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President Sassou: This is a very important moment for me. I am happy to see you after meeting you last on Capitol Hill, when I was Chairman of the OAU Chairman. After that visit to the Capitol I got Chester Crocker to visit Brazzaville to renew contacts between the U.S. and Angola. Many people did not believe success would be possible, but today we see there is a date for Namibian independence and, despite difficulties, we see prospects for a negotiated solution in Angola.

I sent my foreign minister to talk to President dos Santos last week, and I saw President Mobutu. Dos Santos told me he continues to look for a negotiated solution. I am not sure he wants to go on making war. He's a reasonable man, and I don't see how Angola can go on making war when on March 21 there is going to be peace and independence in Namibia. And in South Africa Mandela is free and they are going toward a negotiating process in South Africa. War in Angola is senseless. President Dos Santos is open minded, and in his recent political statement he was forthright, and gave a clear signal of political reform. He wants to start political reform.

Mr. President, I can tell you that I am gratified by what we have been able to achieve in South Africa. I think we have a real chance for peace in Angola, and I think President dos Santos is open-minded and reasonable. The Congo will continue to play whatever role it can. (Ø)

The President: Are Savimbi and Mobutu still mad at each other? (Ø)

President Sassou: I think there was an improvement after they were both here with you. However, relations between the Angolan Government and Mobutu are not very good. Savimbi did visit Kinshasa, but there is one thing I don't know. Did Savimbi propose that the Portuguese mediate? To replace Mobutu as mediator? I don't know. However, overall the relationship between Savimbi and Mobutu appears good. Luanda now appears to have reservations about Mobutu, not Savimbi. (Ø)

The President: I don't think Cavaco-Silva wants to replace Mobutu. [Turning to Ordway] Can you help me out here?

Mr. Ordway: Savimbi asked the Portuguese to be more active, and use their influence with Luanda. However, Savimbi has publicly expressed his continuing support for Mobutu as mediator. (Ø)

The President: You know the key players, and have their respect. (U)

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President Sassou: Would it not be progress if Savimbi were to recognize the authority of dos Santos. We have had this in the case of Chad, in a similar situation, when all the factions were opposed to Habre, recognized Habre. With the help of Bongo, Houphouet-Boigny, Mobutu we were able to go toward reconciliation in Chad. I ask because in Luanda there is a sense of frustration President Sassou said there was a sense of frustration in Luanda that their authority as the government is challenged. (Ø)

The President: I don't know if recognition would be possible before talks started, but could certainly be part of the outcome. Savimbi is a very proud man, and I doubt he would make such a bow to dos Santos at the outset. However, I would expect that the result would be recognition of the authority of the central government, although there would have to be a negotiated place for him in it. Chad was different. Habre had demonstrated control and had already won--won in the past tense. I don't think that Savimbi thinks that is the case in Angola. (Ø)

President Sassou: I have some bilateral issues I want to discuss with you, because our country is in a very difficult situation. While we are making efforts to secure peace in the region, we are suffering severe economic and financial difficulties. The Congo is an "intermediate" country, but we are not Argentina or Brazil. We are suffering from this unfair situation. I would like to know if, as we have very major talks with the World Bank and the IMF, and I will be meeting with their directors, can we have the benefit of your support? Is it possible for us to have your support to handle the debt problem? We owe you \$18,000,000. Can the U.S. Government act toward a resolution of that indebtedness? Can we receive financial support from the U.S. when we face such a difficult situation? There are other questions we can discuss but the main one is the question of support we could receive from you in the financial area, is support from you in our discussions with the Bank and the fund. (Ø)

The President: You have our support in the Bank and the IMF. But the problem is that these institutions did not always listen to outsiders on these things. Are you seeing Secretary Brady? (Ø)

President Sassou: No.

The President: Well, you do have the support of the U.S. on this.

President Sassou: We tell them, but when you tell them it has more weight. (Ø)

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The President: We understood your request, and will take care of that. I will tell the Secretary of the Treasury we had this discussion and ask him to follow up. The Congo is "trapped" because of its success. (Ø)

Let's go on and join the others in the Cabinet Room.

The meeting then moved on to the expanded session in the Cabinet Room. (U)

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