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THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

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MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Meeting with Cardinal Casaroli of the Holy See (U)

PARTICIPANTS: The President
James A. Baker, Secretary of State
John H. Sununu, Chief of Staff
Brent Scowcroft, Assistant to the President for
National Security Affairs
Robert M. Gates, Assistant to the President and
Deputy for National Security Affairs
Raymond Seitz, Assistant Secretary of State for
European and Canadian Affairs
Thomas Melady, Ambassador to the Holy See
Robert Hutchings, Director for European Political
Affairs, NSC Staff (Notetaker)

Agostino Cardinal Casaroli, Secretary of State
Archbishop Agostino Cacciavillan, Apostolic Pro-
Nuncio

DATE, TIME: October 31, 1990, 10:23 - 11:05am EST
AND PLACE: Oval Office

The President: I am very interested in your thinking on the
Middle East and Lebanon. (U)

Cardinal Casaroli: What to do when peace requires all sides to
agree? The principle that war is not the means to solve
questions has been accepted in the world. But what is possible
to do to achieve peace without resorting to war? Pius XII on the
eve of WWII said "nothing is lost with peace but everything could
be lost with war." We now have the instrument of the UN. What
could it do? Until now, very little. But now there is unanimity
in condemning aggression. Personally, I wonder whether there is
some way to oblige Iraq. (C)

The President: I don't know what that would be. We have had
resolution after resolution, an embargo, and we are inspecting
ships at sea. I wish there were more we could do. If you have
any thoughts on additional steps I would be interested in hearing
them. (C)

Cardinal Casaroli: The boycott should be effective -- not,
perhaps, to oblige them to leave, but to put him in a very bad
situation, including with the Arab world. I am wondering what
Iran could do. Is there a danger? (S)

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The President: There is the possibility of danger, but so far Iran -- despite its anti-US rhetoric -- is complying with the sanctions. I don't take that to mean they will be aggressive against a defeated Iraq. I haven't really worried about future Iranian aggression. I don't think the Saudis worry. (S)

Secretary Baker: We have given some consideration to whether we want Iraq totally neutered, and have given thought to the balance of forces in the region afterwards. We don't want any country to dominate like Iraq is doing now. (S)

The President: I don't think this worries the Gulf countries, but it was Iran that attacked Iraq. That certainly wouldn't argue for doing less than to see these sanctions work. One thing that worries us is that in an effort to achieve peace, an accommodation might be reached that would reward aggression. I am doing my best, with great support here, to convince the Soviets and the French that we must stay the course and accept no deal short of UN objectives. (S)

Cardinal Casaroli: That Iraq must leave Kuwait is clear, but is there no other way to oblige them? (S)

Secretary Baker: Your Eminence, people talk about allowing Saddam Hussein to save face. But when you ask the difference between that and rewarding aggression, they find it hard to answer. (S)

The President: I am increasingly concerned about "guests" or hostages. There can be no compromising with this brutal treatment. I pray about this. It is offensive and barbaric. I hope we can all continue to speak out against that because it can lead to the most horrible conclusions. I listened to your words from Pope Pius. I am sure he didn't mean to condone Hitler's barbarity. Now we are seeing this happen again on a small scale with Saddam Hussein. I believe it is a clear cut case of good and evil, and I believe he is evil. What he has done will live in history, so I am not flexible. There may be people in our country who say "no blood for oil." But I have no flexibility. I hope it leads him to a peaceful solution and unconditional withdrawal. (S)

Cardinal Casaroli: Are there other means, such as Saddam Hussein's ouster? (S)

The President: If there were some way, it would be great, but he has security and a record of dispatching those who are disloyal to him. Yes, the replacement of this one man could mean instant reconciliation. We have no grievance against the people of Iraq. (S)

Governor Sununu: May I ask a question? Sources from Iraq indicate there is turmoil in the government. Do you have any information on that? (S)

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Cardinal Casaroli: Unfortunately, no. We realize how difficult this is for you. In our opinion, the problem should be seen in all its complexity. Speaking more personally, justice demands that the guilty be punished, but looking at the complete view this can't really alter the balance. We should not accept evil but we may have to tolerate some evil to avoid the worst. War should be the last resort. You mentioned the suffering of the hostages. With war, we could see the suffering of the total population. In my personal opinion, it is important to accept that the aggressor could have the advantage. There are justified interests of mankind, but when war begins no one knows the consequences. A man with tremendous responsibility should have a sense of the complete picture. (S)

During the war there were some attempts to overthrow Hitler and the regime. I don't know, Mr. President, if the Holy See could do more -- perhaps through our representative in Baghdad. (S)

Secretary Baker: I am not sure I understand. (S)

The President: Maybe there is a role for the Vatican to try a peaceful solution. (S)

Cardinal Casaroli: And a just solution. (S)

The President: ... if it didn't look like the Vatican were accepting a solution short of the UN resolution. Perez tried, but his mandate was that of the world body, so he had no flexibility and shouldn't have flexibility. I worry about war, as you obviously do, but there is a war involving innocent Kuwaitis. I don't want the blood of one single Iraqi child or soldier on my hands. I don't want that on my conscience for the rest of my life. But, to those who say we should have no war, I answer that we have got a war. We can't reward aggression. The Holy Father is unique in the world. I don't see what constructive role he might play, but if he thinks Saddam Hussein's stepping aside would help, why not try? (S)

Cardinal Casaroli: In any case, my opinions were completely personal. Is it more important to punish aggression or to prevent new aggression? (S)

Secretary Baker: We tolerated the evil of aggression against Ethiopia, and did the same against Poland and Czechoslovakia, thinking that would mean less chance of future aggression. I wonder whether the Holy Father's position would be that under no circumstances should force be used. I don't know what else we can do if all this fails. (S)

Cardinal Casaroli: At Munich, Pius XI was not satisfied because Hitler could think the world would accept the next step. Perhaps it would have been better to adopt strong measures, but there was no UN then and no international consensus. If you begin a war you never know where it will lead. We wouldn't interfere, because you are seriously dealing with the situation and we have confidence in the competence of the US. (S)

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The President: What about the Holy Father, who is so respected, making in the name of peace a moral appeal to Saddam Hussein to step aside? (S)

Cardinal Casaroli: A public appeal? He would just say no. (C)

The President: Yes, but I have tried, in my little speech to the people of Iraq to make it clear that our argument is not with the people of Iraq. (S)

Cardinal Casaroli: Yes, but the little people of Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and Jordan feel he is defending the people. (S)

The President: He's trying to tie into the Israeli question and is making some headway. (S)

Cardinal Casaroli: I wonder if the US and Israel have some way of deterring these people. The Pope has accepted deterrence in his message to the UN. He said that until other methods are found, deterrence is morally acceptable. (S)

The President: What we are trying to do is to achieve a peaceful solution. We will keep that up for a bit, but if there is a provocation I hope people understand that we have not only the right but the obligation to respond. I consider starving American children a provocation. I don't yet know what I'll do. (S)

Cardinal Casaroli: I realize the difficulties of your moral and political position. The new international order should give the international community the right not only to condemn but to enforce. May I ask a personal question? Do you think it possible for there to be a quick strike? A war there could last for years. (S)

The President: Not this war. It would not be a Vietnam situation. He's never fought without air cover. I wish I could say there could be war without major loss of life, but it could be short. (S)

-- End of Conversation --

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