

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Meeting with President Francesco Cossiga and Prime Minister Giulio Andreotti of Italy (U)

PARTICIPANTS: The President
James A. Baker III, Secretary of State
John H. Sununu, Chief of Staff
James F. Dobbins, Acting Assistant Secretary of State for European and Canadian Affairs
Robert L. Hutchings, Director for European Political Affairs
Raphael Visconti, Interpreter

Francesco Cossiga, President
Giulio Andreotti, Prime Minister
Rinaldo Petrignani, Ambassador to the U.S.
Sergio Berlinguer, Secretary General of the Presidency
Umberto Vattani, Diplomatic Advisor to the Prime Minister
Carla Lonigro, Interpreter

DATE, TIME AND PLACE: May 7, 1991, 3:06 - 3:50 p.m.
The Oval Office

The President: I am delighted to see you. It seems like yesterday that you were last here, but it was more than a year ago. (U)

President Cossiga: I recall I met you, Mr. President, many years ago when you were Vice President. You stopped over in Rome on your way to Moscow. (U)

The President: ...for one of many funerals. (U)

President Cossiga: I am happy to see you in such good shape. I already checked on television to see how you were doing. (U)

The President: You are nice to comment on it, but the doctors are upbeat. My heartbeat is back to normal. (U)

President Cossiga: Mr. President, you have too many responsibilities. You should stay far away from doctors. (U)

The President: How do you see things? U.S.-Italian relations are good. In Iraq, the question is how to get out. We do not want to stay there. (U)

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President Cossiga: We have organized a camp to host 20,000 refugees and entrusted operational control to an American commander for protection. I hope that very soon we can reach an agreement to send UN forces so as not to create further problems. Should it be necessary to defend the camp, we are ready. Agreements are already concluded for the location of the camp, which will be a pool of all coalition forces. Both the Italian Government and I agree that the sooner the military component goes away, the better. (Ø)

The President: Tomorrow I will be seeing Perez de Cuellar. He made a statement questioning our legal right to be there. (Ø)

President Cossiga: Italy has contacted your Government and France and Britain. We agreed that legality exists through Resolution 688. (Ø)

Secretary Baker: The question is raised about the sufficiency of 688 to all Iraqi operations north of the 36th parallel and the insertion of foreign forces into that area. (Ø)

President Cossiga: I think we can maintain that 688 allows that. (Ø)

Secretary Baker: The Iraqis, of course, have asserted in New York that there is no authority. (Ø)

The President: I think we will be okay. (U)

President Cossiga: Do you think the UN will be able to get ready in a short time its own force? (Ø)

The President: I hope so. They have been a bit slow. (U)

President Cossiga: It could act as a sort of buffer force between the Kurds and Iraqis. (Ø)

The President: That is the best answer for now. A UN force probably couldn't stand up to Saddam Hussein, but its presence should deter him. (Ø)

President Cossiga: But frankly it would be very difficult for Saddam Hussein to attack UN forces. Normally UN forces exert this power of dissuasion because they represent the UN. (Ø)

The President: May I change the subject? What is your feeling on Yugoslavia? (Ø)

President Cossiga: When we were coming here, I was discussing this with Prime Minister Andreotti. We have very close relations with Yugoslavia. We have always supported the Government of Yugoslavia, also vis-a-vis the EC. We also have to recognize that Yugoslavia always acted as a very effective buffer between us and the then Warsaw Pact. The Federal Government, as Prime Minister Andreotti can confirm, was always very loyal toward

Italy. They have suffered the impact of the fall of Communism, though their form was rather special. There are so many diversities -- economic, ethnic, religious, historical, and cultural. In the abstract one can see that Slovenia and Croatia have political systems and cultures more alike to ours, but this should not be the only factor we consider. We believe it necessary while respecting human rights to try to maintain unity. (Ø)

The President: Do you think there is a chance for outside mediation? (Ø)

Prime Minister Andreotti: Perhaps it might be useful if you directly made a step vis-a-vis Austria, because it can exert a calming pressure -- on Slovenia, especially. I think perhaps the future situation cannot continue as it is, but it will take time to change the Constitution gradually. It cannot be done overnight. If Slovenia pushes too hard its accelerator, they risk blowing up the situation. We have tried to speak to them as the EC. We have told them that if they decide to break away, they would lose any contact with the EC. We cannot handle 10 different states. Because the problem is time, it would be useful to make a step toward Austria. (Ø)

Secretary Baker: I saw the Austrian foreign minister two weeks ago in Cairo. We discussed Yugoslavia in some detail. I asked if they could use their influence to try to moderate the situation, because they do stay very close to events. (Ø)

Prime Minister Andreotti: I think you should take another step. For Austria it would be prestigious to act as mediator. A step toward the Nonaligned Movement could also be a step that might assist in cooling down a situation that is incredibly hot. (Ø)

President Cossiga: Should the situation become worse, we would be faced with a grave problem -- the flight of refugees to Italy, Austria and Hungary. It would be an enormous problem, also at the political level. (Ø)

Secretary Baker: A critical date is May 15th when the Croatian Presidency is to begin. Is it your view that if we get by May 15 we are over the immediate crisis? (Ø)

President Cossiga: No. (U)

Prime Minister Andreotti: I can't say that the crisis will be overcome. They say they will overcome this acute step, but the crisis stands. I think personally that is reliable. Foreign Minister Loncar is very balanced. Perhaps he does not have great political authority, but he enjoys personal prestige. (Ø)

Secretary Baker: Our understanding, based on a conversation we had this morning, is that he is very depressed and not sure he can do anything, but I am certainly prepared to call him. (Ø)

Prime Minister Andreotti: He has one advantage in that he comes from Dalmatia and is not part of the conflict. (Ø)

The President: He is a good man. (U)

President Cossiga: Mr. President, what is your thinking on the Soviet Union? (Ø)

The President: We had an interesting visit from Shevardnadze. Jim had a long talk with him; I had 30 to 40 minutes. We are worried. Our policy has been to deal with Gorbachev and not to undermine him. We are a little encouraged by his agreement with Yeltsin and the others. They have asked for \$1.5 million in agricultural credits. Very candidly, I would like to help but there is the requirement in our law that the Agriculture Department must certify that they are creditworthy. We would have to stretch to say that. Perhaps there is some form of guarantee, but I don't know if they would be willing. We are pushing hard on our arms control agenda and may be making progress. (Ø)

I asked Shevardnadze if were sitting here what he would do. He said to offer grain credits, finish the arms control agenda, and move to a summit. We want to do that, but there has to be an agreement on START and we must work out our difficulties on CFE. (Ø)

Prime Minister Andreotti: From the information I have gathered from NATO, it seems there are more positive prospects for progress. (Ø)

Secretary Baker: On the CFE question, there were three problems after the treaty was signed: coastal defenses, strategic rocket forces and naval infantry. The Soviets have proposed solutions on the first two that are acceptable, but they continue to insist that naval infantry is not included. Twenty-one other nations say it is. A major principle is at stake -- an effort by the military to walk away from commitments Shevardnadze made. We cannot accede to that because then we will see the same in START. Militarily, it is not a major dispute. (Ø)

Prime Minister Andreotti: But as you said, some agreement was reached by exerting pressure on the first two issues. The same will happen on the third. (Ø)

The President: We are trying. (U)

Prime Minister Andreotti: To resolve this in a positive way is important at the international level and also might help Mr. Gorbachev. I think that Baltic independence is another area where we must be very cautious. In the end the Baltic countries will have their autonomy, but they should not press the accelerator now. (Ø)

President Cossiga: At the final stage, the Baltic states will reach independence. That is in line with what Gorbachev told us

the last time he was in Italy. Because the participation of the Balts in the Federation is a result of agreements between the Nazi regime and the Soviet Union of the time, it is therefore difficult to maintain, but accelerating the process would place Gorbachev in a very difficult situation with his military. There is also the fact of a very strong influence of German culture in the Baltic region. (Ø)

The President: We want to see independence, but don't want to make the situation worse. Gorbachev told me the same thing -- that eventually they will be free but they have to go the constitutional route. The problem is that the Balts don't want to act as if they were part of the Soviet Union. I think we are thinking the same way. (Ø)

President Cossiga: We will soon hold a meeting to examine the evolution of NATO. The Italian government has stated several times that we are deeply convinced that it is very essential to maintain the linkage between Europe and the U.S. and Canada. (Ø)

The President: We agree totally. (U)

Prime Minister Andreotti: So if there is a decision at the June meeting of NATO to hold a meeting of heads of state and government in October or November to complete NATO's revision, we suggest it be held not in Brussels but in Rome because we think we have the most clear idea how to reconcile the long term prospect of EC security aspects with the need to maintain a strong linkage through the Atlantic Alliance. (Ø)

Secretary Baker: We have had our reservations on the European security identity and have made them known to our European NATO partners. NATO must be the principal vehicle for trans-Atlantic security. (Ø)

(The President's aide interrupts.)

Prime Minister Andreotti: Just one more minute. Yesterday at Columbia University I met with Professor Said, a Palestinian and a U.S. citizen. He made an excellent impression. He is not a member of the PLO but of the Council of Palestine. He has spent 25 years in the U.S. and might be useful as we look for interlocutors. (Ø)

(Hands the President a book.) Please accept this small volume of letters of Cicero published in Rome in 1549. (U)

-- End of Conversation --