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THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

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MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Meeting with President Soglo of Benin (U)

PARTICIPANTS: The President
Arnold Kanter, Under Secretary of State for
Political Affairs
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
Herman Cohen, Assistant Secretary of State
for African Affairs
Harriet Isom, United States Ambassador to
Benin
Thomas E. McNamara, Special Assistant to the
President and Senior Director for African
Affairs

President Nicephore Soglo
Minister of State Desire Magloire Vieyra
Minister of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation
Theodore Holo
His Excellency Candide Emile Pierre Ahouansou
Ambassador to the United States

DATE, TIME November 5, 1991; 1:30 p.m. EST
AND PLACE: The Oval Office

President Bush and President Soglo met briefly in the Oval Office where President Bush congratulated President Soglo on his award and briefly discussed several issues. (U)

President Bush: I want to welcome you here to Washington, a rather quick visit. I know you're here on matters not entirely related to our government. I want to congratulate you on your award and to welcome you to the White House. Also, I would like to hear your concerns and matters of interest to you. Let me say that we want to be partners of democracy in Africa, and we're very pleased with your efforts to promote democracy in your country. I also want to thank you for the kindness you showed our delegation which we sent over to Benin for your inauguration. (U)

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President Soglo: I would like to thank you in turn for sending a member of your family to Benin. We are very pleased to entertain the delegation. It was a very proud moment for us in our country. It was a very dramatic change after 18 years of military rule. After much hard work we were successful and I think now we can say we have finished the transition process to democracy in our country. Our experience is one that can be emulated. We think that many countries can return to democracy. The good success that we've achieved can help other countries. It can be a force for peace. Furthermore, we've shown that such a transition can, in fact, be done peacefully and in a way that can save face for all. We can pass this message to others, Togo and Mali, and Kenya, Madagascar and Zaire. We have told them all that transition to democracy is good and useful. (U)

In fact, I happened to meet President Moi in Tokyo last year, and I gave Moi this same message. He told me I was a "troublemaker" in Africa. And he said this at a reception, a party. At another occasion when I was Prime Minister, there were students in Togo who were shouting, demonstrating for democracy, and the Togolese were not pleased by this. (S)

In Benin the old regime tried to complicate matters for us in this election by creating a number of different parties so there would be a large number of candidates running against me. And President Keriokoe tried to place obstacles in our path. But we overcame these because things are changing. We overcame these because there was a desire for change. Keriokoe ran in that election, and he lost. But we're both gentlemen and so we still talk. I still consult with him, and we have very friendly conversations. In fact, I would hope the same situation could come about in Zaire. (S)

I want to stress how important the U.S. has been in this process. I know that the United States has been a key factor in Latin America. The United States was important in the development of democracy in Europe. The same is also true in Asia. Japan, South Korea, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Thailand have all received support and assistance from the United States. But our commerce minister was in Thailand recently and saw the results of U.S. assistance; where roads and highways were built; where the Thai government was strengthened, and development has gone forward because of U.S. support and assistance. (S)

It is my hope that this help and assistance can now be directed to sub-Saharan Africa where we have a great need for assistance. And this can be done in the context of a transition to democracy. Zambia, for example, has just had an election. (U)

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President Bush: Yes, that was quite an election, quite a landslide as a matter of fact. (U)

President Soglo: We are looking for more attention and assistance in Africa now that we are at the end of the Cold War. You, the United States, are shaking the whole world. You are the ones who are trusted; you are the ones we look to. We are fortunate to have the United States strong and assisting us. Whenever you have a friend, you can develop a lot of hope. We have such hope in our programs, and we hope and expect the United States will assist us. (C)

President Bush: Can you tell me what you're doing to promote private enterprise? (U)

President Soglo: We are making efforts to educate people in it. Already we have reduced the number of public enterprises from 60 to 40. We hope to attract U.S. private investments to Benin. We hope that our resources will prove attractive to private investments. Thus far, we have had the Germans cooperating and, of course, there is substantial French interest. We're hoping to develop petroleum. There are some gas fields. As you know Nigeria, Gabon, and Angola all have oil and gas fields. Although Benin is much smaller, we hope to develop petroleum resources also. (C)

President Bush: A good deal of our support is going into support for education, is that not correct? (U)

Ambassador Isom: Yes, we have a \$57 million program in education in Benin right now. (U)

President Soglo: Yes, and that assistance is very important to us. It is crucial to have the United States involved and committed in Benin. We also need the assistance of the World Bank to invest in Benin, as they do in some of the larger states such as Nigeria. (C)

President Bush: Yes, that's important. Your award -- you're going to get an award from the African American Institute or is it some university? (U)

President Soglo: It is an award from the African American Institute. (U)

President Bush: And then are you going home? (U)

President Soglo: Then I must go to Paris where I'm participating in a conference. (U)

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President Bush: Where did you learn your English, you speak it quite well. (U)

President Soglo: Well I lived here for ten years. I was a student in Montreal. My children live here and, of course, speak English quite well. (U)

President Bush: Let's see what we can do in assistance for Benin. I really appreciate your visit, and we are really looking to you for leadership. I wish you well. (U)

When President Moi says that you are a troublemaker, that only increases my respect for you. I have even more respect for you after hearing that. Frankly, he needs more democracy in that country. I worry about the resistance for democratic change in Africa. I worry about Mobutu. He is going to have to do something different or it's not going to be very comfortable for him down there. (U)

President Soglo: Several years ago Benin was getting substantial assistance. Nigeria gets more assistance than we do, and the smaller countries that need that assistance very much. It's important now that you concentrate on Africa, that you pay attention what is happening now in Africa. (U)

President Bush: Yes, that's right. Hank Cohen here is our African man, and he's quite good. He can tell you what we're doing and in fact he knows all too well how difficult it is with shrinking assistance budgets and shrinking resources to get the job done. The Congress wants to cut in some cases all of this out and others want to cut substantial amounts for foreign assistance. It's not easy. (U)

But I don't want you to get the idea that just because you read so much about the USSR and the United States that we're just thinking about that quarter of the world. That we're not paying attention to other parts of the world and we're not paying attention to our friends. It's really a question of scarcity of resources and not at all a question of neglecting friends. We need to pay attention to the relationship with the USSR so that we can make that relationship smoother, more friendly, less of a concern. This would, then, free us up to spend more time worrying about how to help some of our good friends. I want to thank you very much for coming here, it's been a great pleasure, and I wish you the best. (U)

President Soglo: Thank you so much for the meeting, it really was a pleasure for me also. (U)

End of Meeting

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