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THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Meeting with Mario Soares, President of Portugal

PARTICIPANTS: The President
The Vice President
James A. Baker III, Secretary of State
Samuel K. Skinner, Chief of Staff
Brent Scowcroft, Assistant to the President
for National Security Affairs
Thomas Niles, Assistant Secretary of State
for European and Canadian Affairs
Tony Wayne, Director for Western European
Affairs, NSC Staff
Marcel Bouquet, Interpreter

Mario Soares, President
Joao Barata, Chief of Staff
Francisco Knopfli, Ambassador to the U.S.
Sophie Porson, Interpreter

DATE, TIME
AND PLACE: January 13, 1992, 4:10 - 4:30 p.m.
The Oval Office

During the photo opportunity, the President stressed our desire to cooperate closely with Portugal during its EC Presidency and the need to conclude successfully the Uruguay Round.

The President: On East Timor, I want you to know that we share your concerns about the human rights situation there. I just hope we can get to the bottom of this. (Q)

President Soares: I was in Paris last week and met with UN Secretary General Boutros Ghali. As you may know, the Secretary General has responsibility for trying to see if he can organize a negotiation between Portugal and Indonesia on East Timor. I told him that despite the November massacre, we are ready to go ahead with negotiations. We have no claim on East Timor. We only ask that the human rights of the people be respected and that they have the opportunity to decide their future. We have not accepted Indonesia's occupation of East Timor, but we are willing to go along with a democratic referendum which has appropriate guarantees and international observers. This is all that we ask. This is the problem that we face at present. I think the Indonesia problem could be resolved if there is a democratic evolution. (Q)

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The President: I empathize with your concerns. Do you see a role for the U.S. in this? (P)

President Soares: Yes. The U.S. can always play a role. In fact, there is something of a new development now in the United States. Public opinion among young people and in Congress has been roused by the events in East Timor, and we have seen expressions of concern for the respect of human rights there. This is an important development. Now what the United States could do is to exert pressure for negotiations between Portugal and Indonesia within the framework of the United Nations. (P)

The President: OK. Let's take a look at that with the Secretary and examine the appropriateness of raising it. Well, the rest of the world has certainly changed since the last time that we talked, and it's mostly for the better. Certainly, there are now problems with the new Confederation of Independent States, but there have been big changes toward freedom and democracy. (P)

President Soares: I am normally an optimist, but I must confess that I am currently pessimistic about many things. There is a war in Europe for the first time in 45 years in Yugoslavia. I am worried about the way things are sorting themselves out in the former Soviet Union and particularly the conflict between Russia and the Ukraine. (P)

The President: But you must allow me to argue with you on that, my friend. There is now no monolithic communist dictatorship to worry about. Certainly we are concerned with the current disagreement between the Ukraine and Russia, but I think it's much better to worry about that than about a communist dictatorship building up its nuclear arsenal and threatening its neighbors. So, yes, there are problems, but the situation is better overall. (P)

President Soares: Yes, I agree. But with the fall of the Berlin wall, people thought that we arrived at a new state of things. Now we have found that the situation is much more difficult than we had foreseen in those euphoric days. Also, looking at North Africa, I am deeply worried about what is happening there, especially the spread of Islamic Fundamentalism. (P)

The President: Yes. Chadli Bendjedid was a good man. I am sorry to see him go. Are there any new developments? (P)

Secretary Baker: No. He turned over power to a committee of senior leaders. (P)

President Soares: I think they organized all of this. (P)

Secretary Baker: Yes. (U)

The President: Where do you think this is all going? (U)

President Soares: As you know, I am deeply democratic, and we definitely have an interruption of the democratic process in

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Algeria, but with a certain justification. If the Islamic Salvation Front had won, Algeria would have gone back three or four centuries. We would have an exodus of the more liberal-minded citizens to France, Spain and elsewhere. (P)

The President: And we would have had more pressure on King Hassan. (P)

President Soares: Yes, no doubt. (U)

Secretary Baker: And Tunisia even more. (P)

President Soares: The situation in Morocco is teetering. The King is not exactly an example for democracy, but he has maintained stability in that part of the world. (P)

The President: Yes. (U)

President Soares: All the Europeans in our part of the continent -- France, Spain, Italy and Portugal -- are very worried about developments in the Maghreb. Indeed, Western Europe is being subjected to tremendous demographic pressure. From Eastern Europe, there is pressure to absorb highly skilled workers, engineers, etc. This is felt mainly by France, Germany and Italy. And then there is pressure from the South via Spain and elsewhere. This is a grave concern. (P)

The President: Yes, there is reason for worry. (P)

President Soares: Still, we all have to make an effort for things to work for the best. (P)

The President: Do you see any opportunities now in Angola? (P)

President Soares: There is one major positive factor. The people have a tremendous desire for peace. They will refuse to go back to war. There has been reasonable progress, though there have been some incidents and some violence. The election won't be as democratic as one might wish. There has been no census so the vote will be under a very primitive system such as was used in Eritrea, where voters fingers were dipped in dye and they voted with their finger print. Of the two parties, in my opinion, UNITA has a good chance of winning. Savimbi is charismatic, but he is also very African. (P)

The President: But is he a democrat? I know he was trained in China, and he has done many other things. I just don't know what he really is. (P)

President Soares: Well, I think his Maoist period is over, but I am ill-placed to say exactly what he is. I have always argued to you and your predecessors as far back as Jimmy Carter that we had to support Savimbi as the only lever to get the communists out. Now the communists are destroyed, and almost all of the Cubans are gone. The MPLA is completely disorganized, and there is a lot of corruption. The structure around Savimbi is very

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militaristic, and he still uses an iron fist. That is why I say he is very African. He is finding it hard to adapt to democratic ways. (P)

There is a third group in Angola assembled with the support of the Catholic church. The church is still important there, but if the elections are held in September, it is almost certain that Savimbi will win. He has made a lot of commitments to us and to you, so I think we can expect to exercise positive influence. I must add that President Dos Santos has played a constructive and intelligent role through this period. (P)

Secretary Baker: Coincidentally, I just talked with Savimbi an hour ago. His message was that he hoped we would not forget southern Africa while we are absorbed with the former Soviet Union and the Middle East. I said that we wouldn't. He said he was very confident about the outcome of the election. He noted that almost 50% of the MPLA troops who had been assembled in administrative centers had left. But that all of the UNITA forces were still intact and there. His point was that Dos Santos' position is very weak. (P)

The President: Well, that would be a good development, but I just hope he proves to be a democrat in the final analysis. (P)

President Soares: Portugal needs to recognize that a lot of people want to get into Angola: the French, the Germans, the Spanish. We have to recognize this. I see America as our big ally in Angola. We have the language, the people and the know-how. America has the technology and the capital. It could be a very good partnership. (P)

Secretary Baker: Yes. A good partnership. (U)

The President: Yes. A very good role. What brings you to the States? (U)

President Soares: I was here to close the Circa 1492 exhibition, which had been opened by the King of Spain. (U)

The President: It's been a very interesting exhibition. There was great cooperation from all the countries that participated. (U)

President Soares: Yes. Portugal donated some very fine pieces. Today, I also gave the opening address for a seminar at George Washington University on the history of Portugal in the 15th century. (U)

The President: Are you staying here for a while or heading right back? (U)

President Soares: I'm going to New York tonight, and tomorrow I leave for Portugal. But I wanted to see you. You know, we have the highest respect for you in Portugal. And as you know, we are

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starting as President of the EC, but I want you to know that we are faithful allies of the United States. (Ø)

The President: Yes, we appreciate that very much. (U)

President Soares: We are, of course, part of the Community, and we want that to develop. But we will never forget the United States. We are your neighbors across the Atlantic. As far as the question of GATT, it won't be an easy issue. Even within the EC there are a lot of differences over the common agricultural policy and the whole matter of subsidies. But we will do our best. (Ø)

The President: Yes. Any help you can give us on the GATT Round and CAP reform will be deeply appreciated. We have very big problems with Europe on GATT, and we need to work them out. Your support will be appreciated. (Ø)

-- End of Conversation --

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