

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Meeting with Philip Johnston President of CARE

PARTICIPANTS: The President
Marlin Fitzwater, Assistant to the President and Press Secretary
Jonathan T. Howe, Deputy Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs
Andrew Natsios, Assistant Administrator of AID for Humanitarian Assistance
John M. Ordway, Director, African Affairs, NSC Staff (notetaker)

Philip Johnston, President of CARE

DATE, TIME December 18, 1992, 9:35 - 9:45 a.m.
AND PLACE: The Oval Office

Mr. Johnston: You know, Mr. President, we met once before, in Sudan.

The President: I remember that. You know, that trip to Sudan is one of the reasons why we are doing what we are in Somalia. Barbara and I will never forget what we saw there during that trip.

Mr. Johnston: Mr. President, the step you have taken will go down in history as a landmark. It is very important.

I hope you will come to Somalia. Such a trip would show the whole world how strong this humanitarian intervention is.

The President: Two points.

First, I want to salute what you have done in the private eleemosynary sector. You are the key to success.

On my visiting Somalia, I have been thinking quietly about a visit. But you know how it is here, you can't do anything quietly.

I'm not sure it is the right thing to do. We would probably do it over New Year's and visit the troops who are away during the holidays. Also, we would do it because of what you are doing, and what we saw during that trip to the Sahel.

I am delighted with your enthusiasm for the mission. It is not without controversy, with some saying that the U.S. has expanded the horizons under which U.S. military forces are used. Hearings have started up on the hill, and some are saying that the President has started an open-ended commitment. But I am convinced we have done the right thing.

Mr. Johnson: You have, Mr. President. It is important that you set the tone. It is a question of human rights, and the prevention of premature death of hundreds of thousands of people. I salute you and the U.S. military.

The President: How is Bob Oakley doing? He was praising what you are doing.

Mr. Johnston: When I volunteered for this I had no idea what was involved. I am now the coordinator for all UN humanitarian activities in Somalia.

The President: Is Americares doing anything there?

Mr. Johnston: No, not that I know of.

The President: They would, if you want them to.

Mr. Johnston: This move has reinforced the connection between the military and humanitarian relief. There are lots of good solid things going on in Somalia.

The President: Do you see any downside for a visit by the President there? There is a downside here -- a lame duck trying to do something. But do you see a downside to a visit?

Mr. Johnston: No. I am very confident that everyone would support it in Somalia. There are only upsides.

Mr. Natsios: A CDC report came out four days ago which says that the death rate in Somalia is the worst anywhere in the world in 20 years. In Baidoa, for instance, 70 percent of the under-fives have died. The situation is worse than it was in Ethiopia.

The President: There is an argument against a big group sweeping in there with a big entourage that would disrupt relief activities.

Mr. Natsios: The relief activity will be in full swing by then.

Mr. Johnston: There will be so much activity going on that it would not divert it.

I bring you greeting from Cannes Weaver. He is working to fulfill Carla's dream.

The President: That's wonderful. She was very close to us.

Mr. Johnston: We have a CARE person on that plane, who was badly injured but who survived.

The President: When are you going back?

Mr. Johnston: On Sunday.

The President: Christmas in Somalia!

Mr. Johnston: Yes. It has not met with approval from my daughter.

The President: Where do you live there.

Mr. Johnston: In the CARE compound. It is very rugged.

I was medevaced. I had malaria, amoebic dysentery and an ulcerated digestive track. But I'm taking medicine and am much better.

It is a rather unhealthy environment. There are a lot of people suffering from dengue fever.

The President: We are proud of you and what you are doing. Thanks for stopping by.

-- End of Conversation --