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THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

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MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Meeting with Mobutu Sese Seko, President of Zaire (U)

PARTICIPANTS: The President
John N. 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 C. Cohen, Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs
William C. Harrop, U.S. Ambassador to Zaire
David Passage, Director, African Affairs, NSC Staff (notetaker)

President Mobutu Sese Seko
Karl-i-Bond Nguz, Foreign Minister
Liloo Nkema, National Security Advisor
Lalimba wa Katana Mushobekwa, Zairian Ambassador to U.S.

DATE, TIME: October 4, 1989, 10:00 - 10:45 a.m. EDT
AND PLACE: The Oval Office

The President: Thank you very much for coming down to Washington on such short notice. I know this has been a hectic time for you. I gather that you speak at the UN this afternoon. Will you be returning to Zaire after you deliver your speech? (U)

President Mobutu: Thank you very much for receiving me. Yes, I speak before the General Assembly at 3:15 p.m. and then fly to Boston for a day, departing on Saturday morning. (U)

The President: We need to work with you to achieve national reconciliation in Angola. I have great respect for the role you have played in the difficult and lengthy negotiation which is now getting Cuban troops out of Angola. I don't know all the ins and outs of the difficulties with Savimbi, but I'm absolutely convinced -- for Zaire's standing in the U.S. and in the world -- that we need to get the national reconciliation process back on track. UNITA has many supporters in the United States, and we believe UNITA needs support. With the prospect of success of a 15-year policy ahead of us, we don't want to see it fail now. Can we (the U.S.) play a useful role? Is there anything we can do with the Soviets or UNITA to help make it a success? I'd appreciate your views. (C)

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President Mobutu: Thank you very much, Mr. President, for your kind words. Let me begin by saying that your description of the problems we have been going through is accurate, but I believe we must rule aside the events of the recent past and deal only with the future. And in those terms, things are looking very good. I know you appreciate that our style of diplomacy is different from yours; we are not so accustomed to dealing in public and with the press as you are. I prefer secrecy to dealing through the pages of the Washington Post. (Ø)

The President: I couldn't agree more. Sometimes I get so frustrated at trying to keep confidential information confidential! But I think we have a very good record between the two of us; I don't recall any of our conversations ever having gotten out into the papers. (Ø)

President Mobutu: I agree. We have been able to be very candid and forthright with each other without fear of leakages in the press. (Ø)

If I may turn to the negotiations themselves. As the result of the Gbadolite meeting, I was designated "mediator" along with seven (7) other chiefs of state. The good news I bring you is that we are ready to work in the wings, without noise, to bring about peace in Angola. Our next (summit) meeting is supposed to take place in Gabon. Since it's up to me to tell them when I have something for them, we will work quietly and off-stage for the time being. (Ø)

But you should know that since I began working on this, Savimbi has repeatedly insulted me and offended me. In the beginning, I chose not to respond, thinking perhaps he did not realize the pressures on the mediator -- or on any chief of state. I had no problems with Dos Santos, no statements in the press, no negative "media hype," no use of public diplomacy to defeat the purposes of the mediation. I don't believe we should wage a guerrilla war against each other over the air waves. We need to work on the three major elements of the Gbadolite accord -- and preserve the secrecy of our discussions until we have reached agreement. (Ø)

Dos Santos has asked me for help with one of his internal problems (with his hard-liners), but he stressed the need for secrecy. He has a Central Committee, which watches over him. He asked for help with them. So I have invited members of his Central Committee to visit Zaire, and we agreed to help him by saying how well things were going. (Ø)

The President: Dos Santos is sending a delegation to visit Zaire? How does this affect UNITA? (Ø)

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President Mobutu: It would be to help Dos Santos with his "hard-liners." (Ø)

The President: Sure, I'd think that would be all right as long as it isn't seen as a help to the MPLA. (Ø)

President Mobutu: The problem is that Dos Santos has real problems with his "hard-liners." I need to help him create a consensus behind his search for peace with UNITA. The (Angolan) delegation would not be coming for negotiations. It's just to help out Dos Santos. (Ø)

The President: Savimbi has a big following here. I have great respect for what he's been able to accomplish against a Soviet-backed government. But I understand your point of view (about him and his attitude) completely. What can we do to be of help? We can tell him not to slander you. We can tell him President Mobutu is a long-standing friend of the U.S., a good friend. That you have been fighting communist regimes all your life. Is he (Savimbi) hung up on the "exile" thing? (Ø)

President Mobutu: I think part of his suspicions are the result of the confusion following the Gbadolite summit. The first problem was when some of the presidents at Gbadolite talked about "exile"; the second was when they talked about a "piece of paper" -- a document -- in Harare. I asked Savimbi to send me his foreign minister so we could resolve his doubts and he did, and we agreed to forget the confusion of Harare and go back to the three essential points of Gbadolite. We would do this in secrecy -- Dos Santos, me, and -- with your support -- Savimbi. Once we agree among ourselves, we will announce it to the public. (Ø)

The President: Let me raise one very important question: if one side or party in a situation like the Angolan conflict receives supplies from a major power outside the country and the other doesn't, it is very bad; it creates an unbalanced situation. The Soviets are supplying the Angolan Government, but UNITA is currently cut off. I don't want people to begin to think that you -- who have been so constructive and so helpful throughout this long ordeal, have decided to hurt UNITA. What can Savimbi do to satisfy you so you would be willing to make it possible to turn back on the flow of supplies to UNITA? (Ø)

President Mobutu: I understand what you're asking. Let me put it this way. I realize it is very difficult for the President of such a great country as the United States to imagine what it must be like to be the President of a small country like Zaire, but let me ask you to try to imagine, for a moment, what it would be

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like to be the President of Zaire. You know what my country has done for Savimbi and for UNITA through all these years. You know that my country -- and I personally -- have supported him and helped him, even in a time when your own country, because of the Clark Amendment, could not. And then one day you see in the newspapers that you are being criticised and abused. You see yourself insulted. You ask him to come visit so you can resolve the problem and he refuses to come, saying he is too busy. And then you see that he goes instead to see the President of another country, a president who wasn't even among those at Gbadolite -- which gave Savimbi his first public legitimacy and recognition. (Ø)

The President: I can imagine it! No one wants their support and their hard work to be insulted! Would it be helpful -- after all you've done for him -- for us to suggest that he find a way to make up to you? Would it be helpful for us to try to put together a meeting between the two of you? (Ø)

It just worries me that we have this imbalance of supplies, with the Soviets actively supporting their side. Dos Santos will obviously be encouraged by this development (cessation of the flow of supplies to UNITA through Zaire). Your own mediation of "national reconciliation" will be much harder to achieve. (Ø)

What can I do, as President, with a long-standing friendship and respect for you both? Would a direct talk with you by Savimbi be helpful? You're the one who has done more than anyone else to help him. I just don't want to see the process go backward. I don't want to see you begin to lose support among the American public for your magnificent achievement when UNITA's support dries up because the pipeline has been closed. Should I tell Savimbi to meet with you? Savimbi owes us good will as he owes you good will. (Ø)

President Mobutu: I think you've understood me well. I am not interested in the past -- only the future. You can tell your friends that we're willing to forget the past -- but he must now act and behave responsibly. (Ø)

The President: (Turning to the other Americans in the room:) This is a rare opportunity -- seldom do we have such a wonderful opportunity to speak candidly and freely among each other with you. Does anyone else have anything to say? (U)

Assistant Secretary Cohen: (To President Mobutu) Mr. President, if I heard you correctly, may we assume, therefore, that everything is back to where it was before (clearly referring to the supply pipeline)? (Ø)

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President Mobutu: Almost. (U)

The President: I think we're on the same wave-length. I'll be talking to him (Savimbi) myself tomorrow morning, and I'll make sure that he understands very clearly that we want the leadership role to be yours (Mobutu's). You've stood up to leftist regimes. You know a Dos Santos regime, aided from the outside with no moderating aid to Savimbi, would be a danger. But I don't mean to be totally suspicious about Dos Santos -- I realize that the times are changing, and the world is changing. (Ø)

President Mobutu: If I may, Mr. President, let me take just a moment of the remaining time to raise a different matter with you. In my speech to the United Nations this afternoon, I intend to point out that there are only 10 years left in this century. You know our (Africa's) development problems, our debt problems, and our need for cooperation. I'd like to propose that the world declare the decade from 1990-1999, the year which heralds the end of the 20th century, to be a decade of cooperation for Africa. (Ø)

Belgium and China have agreed to take all the debt Zaire owes them and convert it into local currency and put it at the service of economic development in Zaire. I'm not talking about forgiving debt, but rather using the debt for economic development purposes. The IMF would monitor the program. It would be a way to increase North-South dialogue and solidarity. (Ø)

The President: It sounds like a very interesting proposal. We'll be glad to take a look at it. There will be some need for economic reforms -- I know Zaire is one of the countries that has spent a great deal of effort on economic reform. Without economic reforms, some countries might get to the end of the 10 year period with no progress at all. But we'll read it and with keen interest. (Ø)

Meeting ended with Mrs. Bush coming in to meet President Mobutu. (U)

-- End of Conversation --

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