

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

28 February 1969

Prime Minister's Office - Palayzo Chigi, Rome

Present: The President

Prime Minister Mariano Rumor

Ambassador Catalano, Diplomatic Adviser to P.M.

Major General Vernon Walters

The Prime Minister opened the conversation by stating how happy he was to have this opportunity to talk privately with the President.

The Prime Minister said that the President was undoubtedly aware of the fact that there had been riots in Rome last night which involved regrettable incidents. Behind these riots there was some degree of spontaneous violence but really behind them was the Communist Party and herein lay the main problem of Italian political life. The Communist Party and its allies the Socialist Unity Party, PSIVP, (which was to the left of the Communist Party) constituted roughly 1/3 of the Italian electorate and all other political facts (factions) had to bear this in mind. This is what had led the Christian Democrats to establish the current coalition with the Socialists. This was not easy as every now and then the Socialist Party which had a left faction not unfavorable to the Communist was shaken by convulsions that made the life of the coalition difficult and sometimes provoked governmental crises. There had been three such crises last year but after each of them the coalition government had been reconstituted. There was no real possible alternative to this except that of including the Communists and this simply was not acceptable. The government had to be careful not to do anything that would help the Communists on one hand or the Fascists on the other.

He hoped that the United States would bear all of the foregoing in mind and would do all it could to strengthen the democratic forces in Italy.

None should doubt Italy's loyalty to NATO. Its contribution to the Alliance was limited by the factors he had mentioned the previous evening but it unconditionally supported the Alliance.

The Prime Minister said he was very optimistic that if they succeeded in getting by the next few years that the political situation in Italy would improve. The country was economically healthy, its currency was sound, its reserves large and its trade balance favorable. He felt that if the government was firm and steadfast it could make Italy politically healthy as well.

Italy had always supported the integration of Europe and felt that everything should be done to bring this about without getting into a frontal clash with France.

The President asked whether the Prime Minister felt that we should talk with France and the Prime Minister replied that we should.

The President then asked what the effects in Italy would be if the U.S. began talks or arrived at agreements with the Soviet Union. The Prime Minister felt that the U.S. should talk to the USSR but that if it kept Italy informed by conversations such as those the President had referred to previously, consultations before and during the talks with the Soviet Union that the general effect would be good. Italy above all did not want to feel left out or less than other countries. Italy was the most populous country in Europe, its finances were healthy. It had been loyal to the Atlantic Alliance and had perhaps created fewer problems for the U.S. than many other countries despite the large Communist Party in Italy. It therefore did not like to be left out or to feel less worthy of consideration than other countries. He was particularly happy that the four powers working on a solution of the Middle East crisis were doing so within the framework of the United Nations as the Permanent Member of the Security Council, rather than as four great powers. Frankly, however, felt that the four would not find a solution for the Middle East crisis. Such a solution could only be achieved by an agreement between the U.S. and the USSR.

The President then asked about youth. The Prime Minister said that the difficulty in dealing with youth today was that they knew the things to which they were opposed -- they did not know what they wanted and this made it difficult to deal with them satisfactorily. The President said he had understood from Mr. Piccoli, the Secretary

General of the Christian Democratic Party that the Party had a special program for youth. Did the Prime Minister feel that such a program was sufficient? The Prime Minister replied that any such program was always very difficult. He believed that every 25 years in Europe there was a ferment among youth. In the past this aggressiveness had been released through national wars, now, however, that war had become practically impossible this aggressiveness was discharged by youth on the domestic scene but with almost the same violence as in war. He felt that youth was searching for new crises.

The President asked whether the Prime Minister felt that neutralist sentiment was gaining in Italy. The Prime Minister replied that there were three currents of neutrality in Italy. The Communists and their allies who were neutralist in the service of the Soviet Union. Their slogan for this 20th anniversary of NATO was "Italy out of NATO and NATO out of Italy." They would undoubtedly organize demonstrations in March and April and try and whip up sentiment against NATO. Then there was the Neutralist current arising on moral and religious grounds but this current was not really politically significant even though it infiltrates itself into many areas. The third current was that of the Neutralism of the fearful. Those who said America will not defend us in the crunch and we therefore have to be on good terms with our future masters. This was the most dangerous current of all.

The President said that we intended to consult with Italy not merely on matters affecting the two nations but also other areas, such as the Middle East when he felt Italy was vitally interested or had great experience. The Prime Minister said that Italy was most interested -- this area the Prime Minister hoped that we would move quickly in this area as he felt some of the current leaders might well be overthrown or subjected to extreme influences such as the Fedayeen. The President said that he hoped an effective solution for the complex problem could be found as he did not believe that Israel could survive forever in a sea of hatred.

The Prime Minister said that he would like in all frankness to mention a few other problems that were of concern to them such as Vietnam. The cessation of bombings had been well received in Italy; if for any reason the bombings of North Vietnam were resumed this would be very negative for democracy in Italy -- it would be almost like a bombardment of Italy. Vietnam had been the Communist's greatest propaganda success in the last 20 years.

Another problem was Greece. He understood that the U.S. could not expel Greece from NATO nor could they push Greece out of the Mediterranean but anything that the U.S. could do to hasten a return to democracy there would be helpful in avoiding problems for the Italian government.

Italy should not be excluded from discussions on the Middle East. She was, after all, one of the very few democracies around the Mediterranean and was almost an island immersed in the Mediterranean and separated from Europe by the Alps. The President said that this would not happen. We were well aware of Italy's experience in this area. He asked what countries Italy felt it could not influence. The Prime Minister replied Tunisia, Algeria in some measure, Libya less because it was a former Italian Colony although they were working closely with the Libyans in oil matters and in some measure Egypt where Ambassador Catalano had been until recently Ambassador. They had little or no influence on Iraq and Syria who were both a little crazy. Soviet influence was perhaps greatest in Syria where they changed leaders almost weekly.

The Prime Minister said he wished to make plain that he was absolutely opposed to the Spanish Foreign Minister's proposal for a neutralization of the Mediterranean. This had been supported by the French but was nonsense. It heard that the Soviet would withdraw into the Black Sea which was an appendage of the Mediterranean, leave the Adriatic and the U.S. would leave the sea to them. The President asked whether the French had really supported the idea and the Prime Minister said that they had expressed support for it but the French had very curious policies at times. He felt that France was already entering a phase of transition. He felt certain that Pompidou would be de Gaulle's successor and while there would be no sudden moves he would slowly move back towards Atlantic and European policies. De Gaulle after all expressed many deeply rooted sentiments in France of nationalism, Europe, Hegemony or Anti-Americanism.

The Prime Minister said that Italy was finding it increasingly difficult to consider that Formosa represented 700 million Chinese are hand made. Some initial contacts regarding recognition of Red China. He added ruefully "This is part of the price we must pay the Socialists."

The Prime Minister hopes the President would keep his eye on the Iberian Peninsula. He felt that the U.S. should offer clandestine, if need be, assistance, to the Christian Democratic and Socialist forces. This could be done through international organizations. The Prime Minister himself was the Chairman of the World Christian Democratic Movement.

The Prime Minister also asked the President to do what he could to assist the Christian Democrat Movement in Latin America, particularly President Frei of Chile and President Caldera of Venezuela. He felt that Christian Democracy was the only force that could keep Latin America democratic.

The President expressed the hope that meetings such as this could continue and that he would see the Prime Minister in the United States. He felt that they had "hit it off well together and were on the same wave lengths. The Prime Minister agreed and thanked the President.