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MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Summary of the President's Meeting with Italian Prime Minister Emilio Colombo

PARTICIPANTS: President Ronald Reagan
 Vice President George Bush
 Secretary of State Alexander Haig
 Richard V. Allen, Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs
 The Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs, George Vest
 NSC Staff Member, James M. Rentschler
 State Department Interpreter, Neil Seidenman

Foreign Minister Emilio Colombo
 Italian Ambassador to the U.S. Paolo PANSA Cedronio
 Ms. Isabella RANDONE, Interpreter

DATE, TIME February 12, 1981
 AND PLACE: 3:30-3:50PM, Oval Office

Responding to the President's word of welcome, Foreign Minister Colombo said he was delighted to have this opportunity to meet with the President. He brought with him, he said, an expression of very warm wishes to the President from President Pertini, Prime Minister Forlani, and indeed the entire Italian people. Italy considered it essential to touch base with the new Administration, and for that reason the Foreign Minister was especially grateful for today's meeting. (U)

The President replied that he appreciated the Foreign Minister's greetings. The United States enjoys great friendship with Italy which makes it entirely appropriate for the President to be meeting with such a distinguished representative of his country. The President noted that Italian support for the deployment of theater nuclear forces in Europe had been very strong, and this was a contribution to our common security which made us very happy. The President went on to say that he had had a nice phone conversation with Prime Minister Forlani shortly after assuming office; in that conversation he told the Prime Minister that he was anticipating the Foreign Minister's visit. (U)

Foreign Minister Colombo emphasized that the President's phone call had been greatly appreciated in Italy. It was a sign that the new Administration wanted to have even closer contact with a country which has been a faithful friend and ally dating back to the end of the Second World War. Italians recognize and appreciate the extent to which the United States has enabled their country to prosper since that time. (U)

The President responded that the feelings were mutual. He had looked forward to the Foreign Minister's visit to underscore the close ties which exist between our two countries. The President said he knew that the Foreign Minister had had a

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full substantive discussion with the Vice President and the Secretary of State and that therefore there was probably no need to review many of the issues which interest our governments. The President indicated that there was one key issue it might be worth spending some time on during his exchange with the Foreign Minister, and that was the question of theater nuclear forces. (C)

The Foreign Minister acknowledged that the TNF issue had been discussed at length earlier in the day with the Secretary of State. He emphasized that so far as Italy was concerned, the issue presented no problems. Italy had accepted the decision, and continued to support it. The government had had some difficulty, but it was working on implementing the decision. There would be perhaps additional problems in the future, but the government is not afraid. It is accustomed to living in the "difficult democracy" which is Italy's. The Foreign Minister expressed the view that it was important to maintain the link between the deployment part of the TNF decision and negotiations aimed at reducing them. When Italy decided to support TNF, it was aware that its actions did not affect Italy alone; indeed, it was undertaken to assist other allies, notably the Federal Republic of Germany. The Foreign Minister speculated that without Italian help on the issue, the Federal Republic might have found it very difficult to proceed with TNF. It was therefore important to be consistent in the application of the December 12, 1979 decision which NATO took; the link should be continued. (C)

The President thanked the Foreign Minister for his views and told him chucklingly that he was especially pleased to hear that there were no problems; the President said he wished that everyone who came in to see him were like that but that unfortunately the Foreign Minister was very unusual in that respect. The President went on to say that he had a very personal link with the Foreign Minister's country. He said that his sport is riding and that he is especially indebted to Captain Caprilli who created the modern system of riding with his innovation of the forward saddle. The President said that he himself has a Periani saddle. (U)

Ambassador Pansa interjected that he was particularly pleased to hear the President's comment and that it carried special meaning for a man like himself who was a former cavalry officer. (U)

The Foreign Minister told the President that in Italy riding is widespread, and that knowing he practices that sport only enhances the high degree of confidence in him which the Italian leadership already had. The Foreign Minister went on to say that many other sports are popular in Italy, too, but perhaps the most popular is tight-rope walking. Many people have watched Italy try to maintain a precarious balance, steering its way through many different obstacles; these spectators often watched in amazement and wondered where Italy was going. The result, however, has been very positive so far, since Italy has become a democratic society, a committed Atlanticist, and a faithful European partner. It is a nation that is secure, and this is perhaps the single most important contribution that Italy can make to the world community. The Foreign Minister added that his country is now engaged in fighting the serious threat of terrorism. The problem is difficult because terrorists have an internal organization, they have their own doctrine, and they have international links indicating a well-coordinated destabilization scheme. Nevertheless, Italy has just come through a debate on terrorism and he is personally pleased to be part of a government which has received a very large vote

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of confidence from the Italian people on this issue. Of course there are deaths and tragedy, but the government has achieved a measure of success. The Italian people stand united in the fight against terrorism. (U)

The President responded that we are well aware of the strides Italy has made in that area. He stressed that we are all victims of terrorism: terrorism exists for one reason, and that is because there is a belief in certain parts of the world that those who have designs on other parts of the world can further those designs by intimidating the citizens of democratic societies and making them believe that there is no defense against terrorism. The President said that we in years past had very unwisely taken away from some of our agencies - for example the CIA and the FBI - the very tools they need to combat terrorism. The President stressed that we are determined to restore those tools and to wage an effective fight against terrorism. (U)

With another exchange of amenities the meeting concluded. (U)

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