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THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

February 25, 1976

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

FROM:

MIKE DUVAL 

SUBJECT:

MEETING WITH THE PRESIDENT
ON FEBRUARY 24, 1976

At approximately 7:30 p.m. I went to the second floor of the Residence with Dave Kennerly, Don Schneider and Jerry McGee. We had been upstairs with Susan Ford and her date and went downstairs with them as they were on their way out.

The President asked us to have a drink with him, and the four of us accepted.

The President seemed to be somewhat uptight, probably because of the New Hampshire primary. We asked him about it and he told us the most recent information he had gotten from Dick Cheney. My impression throughout the time we were with the President was that he was indeed concerned about the primary, although he rarely referred to it.

The conversation ranged over many subjects, but tended to center on fairly serious matters, including the strength of the Peoples' Republic of China vis-a-vis the Soviet Union. The President stated that the great threat facing the United States had nothing to do with current problems, but rather what could happen five or ten years in the future if China with 800 million people joined with the Soviet Union with over 200 million, forming a potential adversary to the United States of over a billion people. We discussed the importance of so many specific decisions facing the President, such as selling wheat to Russia. The President pointed out that at stake was the effect of that decision on the leadership of Russia. He indicated that the Brezhnev regime could fall if Russia did not get the wheat, and that could bring on a USSR leadership which might not be agreeable to working with the United States. The President indicated



that it was possible for the Soviets to replace Brezhnev with people who could seek an alliance with China.

During the conversation, Don mentioned the current book, Bodyguard of Lies by Anthony Brown and, specifically, the decision Churchill had to make about letting Coventry be bombed in order to avoid tipping the Germans that the English had broken their codes. I told the President about my conversation with Larry Stern of the Washington Post on this subject. I made the point that the Coventry decision which Churchill had to make was a good example of the fact that certain decisions had to be made by individuals and could not be made by committees or legislative bodies. I related this story in the context of the current debate concerning covert actions, making the point that these were decisions the President has to make, and not the Congress.

All in all, the conversation with the President lasted about an hour, during which time we had one drink. It tended to be a fairly serious and heavy conversation, with the focus on the importance and complexity of the decisions which he faced.

The President on several occasions referred to the parallel between post World War II appeasement by the West in face of German aggression and the current mood of Congress vis-a-vis Angola. He had specific reference to Ethiopia. The President cautioned that they were not, of course, exact parallels but that the mood of Congress in terms of retrenchment and failure to stop aggression was similar to the pattern that developed prior to World War II.

I mentioned at this point that there was a parallel between that phenomena and the central problem facing us on domestic policy, which is, that Congress is unwilling to accept a near-term cost for a long-term benefit.

The President agreed with this assessment.

At one point, Jerry made reference to the swinging pendulum analogy, as I recall, in the context of Congress' reaction to covert operations. The President picked up very quickly on this swinging pendulum concept and indicated that we often weren't sure where the pendulum was at any given point in time.

