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WHITE HOUSE CABLE

SUBJECT: Presidential Telephone Calls to Presidents Sanguinetti, Alfonsin, and Garcia on May 13

The following should be distributed to Ambassadors only in Montevideo, Buenos Aires, Lima, and Asuncion, and the head of the U.S. delegation to the Rodriguez inauguration, Mrs. Dorothy Bush.

The President telephoned Presidents Sanguinetti, Alfonsin, and Garcia on May 13 between 6 p.m. and 7:45 p.m. EDT to discuss the situation in Panama. All three calls were made from Air Force One, the first two while on the ground at Columbus Air Force Base, Mississippi and the Garcia call shortly after takeoff from that location.

The President solicited the views of each leader and asked each if there was anything that we could or should do. He emphasized that he valued consultations and was trying to avoid acting alone in this case. In all three conversations, the President referred to a statement he gave to a press conference on Air Force One while enroute to Mississippi for a speech (SEPTEL). All three recipients of the calls welcomed the consultation in warm terms and indicated a willingness to follow up by maintaining contact with the President. The only other subject discussed in the conversations was the President's noting that the pretty woman in the U.S. delegation to the Rodriguez inauguration was his daughter. She was sent to indicate his personal interest in Paraguayan democracy.

In the conversation with Sanguinetti (21 minutes), the President indicated that the OAS might take action now as it did in 1979 when it paved the way for the downfall of Somoza. The President stated that we would like to see recognition of Endara as victor in the election. Sanguinetti agreed on the necessity of maintaining pressure on Noriega. Although he was favorable to recognizing Endara, he did not have a definitive position on an OAS resolution and did not know if a consensus could be reached. From a practical standpoint, he wondered if recognition would solve anything, since we would have a new situation like that of Delvalle. Sanguinetti briefly commented that we would need a mechanism of negotiation at some point, although not before the OAS session.

The President summarized his press statement: if Noriega leaves Panama, we would instantly normalize relations and lift the sanctions. We also said that he had stated that we had no quarrel with the Panama Defense Force as an institution; it could have a useful role in the future. Sanguinetti regarded this as a good and useful statement. He suggested that the U.S. approach Mexico since it was an obstacle to consensus. The President said he did not know the degree to which Mexico would be receptive given its historical position on this issue.

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In the conversation with President Alfonsin (13 minutes), Alfonsin said that he agreed with the President's thoughts on Panama. He hoped to be able to talk to State Department representatives attending the Rodriguez inauguration. The President said he would contact them with the results of his conversation.

Alfonsin called the President's statement to the press "a very intelligent statement." He also noted, "It opens the path to negotiations which can be fruitful." He made no specific comment on endorsing Endara or on the content of an OAS resolution.

The President's call to President Garcia was the longest (26 minutes). Garcia said he was following the President's comments very carefully. He regarded Endara as the legitimate winner of the election. He saw the necessity for the United States and the Group of Eight to have more pressures on Panama in the OAS, but he did not volunteer any specifics on an OAS resolution.

Garcia apparently was under the impression that U.S. military measures in Panama were imminent. He suggested that the President let the situation mature a bit, since his information was that there were splits in the Panama Defense Forces. He urged the President to wait a few days. The President replied that he had no early expectation of military action unless U.S. citizens were jeopardized. Then, he would have a responsibility to protect them. He referred to watching Noriega's thugs on television, saying that it demonstrated the need for his decision to send U.S. reinforcements.

Garcia also warned about a Noriega provocation to force the governments of the hemisphere to line up with him. Nevertheless, he trusted in the good judgment of the President to avoid overreaction. He commented that the events in Panama had an irreversible course, for they awakened the thirst for democracy; the President agreed.

In his reference to the press statement, the President also stated in the Garcia conversation that it would be a good thing if Noriega went to a country with which the United States did not have an extradition treaty. Garcia thought the President's remarks to be well thought out and precise. Although he agreed it was correct to separate out U.S. opposition to Noriega from its position toward the Defense Forces, he advised that it would be better to say nothing more about what will happen to Noriega himself. His second suggestion was that the United States ensure that its policy be put in a broader context of support for democracy everywhere in the hemisphere, not just support for democracy in a country where the United States has a historical and specific interest.