

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: The President's Telephone Conversation with
President Salinas of Mexico (U)

PARTICIPANTS: The President
Shelly Dionne, NSC, Notetaker
Ralph Sigler, White House Situation
Support Staff, Notetaker

President Salinas

DATE, TIME May 15, 1989, 10:58 a.m. - 11:09 a.m.
AND PLACE: Oval Office

The President initiated this call after he was unable to come to the phone when President Salinas called earlier in the morning. (Ø)

The President began by saying that it was nice to hear from President Salinas. (Ø)

President Salinas replied that the pleasure was his. (Ø)

The President said, " How are you? I have been thinking about you a lot lately and hope all is coming along well." The President asked if Salinas was calling about Panama. (Ø)

President Salinas said yes, that he had been following closely and with great attention the problem in Panama. He said that he was looking forward to the meeting of the OAS in Washington on Wednesday. Mexico's Minister of Foreign Relations would attend that meeting. He said that Mexico had presented today a public declaration in relation to the problems in Panama in which it stated that even though the OAS is a body which is aware of the problems, it cannot act directly, as its principles so state. At the same time, Mexico says clearly in its declaration that Noriega is an obstacle to the development of democracy in Panama. His lack of prestige and lousy reputation and areas of moral decay are hindrances to democracy in Panama. (Ø)

The President asked if that statement was in the declaration. (Ø)

President Salinas said that it was. (Ø)

The President stated that it would be very helpful. He said he had been planning on calling Salinas today to discuss this. The President asked when the declaration was to come out. (Ø)

President Salinas replied that it is in today's papers and that it had been sent to the State Department yesterday. (Ø)

The President said that the statement will come over here to the White House. He asked if it says that Noriega is a clear obstacle to the will of the people. (Ø)

President Salinas said, "Yes, by name." (Ø)

The President stated that this is great progress. The President said also that after meeting with Salinas he had been determined to try to understand and to be helpful to the problems that Mexico has. He said that he knew Mexico stands as a proud, sovereign nation and has its own problems with what the U.S. wants. The President was pleased that the statement would be published. He stated that Mexico is an important country in this subject and he knew Salinas had to chart his course on this. (Ø)

The President said he was going to urge that we get a strong public statement out of the OAS. He had been encouraging others in Latin America to get the strongest possible consensus against Noriega. The President stated he believed this is a historic chance to help people and democracy in Panama. He made it clear that the United States has no grudge against the Panamanian people or the Panama Defense Force, saying that they have a useful role to play. He declared that the U.S. wants a strong post-Noriega regime and that the only reason for sending additional forces to Panama was because we saw all the bloody beatings on television and five American servicemen were detained, although only for a short period. I have a solemn obligation to protect the 40,000 Americans down there, he said. Nevertheless, the President said he didn't want people to think we were engaging in a macho, gun-boat sort of diplomacy. He concluded by saying that he hoped Salinas' actions, and those of others in the hemisphere, plus the stark reality of the election, will result in Noriega leaving. (Ø)

President Salinas said that Mexico stated in its declaration that the OAS cannot intervene itself in the work of the electoral tribunal. He said that we must leave to the Panamanians the chance to decide their future. Salinas emphasized that with Noriega there it is almost impossible. (Ø)

The President asked what does Salinas think could come out of the OAS. (Ø)

President Salinas replied that he thought the OAS should stay to a resolution citing its key articles and not intervene with the

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local problems of Panama. At the same time, Latin America must walk toward democracy and the nations of Latin America must walk together to create an international climate for democracy in Panama. (Ø)

The President said that if the OAS has an impotent resolution that does not comment on election fraud or the worldwide offense over the stealing of the Panamanian election and the brutality to the candidates elected, it will send a very bad signal. The Church sent a signal of its outrage. The EC has done the same. The President said he would urge that the OAS be as strong as possible. (Ø)

President Salinas said the Mexican statement is a very strong declaration against Noriega. (Ø)

The President asked if President Salinas meant at the OAS. (Ø)

President Salinas said yes, that Mexico will firmly support a resolution. (Ø)

The President said, "Well, let me look at your declaration." He told Salinas that he appreciated the call saying that he knew that the issue is not an easy one for anybody. "Let me assure you," he said, "that as a friend and as a leader, we do not want to be the big stick up in the North." The President said he knew enough about history, and particularly about Mexico's history, that the United States did not want to look like some macho power dictating to Panama. (Ø)

President Salinas said he appreciated the President's sensitivity and prudence on this. (Ø)

The President said that President Salinas should understand why U.S. troops were sent down there. He said that he had been in contact with Latin leaders to be sure that they understood and added that he hoped Panamanians themselves (or the Panama Defense Force) would do something about this. He wanted to be up front and say we see a useful role for the Defense Force. The other militaries in the hemisphere are watching what we do. (Ø)

President Salinas said that he had recalled his Ambassador to Panama. He was already in Mexico City. (Ø)

The President said he commended President Salinas for that, adding it is a good step. (Ø)

President Salinas said that some people in Mexico are surprised that we condemned Noriega explicitly. It is not in Mexico's tradition, but he was convinced that Noriega is a man of low reputation. He did not want anyone to think Mexico is siding with Noriega. (Ø)

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The President said that he would love to talk to Salinas about the behind-the-scene things our team went through up here on Panama. It is not easy and we all respect that. He expressed confidence that Mexico's declaration will be a good one. The President said, "Given your historic study of how the OAS ought to operate, the stronger the OAS is, the more there will be change in Panama." The President asked Salinas if he thought there was any chance Noriega could leave. (Ø)

President Salinas replied that if there is enough diplomatic pressure from the Latin American countries, he believed Noriega would pull himself out of there. (Ø)

The President said that would be good. He added that we would do our level best to have sound relations with the new regime. If the will of the Panamanian people is respected, he believed there would be a great sigh of relief in the hemisphere. (Ø)

President Salinas said that was why he was sending the Minister of Foreign Relations to this meeting because, "he will be good at the proceedings." (Ø)

The President said he had a lot of respect for the Foreign Minister and knew Secretary Baker looked forward to working with him. The President thanked Salinas for the call and said that he was looking forward to reading Mexico's declaration. He said that he looked forward to working with Mexico's Foreign Minister here at the OAS meeting. He concluded by saying that he enjoyed talking to Salinas. (Ø)

President Salinas ended the conversation by also saying that he enjoyed the conversation. (U)