

THE WHITE HOUSE  
WASHINGTON

## MEMORANDUM OF TELEPHONE CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Telephone Conversation with Oscar Arias, President of Costa Rica

PARTICIPANTS: The President  
Oscar Arias, President of Costa Rica  
Notetaker: David Pacelli  
Stenographer: Barbara Desina

DATE, TIME July 27, 1989, 3:17 p.m. - 3:28 p.m.  
AND PLACE: Oval Office - Arias Residence

The President telephoned President Arias concerning the Central American summit which will take place on August 5-7 in Honduras. (P)

The President began by asking President Arias how he was. (U)

President Arias replied, "Fine, fine. How are you?" (U)

The President said he was sorry to be calling again so soon, but he wanted another opportunity to consult on the Central American summit. The President said he felt that the summit presented a critical opportunity to let the Sandinistas know that their lack of progress in creating conditions for truly free elections is disappointing. They have got to do more. The President said he hoped that everybody [the democracies] will be together on this. Although he recognized that the meeting is the business of the Central Americans, the President said he hoped that the democracies will demand action of [Nicaraguan President] Ortega when the meeting is held. The specific thing I am concerned about, the President continued, was the Sandinista objective of gaining approval for a plan to demobilize the Nicaraguan Resistance before the election in February. "I just feel that would be very, very bad," the President said. He added that he did not know what President Arias's view was, but his opinion was that if the Sandinistas succeeded in demobilizing the Contras now, they would not go forward at all with democratization. (P)

President Arias said that his impression was that they both must be parallel. (P)

The President said, "Yes." (U)

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President Arias said that he did not think the Contras wanted to go back to Nicaragua. It is a very difficult process for them to go back. There is nothing to do in Nicaragua and it is "so chaotic." They don't want to go back unless the Sandinistas go ahead with the democratization process and offer them economic opportunities. President Arias commented that [Assistant Secretary of State] Aronson came to visit recently and arranged a meeting with the Contras. He had just met with them. (S)

President Arias continued that he agreed with the President about the need for pressure on the Sandinistas. He said that he had asked his Latin American and West European friends to put the pressure on the Sandinistas for the next election to be free.

(S)

President Arias continued that he had just seen some polling data on Nicaragua. The Sandinistas do very badly in those polls. Arias said he had told Ortega that if polls are allowed in Nicaragua, they would show that the Sandinistas have no chance to win at all. This is what I want the world to know, he said, just like in Panama. The majority of the Nicaraguan electorate are not registered for the election and "the conditions for a free election are not the best." But he asserted that the vast majority of Nicaraguans are against the Sandinistas. This is why the Sandinistas are reluctant to go ahead with changes to the electoral code. They won't be able to hide the evidence that the vast majority of the people don't want to stay five more years under a Sandinista government. (S)

The President emphasized that demobilization should not happen before the election process. He said that we would try to keep pressure on. He had told President Azcona that, and that we would try to help Honduras and try to keep the Contras alive. This would bring pressure and it would be useful. I haven't seen the polls, he said, but if everybody is pushing, then maybe democracy will have a chance. Maybe the Sandinistas will be voted out, if the people have a chance to speak up in a fair vote. But if the Contras are demobilized, if the Contras are disbanded, then the Sandinistas will be free to do whatever they want. (S)

President Arias asked what President Azcona had said. (S)

The President replied that Azcona said that he agreed with me. He did not believe the Contras should be dismantled before the elections. The President said that Azcona's government had been under great pressure, but nevertheless the President did not sense any difference in views. The President conceded that Azcona was talking in Spanish, and it had to be translated. But the President said he wanted to be sure what he told Arias was correct and he had repeated his views to Azcona two or three times. The President asked Arias if he believed that Azcona felt differently. (S)

President Arias remarked that he knew that Honduras was holding elections soon. Arias said he knew there was a lot of pressure on Azcona's government for the Contras to go back to Nicaragua.

(Ø)

The President said, true, but Azcona made the point that we could rest assured that Honduras will not follow any such line until the [Nicaraguan] election took place. The President said he told Azcona that it is very important that the Resistance not be thrown to the wolves before conditions are ripe for their return, and he agreed with that. The President said he was encouraged by that. Azcona also talked a little about international verification of the elections. The President concluded that he and Azcona "are on the same wave length." It would be very bad to let the pressure off by demobilizing these people while conditions for demobilization have not been met. The President said this is a matter that you [the Central American Presidents] will decide. But to send a signal to the Contras that they will be forced back into Nicaragua now, without democracy, would be saying to the Sandinistas that they can "clutch victory out of the jaws of defeat." (Ø)

President Arias said that demobilization must be voluntary. "If they don't want to go back, there is nothing we can do." He said that the Contras will not go back unless they are offered something. (Ø)

The President said yes, the fact that the Contras are there [in Honduras] and together keeps the pressure on the Sandinistas to offer the Contras what they want. These are the same type of things that Costa Rica and the United States want to see happen. The President said that he had said publicly that if there is a free and fair election, we will have to live with that, even if we do not like the results. (Ø)

President Arias said again that if the election is free and fair, the Sandinistas would lose; "that is for sure." He said he trusted the results of the polls. (Ø)

The President said, "Yes, yes." (Ø)

President Arias continued, saying that this is why there is some reluctance by the Sandinistas to make changes. (Ø)

The President said that if you keep the pressure on for changes, the Sandinistas may not be able to stand it. The President observed that he had found that out on his recent trip. There is change in Europe and people are waking up to reality. Some who were for the Sandinistas are now seeing something else. The President reaffirmed his commitment to keep the pressure on the Sandinistas. He mentioned once again the importance of not demobilizing the Contras before the election, telling President Arias, "We would appreciate anything you can do." (Ø)

President Arias responded, "Ok, ok." (Ø)

The President asked Arias to let him know if he had further thoughts about this, and to stay in touch. (Ø)

President Arias replied, "Ok." (Ø)

The President continued, jokingly, "And when you got that all figured out, then tell me what to do about getting rid of Noriega." (Ø)

President Arias [not understanding] said, "I'm sorry." (Ø)

The President repeated himself, observing that Panama was a difficult issue. (Ø)

President Arias said, yes, it was a very difficult problem. (Ø)

The President concluded by saying that it was nice talking to President Arias and that he sent his best wishes. (U)

President Arias thanked the President, said goodbye, and the conversation ended. (U)