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THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

MEMORANDUM OF TELEPHONE CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Telephone Conversation with Virgilio Barco Vargas, President of Colombia

PARTICIPANTS: The President
Virgilio Barco Vargas
Notetaker: William T. Pryce

DATE, TIME August 21, 1989, 8:04 - 8:20 p.m.
AND PLACE: Kennebunkport, Maine

The President: Mr. President, I am calling to express my condolences on behalf of everybody in the U.S. on the loss of Presidential candidate Galan. It is a terrible thing and we are thinking of you and your courage. I want to work with you to ensure that these Colombians and those before have not died in vain. I want to tell you that we stand ready to help in any responsible way you feel appropriate. It is strictly your call as President of a friendly country. We are ready to respond as quickly as possible to support your police and military in the execution of your new decree laws. I want you to know you have my strong support and admiration for the courageous and sweeping decrees you have adopted. Frankly, from our standpoint, not only is reinstatement of extradition an important move, but provision for the seizure of traffickers' property is critical. And again, if you request it, and only if you request it, we will try to provide assistance to protect judges and other officials who are threatened. (d)

President Barco: I appreciate very much your call and your interest for helping our country. I appreciate very much your expressions of solidarity with us, and by your government also. I am grateful for the offering of help that you have given. In that respect, it occurs to me that I could order the Minister of Justice, the Chief of the Narcotics Police, and some representatives of the security organizations of Colombia, like the Armed Forces and the investigative organization, DEAS, that they could meet, if you believe it convenient, convene as soon as possible with U.S. experts/government representatives. (d)

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This, of course, as you understand -- it is very difficult for us to accept military help if this requires the sending of troops. We are able to accept your help. We are grateful for all equipment such as helicopters and other electronic aids, etc., and of course, any of those armaments or articles of help will be only for use by our Armed Forces not for anyone else. This is a long time Colombian policy - which is very difficult to change. But, as you stated, there is much help which you can lend to us in many areas. (Ø)

The President: In terms of what you suggest, if it would be useful, I would be prepared immediately to send a team to Bogota to talk to you and law groups and I can get that team underway, people who have my confidence - (Ø)

President Barco: Or I could send the Minister of Justice, the head of the Narcotics Police, our people could come to Washington. (Ø)

The President: I offer this support in a way that is most beneficial to you I realize that you do not want, and must not have, a big overwhelming U.S. presence. (Ø)

President Barco: I don't want a problem -- if I send experts they can come without press and can make a study of what things can be done. We have this problem in the government with elections beginning and this, as you suggested, this could be used by people that prefer to make political points instead of finding a solution. (Ø)

The President: I have great confidence in Ambassador McNamara. You can work closely with him. (U)

We will instruct McNamara to be receptive to any ideas you may have, and ask State and the National Security Advisor to prepare to have a Colombian team come to the U.S. (Ø)

President Barco: There must be a low level of presence. (Ø)

The President: We will work it so your experts can come here and receive a warm welcome at a high level. You tell McNamara what you want. (Ø)

President Barco: I read this afternoon in the Daily Telegraph of what your government has said and I am very grateful for your expression and for what Thornburgh has said. I read the International Herald Tribune (Fred Harris) said that the U.S. might send troops. This would create a very difficult situation -- we are very happy to receive help. (Ø)

The President: U.S. troops send a very difficult signal. We want to do what you want. (Ø)

President Barco: We are very appreciative of the help and we will see how much and what type. (Ø)

The President: The problem we have is that U.S. press keeps asking high level U.S. officials "What about troops -- what about troops?", all the time. We say that if they are requested, that is something we would consider. We don't want you to feel we are pressing them on you. (Ø)

President Barco: The press is very similar everywhere in the world. We will take care of that. I appreciate very much your interest about our problem. You can be sure that we are very grateful for your suggestions and for your help that we have received from you in the UN and the OAS. Many countries have sent messages of support, including the Pope. We think that the world is beginning to understand that we have a very difficult problem created several years ago when the previous government congealed (froze) the budget of the Army and took back their efficiency and morale. I can assure you people are now ready and doing a good job. There are many things we might need-technical devices and armament that you have. (Ø)

The President: We want to cooperate. Thornburgh tells me that we will be coordinating our indictments in connection with the extradition question -- we will take those we can get extradited. You tell our Ambassador there who you would like to send and when. It would be useful to have high ranking experts talk to your experts. We will call McNamara and tell him to coordinate this matter. (Ø)

President Barco: I will begin tonight on this matter. (Ø)

The President: My respect to you. What a courageous President you have been for your people. (Ø)

President Barco: I appreciate your interest and your words and the interest you have shown and your prayers about the future of Colombia; for your understanding and words of hope. We will try to meet and find what things are urgent and necessary. (Ø)

The President: If you want to talk to me in confidence, there are channels to do this, Ambassador McNamara is probably the best. Good luck. (Ø)

President Barco: My Foreign Minister, a retired Colonel, is leaving for Washington tomorrow for the OAS meeting. I will also tell him to join the group to study what to do. (Ø)

The President: Thank you very much for all you are doing. (Ø)

President Barco: My regards to Mrs. Bush. Thank you on behalf of all Colombians for the interest you have given and for your personal interest. (U)