

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Meeting with Nicaraguan Presidential Candidate Violeta Chamorro (Ø)

PARTICIPANTS: The President
John H. Sununu, Chief of Staff
Brent Scowcroft, Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs
Robert M. Gates, Assistant to the President and Deputy for National Security Affairs
Bernard Aronson, Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs
William T. Pryce, Director, Latin American Affairs, NSC Staff
Joseph Sullivan, Director, Office of Central American Affairs, DOS
John P. Leonard, Charge d'Affaires, American Embassy, Nicaragua
Stephanie Van Reigersberg, Interpreter

Nicaraguan Presidential Candidate
Violeta Chamorro
Antonio Lacayo, UNO Campaign Manager
Ernesto Palacios, UNO Washington Representative

DATE, TIME AND PLACE: November 8, 1989, 3:00-3:30 p.m. EST
The Oval Office

The President and Nicaraguan Presidential Candidate Violeta Chamorro met in the Oval Office to discuss her electoral campaign. (Ø)

Mrs. Chamorro: This visit to you is to thank you for your solidarity and concern for our country. I am sure that on February 25 Nicaragua will be a republic, as my husband used to say, because I will win the elections. The Nicaraguans want change. They are tired, not of the Boy Scouts, but of the boys. From February 25 on I shall be asking for your help and assistance in the reconstruction of Nicaragua. I shall be leaving for Europe to visit friends in the democracies and tell them about our situation in Nicaragua. (Ø)

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The President: I hope that you are seeing Socialist leaders in Europe. They should be supportive. Some have not been. In talking to them, I have noticed some changes. Many European socialists are strongly supportive of democracy, but have supported Ortega in the past. (Ø)

Mrs. Chamorro: I will be seeing Felipe Gonzalez and Italian Socialist leader Craxi, as well as Margaret Thatcher. (Ø)

The President: I also recommend that you see German SPD leader Vogel. Who else are you seeing? (Ø)

Mrs. Chamorro: Felipe Gonzalez and Mitterand. (Ø)

The President: They should be most sympathetic. Are you seeing British Labor leader Kinnock and German SPD leader Vogel and Italian leaders Craxi and Andreotti? (Ø)

Mr. Lacayo: Despite the short time, we are seeing all of those. (Ø)

Mrs. Chamorro: We will be dropping our grain of sand everywhere. (Ø)

The President: The Scandinavians are nice people, but have been coopted by Ortega, although this is lessening. (Ø)

With respect to Ortega's disgraceful conduct in San Jose, I hope my comments in San Jose were not offensive to anyone but Ortega. I used the expression "little man," not with respect to his physical stature, but to his small-mindedness in raising his points in a celebration of democracy. My comments on his uniform were also not meant in disrespect of the military. (Ø)

Mrs. Chamorro: Don't worry. We enjoyed it. (Ø)

The President: I was troubled that he disrupted the summit. I didn't want him invited, but Oscar Arias, with his Nobel Prize, wanted to invite him based on the fact that he had held elections. (Ø)

Mrs. Chamorro: Don't worry. The next day, Ortega jumped on a plane and raced home. (Ø)

The President: The fact that he did what he did makes what you are doing clearer. (Ø)

Mrs. Chamorro: He was very upset with the support we got from the other Presidents. (Ø)

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The President: Did you talk with him? Is he friendly? (Ø)

Mrs. Chamorro: I did not speak to him in San Jose. In Caracas, we spoke and he proposed that I return to Nicaragua in his plane. I said no, that I have had better propositions. I could not let the world think I would accept an offer like that. (Ø)

The President: I would like to ask you a question. We obviously want you to win, but we don't want to smother you with a U.S. embrace. We want to give you whatever support you think would help. I don't know whether it would help for us to visit or not. We could have government or sports figures visit, but this could be used against you. (Ø)

Mrs. Chamorro: Whatever comes from you or the U.S. is positive. (Ø)

Governor Sununu: Printed material is often useful in campaigns. (Ø)

Mr. Lacayo: In a recent poll of 1,300 respondents, 56 percent supported U.S. assistance to the opposition and 28 percent opposed. The latter were the solid Sandinista supporters. Ortega should not be allowed to escape from the election process. The purpose of the trip to the U.S., Europe, with the Congress, and when we return, with Gorbachev, is to prevent Ortega from moving away from the election process. We need to press so that he cannot escape. We hope that you will coordinate this policy with Congressional and European leaders and ask for help with Gorbachev. (Ø)

President Bush: We will do that. Is it better to have someone from the U.S. in the campaign or not? Someone with a following in entertainment or in sports who would be respected could come or perhaps it would be better to have no one. (Ø)

Mr. Lacayo: We decided that we could not compete with them in singers, given the resources they have. We decided not to have outside campaigners. But, the more American visitors observing, the better. (Ø)

Governor Sununu: Who is appearing for Ortega? (Ø)

Mr. Lacayo: Young singers from Puerto Rico and Mexico. (Ø)

The President: If it is useful, we could help. Get us the names. Perhaps, Jose Canseco. I took Nolan Ryan and Gary Carter with me to the Honduran presidential inauguration and they were a great attraction in their baseball uniforms. You let us know. Also, with respect to entertainers, think about it and let me know. (Ø)

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Mrs. Chamorro: All your ideas are wonderful. (Ø)

The President: I am inclined to send my son, who speaks Spanish and is very interested and supportive of you, but maybe that is too much. (Ø)

Governor Sununu: How much time do you get on television? (Ø)

Mrs. Chamorro: About one hour a month. (Ø)

Mr. Lacayo: Independent pollsters are very important. The Sandinistas say that polls published in "La Prensa" to date are UNO pollsters. (Ø)

The President: Do you have confidence in the Costa Rican pollsters? (Ø)

Mr. Lacayo: Yes, but independent pollsters would also be very important. (Ø)

Governor Sununu: A poll should be taken every two weeks. How much does it cost? (Ø)

Mr. Lacayo: Twelve thousand dollars with a sample of 1,300 people. (Ø)

Mr. Gates: In the Philippine election, we supported a steady string of polls, polls every three weeks and they helped create the perception that if Marcos won, this would be fraudulent. (Ø)

Mr. Lacayo: Twelve percent of the citizens, the exiles, can't vote. (Ø)

Governor Sununu: If it is not too difficult it would be a good thing to ask someone to count the number of votes you would have, even though the votes don't count. (Ø)

The President: Sounds like you have a cold. If you need doctors, we have them here at the White House. Take care of yourself. (Ø)

Mrs. Chamorro: I will be all right. (Ø)

The President: It will be good if you talk to the press and answer two or three questions when you leave. (Ø)

(Mrs. Bush came in to greet Mrs. Chamorro at the end of the meeting.)

-- End of Meeting --

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