

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

MEMORANDUM OF TELEPHONE CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Telephone Conversation with President Menem of Argentina (U)

P@U@TICIPANTS: The President
Carlos Menem
Interpreter: Stephanie van Reigersberg
Notetaker: David Pacelli

DATE, TIME AND PLACE: December 20, 1989, 3:41 - 3:54 am, EST
The Oval Office

The President: Mr. President. (U)

President Menem: Good morning, Mr. President. (U)

The President: I'm sorry to be calling you at this God awful hour. (U)

President Menem: On the contrary, it is a great pleasure to hear your voice. (U)

The President: I just wanted to have a chance to tell you about the events in Panama, if you have a minute. (U)

President Menem: Please, I haven't heard anything about it yet. (U)

The President: First of all, the democratic nations, including you, have tried to solve the Panamanian crisis created by Noriega through multilateral diplomatic means. (U)

In fact, events became more dangerous recently. Last Friday, Noriega declared a state of war with the United States. The next day, the PDF killed a Marine officer, wounded another, beat up another serviceman, and sexually harassed his wife. It was our judgment that more innocent lives would have been lost and that Noriega was becoming increasingly irrational and unstable. we decided we had to -- with regret -- but now we had to take action. (U)

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So tonight we directed U.S. forces to deploy to Panama. The purpose is to defend American lives, to help the Panamanians restore the democratic government they elected a few months ago, and to bring Noriega to justice. (S)

At 12 o'clock, Mr. Endara was sworn in as President of Panama and Mr. Calderon and Mr. Ford were sworn in as Vice Presidents. They welcomed our actions and stated their intention to install a democratic government immediately. I am sure Endara will be contacting you and other leaders shortly seeking recognition. (S)

As for the United States, I will return our Ambassador, lift all economic sanctions, return the Canal funds which we are holding in escrow, and move forward with a Panamanian nominee of the new government to be Administrator of the Canal, because I am fully committed to implementing the Canal treaties. (S)

At this junction, we don't know the status of Noriega. But we do know that at the prison where he locked up 47 PDF officers, they have been freed. (S)

We don't know yet how many have lost their lives. We know some U.S. servicemen were killed and some PDF. So far very few, but I hope it stays that way. (S)

This is it. I know that our friends worry about intervention, but I just couldn't sit back and see more risks to innocent American lives. I hope Panama ends up with a democracy, a free democracy, and a just democracy for Panama. That is about where it stands and I just wanted you to hear it from me directly. (S)

President Menem: Thank you very much for this information. Of course, I would ask you to keep me constantly updated and I will be talking to our friends about this. (S)

The President: That is good. I have placed quite a number of calls and I have not always gotten through. But I did talk to Salinas and to Carlos Andres Perez. I will keep you informed. I am sorry to call you at this hour, but it is better to have a direct call about this matter. (S)

President Menem: Of course. Don't worry about the hour. It is not a bad time; it is a good time to call. Could you tell me again what is the situation with Noriega? (S)

The President: We don't know the situation with Noriega. We think he is in Panama [City]. He has not been apprehended at this point. (S)

President Menem: Good. In any event, please let me know if there is any mission I could perform. I want to be of help. (S)

The President: Thank you very much. I will be in contact with you. And I hope to see you in 1990. (Ø)

President Menem: I too want to see you in 1990. We await you in Argentina, as you know. I would like to say that my wife and children send you and Mrs. Bush the very best wishes for the holidays. (Ø)

The President: That is sweet. Well, my very best wishes for the coming year to you. I'll be back to you later. Thank you sir. Adios. (U)

President Menem: Thank you. (U)