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MEMORANDUM OF TELEPHONE CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Telephone conversation with President Carlos Andres Perez of Venezuela (U)

PARTICIPANTS: The President
Carlos Andres Perez, President of Venezuela
Interpreter: Stephanie van Reigersberg
Notetaker: Trudie E. Thompson

DATE, TIME AND PLACE: February 26, 1990, 7:25 - 7:46am EST
The Oval Office

President Perez telephoned the President concerning the results of the Nicaraguan elections. (U)

President Perez: Hello, happy to hear from you. (U)

The President: Happy to hear from you, too. I'm very happy at what looks like good results in Nicaragua. (U)

President Perez: Yes, I believe the trend is irreversible -- UNO has won. That is why I'm calling you. (U)

The President: I believe Ortega is on television right now conceding the election. (U)

President Perez: I talked to [indistinct] in Managua; that's why I called. The Sandinistas told me they would respect the results of an UNO victory even if it is by one vote. They said they would like my mediation to help in the transition so that it would not be so difficult. I also talked to Mrs. Chamorro and to her advisers to urge that any speech they give will be cordial and directed toward a process of national reconciliation. She agreed. (U)

The President: Very good. (U)

President Perez: I also spoke with [Nicaraguan Interior Minister] Tomas Borge and he expressed concern that the Contras could cause problems. I share that concern, because we've had the experience that adventurers sometimes want to take advantage of a situation. They think that the shattering of the Sandinista movement will give them room to take over in an armed coup, to

claim victory for their movement. I believe precautions should be taken to avoid any such action. I also called President Callejas in Tegucigalpa and spoke with him about these concerns. I think you could help, Mr. President. (C)

The President: I agree. Frankly, it never dawned on me that the Contras would try to take over after a Chamorro victory. Certainly the US would strongly oppose any such action. Secondly, that they call on you for mediation is a very good sign; you are in a good position to help. I would be grateful for any specific suggestions you could make as to what the US can do to help. (C)

President Perez: I think that a firm warning from you to known chiefs of the movement would help. President Callejas has said he will take measures to prevent crossings from Honduras into Nicaragua. I also think a message from the White House after Ortega's speech, expressing your pleasure with the situation, would be useful. (C)

The President: I have already talked with my senior advisors. We will have a conciliatory statement, congratulating the winner and praising the process and Daniel Ortega for allowing free and fair elections. (C)

President Perez: Magnificent. This shows that it is good to have a measure of trust and to give the Sandinistas a chance to act. I am also sure this will facilitate a settlement in El Salvador. The Farabundo Marti asked for a meeting with me on March 8th. I think we are on the edge of resolving the entire Central American crisis. On 2 March we will be normalizing our relations with Panama, and we are encouraging others to do so. (C)

The President: That is very encouraging. It is important to stay in touch and to work together. Let me ask you, do you think Ortega will pass power of the Army to Violeta Chamorro? (C)

President Perez: There is no doubt that this is one of the most difficult problems and must be worked out as soon as possible. We have to negotiate as fast a transition as possible. I have also talked to Borge on that point. I have asked Daniel Ortega to send [Nicaraguan Vice President] Sergio Ramirez and [Nicaraguan Defense Minister] Humberto Ortega to Caracas to talk to me. (C)

The President: Is there any chance that they won't transfer power, given the size of the apparent victory? (C)

President Perez: No, absolutely not, I'm sure they will. (C)

The President: That is very important. You've played an important role. Mrs. Chamorro told me how grateful she is for

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your help, letting her use the airplane when she was in the U.S. for her knee, and for your support in general. We do not want to crow about the victory. We will not rejoice in Ortega's downfall or make anti-communist statements. We want to rejoice in the functioning of the democratic process. (Ø)

President Perez: That is very important. That's what I admire so much about you, Mr. President. It is important that we help in the transition. The Sandinistas are armed with goodwill and want all to proceed peacefully. That's why, as I said, I asked Mrs. Chamorro and her advisers to use great discretion in their public statements. (Ø)

The President: I think we are on the same wavelength. I welcome any specific suggestions you have. I would like to mention in our press release what we discussed this morning, if that is agreeable to you. (Ø)

President Perez: I agree. I think the most important thing is to help the Sandinistas. I will call Daniel Ortega and tell him of this conversation and of your mood. (Ø)

The President: That's fine. Of course, this is all predicated on a peaceful transition. If there is a reversion, it would affect every country differently. Our good will is based first on the fact that the process was fair, and secondly on the intention to transfer power peacefully. (Ø)

President Perez: Of course. (U)

The President: That's the way our attitude must be. We need to stay in touch. I appreciate this conversation, and I appreciate your role as a catalyst for democracy. Thank you and good luck. (Ø)

President Perez: Thank you and see you soon. (U)

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