

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Meeting with Gilberto Guardia of the Panama Canal Commission (U)

PARTICIPANTS: The President
 Brent Scowcroft, Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs
 Bernard W. Aronson, Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs
 William T. Pryce, Senior Director for Latin American Affairs, NSC (Notetaker)

Robert W. Page, Assistant Secretary of the Army and Chairman of the Board of the Panama Canal Commission
 Gilberto Guardia, Administrator
 Raymond Laverty, Deputy Administrator
 Billy Ford, Vice President of Panama

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 PER E.O. 12958,
 AS AMENDED
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 Jc 8/21/09

DATE, TIME AND PLACE: September 21, 1990, 11:50 a.m.-12:05 p.m. EST
 The Oval Office

The President: I'm so glad to welcome my good friend Vice President Ford to the White House on the occasion. It is always good to see you, and I want to congratulate Mr. Guardia on assuming his important responsibilities. Any serious problems?
 (Ø)

Administrator Guardia: No. We have lost time in utilizing the reverted areas, and we are working on that. (Ø)

The President: Reverted areas? (Ø)

Vice President Ford: The areas that reverted to Panama under the Panama Canal Treaty. And we are making progress on that. (Ø)

The President: How are things at home? (Ø)

Vice President Ford: There are a few problems, but we have come to grips with the situation. All in all, I am pleased. I am worried that Gaitan escaped from the Papal Nuncio's residence.
 (Ø)

The President: He escaped? (Ø)

Vice President Ford: Yes. He was the head of Noriega's security detail and had been in the Nunciatura, and evidently he just left. (Ø)

The President: Do they have lookouts for him? (Ø)

Vice President Ford: Yes. He is a dangerous person. (Ø)

The President: Are you satisfied with the way the police force is shaping up? (Ø)

Vice President Ford: Yes. There are no serious problems. (Ø)

The President: And the economy -- is it starting to move? (Ø)

Vice President Ford: Yes. (U)

The President: I wish I could say the same! (Ø)

Vice President Ford: The budget now has an excess of \$150 million. We are moving in the right direction. (Ø)

The President: I recently asked for a report on Panama. I am a little embarrassed that it has taken so long for our aid to start moving. (Ø)

Vice President Ford: We have had some problems with our Congress too! (Ø)

General Scowcroft: We could say there have been problems on both sides. (Ø)

The President: What is the sentiment on Noriega? Oh, that's right, Arias Calderon is in charge of security. (Ø)

Vice President Ford: Yes. The situation is pretty well cleared up. There were stories of support for Noriega, but they were greatly exaggerated. (Ø)

Mr. Page: There were stories of guerillas out in the interior and plans to support a return of Noriega, but we have checked these out and they turned out not to be correct. We have not found any significant guerilla support for Noriega. (Ø)

The President: I understand that General Thurman was at the swearing in ceremony and that he is looking well. He has a tremendously positive attitude which will help him overcome his illness. Is General Cisneros still there? (Ø)

Mr. Page: No. He has left and is now at Ft. Hood. (Ø)

The President: He did a good job. General Thurman is so dedicated and hard driving. I remember a joke when he said that when he was asked why he never married, he replied that if the Army had wanted him to have a wife, they would have issued him one! (Ø)

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I am very glad to have had the opportunity to meet with you and wish you well in the tasks that lie ahead. We will do what we can to help if bilateral problems arise. It was so good to meet you! (Ø)

-- End of Conversation --

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