

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

MEMORANDUM OF TELEPHONE CONVERSATION

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

PARTICIPANTS: The President
Carlos Andres Perez of Venezuela
Interpreter: P
Notetaker: Dc

DATE, TIME AND PLACE: February 8, Oval Office

Call made from Camp David

The President telephoned President Perez and reported on the situation in the Gulf.

The President: Hello?

President Perez: Hello, Mr. President.

The President: Nice to hear your voice.

President Perez: Thanks very much, Mr. President. I've been thinking of you a lot, and know of the decisions you are making. (P)

The President: I appreciate that. I'm really calling, with no special agenda, but since I haven't talked with you for a while, I wanted to give you a progress report on the situation in the Gulf. Let me go through a few points, and then I will answer your questions. (P)

In the first place, I want to say that we are not targeting civilians or holy sites. I think people who look at targeting and see the pictures are convinced that we have done a good job, that we've been very precise. (P)

As you probably know, I've sent Dick Cheney and Powell to the theater. They will report back on Monday. (P)

No decision has been made yet on a ground campaign. I am somewhat skeptical that air power alone can drive Iraq out of Kuwait, but I really want to hear from Cheney and Powell. (P)

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PARTICIPANTS: The President
Carlos Andres Perez, President of Venezuela
Interpreter: Patsy Arizu
Notetaker: Donald C. Johnson

DATE, TIME AND PLACE: February 8, 1991, 5:45 - 6:17 p.m.
Oval Office

The President telephoned President Perez to give him a progress report on the situation in the Gulf. (Ø)

The President: Hello? (U)

President Perez: Hello, Mr. President. (U)

The President: Nice to hear your voice again. (U)

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The President: I appreciate that. I'm really calling, with no special agenda, but since I haven't talked with you for a while, I wanted to give you a progress report on the situation in the Gulf. Let me go through a few points, and then I will answer your questions. (Ø)

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In any case we will set the timing of the next phase -- not Saddam. The initiative is ours, and we control the skies. We feel that we are controlling events. (S)

When Saddam sent his forces down to Kafji, he really got wiped out. We wiped out a lot of his armor. Some said he was trying to draw us into a ground war. (S)

I want to tell you that we don't want to dismember Iraq or destroy it, because that would create an Iraq that is so unstable that it is a target for aggression of others. We believe that Iraq can and should play a role in the Gulf's security arrangements, but certainly there can be no return to Saddam's military hegemony. (S)

I've been pleased that so far casualties have been low -- far less than we would have anticipated -- that we did anticipate before the air war began. In my view, there is no chance for a cease-fire, because as recently as two days ago, the Iraqis reiterated their view that they would not get out of Kuwait. (S)

We're outraged by their treatment of our POW's, and by their SCUD attacks. These SCUDs are terror weapons against civilians. And also by the oil terrorism of the environment that comes from the dumping of that oil into the Gulf. (S)

The other point is we're already starting to think about a post-war Middle East, and I personally want you to know that I will try to be helpful on these other regional conflicts, especially the Arab-Israeli problem. There is potential for progress there, based on the Arab coalition -- Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Syria -- that has united against Iraq's aggression. (S)

That's kind of an update, and I wanted to fill you in. How are things with you? (S)

President Perez: Thanks, Mr. President. It is very interesting to hear from you. I want to tell you some of the ideas that we have now. (S)

The President: Yes. (U)

President Perez: First, there has been a growing trend among thinkers, the press, and political leaders about the anguish that the destruction of Kuwait is causing. Some people are asking for a cease-fire. There is a movement among the non-aligned countries, which are requesting a meeting of the UN Security Council. (S)

A meeting has been called in Belgrade. Fifteen countries from three continents are attending. The Foreign Minister of Venezuela was invited. There are some quite radical countries attending. I made the decision that our Foreign Minister should:

not go, but I will have another minister go instead. Tomorrow the Minister of the Secretariat, Dr. Duran, will be going to Belgrade, with clear instructions from us. (Ø)

The President: Where is the meeting, Pat? (U)

Patsy Arizu: In Belgrade, sir. (Ø)

President Perez: I think there will be some harsh discussion, and there will be some who will be more balanced, and it will not be without interest. (Ø)

No doubt there will be discussion of a proposal by Iran on solving the situation. I have sent a letter by fax to President Rafsanjani, expressing our solidarity for his position of neutrality and the need for that neutrality, and the need to find a solution. (Ø)

The President: They keep assuring us that they'll be neutral, despite the fact that they have more than 100 Iraqi aircraft that they've allowed to land there. (Ø)

President Perez: I believe that what we have to do is to stimulate their neutrality in this conflict. Prolonging the conflict is not going to help the stability of the area. (Ø)

The President: Exactly, yeah. (U)

President Perez: The Minister I'm sending to Belgrade has very precise instructions. He is to take careful notes of what goes on there, and talk to Foreign Ministers such as the Egyptian Foreign Minister, and report back to me. There will be Egyptian, Cuban, Iranian, and Algerian Foreign Ministers there. This will be a broad group of Foreign Ministers, representing various positions. Our man has instructions to listen and report back. (Ø)

The President: Well, that's interesting. Because the Egyptians are very solid. I have great respect for Algeria, although they seem to favor Iraq. Syria, oddly enough, has been solid with the coalition. (Ø)

President Perez: This will be an interesting meeting. Mr. President, I want to call your attention to another matter. As usual there is a campaign starting in favor of those who are the weakest or the losers. I have to mention that in the next three weeks when the bombing continues, it will become greater. There is a situation that needs to be looked at carefully. (Ø)

The President: I do think this is important. He's trying to portray this as a targeting of civilians. (Ø)

President Perez: I think we should give a more important role to the UN Secretary General. He could help matters. (S)

The President: I just talked to him a few minutes ago. He thinks there may be a useful role for the Security Council. I don't think I agree with him, at least not now. There has to be some evidence that this man is getting out of Kuwait. (S)

President Perez: I fear that there may be mounting pressure for another meeting of the Security Council, and this can be dangerous. We can't be sure of the position of the Soviets and the Chinese in this. (S)

The President: I think so far the Soviets have been very supportive. In my conversations with Gorbachev and other Soviets, the Soviet position has been very supportive. I don't think they will change much. There has not been much out of China lately. (S)

President Perez: But, I think perhaps we need to exert more diplomatic action. It is very possible that the Belgrade meeting will call for a Security Council meeting. It is not clear how things are shaping up there, however. (S)

The President: My view is that there is no reason for having a meeting until the fundamental position is addressed by Saddam Hussein, and that is unilateral withdrawal from Kuwait without any concessions. I'm not sure he can do that. People I talk to are divided on this. The Egyptians think that he can't do it and survive, especially after withdrawing from Iran. (S)

President Perez: I'm afraid that is so. It's tragic that Saddam Hussein cannot take a step backwards without risking his position and his life. I also understand the U.S. position with the problem. But in Arab countries they want a quick decision, with the ground war beginning. I'm also skeptical that an air war alone can get Saddam out of Kuwait. (S)

The President: I may be wrong on this, and I want to hear from Cheney, but I don't think a ground war will be a long war. (S)

President Perez: Besides, it would be useful, Mr. President, to have some kind of declaration, going on with the UN Security Council resolution, in which France also participated. Otherwise we might run into strong opposition. (S)

The President: I think France is very solid in the position that I've just outlined. (S)

President Perez: I know the burden on you is very heavy. It needs to be shared by the other allies. This would help. (S)

The President: They're sharing the burdens in terms of the military effort. There are a total of 28 countries in the coalition. None of them want a new UN Security Council resolution. There is nothing to do, nothing for the UN Security Council to do right now. There is no indication that this man wants to get out of Kuwait. (S)

President Perez: Well, I believe things are as you say. But we need a sense in public that the USSR, the US, France, and the UK and others are maintaining a solid position that does not go beyond the mandate of the UN Security Council resolution. Because there is concern in some quarters that the mandate is being exceeded. (S)

The President: Well, with that group (the NAM) it will be evidenced. But with people in the coalition, you'll find the position that we have to get this job finished. The UN resolution is very clear and the debate leading up to it was very clear. Resolution 674 about reparations was very clear. (S)

But if there's a way to reaffirm that solidarity, we ought to be looking at that. But I worry about the mischief that would occur from those taken in by Saddam Hussein's propaganda. (S)

President Perez: This is why I'm making these reflections. I'm very clear: I believe you are acting in the only way possible, despite all the difficult decisions you have to make. That is why I have presented these ideas. But we have to be in accord with public opinion in our position. (S)

The President: Exactly. And maybe we can find a way to do it. But I'm worried about the UN Security Council because of the composition. (S)

But in any event, let's stay in touch. I'm embarrassed to say I wasn't following the fact that the Belgrade meeting was taking place so soon. (S)

President Perez: We have to move so that it doesn't become a negative event. (S)

Yesterday, in Haiti, I had a good meeting with Assistant Secretary Aronson. And I would like him to inform you of our conversation. I see some favorable points on El Salvador and Nicaragua. (S)

The President: I'll be sure to have him report to me on it. I'll be anxious to hear what you had to say to him. (S)

President Perez: Please receive a great abrazo and I want you to know that we're in solidarity with you and fully backing the UN resolutions. (S)

The President: I'm delighted to have had this conversation. Please call me whenever you need to talk to me. (U)

President Perez: Goodbye. (U)

The President: (in Spanish) Hasta luego. (U)