

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

MEMORANDUM OF TELEPHONE CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Telephone Conversation with President Carlos Andrés Pérez of Venezuela (U)

PARTICIPANTS: The President
President Pérez
Interpreter: Stephanie Van Reigersberg
Notetaker: Donald C. Johnson

DATE, TIME AND PLACE: April 9, 1991, 4:12 - 4:49 p.m. EST
The Oval Office

The President: How are you, my friend? (U)

President Perez: What a great pleasure to talk to you, Mr. President. (U)

The President: It's a great pleasure for me, too. Nice to hear your voice again. (U)

President Perez: I've been wanting for some time, since the end of the war in the Middle East, to call and talk to you. (U)

The President: Good. (U)

President Perez: I wanted to express my deepest pleasure for the way you handled this conflict. You handled all the important decisions with great intelligence. (U)

The President: Thank you very much for the kind words. We are very concerned about the human suffering there. But I have no intention of using U.S. forces to solve that problem. (U)

President Perez: Unfortunately, that's true. It's irritating and difficult to feel powerless when dealing with such a situation. I think you've done the best thing possible, and you could not have done otherwise. It's important that the United Nations be involved to help in this matter. (U)

The President: Thank you for those words of support. (U)

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President Perez: As usual, the people who criticized you for intervening in the Gulf are the same ones who are now criticizing you for not intervening. But that is the fate of those of us who have to make the difficult decisions. (Ø)

The President: True. (U)

President Perez: I called to talk about the situations in El Salvador and in Haiti. (Ø)

The President: Please go ahead. (U)

President Perez: As you know, the conversations in Mexico City are paralyzed. There is a lack of flexibility by the FMLN as well as by the Salvadoran Government. I understand that President Cristiani is being pressured a great deal by people in the right of his party linked to Roberto D'Aubisson. (Ø)

The President: Uh-huh. (U)

President Perez: It would be a tremendous mistake to waste this opportunity to solve the problem. If we can get to a cease-fire, that would mark the end of the guerrillas. (Ø)

It is necessary to pressure Cristiani to give as much as possible, so he'll be as flexible as possible, but to support him publicly very strongly so he'll gain respect at home, and this will help him with the parties of the left. (Ø)

The President: Uh-huh. (U)

President Perez: What they're doing now is arguing about constitutional niceties, but what they need is real constitutional reforms. The FMLN needs constitutional guarantees, because the people in charge of the Assembly are ARENA and the Christian Democrats. (Ø)

I've called Cristiani and will call him again today. There is a Salvadoran commission presently in Caracas, and I spoke to them, praising him (Cristiani) very much, so it will get wide play in the press in El Salvador. (Ø)

The President: I see. (U)

President Perez: I've also been talking on the phone to the FMLN, asking them to be flexible. But I think the one who will have to give more is Cristiani. That is the important thing. (Ø)

They need to get to the point of a cease-fire. (Ø)

The President: Yes. (U)

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President Perez: Now, on Haiti. I was extremely concerned when I heard of the arrest of Mrs. Trouillot. But she got out, however, and the incident came out all right. I think Aristide is increasingly sound (sensato). Unfortunately, he's got some people who are confused and extremists, and they are trying to drive him to adopt ever more negative positions. We need to help him. (Ø)

The tragedy is that the poor man has no money at all. Venezuela is making a great effort to help. We have been doing even more than we can do. We cannot let Haiti sink (naufragar). (Ø)

The President: Well, I think that's very important. We've put together a project that Beatrice Rangel discussed with General Scowcroft -- maybe not. It's \$83 million and we've already started disbursement. (Ø)

President Perez: I'm going to tell Beatrice to call General Scowcroft because this is a very important thing. (Ø)

The President: He'll be looking forward to talking to her. (Ø)

President Perez: I want to raise the Middle East with you again. Shimon Peres is coming to Caracas later this week. I'm going to have a breakfast for him on Friday. We can't waste any opportunity to try to resolve this conflict. This is the most dangerous issue that you will face during your Presidency. If you have anything you'd like me to raise or anything you want me to do, I'll be delighted to do so. I'd like also to ask if you have any advice or counsel for me on this issue. (Ø)

The President: One, please pay my personal respects to Shimon Peres. We have not settled on one specific plan. But Jim Baker is back in the Middle East as you know, and he's trying to make headway with Israel on two points: One, they're going to have to give up some land, and second, that there must be some talking, some discussion going on. (Ø)

As you know, Peres supported rather strongly the concept of an international conference. The Europeans are still talking about an international conference. And our position is that we don't oppose the concept, but after all these visits by Baker we want a conference that will work. (Ø)

We want people to come together and talk to each other. But too broad a conference at this juncture would only guarantee that the Shamir Government would not attend. (Ø)

We do feel the Arabs are a little more flexible now than they were. We would like them to eliminate the anti-Israel boycott and agree to talk to the Israelis. We'll know a little more about that when Baker gets back from the trip. But we were a

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little more optimistic after his first visit, that there was a chance to put an end to hostilities and begin a dialogue. (C)

The last point relates to Jordan. I'm interested in knowing what Shimon Peres thinks on this point. We think Jordan will eventually have a very important part to play in any final solution. Jordan is still in the bad graces of the Saudis, of the other Gulf states, and Egypt. But we've re-established contact at the Foreign Minister level, and Baker will meet their Foreign Minister in Geneva. (C)

We will handle the Jordanian situation, which is a delicate situation, properly. We were upset with King Hussein. At the same time, we knew the pressures he was under. It will take a little time, but we don't want to destabilize Jordan. (C)

These are the main themes, and we'll be glad to bring you up to date when the trip is finished. (C)

If you pick up anything of importance from Shimon Peres, I'd be happy to hear about it, but I worry that he no longer has the political clout he once had. (C)

President Perez: I'm very much in agreement with all you said. Hussein behaved in an extremely clumsy manner in this crisis. It's as we say "A crown without a head under it" (una corona sin cabeza). We share your view on an international conference. Too broad a conference would be a negative thing. However, the basic countries need to participate. We need to keep pressuring Israel to start talking to the Arabs. And the Arabs need to be more flexible. (C)

Mr. President, I don't want you to forget what I told you in Caracas last December on Iran. My energy minister is going to Iran next week. I'm sending a letter to Rafsanjani with him. (C)

The President: That's very interesting. We've told Iranian representatives, through the appropriate channels, that we're willing to help on the refugee problem that they have. Maybe this will help. (C)

Tell your minister to say the one word that I keep repeating over and over again -- "Hostages." Please help us with the hostages. (C)

President Perez: Of course, Mr. President. I agree, and have already sent a message to Rafsanjani on the subject of the hostages. It would also be good to start dealing with Iranian claims for compensation. (C)

The President: Exactly. That's the one they're interested in, and talks are going on right now with their representatives. But we can't buy out our hostages with some deal. That would lead to more hostages down the road. (Ø)

President Perez: It's clear that something has to be done so it doesn't appear that the two things are linked to each other. (Ø)

The President: Well, I've enjoyed this call, and it's wonderful to hear from you. (U)

President Perez: I feel very satisfied to be able to talk to you. It is always such a great pleasure. I send you an abrazo. (U)

The President: If you have any news on the meeting with Peres, please pass it to me. (Ø)

President Perez: Thank you, and good-bye. (U)

The President: Good-bye. (U)

-- End of Conversation --