

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

MEMORANDUM OF TELEPHONE CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Telcon with Carlos Andres Perez, President of Venezuela on April 20, 1991 (U)

PARTICIPANTS: The President  
 Carlos Andres Perez, President of Venezuela  
 Interpreter: Stephanie Van Reigersberg  
 Notetaker: Donald C. Johnson

DATE, TIME: April 20, 1991, 7:00 - 7:17 a.m. EST  
 AND PLACE: Camp David

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

President Perez: Delighted to hear your voice, Mr. President. (U)

The President: Sorry to call you so early, but I wanted to discuss with you the peace negotiations in El Salvador. (U)

President Perez: I'm very worried. I'm in permanent contact with President Cristiani and with the FMLN. From this I understand the talks are at a critical juncture. (U)

The President: You know much more about it than I do. But I talked yesterday with Cristiani. I wanted to fill you in on our conversation. Let me run through a couple of points. (U)

As you know, De Soto met with him on Thursday. The key issue, as he [Cristiani] explained it to me, is constitutional change. Cristiani tells me he is prepared to go a long way to meet legitimate FMLN demands. And, indeed, we have been impressed with his, and the government's flexibility. He has strong domestic support, including in his own party, and he sounded confident to me. (U)

He has to bring something back from the negotiations to justify the steps he is willing to take, particularly on reducing and reforming the military. It seems to us the guerrillas should not demand an unlimited number of revolutionary changes. They have never been elected to anything. (U)

The last point, on this Article 248 question. All the democratic parties in El Salvador oppose this, but this seems to be one of the major objectives of the FMLN. I don't know why the FMLN is

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so adamant. If they leave this Article 248 open, there will be unlimited amendments to the constitution, and make the process open-ended. All the parties oppose this. (S)

I told Cristiani if he wanted someone from the U.S. at the next meeting, we could send someone, but I'm not sure whether that would help or not. That's how we see it, but how do you see it? We hope you'd use your wonderful influence with the FMLN to urge them to agree to a cease-fire. (S)

President Perez: I'm a bit confused about the situation there. It's not clear to me that all of the political parties are supporting the government. (S)

The President: On constitutional reform? (S)

President Perez: Correct, Mr. President. Second, because Alvaro de Soto tells me there's a great deal of difference between Cristiani's position and what the FMLN is seeking. It seems necessary to extend Article 248 until next year. (S)

Third, the Assembly which would change the Constitution next year is an Assembly where ARENA and the Christian Democrats have an absolute majority. So, in practice, this democratic sector would always have the power to dictate any changes in the Constitution. (S)

But for me the following is the most important thing: It is clear that, once a cease-fire is established, the FMLN will cease to exist or be an operating force. After a cease-fire is established, it will be very difficult for them to keep their morale up. They will become a demoralized force. The FMLN knows that once a cease-fire is declared, all of its possibilities to act are over. (S)

So the talks have to be seen from that point of view. The greater flexibility therefore has to be shown by Cristiani, or better put, by the Army. (S)

I agree with you that Cristiani gives the impression of great sincerity, but there are strong pressures on him. (S)

The President: Mainly from the right, from ARENA? (S)

President Perez: Right, and from the Army. (S)

But this idea of sending someone to Mexico is quite interesting. I'm going to do something similar. I am going to name someone of my utmost confidence and send him to Mexico City. Because if these talks fail, the situation will be very grave. (S)

The President: We worry about it, too, and we're glad you're going to send someone. (S)

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President Perez: Today I'm going to talk to the person I'll send down. I'm thinking of sending our Ambassador in Washington. He knows the situation has good sense. (Ø)

The President: Yes, he's a very good man. (Ø)

President Perez: That would make it easier for the person I send to keep in touch with whoever you send. (Ø)

The President: That's right. (U)

President Perez: Why don't we agree to keep in touch after we choose our parties? (Ø)

The President: Let me fill you in a little on the visit of your friend Dona Violeta. We had a good visit. Her number one priority is to clear Nicaragua's arrears with the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank. (Ø)

I told her we would give serious help. I found her to be in a good frame of mind, and I'm always impressed with her commitment to peace and reconciliation. I wanted you to know that we're determined to help her. (Ø)

And also, I look forward to seeing you here in early May. I understand you're coming up here. (U)

President Perez: Thank you very much, Mr. President. I'll be delighted to see you. (U)

We've been helping Nicaragua in our own way. We need to have the U.S. increase its contribution in the international financial institutions, so they can clear the arrears. We've done more than we really can afford. (Ø)

The President: Okay, we'll keep trying on that. (Ø)

President Perez: I'm delighted to hear you will do so. (Ø)

(Dog barks in background)

The President: Is that your dog, or ours? (U)

Stephanie Van Reigersberg: That's Stephie's, Mr. President. (U)

President Perez: Well, delighted to talk to you. (U)

The President: (in Spanish) Muchisimas gracias, y adios. (U)

President Perez: Adios, Presidente. (U)

-- End of Conversation --

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