

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

4816

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Meeting with Alfredo Cristiani, President of the Republic of El Salvador (U)

PARTICIPANTS: The President
The Vice President
Brent Scowcroft, Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs
Robert M. Gates, Assistant to the President and Deputy for National Security Affairs
Robert Kimmitt, Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs
Bernard W. Aronson, Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs
William Walker, U.S. Ambassador to El Salvador
William T. Pryce, Senior Director for Latin American and Caribbean Affairs, NSC Staff (Notetaker)
Stephanie van Reigersberg, Interpreter
Patricia Arizu, Interpreter

Alfredo Cristiani, President
Margarita de Cristiani, National Secretary for Family Issues
Dr. Jose Manuel Pacas Castro, Minister of Foreign Relations
Miguel A. Salaverria, Salvadoran Ambassador to the U.S.
Dr. Oscar Santamaria, Minister of the Presidency
Mirna Lievano de Marques, Minister of Planning
Arturo Zablah, Minister of Economy
Saul Suster, President, National Telecommunications Agency

DECLASSIFIED
PER E.O. 12958,
AS AMENDED
8/21/2009
2000-0429-F

DATE, TIME AND PLACE: June 12, 1991, 11:20 - 12:05 p.m. EDT
The Cabinet Room

The President: At the beginning I want to make clear to you all how much I appreciate this visit. I have already told President Cristiani in the Oval Office and also told the press how very much I support his government and how much I respect him for what he has done and is doing. To the rest of the delegation, I want to say I am delighted that you are here. We strongly support all you are doing. We know that some problems remain but that you are dealing with them in a positive way. I want there to be no

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

Declassify on: OADR

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

question on where we stand. I have the highest respect for your President and for his government and great confidence in his ability to lead your country. (C)

The President and I had time to go over some of the pressing issues in our talk and we can continue on some of those issues and take up anything that you would like to speak about. (C)

President Cristiani: Thank you very much. It is a great pleasure for me to be here. As you know, the main problem we have is how to end the conflict. We have been trying to see if there is a way to speed up the process. We want the negotiations to succeed and the remaining issues to be negotiated. Our immediate goal is a verified ceasefire. As a summary, our position is to try to speed things along as much as possible. We feel that the FMLN is using the peace process to try to prolong the process, to delay a ceasefire. This might be part of their strategy. They seem to have little focus on a ceasefire. Various of the groups in the FMLN have differing points of view on this subject. All of the groups are affected by and receptive to international pressure. We think that concerted international pressure can speed up the course of the negotiations. The FMLN is going back to old positions, seeking to delay a ceasefire. They are doing this first by asking for dissolution of the armed forces again. We have made much progress in our position on relations with the military. We have agreed to the submission of the armed forces to civilian government. The Constitutional reform places the armed forces under the supervision of the government whereas under the previous Constitution, the armed forces acted as a semi-independent entity. We have also agreed to have the several security forces to be taken away from the armed forces and put under civilian control. We have also agreed to have a commission to evaluate the officers corps. The commission would see how people might adapt and human rights would be an important consideration. There may be officers who could not properly adjust to the new approach to human rights. The only question left is whether there would be one or two military representatives; we think there should be two in addition to three civilians, although the military would not have a vote. (C)

The President: Would you appoint the members of the commission?
(C)

President Cristiani: I would appoint them but they would be appointed from the list submitted by the Secretary General of the United Nations who would make the list after he had considered recommendations from various sources. We have also agreed to a large reduction of the armed forces so there will be more money for social programs. These are agreed upon positions. Now the FMLN wants to discuss a dissolution of the armed forces. This is not a viable position. The only place where we are discussing that is in the Central American context where reduction of all armed forces is being considered. (C)

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

The President: Are you trying to do this along the lines of the Costa Rican model? (Ø)

President Cristiani: I was reminded that Costa Rica spends about 30 percent of its budget on defense. It's an interesting situation. They have about 20,000 security forces. After the incursion at the Nicaraguan Border, they are using more uniformed personnel. At the Central American Conference, we have been discussing these problems. On judicial reform, when we complete the reforms in compliance with the new Constitution, six percent of the government income will be devoted to the judiciary. The judges of the Supreme Court will be voted on by a majority of two-thirds of the legislature. There will not be nominees by political party. And the terms of the judges will be changed so as not to coincide with Presidential elections. We have also changed the elections of the Attorney General to two-thirds election by the Assembly. Everything will now be more of a consensus, where before the government previously named all the judges. (Ø)

The other area is electoral reform. The FMLN has said that our party was their enemy, and that we won't allow them any political space. Our party has said that I have been too lenient. By increasing the size of the General Assembly we have allowed the minority parties to be in. Also by expanding the Electoral Council, we gave up the right to control the Council. There will be a member nominated by the Supreme Court and he will be the President. We gave space to Zamora; he is now a Vice President of the Assembly. We have shown that we are willing to open up political space for the opposition. On human rights, the decision of the UN to send a team will be very useful. All we have done has seen (produced) no response from the FMLN. Rather they have continued their violence. We think that now is the time to demand response from the FMLN. (Ø)

The President: Did they break up the discussion at Caracas? It is clear that we wanted a ceasefire, how did the recess happen? (Ø)

President Cristiani: The Caracas meeting had been set for a maximum number of days and we did not arrive at a conclusion. (Ø)

The President: So time ran out? (Ø)

President Cristiani: We have said that we wanted the talks to resume in Mexico on Saturday; they will be, I think, in Queretaro. (Ø)

The President: Does the UN sponsor this round? (Ø)

President Cristiani: Yes, it is the coordinator. If the talks are really successful, they must be more forthcoming. They said they would not discuss unless we agreed to discuss the dissolving of the armed forces. They want to remain with an armed group and also act as a political party. This is unacceptable to us; not

only do we not want it but we are also restrained by the Constitution. We cannot allow armed groups. There are other elements of the UN proposal to be considered; the armed forces, Constitutional reform, and a ceasefire. In Caracas, they said they wanted to introduce social and economic issues, which of course would take more time. What we want to have is to generate pressure through the friends of the Secretary General, if we could receive your help. The idea is to get a global proposal which would treat all demands. We would then get one which the Presidents of the groups of friends could support, then they could talk to the Secretary General. (Ø)

The President: We support the idea of putting a global position on the table. We would like to be helpful. Would it be helpful for us to call on the FMLN to sit down at the table and take as long as necessary to come to an agreement? Would such a call be helpful coming from the United States or would it make it more complicated? (Ø)

President Cristiani: I think that a call from the White House would have a positive affect. But, if there is not a position proposed, supported perhaps by the four friends, the FMLN will say that the delay is the fault of the government. The government has limit as to what it can accept. We can't go beyond the legal framework. (Ø)

The President: Think about whether we should have a statement that they should go there and stay there until the negotiations are concluded. If you think that will help, we will be glad to do that. (Ø)

President Cristiani: It would help. And it would help even more if it came out from all four. Maybe we should try to get President Salinas and Gaviria and Felipe Gonzalez and CAP. (Ø)

The President: Alright. Let's try it. (Ø)

President Cristiani: If we could work together. In the past the State Department has sent a team down. The Ambassador has been very, very helpful on this. Joe Sullivan and Mike Kozak came down -- it was helpful. In a document which was captured, the FMLN agreed that their objective is not to get immediate ceasefire but to wait until after December and to have demobilization wait until 1994. (Ø)

The President: Where do they go? They come back to negotiate and then what? (Ø)

President Cristiani: They go to Mexico or Managua. (Ø)

The President: And they live open lives? Do they go to the barber shop? (Ø)

President Cristiani: Yes, and some of them go back to Cuba, especially Villalobos. (Ø)

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

The President: Is he one of the more radical? (Ø)

President Cristiani: He is more militant but when he shows up he makes decisions. Sometimes it's easier to deal with him than with their President of their Commission, although my chief negotiator has developed a working relationship with him. (Ø)

The President: Very interesting. (U)

Assistant Secretary Aronson: We would be happy to send people down there. (Ø)

The President: Is the FMLN hostile toward the United States? (Ø)

President Cristiani: I would say so. (Ø)

The President: But they want us to talk. (Ø)

President Cristiani: While they are hostile, they also accept reality. They may dislike the United States, but they have to accept its role. (Ø)

The President: Do you think Nicaraguans are still supplying arms across the border? (Ø)

President Cristiani: The arms flow probably continues but it is less than before. Honduras has discovered things at the border but now instead of rifles it is mortars. Unfortunately, the mortars are not very accurate and have killed many civilians. They also continue to send SA-16s. Now that they had to give back the SA-14s. We think the SA-16s are coming from Cuba. (Ø)

The President: What does Violeta say? -- "we can't control the army?" (Ø)

President Cristiani: Obviously, the government cannot control the army or at least part of the army. We have seen that the government is having some success here. I sent a letter to Mrs. Chamorro saying that we didn't see why it was permitted with red eyes and also we did not think that it was a positive thing to be involved with this guy called Reichler. At no point did his government consult us about what we thought or seek our advice. This baffled us, and we are bothered by what the FMLN is doing in Nicaragua. They sent a letter by their Vice Minister to say that they were rescinding Reichler's contract. (Ø)

The President: What has his role been? (Ø)

President Cristiani: He was giving Ortega advice. (Ø)

The President: Did they give him a contract after all this? (Ø)

President Cristiani: We need to get the idea across of the harm it can do if the FMLN can move freely in Nicaragua. After the

CONFIDENTIAL

doors were opened to them in Nicaragua, they started to talk about two powers in El Salvador, which was Ortega's line. (Ø)

The Vice President: Did you meet with Congress and talk about your global approach? (Ø)

President Cristiani: No, I did not. I told them about our efforts, and that when there was not a ceasefire who was responsible. I told them all we had done. (Ø)

Assistant Secretary Aronson: I think we got a good impression on the Hill. (Ø)

The President: I want to raise this contentious thing about the Jesuit thing. Did Congress get on this subject -- and what did you say? (Ø)

President Cristiani: They asked about it. The judge decided that he thought he had enough evidence to go. There was an appeal and then there was an eight-day period to allow for new evidence. We offered some new things, not much. A little on the role of intelligence and an officer on the military school staff, but up to now there was no evidence linking anyone else. They said there was some doubt as to where he was -- he was not at the school. (Ø)

At some point the Jesuits appointed a private prosecutor. They had a petition of 100 pages for the judge. They also invited a U.S. military person, Buckland, and other military members. So the judge decided to prolong this period for 90 more days before selecting the jury. Now, the judge is basically doing all that the private attorney is asking. I gave another testimony, mainly about Major Buckland's testimony. That is the status now. We hope that this will be helpful. We have been in close contract with Ambassador Walker on how to go about it. We think that the high command did well in asking that people come forward without fear or without fear of retaliation. One member of an intelligence unit was said to have heard on the 16th that L. found out about the assassination. This was not covered by intelligence reports, but they were at all times turned over to Benadize. So everything has been delayed by the 90-day extension. (Ø)

Ambassador Walker: I think it's unfortunate that a 90-day delay will produce nothing, but simply take more time. One problem, and I think the President agrees, is that there are people who want to prolong this. There are deficiencies in the system and people can use them. The Jesuits are now saying that they want to get this one over as fast as possible. (Ø)

The President: Have there been other questions? (Ø)

Assistant Secretary Aronson: President Cristiani knows that this is the key problem on the Hill. There have been a lot of tough questions on this, but a good dialogue. (Ø)

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

The President: People are very emotional on this. The sooner we can get to the bottom of this, the better off we will be. You are being looked at by different standards. (Q)

Ambassador Walker: There are people who are trying to picture the government as negative. (Q)

The President: I think we will be going to lunch now, would you like to bring the Family Minister in with me and we'll freshen up? (U)

--- END OF CONVERSATION ---

CONFIDENTIAL