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THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Meeting with Jean-Bertrand Aristide,
President of Haiti (U)

PARTICIPANTS: The President
The Vice President
James A. Baker, Secretary of State
John H. Sununu, Chief of Staff
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, Latin
American Affairs, NSC (Notetaker)
Eliza Burham, Interpreter

Jean-Bertrand Aristide, President of Haiti
Jean Casimir, Ambassador to the United States
Fritz Longchamps, Ambassador to the United
Nations
Raymond Valcin, Minister Counselor, Embassy
of Haiti

DATE, TIME: October 4, 1991, 9:40 - 10:10 a.m., D.S.T.
AND PLACE: Oval Office

The President: Welcome. They were asking questions on what the American people are interested about (use of force to restore the government of Haiti) and I gave the answer. We want to see democracy restored. I am anxious to see what you think about the situation. Is there something additional that we should do? Please let me know what you think. I would like to have you speak completely freely. (c)

President Aristide: I am convinced that people want to live in democracy and that they will die for democracy. That is why we are happy with what you have said and done. We are alive with you in your hope for democracy. (c)

On behalf of the Haitian people I want to thank you and all that the democracies are doing to resolve the process in Haiti. I talked to a journalist in Haiti about an hour ago and he said there were about 500 casualties. (c)

The President: Dead? (U)

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President Aristide: The Washington Post says there are about 300 dead. This is the doing of one General with the help of the army. (C)

The President: What General? Cedras? (C)

President Aristide: We, the people of Haiti, want to thank you and the people of the United States for their help in restoring democracy to Haiti. We think that the OAS delegation, which is going to Haiti, will be positive. It leads us to believe that they can convince the small group that they cannot prevail. (C)

The President: What do you think about the use of force? (C)

President Aristide: If we can have the express will of the United States to demonstrate the determination of the U.S. Government not to tolerate the destruction of democracy, this will be helpful. Of course, the presence of U.S. Navy in the area is an expression of determination and reflects U.S. objectives. For the moment, the OAS mission is the best way to solve the problem. (C)

The President: I agree. (U)

President Aristide: If we can solve the first phase of the problem, then we should take that for a guarantee for democracy down the road. (C)

The President: I don't understand. (U)

President Aristide: There are three points for the protection of democracy. First, no democracy will exist without justice so there must be punishment for crimes. Two, the Haitian armed forces have been institutionally used to protect dictatorships. With your help we should be able to support the police who will help the people. Third point, and this is delicate. As you know, the government of Haiti have always looted, pillaged and killed. It's also unfortunate when we see people in the government get aid and it goes to the pockets of a small group of people. So when I took over on February 7th, we had a change. Your Ambassador Adams can corroborate this. I think emergency economic assistance is needed to train judges for justice. And secondly for the training of police; this would also provide jobs and allow people the possibility of working in peace. I am convinced that this way we can have non-violence. I am convinced that it is most necessary that we have non-violence in arriving at democracy. I will continue in that struggle. Struggle to assure a non-violent approach. I will continue so that with your help and with that of other countries we can build democracy. (C)

The President: Let me respond. We take this matter very seriously, because this is a very significant event. We don't want to see democracy set back. There is also the problem of protection of American lives. I view this as a prime responsibility of the Presidency. I take your point. We will do

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what we have to protect Americans. I am concerned about the use of U.S. force to bring about domestic tranquility in the hemisphere. When in history we have used force, even though we used it to protect democracy, it was often not perceived that way in the hemisphere. It has almost always given us a black eye. I am not speaking of Haiti, but rather of other countries. I strongly support your hope that the OAS can do the job of providing domestic tranquility. Human rights has got to be the hallmark of all this. The more you can identify with human rights, the stronger you will be. And even the rights of people who made this unconstitutional change, if you can protect their rights too, all of this will be of benefit to democracy. I would encourage you to speak out on human rights and when you get back, which I hope you do, to take that very much into account. People will say that you condone violence. The more you can do to support human rights, the better it will be. (C)

If force has to be used, the OAS should organize, so people can't say it was the U.S. trying to impose this or that government. I don't want to be under a false claim. I am reluctant to put U.S. force into Haiti. I think a better way to do it is through the OAS. I think we have a chance to make an historic change. You have been set back -- all the hemisphere has been set back -- and we want to see a restoration of your government. I will try to make that point in a press conference I am giving later. (C)

President Aristide: I am very happy with what you have said. I want to share one more thought. You see Haiti is a country of great poverty. One of the reasons that you have had such poverty is that the armed forces refuses to support democracy. When I was arrested and taken to their headquarters in the presence of General Cedras, there was a major criminal there who was famous for killing people. This person was released; it was in my presence and he will be in a senior position of the government. (C)

The President: As I get it, they took the bad guys and are giving them their release. I can understand your worry. (C)

President Aristide: He will be the new chief (of police). Several of the narcotics prisoners are free. (C)

The President: What does Cedras have to say about this? (C)

President Aristide: He wants that. (C)

The President: Who came to pick you up? (C)

President Aristide: I was in my house, and shots were fired. The U.S. and French Ambassador came to get me, and then when I arrived at the Palace, and I tried to get Cedras to talk to the smaller group of soldiers to help, he did not. He gave an order to the soldiers in the Palace not to shoot (his own guard), then went out. They shot at me, I then was helped down on the ground. One of my soldiers next to me had a leg broken by a bullet. They tied my hands with my necktie and took me to General Cedras, who

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said that he was President now. They released during the day, all the drug dealers and criminals. The question I raise is, if I go back to Haiti for democracy, what can I do about the drug people who are free? (e)

The President: The OAS Mission must be fully informed of this. As a first step the Mission must know. Bernie is going on the Mission, isn't he? And I want you to know that he has great respect, not only in the State Department, but here in the White House. We will have to be sure he understands what you have said. (e)

What do you think about the attitude of the majority of the armed forces? (e)

President Aristide: It is only a small group in the army who are involved. But structurally, the army has always been involved in drugs. (e)

The President: You will see that there are people out in the Rose Garden who are not as important as this meeting, but it is something that has been arranged and I will have to go. How long will you be here? (e)

Ambassador Casimir: We will go back to the hotel and will be meeting with the Haitian community; we will be here until tomorrow. (e)

The President: If we have any new developments, we will certainly keep you informed. May I make a gratuitous suggestion. In the interviews with The Washington Post and The New York Times, and other establishment press, it would be useful to emphasize your commitment to human rights. The media are offended by what happened to you and democracy but they are also committed to strong internal programs of human rights, so as much as you can link your return to human rights, the more support you will get. The other thing they will be interested in is in freeing of the drug people. This I think would also be very interesting. (e)

The President then began closing the meeting with a strong reaffirmation of support for President Aristide and he took him over to the window to explain a little bit about how, as he put it, a President earns his pay, "in working with domestic groups - this one on education." (e)

-- End of Conversation --

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