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THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Meeting with President Vinicio Cerezo of Guatemala

PARTICIPANTS: The President
The Vice President
James Baker, Secretary of State
John Sununu, Chief of Staff
Brent Scowcroft, National Security Advisor
James H. Michel, Ambassador to Guatemala
Michael Kozak, Acting Assistant Secretary of State
for Inter-American Affairs
Robert Pastorino, NSC (Notetaker)
President Vinicio Cerezo
Sara Mishaan, Minister for Specific Affairs
Rodolfo Rohrmoser, Ambassador of Guatemala
Claudia Arenas, Secretary for Press Relations

DATE, TIME March 2, 1989, 10:30 a.m. - 11:05 a.m.
AND PLACE: Oval Office

The President and President Cerezo met for thirty-five minutes in the Oval Office to discuss Central American regional issues and U.S.-Guatemalan bilateral issues. (Cerezo spoke somewhat broken English--some not fully intelligible.)

The President began the meeting by welcoming Cerezo to Washington. After discussing his Far East trip and the press corps, the President turned the floor over to Cerezo.

President Cerezo said he was in Washington on a private visit to meet with the Administration and Congressional officials about misperceptions concerning respect for human rights in Guatemala. He noted he had already met with some Congressmen and was providing specific details on alleged violations of human rights. He then added there was considerable interest on the Hill about the Central American peace process and economic development in Guatemala.

President Cerezo noted that he was satisfied with current economic development trends in Guatemala. He stated his Government has an agreement with the International Monetary Fund; with USG support similar to current levels and programs, economic development should continue. Cerezo noted his efforts to work with the private sector.

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President Cerezo then turned to Central America. He said he was trying to elaborate a plan to assure democratization in Nicaragua. He stated his belief that Nicaragua's back was against the wall because of its economic problems; that the Presidents of the four Central American democracies are not naive about Sandinista intentions; and that they must refine and explore the Tesoro Accord.

The President said he was encouraged about economic development in Guatemala and was glad to hear a positive policy on human rights.

The President then noted his disappointment that the U.S. didn't know about the Tesoro Agreement in advance. He noted real U.S. commitments in Central America which he is trying to support, and that "life is a two-way" street.

The President noted we now have 90 days under the El Salvador Agreement. He asked how we could be sure the Sandinistas would comply with their commitments (since Ortega had broken them before) and how we could put teeth in the agreement. The President said the U.S. does not want to overthrow Ortega but only wants the political benefits for the Nicaraguan people enjoyed by Guatemalans. He said he needed to be convinced about Sandinista sincerity and didn't want to be part of a situation in which a non-democratic cancer flourishes and spreads. He noted changes in rhetoric by Ortega but asked for evidence.

The President hoped Cerezo agreed with the U.S. on the need for further humanitarian assistance for the Nicaraguan Resistance. We haven't yet convinced Congress or the American people about the reality of the Resistance; thus there has been division in the U.S. He said we would be speaking with one voice in the future. President Bush also noted that the U.S. has to change the age-old perception of being the colossus of the north. He said he wanted to find ways to dispel that reputation and to work together with Latin America.

President Cerezo noted there is a very positive feeling in Latin America--and especially in Central America--about President Bush. He noted there is a perception of the President's sensitivity to relations and to problems. He stated this is a historic moment to accomplish something in Central America. Even Daniel Ortega said good things, according to Cerezo, and so did Carlos Andres Perez.

President Cerezo noted it is time to seek practical ways to reach our common goals; time is running against Nicaragua; they are losing even Northern European support and confidence. Europeans are also changing in a positive manner their opinions of

Guatemala, he added, and are now providing assistance to the Government rather than only to nongovernmental agencies. The Europeans are also telling Ortega to comply. Cerezo said he also believes the Soviets had told Ortega that they would not continue assistance. All of this was causing changes in Sandinista attitudes.

The President asked Cerezo how we develop specific criteria and mechanisms as well as how he could provide guarantees.

President Cerezo thought the Sandinistas only negotiate when they are desperate and said that "we must have a plan." He said the Sandinistas must be forced to comply or the world must be shown their non-compliance. He said the Central Americans must avoid Sandinista destabilization. Cerezo noted the need for opposition people inside Nicaragua to organize for elections. He offered to help his friends (Christian Democrats?) to do that.

Secretary Baker asked why the U.S., the Central American democracies and some Europeans could not get together to develop a plan containing specific time lines with respect to Sandinista promises. The U.S. will be unified and we also could work with Venezuela, Canada, and perhaps others. With regard to the repatriation plan, there would be repatriation once Nicaragua had kept its promises. Meanwhile--for the next eleven months until the election--we will maintain the Resistance. He said it doesn't make sense to repatriate in exchange for promises. He asked Cerezo why we don't ask for performance while we keep the Contras in being--but without lethal aid. He noted he hoped to begin consultations with Congress this afternoon and said we might be able to reduce economic sanctions--but only after some Nicaraguan performance in meeting their promises to democratize.

President Cerezo said he was in agreement on humanitarian assistance.

Secretary Baker emphasized that he was talking about 11-12 months which should be enough time to judge Ortega's performance.

President Cerezo again said he wanted to help the internal opposition.

Secretary Baker stated we had to hold out the possibility of the Resistance in case Ortega doesn't comply.

The President says there is a strong feeling that the U.S. can't back off or be seen as weakening on our commitment to the people of Nicaragua. We feel strongly, he added.

General Scowcroft asked Cerezo if he would state his agreement (to what he had said) publicly. Cerezo said he can now say more publicly because people don't believe he is being forced by the U.S.

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Secretary Baker said the U.S. is willing to give diplomacy a chance; but in order to do that we will need vocal Central American support as Scowcroft has mentioned. He said we must dissuade people of the perception that Central America wants to disband the Resistance. Baker added finally that Cerezo should know that if Nicaragua becomes a back-burner issue, Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador will receive more attention from our political opponents.

The President said the leftist activists don't care about democracy; in fact, some support the FMLN and the Guatemalan guerrillas. He again said the U.S. does not want to "smother" the Central Americans.

The meeting then ended.

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