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THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Meeting with President-Elect Gaviria of
Colombia (U)

PARTICIPANTS: The President
The Vice President
James A. Baker III, Secretary of State
John H. Sununu, Chief of Staff
Brent Scowcroft, Assistant to the President
for National Security Affairs
Robert M. Gates, Assistant to the President
and Deputy for National Security Affairs
Thomas E. McNamara, U.S. Ambassador to
Colombia
Bernard W. Aronson, Assistant Secretary of
State for Inter-American Affairs
William T. Pryce, Senior Director for Latin
American Affairs, NSC
Lilian Nigaglioni, Interpreter

Cesar Gaviria, President-elect of Colombia
Luis Fernando Jaramillo, Senior Foreign
Policy Advisor
Victor Mosquera, Ambassador of Colombia to
the United States
Rodrigo Pardo, Advisor to President Barco

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PER E.O. 12958,
AS AMENDED
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JL 8/21/09

DATE, TIME July 13, 1990, 10:30 a.m. - 11:00 a.m. EDT
AND PLACE: The Oval Office

The President: We have been following your trip to Europe with interest. First of all, I want to emphasize how pleased I am to have the chance to meet with President-elect Gaviria on a basis of respect and friendship. He made a strong, impressive showing in his election. (P)

With the help of Secretary Baker and General Scowcroft and Bob Gates and Assistant Secretary Aronson and the NSC Staff we think we pretty much know what is happening in Colombia, but I want to hear from you. I think that the way you put forth the best positions, when you were forthright and it was not easy, is something we all admire. (P)

I want to start out by saying that there's a lot of bad stuff coming out from the press on our military. Most of it completely unfounded. One of the worst, and I have to watch my language in

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the presence of a lady, came in a article in one of my most unfavored magazines, Newsweek, which said a lot of stuff which is simply not true. Yes, we want to work with Colombia in fighting narcotics. We need to help on the demand side in the U.S. to start. I want to assure you that we are not going to do anything to cause your country concern. The article is inflammatory and untrue. I didn't have a chance to read the article but I've been told about it. There is going to be no mounting a military operation which would be detrimental to a freely elected sovereign country such as yours, and I wanted to clear that up at the very start. (Ø)

President-Elect Gaviria: I offered in my campaign to fight narcotics. I told President Barco that we would carry on his program. We have had a hard cartel to fight. Three candidates were assassinated. In Medellin, they are paying 2 million pesos, (about four thousand dollars) for each policeman killed. Recently, they have been killing two to three a day; sometimes five or six. The fight against narcotics traffickers is quite harmful. I'm not sure that all the things we were saying were popular -- our refusal to dialogue with the traffickers. (Ø)

The President: That was a very, very courageous decision. (U)

President-Elect Gaviria: My policy was not popular, but it was a matter of principles. I know we will keep the policy, but we need to find a way to make it work in our juridical system. We need to have narco-traffickers go to jail in Colombia. It is bad for Colombia when they don't. (Ø)

One reason the policy is unpopular is because we don't see the international support for the fight. We need more than rhetoric. We see the other countries just looking. Because some of our people are intimidated, we may not have support in future years for the policy. We need support for Colombian opinion. We may have difficult times ahead. People who want no extradition may win the next elections. (Ø)

When Colombian people are asked what they expect from the United States they reply -- reduction of consumption and increased trade. They are not even asking for economic assistance. Ninety percent of the Colombian people are wishing for more trade. (Ø)

The ending of the coffee agreement has been harmful, and the problem with cut flowers. (Ø)

Sometimes people think there is a feeling against Colombia. This gets people upset. We have fulfilled our international economic obligations. We have paid our debts. We have a sound economy. We did not benefit from the Baker Plan, and will not benefit from the Brady Plan because we are not on a list for debt reduction. (Ø)

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The President: What kind of help would be constructive? There are a number of anti-narcotics funds. (Ø)

President-Elect Gaviria: I think your new initiative (for the Americas) will be helpful for Colombia. (Ø)

The President: I was going to suggest that you get together with other experts on counter-narcotics for a briefing if you have time. We want to make sure that you don't think we are planning anything which would be detrimental to Colombia. How long will you be here? (Ø)

President-Elect Gaviria: I'm leaving tomorrow, but- (U)

The President: I just want you to learn what our thinking is and to be sure that nobody thinks there is some conspiracy. (Ø)

Ambassador McNamara: I can give the President-elect a briefing back in Colombia. (Ø)

President-Elect Gaviria: I would like to talk about commercial aid and other economic matters a little. I should tell you how important commerce is for us. (Ø)

The President: How about flowers? (Ø)

President-Elect Gaviria: We got some good decisions on flowers. We have improved a little bit there. We had hoped for more. We are hoping for progress on our GATT subsidies code negotiations. (Ø)

Ambassador McNamara: On the GATT subsidies question, the Colombian Minister of Economy is here to talk with USTR one more time. We hope to wrap up the talks this afternoon, but we don't know. I mentioned to you previously that we needed to do more work on this and we have done more. We have narrowed the gaps. We need to do more to wrap it up. (Ø)

The President: Back to drugs. You wrapped up some collaborators of Escobar. What happened there? (Ø)

Ambassador McNamara: The Colombian forces were able to capture twelve collaborators. They have a ring around Escobar's zone of operations and are hoping to catch him in it. (Ø)

President-Elect Gaviria: We will work together to catch him. (Ø)

Ambassador McNamara: They think he is inside the police net at this time. (Ø)

The President: If that man is captured, would that collapse the drug cartel or would another man be likely to take his place? (Ø)

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President-Elect Gaviria: If we get this man, it will stop the bombing, but won't stop trafficking. It will be very good news from a public opinion point of view. We have to catch Escobar, but it won't change the situation very much because others will take his place. (Ø)

The President: What about the other cartels? I think it is just terrible the killing of all those policemen. (Ø)

President-Elect Gaviria: Ninety seven a month. (Ø)

Secretary Baker: What was the significance of the arrest of the Escobar accomplices? Was it significant? (Ø)

President-Elect Gaviria: Yes, it was significant. (Ø)

Mr. Jaramillo: The very top people will know now that all the top people in their organization are at risk. (Ø)

The President: How is your personal security? (Ø)

President-Elect Gaviria: Not bad. It is good I am going to improve it. We need to get the best out of different organizations and reorganize somewhat. We are trying to improve. (Ø)

Ambassador McNamara: We gave the President-elect organizational ideas which could be used as a basis to improve security, first up to inauguration and then while in the presidency. (Ø)

The President: Will President Barco need security after he leaves office? (Ø)

President-Elect Gaviria: Yes. (U)

Ambassador McNamara: And some of his people. (Ø)

President-Elect Gaviria: We are having trouble with the World Bank. We have a very good relationship with the IMF and now the World Bank is trying to put new conditions which are the same that we have already accomplished with the IMF. What they propose will not be bad, but it looks like it is being imposed. The thing is that we are doing what they want, but why do they need to impose. (Ø)

Secretary Baker: Is it balance of payments or sectoral? (Ø)

Ambassador McNamara: Sectoral. (Ø)

The President: When President Barco was here he raised this problem and we said we would try to help and I think we called. (Ø)

Ambassador McNamara: Yes, Robson told me they had called. (Ø)

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Mr. Pryce: We were told that recent talks with the Bank went well. (Ø)

The President: Let's call and see how things went. (Ø)

Ambassador McNamara: I will call and check on this this afternoon. (Ø)

The President: I wish you well on this. Please give my best regards to your wife. I hope you have had a chance to relax. (Ø)

President-Elect Gaviria: We have tried to do so. (Ø)

The President: You have organized security problems from the cartels. We have nuts, real nuts. My son Jeb had a problem with a man named Rip Holmes. He had a crazy idea that Jeb had kept him from passing the Bar Examination. He threatened to kill Jeb for this in calls to the house. A year later he called from the Federal penitentiary in Danbury, Connecticut, and the call got through to Jeb's wife Columba. He said, "This is Rip Holmes in the penitentiary and I just want you to know that I am going to get Jeb when I get out." There are nuts around here, and the thing is that under our system they will eventually get out of jail. (Ø)

We want to cooperate in every way possible. We wish you well as you assume your new duties. We will have a high level representation at you inauguration. The Vice President is interested in doing it if it works out. We don't want to impose additional requirements. (Ø)

President-Elect Gaviria: I think it will go well. (Ø)

The President: I wanted to go to Cartegena. There were people who said that two-thirds of the U.S. Army was involved. We didn't want to send a bad sign, but there are rigorous requirements for our Presidential travel everywhere. Even in London we had to make special extra precautions. We hope we don't send a bad signal. In every case the sign should be respect, which is what we feel. (Ø)

When you are President, if you see signs we are sending signals which are other than they should be, please let me know. (Ø)

President Barco had told me there was a problem with boarding ships. We were not asking the people on shore before boarding. We were able to adjust this satisfactorily. That is why I feel strongly that we need to be sure we are communicating well. (Ø)

President-Elect Gaviria: What do you think of the Free Trade Agreement? (Ø)

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The President: We haven't set a schedule. You may have seen that we are going to start with Mexico. We have the problem of the Uruguay Round. We wanted to move fast enough for Salinas and slow enough for the Uruguay Round. (Ø)

Assistant Secretary Aronson: You are talking about a Free Trade Framework agreement now, which is a first step. (Ø)

President-Elect Gaviria: We have been talking with the U.S. representatives at Commerce and with USTR. We can reduce drugs (with more trade). (Ø)

The President: Let's let Carla and Jules know that. (Ø)

-- End of substantive conversation --

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