

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Meeting with President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, Haiti

PARTICIPANTS: Samuel R. Berger, DAPNSA
Ambassador Lawrence Pezzullo
Lawrence G. Rossin, NSC Staff (Notetaker)

President Jean-Bertrand Aristide
Jean Casimir, Ambassador of Haiti

DATE, TIME February 4, 1994, 1:00 - 2:30 p.m.
AND PLACE: President Aristide's Apartment

President Aristide: Thank you for coming to see me.

Mr. Berger: We wanted to call on you to discuss how we can achieve our common objective of restoring democracy to Haiti. First Ambassador Pezzullo will discuss a few points.

Ambassador Pezzullo: Let me discuss a little recent history to help you understand our position. I know we can speak in the candor which has always characterized our frank and good relationship. You will recall our dinner in January, before the Miami conference, at which we discussed ways you could design it to promote the effort to restore democracy to Haiti. One issue we discussed was building a parliamentary capacity to govern the country, pass the needed laws, confirm nominees and so forth. We continue to feel that this is a mechanism to move the political process forward for you, and to show the military that there is a political force extant with which they must reckon. Right now the military is maneuvering to fill the political vacuum, putting out 148, 149, *tabula rasa* proposals. Importantly, the Parliament is standing up to the military and rebuffing these maneuvers despite threats and bribes -- even Bob Mondé, no ally of yours.

We talked of building a parliamentary capability and I sensed that you had a good idea of the need for this in your discussions in Miami, in order to pressure the military to comply with its Governor's Island obligations. The key issue to make that work is for you to nominate a new Prime Minister.

Since Miami there has been a great deal of discussion between political sectors, the private sector, churches, etc. in Port-au-Prince, and progress has been made. My strong sense is that a resolution of the crisis is now achievable provided you act quickly; the time to build a political coalition under your control is passing quickly. The opportunity to do so before

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you now, involving specific people who you know and talked with in Miami. You must seize this opportunity to appoint a Prime Minister after which the rest of the Governor's Island process can fall into place. Reporting we have of deepening splits within the military show that they are seeking a way out of this crisis. We need to get the Prime Minister urgently. If not, there will be a sense of an opportunity lost, sanctions will come under increasing pressure from media reports (even if exaggerated) throughout the international community, and our whole approach will become steadily more difficult to maintain.

So this is the issue: either we move ahead, or we lose ground.

Mr. Berger: This is a critical moment for Haiti. The current initiative grows from your efforts in Miami and brings the leaders of both sides together. You would choose one of the two as Prime Minister who would then win parliamentary approval of the police and amnesty laws and ratification of the new army commander-in-chief and police chief you nominate, the international aid can begin, sanctions be lifted and the conditions of your return can be worked out with your new government without military interference.

We are convinced that this initiative holds great promise and hope you can embrace and lead it. We would work closely with you. If you do embrace it and the military fails to cooperate, you are left occupying the high ground. We would swiftly move at the UN to deepen the sanctions. But if you are seen as not open to and cooperative with this initiative, it will be increasingly hard to maintain Congressional and public support for an activist U.S. policy on Haiti. So, we support this initiative which has grown out of your efforts. If we lose this moment, there would be pressure for our approach and yours to diverge, as others assume the mantle of democracy. We want your support for this effort.

President Aristide: During 28 months I have worked with you and I remain willing to do so. I have shared my point of view frankly even when I have disagreed with you. And several times I have agreed to take actions which I did not think wise in order to demonstrate my flexibility. I saw Governor's Island as the wrong strategy but I signed the agreement, even when I knew it would result in deaths, to show my flexibility. When pressed in the Oval Office to appoint my Prime Minister, I did so even having pointed out that, regardless of the international commitment, if the same thugs were present they would use the process against us. The same with my amnesty declaration.

I shared my point of view at Governor's Island and I will share my concerns today. At Miami, I agreed it was good to build a strategy to get members of the Senate and Chamber, the private sector, etc. together to build a coalition. But we still have before us those who have not respected the Governor's Island Agreement. Yesterday alone, 12 of my people were killed in Port-au-Prince. We build reconciliation; they shoot people. They have two years worth of oil on hand, enough to stay on in spite

of those who say the current embargo will force them to leave. So how can we say that if we embrace this initiative, they will leave?

Mr. Berger: As I understand this initiative, you would choose one of the two as Prime Minister, as part of a deal in which Cedras and Francois would be replaced, the laws would be passed and so forth. Only then would the sanctions be lifted and aid begin. If you embrace this and move the process forward, then there will be broad support to further increase sanctions if they fail to cooperate. There is no magic wand to remove the military. They must be forced out by sanctions. We are prepared to increase the sanctions even though it is painful for us to do so. If they still refuse to move, then the pressure will remain on and you will be reaffirmed as the champion of democracy, reconciliation and reconstruction. My concern is that if you are seen as not moving this initiative forward, it will be hard to maintain support for an activist U.S. policy.

President Aristide: Let me clarify one point: since the Miami conference, I have a majority of the Chamber of Deputies behind me and am building a real majority in the Senate. I have been actively pursuing reconciliation and building a consensus. I am not ready to announce my proposal yet but we are doing our job and not just waiting. In Miami, I spent time with many people, going beyond my Lavalas supporters, in this effort to build a coalition. I will announce this in the future but must take account of the threat the thugs pose.

Mr. Berger: Is there some reason why you cannot seize on the Larosiliere and Benoit initiative to further your own efforts?

President Aristide: I can do so. But I must be discreet given the risk that my people will be killed. I am trying to share power with non-Lavalas people. There have been some meetings in my three Ministers' houses and these will continue; and people come to see me here as part of this coalition-building effort. I am willing to announce this when it is in good shape, but the challenge is when to announce given the people with weapons in front of us.

Ambassador Pezzullo: The issue here is political dynamics. Malval is out, so there is a vacuum and that is bad. It has led to Francois' 148 maneuvering which Parliament has rejected and to Cedras' split from Francois and his scheme. There is another faction in the military led by Duperval. The vacuum is confusing everyone. We see great virtue in your identifying a group of leaders and giving them your sanction -- they are willing to take the risks -- then they can act as a pole around which people can coalesce, giving them courage and producing a constitutional alternative. It can create a critical mass to move the process forward.

President Aristide: In Miami I named three Ministers and two Deputies to advance my coalition-building effort. While in Canada I received reports on their activity. I was supposed to

meet with the Mevs and other representatives of Haiti's rich people this week. If my project is not yet completed it is because it is not fully ready yet to be announced. But now, after the points you have made, I am willing to move further, to take risks to avoid the image of a vacuum.

Mr. Berger: So you are saying that it is not only important to name a Prime Minister but also to get him approved?

President Aristide: Yes.

Mr. Berger: And the current initiative can contribute to that effort?

President Aristide: From my view, the best way forward is not to **announce** it. Let me remind you of a bit of history. In 1946 the political turmoil was very bad in Haiti and we could not have a mulatto as Prime Minister. I had to convince the blacks, the poor that a mulatto Prime Minister (Malval) was essential. I did so but it took a lot of convincing. But after his ratification we lost the climate of unity in the Executive Branch and Parliament. I still must fight to maintain that unity.

So there must be careful, serious consultation so that when I announce a new Prime Minister, that person will be able to follow Malval's path of reconciliation. As I often say, Haiti is like a broken glass I must reassemble. I don't know when I will announce my new Prime Minister but Parliament must then quickly ratify him.

Mr. Berger: My concern is: if two big chunks of the broken glass are coming together and you are perceived not to be helping that, it will be seen as a lack of will on your part, which will create a political dynamic here as well as in Haiti. We must be able to say and believe that a political process is coming together. Without that, support will fade for sanctions and it will be difficult to sustain an activist U.S. policy. So I hope you will support this process and, if you wish, include it into your process, but not reject it.

President Aristide: As you know there is a strike going on in Haiti which the unions are now backing. I had the unions in Miami, and while the private sector was not well represented I got many letters. I expect in one to two weeks to be able to announce the process and vision I have for Haiti and who I will appoint. Maybe the army would like to know today who I have selected but I need to consult more. The worst way to destroy the reconciliation process would be to make a precipitate choice without being clear on that person's commitment to reconciliation.

Ambassador Pezzullo: We share the same objective of building a broad coalition. The difference is timing. You see it coming together at your pace. We see it as more urgent. We have to keep up the pace to counter media reporting of sanctions' impact in the international community. We are in the forefront of this

effort but must have a visible political process to go along with sanctions. We ask you to help us make that argument. We are not asking for a specific choice. These two are both respectable politicians who have the capacity to put together a strong coalition,. Maybe there are others. But it is urgent to have a visible process. We can go into Haiti with projects, aid, a lot to help consolidate a new government. But the President has to lead it. It is urgent.

Mr. Berger: You must understand our domestic dynamic. There is debate within our government over how much to support Haiti or to back off. There were criticisms of your response to Malval's initiative. If for a second time with this initiative you are seen to be saying "no," it will strengthen the pressures to diverge our approaches and make it harder for us to sustain an activist policy, including sanctions. If you reject this initiative or do not try to build it into your plans, you will strengthen the argument that "Aristide is not interested in building a coalition."

President Aristide: You can tell those people that, first, it is me, you, everyone except the military who has worked for democracy, so they should turn their concerns there; and second, that I have always tried to support your efforts by being honest. When I see something proposed which is bad for the United States, I share that concern with you. Even if it seems inflexible, I prefer to be honest.

For example, President Clinton wants to restore democracy and I understand that. He does not want to use force, and I cannot ask him to do so given my constitutional constraint. Now if a new coalition is established under the army's weapons, it could become a danger to democracy. This is why I push to have a coalition **and at the same time** to have Cedras and Francois removed. Otherwise we will face the same problems again.

Mr. Berger: I understand your point, but the capability of the Clinton Administration to support you may turn on whether or not you are seen to be building a coalition urgently.

President Aristide: I will do two things:

- o I will continue my coalition strategy. I will call people from Haiti to meet (the Mevs and others) to see how we can encourage that effort. But I will not pick anyone as Prime Minister first or it will destroy that process.
- o At the same time, I will not just announce my Prime Minister, with those armed people there to destroy my effort.

Ambassador Pezzullo: We agree on coalition-building but disagree on timing. Now within the army there are fissures caused by sanctions, which must be exploited by **action**. That is why we have to have a political force emerge **now**. The vacuum is critical. Why not invite the two Chamber presidents, Larosiliere

and Benoit and others you want and make a decision this weekend with them? Not necessarily publicized, but a decision to forge movement. Let me note: the private sector is desperate for a solution, but they do not see manifestations of or ever speak of your effort. Mr. Berger has been candid on views within the USG. Nobody in the USG is sympathetic to the military, but sanctions on Haiti cause real concern and valid questions are raised about them. We need to be able to say that sanctions are the stick to achieve an end. You must help us construct the answer to their concerns. The way to do so is to invite these people up, begin dialogue with them, and let something emerge.

President Aristide: Could you help me by announcing full sanctions?

Ambassador Pezzullo: Sanctions must be used as a political lever. Their concrete impact is less important given what we are already stopping.

Mr. Berger: If over the next few days you announce your new government and it has substance, we will say that we will give the army perhaps 10 days to cooperate -- we would use the sanctions as leverage. If they refuse to leave, then we would impose the new sanctions. But we must have a broader political process with a solid base, so that we can say that we have in place what we need to resolve the crisis and can say to Cedras that if he does not cooperate with this, then we will hit him with harder sanctions.

President Aristide: I must distinguish between your position and that of Cedras or Francois. You always say "If you don't do this..." to them but it never works -- most recently, January 15 has passed without action. I cannot expose people to danger on that basis. Those thugs will not leave unless put under real pressure. Threats don't work. They will use repression against threats. There will be no climate of freedom in which the Parliament could operate, so how could they freely support this political initiative?

Mr. Berger: I see your point but I am talking about using a short period of intense pressure for completion of the process. If you go along with this initiative then we could impose sanctions if the army does not cooperate. The other side now is harder: if there is a viable political process in Haiti and you fail to embrace it, people will ask why we should cause more pain for the Haitian people. This could be a turning point, a defining moment.

President Aristide: Why should we allow ourselves to be pressured rather than the military?

Mr. Berger: We need to have a political initiative if we are to gain your return. Sanctions are our pressure on them.

President Aristide: No, that won't work, they have 2 years of oil. They won't leave on the basis of an initiative they do not control.

Ambassador Pezzullo: That logic leads to intervention which should not be the basis of your thinking.

President Aristide: There is still the choice of imposing a full embargo.

Ambassador Pezzullo: That will destroy Haiti, rendering it ungovernable whenever you return. It will destroy your hopes.

President Aristide: Haitians want one thing: peace. Once they have that they can move from misery to poverty, but only then. 5% of the population has 45% of the wealth, but rich and poor are under pressure now. Sanctions press everyone to work for peace.

Mr. Berger: It is a tragedy -- there is so much we can do in Haiti if we can get a political solution.

President Aristide: I agree, but without clear steps to remove Cedras and Francois it will not work. Governor's Island, the amnesty, my acceptance of Cedras' resignation -- none worked. I must help you and must say frankly: we must not repeat those mistakes again. If we succeed, it will be good for all of us. If not, it will cause a political problem for the President in three years.

Ambassador Pezzullo: Your approach leads nowhere. We cannot keep going until the end of the month, that is too hard to sustain unless we have a political vehicle. And that initiative will have more impact than you believe it will; **but it needs your sanction.** It will put a stop to 148, CNG and other illegitimate schemes by Francois and Cedras and shift the balance of power to you, putting great pressure on the army from all sides. I believe this group can achieve that and it is urgent. If you want to help us you must move fast. I urge you: invite these people up this weekend and launch a political program. We and the Friends will do whatever we can to pressure the army. We can move Cedras and Francois out under this pressure, especially given the pressure the people from the right involved here can exert.

President Aristide: We don't disagree on the fundamentals. Yes, I will build my political initiative more quickly. But I must know what you will do about Cedras and the others. Pressure is not enough; when under pressure they kill, as they killed Malarly.

Mr. Berger: I understand, but I hope we can continue to move along together. If there is a political initiative that is seen as broad-based, we will tell the army to cooperate or we will raise sanctions. If they leave, that is great. If not, we will have sanctions and your stature will be enhanced.

President Aristide: They won't leave and they will kill people. If my responsibility is to protect Haitian lives, then I must know how they will be stopped.

Ambassador Pezzullo: You must build a political force to get a political process going to achieve this program. You must bless it.

President Aristide: We had a solid government and look what happened. We are beyond the need only for an initiative.

Ambassador Pezzullo: The Malval government was not broad enough. Malval was not politically skilled and he had a weak cabinet. What we are saying is that we have serious political players here who are ready and able to build democracy.

President Aristide: We have to be alert for a second coup maneuver, via Article 148. I have to look to build a real coalition. People spoke of having Franck Romain and his ilk in the cabinet. That was unacceptable. We need a political initiative but it is not enough. I must warn you: the army will not leave on that basis. A full embargo might work.

Mr. Berger: Again, it is an issue of timing. We hope you will embrace, help assemble this initiative. If it is rejected, we impose a full embargo. But it will be hard to do that if you are not seizing upon a real initiative.

President Aristide: The problem for Haiti is not having a new Prime Minister, the problem is that I am out of Haiti. To get me back there, we need a broad government and we need to get the thugs out. The real issue is to get a package with clarity on when I return, when Cedras is out, when the new government is installed and so forth. More clarity is needed.

Mr. Berger: All the elements of this package are there: choosing a Prime Minister, Cedras and Francois stepping down, international aid and lifting sanctions, and you working with the new government without military involvement to arrange your return. I think it would be a problem if it were seen that you were not seizing and leading this political movement.

President Aristide: I see this but I will not make the same mistakes. We must oblige everyone to respect the Governor's Island Agreement. They must leave. I must build the political movement as I am and I will do so faster. This is how it will be good for all of us.

Mr. Berger: How will you build your movement faster?

President Aristide: I will call people to organize meetings here and perhaps first in Haiti.

Mr. Berger: I hope you do not reject the Larosiliere and Benoit initiative.

President Aristide: I am not ready to name a Prime Minister.

Mr. Berger: Their activity is creating expectations. It is important that you be seen to be doing something as it happens. You say you are working within a "larger picture" but that is not visible. We need to find a way to have positive activity and movement.

Ambassador Pezzullo: In Haiti, the rumor mill is spreading fear. We must stop that. If you seize this opportunity it will stop all that. If you do not build on this the present opening will disperse, the situation will appear interminable, sanctions will become problematic. The international community cannot solve this situation. You must and it is urgent. So I urge you to invite this group up this weekend to work up this plan.

President Aristide: I will move faster but I don't hear any assurances of what will stop the killers.

Mr. Berger: If you form a new government and the army does not cooperate, we will impose the tightened sanctions.

President Aristide: Sanctions are not enough.

Mr. Berger: There is no other way short of force which will not work. We want to use our "one more step" most effectively. To do that we must have a political structure.

President Aristide: The problem is that I am being asked to co-habit with the military...

Mr. Berger/Ambassador Pezzullo: No, nobody is asking that. We want the military out of politics and the leadership changes.

Mr. Berger: If you announce your Prime Minister who has parliamentary support and they refuse to step down we will impose sanctions.

President Aristide: I did that and see where we are now. I cannot repeat the same mistake. The army must be compelled to leave.

Ambassador Pezzullo: A political coalition would work out what you are seeking, and this group has the capacity to do it all simultaneously. I could be done in a few days. But we need the coalition first.

Mr. Berger: We must work together on the political side. It will be hard to toughen sanctions without a political process.

President Aristide: I will call people to meet; I can't promise this weekend, but soon. I will **not** announce a Prime Minister until the arrangements are in place. I must be sure first.

Mr. Berger: What can I take back to tell my colleagues? I want to be able to inform them of concrete progress, that you will move rapidly to put this coalition together.

President Aristide: I will do so if at the same time concrete steps are taken to remove the army leadership.

Ambassador Pezzullo: That's the old formula. Without the use of force, that is just kidding ourselves. We must have a strong political force to put through the laws and other actions which are needed. It will not happen unless you empower it.

Mr. Berger: Let's get a new government to get you back.

President Aristide: Pressure must be put on the army while we work for a solution.

Mr. Berger: I understand that, we want the same objective. But we must have a political initiative, then sanctions. You must understand our view. I hope we can find a way to work as closely together as we have over the last year, for you, for us and for Haiti. If the military does not cooperate, then we move to tougher sanctions and wait them out, hard though that will be to stomach. But we could do that because you embraced the initiative and they rebuffed it. If you were seen **not** to embrace a political initiative which is extant, it would be hard to bring that off. By embracing it, you enable us to stay the course.

President Aristide: How long then until democracy is restored?

Mr. Berger: I see two scenarios:

- o You accept, either they step aside or we deliver a direct message to them to do so; or
- o We increase sanctions and there are months of misery.

Ambassador Pezzullo: The army wants out. Cedras wants to retire without fear of retribution; Francois wants a transfer.

President Aristide: Out of Haiti?

Ambassador Pezzullo: We can deal with that.

President Aristide: Let me ask one last question: Have I done my best to support you?

Mr. Berger: You have acted in the best interests of your people. We want to support that. That can't happen if we diverge. It would be tragic to do so. This is the moment for a political initiative along with sanctions. I hope you will consider it. I say this with respect: you are president, it is your country, but I must be honest. We are at a crossroads: either you seize this to break the logjam, gaining tougher sanctions if rebuffed; or it will be increasingly difficult to sustain an activist Haiti policy and that would be unfortunate. What can I tell my colleagues?

President Aristide: 1) Thanks for their support. 2) I welcome this proposal and I will embrace the proposal with something else, but not your way. 3) I will speed up my political initiative and finish before the end of the month; I will organize something within a few days. 4) No promise to announce the Prime Minister, but I promise to fill the political vacuum to staunch the flow of rumors.

As I move that way, I wish you would move with real pressure to remove the violators of the Governor's Island Agreement. My speed will be faster if yours is. If I hear that Cedras and Francois are on the way out, I will work without delay. It must be a package.

Ambassador Pezzullo: I have talked to the Center for Democracy program who could invite these people up and have them here to meet with you to work this out. I can't guarantee anything but I am convinced there would be progress. If you can talk to them and give us an idea of where this is going...

President Aristide: I will meet with them anytime to see how we can build a package.

Mr. Berger: I know you will work closely with Ambassador Pezzullo.

President Aristide: Of course.

-- End of Conversation --