

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Meeting with President Aristide of Haiti (C)

PARTICIPANTS: The President
The Vice President
Warren Christopher, Secretary of State
Anthony Lake, Assistant to the President for
National Security Affairs
Samuel R. Berger, Assistant to the President
and Deputy for National Security Affairs
Ambassador Lawrence Pezzullo, Special
U.S. Advisor on Haiti
Richard E. Feinberg, Inter-American Affairs,
NSC Staff

Stephanie Van Reigersberg, Interpreter
Jean Bertrand Aristide, President
Jean Casimir, Ambassador
Jean-Robert Sabalat, Foreign Minister
Rene Preval, Interior Minister
Mme Mildred Trouillot, Esq.

DATE, TIME March 16, 1993, 4:00 - 5:00pm EST
AND PLACE: The Oval Office

The President: Welcome. I want to thank you for this copy of your book, which I have read portions of and enjoyed very much. I also gave my wife a copy of your other book. Thank you very much. (U)

It's important to me that you understand that I have a deep and personal commitment to the restoration of democracy and of you to Haiti. We've decided that we ought to meet first, at the beginning of our aggressive diplomatic effort. We have named Ambassador Pezzullo as our Special Advisor on Haiti, and have also appointed a new charge to our embassy in Port-au-Prince. We will communicate to the de facto government and others in Haiti that our patience is running thin. We think it is better to take these steps now than to tighten the embargo, so as to leave some steps that we could take if they don't respond. (C)

You will have to reassure people that you will be willing to respect the human rights of all of the Haitian people, and that you will be willing to govern with a representative government. You have spoken eloquently about reconciliation, which I agree is very important. If your intentions are clear to all parties, then we will be able to prevail. (C)

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White House Guidelines, September 11, 2006

By VZ NARA, Date 10/8/2015

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Also, I believe that it is important for the United States to take the lead in helping with the economic reconstruction of Haiti. We are prepared to support an International Fund for Haitian Development and Democracy of at least \$1 billion over five years, and we will contribute our share. ~~(C)~~

I am strongly supportive of the economic embargo and I wish that we could get more countries to do more. ~~(C)~~

I've grown impatient, and we are going to deliver a very clear and strong message, and it is equally important that you deliver a clear message of reconciliation and respect for the human rights of all the Haitian people. ~~(C)~~

President Aristide: I am delighted to be here. I very much enjoyed the way you discussed the restoration of democracy in Haiti. ~~(C)~~

After 200 years of independence, we have 6.5 million people, 80 percent illiterate. Less than one percent of the population has more than 45 percent of the wealth. We want to progress from misery to poverty with dignity. We want to bring the army and the people of Haiti together. But the army we have is involved in drug trafficking. We need to transform these structures of corruption. The country can't return to democracy unless we do something to neutralize the army. ~~(C)~~

It is an historic opportunity for us to meet with you. For us, it is an opportunity to separate the army from the coup leaders. ~~(C)~~

I know I must ask the Haitian people to avoid vengeance and retaliation. We must remove the symbols of the coup, and once that happens, the process can proceed more smoothly, and we will be able to separate the army from the police, and have an army that protects democracy. ~~(C)~~

The President: We are prepared to support professionalization of the army. What happens to individuals should be subject to negotiation and be dealt with by the Caputo mission, which the U.S. strongly supports. Obviously, as you say, the army must cooperate with and reinforce democracy. ~~(C)~~

President Aristide: I agree. (U)

The President: I'm impatient and I want this done. You have said that you don't want us to impose our will. We do not want to set a date certain. There should be a date fairly soon after negotiations are complete. But right now, if I were to set a date, which would be something very serious for the United States to do, and if we acted we could undermine your legitimacy. Right now, I know that if there were another election, you'd win again as you did before. ~~(C)~~

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Also, the security and integrity of agreements will have to be protected. We'll have to provide the means to accomplish this, but this has to be discussed and negotiated. (C)

President Aristide: I am ready to offer a general amnesty to the army. I am the President of every single Haitian citizen. I must respect justice. The judges have to do their work. (C)

I strongly support Caputo. He said that an agreement should be reached in three months. I believe it could be done in that time. I know you cannot give it to me now. But a date is a way of helping Haitians who are suffering, and it would be easier for the people suffering in Guantanamo, and for the refugees in Haiti that cannot flee, if they had a certain date. (C)

I am ready to give that amnesty and to forgive. (C)

Vice President Gore: When you discussed the amnesty, you mentioned a general amnesty, but you seemed to imply that the coup leaders might be subject to prosecution. Could you please clarify that? (C)

President Aristide: If I said a general amnesty that included the coup leaders, people might think that I was proposing to rule together with Cedras. We have many victims who do not have institutions to give them justice, and if they see coup leaders remaining in their positions of power, that would not promote peace. I want the coup leaders to be removed, but not to put them in jail. If they want to leave, or to stay in the country, that would be okay. (C)

Vice President Gore: If they were given amnesty and removed from their positions, would you be content to see them protected from the courts? (C)

President Aristide: That can be part of the negotiations. I would have to see what the Haitian people would get back, whether we still have the same repressive army. I have to protect the army because of the constitution. But if we have your help with the police, and if we can create jobs for the military, for example to help reclaim the topsoil and the forests that we have lost. That would be a beautiful way to put that 7000-man army to work, with your economic help. Then Haitians would be happy to have a police force that protected human rights. Then I would be ready to say that I would live with Cedras in the same house. (C)

I have to forgive, that is what the gospel requires. I have to show that I love them, that there is no personal conflict, no will to persecute them. (C)

Secretary Christopher: The President is fully supportive of the return of democracy and of you to Haiti. When the President says that he is impatient, as Secretary of State I get the message. Let me clarify that Caputo's three months was the period during which he intended to bring the negotiations to a conclusion, not

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for your return. We do want to move as rapidly as we can, but not to set a fixed date. ~~(C)~~

When the U.S. makes a commitment, the U.S. might have to take actions which none of us would want. ~~(C)~~

President Aristide: Thank you. I enjoy saying, Lavalas, which means a flood of unity. With you, we are Lavalas. I agree with you to proceed as you explain. It is just that people fear that the negotiations could drag on and delay until my mandate has run out. ~~(C)~~

The President: We will not let that happen. (U)

President Aristide: My people, my supporters are putting pressure on me. I know that you cannot set a date certain. Is Mr. Caputo's timeframe okay? ~~(C)~~

Secretary Christopher: It is unwise to set a date. The President will indicate that those holding illegal power must yield. Mr. Pezzullo will push ahead as rapidly as possible. ~~(C)~~

President Aristide: I will talk that way. ~~(C)~~

The President: We fully expect you to be back in Haiti with plenty of time to govern. My specific concern is that if we can get you back to Haiti under OAS and UN auspices, we will have established a good precedent for the hemisphere, for sticking up for democracy. But if we set a date certain,, we might be put in the position to take actions which would undermine your legitimacy, which would be a terrible price indeed. ~~(C)~~

We had a very tough meeting here in the White House this Saturday and I said that I was frustrated. We will try to reassure people who are pulling for you. ~~(C)~~

I want to emphasize that we will begin now to construct an economic package for the reconstruction and development of Haiti. I would like the input of you and your team. My daughter, Chelsea, is very knowledgeable about the environmental problems of Haiti, and cares very much about them. Perhaps she could travel to Haiti to help to improve the environment. ~~(C)~~

President Aristide: We would be honored to have her. ~~(C)~~

The President: There are thousands of jobs that could be created to replace topsoil. (U)

President Aristide: During my seven months in government, the international community was willing to provide \$507 million, because they saw political stability. In those seven months, our economic policies were not perfect, but we were making progress. ~~(C)~~

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The wealthy in Haiti are part of the solution. The country is like a broken glass, and we have to put it together again. I am ready to meet with those people who invested in the coup. (C)

Ambassador Pezzullo: People must work together, to seek reconciliation. There is a period for Haiti to emerge reborn. We will work with the army to redefine its mission in the future. Now, we need to work hard, hand-in-hand. I am available to you. (C)

President Aristide: Yes. How do we connect democracy to refugees, to give hope to them? (C)

The President: In Haiti, we'll soon have 200 human rights observers. They've been effective. We've doubled our in-country screening capacity and we will soon open two new centers. Regarding Guantanamo, I am going to send a member of my White House staff to review the situation, and I will meet with my new Attorney General. The problem is under immediate review. Regarding the Haitians in the United States, they will soon have the choice to return home. I do not like the policy of direct return, but I do not want people to die at sea either. (C)

-- End of Conversation --

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