

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

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National Security Council Meeting

March 20, 1986, 3:27-3:58 PM, Situation Room

SUBJECT: Aid to the Nicaraguan Democratic Resistance

PARTICIPANTS:

The President

The Vice President

Office of the Vice President

Mr. Craig Fuller

White House

Mr. Donald Regan

Adm. John M. Poindexter

Mr. Donald R. Fortier

Mr. James Baker

Mr. Larry Speakes

Mr. Dennis Thomas

State

Secretary George P. Shultz

Assistant Secretary Elliott Abrams

OSD

Deputy Secretary of Defense William H. Taft IV

Under Secretary of Defense for Policy Fred C. Ikle

OMB

Director James Miller

Mr. Timothy Muris

CIA

Director William J. Casey

Mr. Alan Fiers

NSC

Mr. Rodney B. McDaniel

Mr. Raymond F. Burghardt

LTC Oliver L. North

JCS

General Paul X. Kelley

LTG John H. Moellering

Minutes

The President: Think how the young men who are the freedom fighters must feel now. ~~(N)~~

Admiral Poindexter: The President asked that we meet this afternoon, now that the vote in the House is completed, to discuss our strategy in the Senate. We have thought of the

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By [signature], NARA, Date 10/21/05

possibility of asking the House to remain in session. That seemed possible to me, with the importance you place on this issue. The House is now scheduled to go on vacation until mid-April. The idea of asking them to remain in session could be discussed with Bob Michel. (S)

Our other concern is how the House vote will be interpreted in Central America and its effect on the Contras and the Core Four, especially Honduras, which is providing critical support to the Contras. In the past, when Congress has voted against aid to the Contras, Contra units have disbanded and Honduras has reduced its support for them. We need to decide how to deal with that problem. (S)

Secretary Shultz: We have embarked on a congressional strategy in the Senate, where there is a little better understanding of what the Sandinistas represent. What we ask the House to do is also a question we need to decide. We need a little different package for the Senate. We should note the effect of their vote on our negotiating strategy. It's devastating. We are distrusted and we must act to reassure the countries down there which are on the firing line. We need at least Elliott and maybe Jack Galvin to go right away to the four countries. Phil Habib also is ready to do anything. And he is very effective. Phil's stance is that as part of our negotiating track, it is as vital to have the capability to exert pressure as it is to have negotiations. I think Phil should circulate in the region after Easter, going to Central America and maybe to the Contadora countries also as the situation firms up. But we should send someone down there tomorrow to give assurance. Maybe someone from the Agency should go, too. (S)

President Reagan: A number of the congressmen I called said they would vote "no" this time but would vote "yes" on April 15, when Tip will let them vote again. I don't know what Tip has up his sleeve. Maybe it would be of some help to those going down to Central America to say that we know there will be another vote, even though we know that promise has been broken before. (S)

Adm. Poindexter: In the Senate we have 43 solid votes in favor, 7 leaning in favor, 6 leaning against, and 38 opposed. (S)

William Ball: That's correct. (S)

Deputy Secretary Taft: Particularly Honduras needs reassurance on this vote. We need to get down there right away. (S)

Director Casey: The Contras can hold out 60-90 days, providing they get logistical support. It would be legally possible to reprogram funds for them, but it takes a vote in the full committees. The Senate committee would vote for it, but in the House we would be defeated 9 to 7. There is the possibility we could turn McCurdy and one other in the interim period. (N)

Adm. Poindexter: There is about \$7 million left, and the program has to wind up by the end of the month. Can funds be carried over? (N)

Assistant Secretary Abrams: They can. They may last for about 60 days after March 31. (N)

Secretary Shultz: There should be about \$9 million left. (N)

Assistant Secretary Abrams: Deliveries will go on into April, May and June even without new money. (N)

General Kelley: We could accelerate military equipment deliveries to Honduras. We will take a hard look at that. We need to do something tangible. (N)

Deputy Secretary Taft: We can speed things up and maybe even increase MAP. (N)

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Secretary Shultz: It would be comparable to Ortega's trip to Moscow if those planes are sent before the House votes. But the Sandinistas also could do something conciliatory. We have to be ready for that also. (N)

Larry Speakes: We have issued a presidential statement. The press asked us if we lost votes because of our rhetoric. I said this statement presented the President's viewpoint. (N)

The President: Some of our friends in Congress told me that we had targeted congressman as if they had already voted. Some congressmen did say that to me. Larry, why don't you read the statement so everyone can hear it. (N)

Larry Speakes: (Reads statement.)

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Adm. Poindexter: We will look at making a trip to Central America in the next day or so to reassure them. We will wait on Bob Michel's opinion to see if we should ask the House to remain. And we will look at the implications of aircraft delivery to Nicaragua. (S)

The President: If we go back a little in history, we see that when we negotiated on behalf of South Vietnam, we promised that if North Vietnam violated, we would provide the fuel and ammunition the South would need. But Congress refused to agree to what the President asked. In Angola, again the Administration--a Republican President--asked for financial help only, and Congress voted "no," so now it is a communist country with 35,000 Cuban troops. And here we go again. (S)

The meeting adjourned.