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SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20301

12 MAY 1981

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INTERNATIONAL
SECURITY AFFAIRS

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Meeting between DepSecDef and Foreign Minister of El Salvador (U)

El Salvadoran participants:

- Foreign Minister Fidel Chavez-Mena
- Ambassador Ernesto Rivas-Gallont
- First Secretary Roberto Jimenez (Interpreter)
- LTC Rinaldo Golcher, Military Attache

United States participants:

- Mr. Frank C. Carlucci, Deputy Secretary of Defense
- Mr. Henry Catto, ASD (Public Affairs)
- Rear Admiral John Howe, Military Assistant
- Mr. Erich F. von Marbod, Deputy Director, DSAA
- COL Charles S. McClain, OASD (ISA)
- Mr. Leslie Scott, Department of State
- LTC Lawrence L. Tracy, OASD(ISA)

Time: 1600, 7 May 1981

Place: Room 3B928, Pentagon

(S) The Political Situation in El Salvador

Foreign Minister Chavez-Mena initiated the substantive portion of the meeting by discussing the prospects for elections next year. He said that his Government views the elections as a sociological process culminating in a political decision. He added that he believes that elections will turn less on ideology than on pragmatic decisions of the populace. With reference to the proposal of the Democratic Revolutionary Front (FDR) for international negotiations, he viewed this as a ploy to gain time. The Foreign Minister said his Government would not permit outside interference in a purely internal matter such as constituent assembly/presidential elections. The Deputy Secretary pointed out that El Salvador had a severe image problem in the U.S. and urged the Government of El Salvador to make public the efforts underway to bring to justice the killers of six

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Americans, as well as to curb abuses committed by the Salvadoran Security Forces. The Foreign Minister responded that he agreed that the image of his Government in the U.S. was a serious problem. On the matter of the suspected killers of the Americans, he said the immediate problem was translating political certainty to judicial certainty, but that his Government would do all possible to solve this problem. (Note: The GOES acknowledged on 10 May that six members of the Security Forces had been arrested in the case of the American Churchwomen.)

(S) Military Situation

The Foreign Minister said continued U.S. security assistance was vital for a military victory. While emphasizing that the eventual solution had to be of a political-military nature, he added that a quick military victory was necessary for the democratization process to succeed next year. The Deputy Secretary said he understood the reluctance of the Salvadoran military to send units/cadre out of El Salvador for training, but that this provided the U.S. the most efficient means to train large numbers of Salvadoran troops. The Foreign Minister agreed, and requested the Military Attache to comment. He, in turn, said he appreciated the constraints imposed on the U.S. by domestic political considerations, and pledged to use all his influence with the High Command to permit an expanded out-of-country training program. The Deputy Secretary expressed appreciation for this, and added that the U.S. goal was to train the Salvadorans as efficiently as possible so that the war and violence could be ended rapidly.

(S) The Problem of Nicaragua

The Foreign Minister said that Cuban and Nicaraguan support is critical for the guerrillas. He said the Nicaraguan Government had repeatedly told him they would stop the aid, which Nicaraguan officials maintained was not Government sanctioned. However, he did not believe them. Air infiltration has continued, and now Belize is likewise being used as a ground conduit. Additionally, new routes are being used through Honduras. The Foreign Minister claimed that the "Cubanization" of Nicaragua is an impediment to peace in the region. He sees Nicaragua as now being at a critical point, given the incompatibility of the Sandinista Government and the majority of the Nicaraguan populace. The two choices, in his view, are democratization/pluralism or a popular overthrow of the Government.

(S) Other Meetings

Foreign Minister Chavez-Mena also met with Mr. Koch, PDASD (ISA) and Mr. Warren, DASD(ISA) I-A in separate meetings. While the discussions essentially followed the same lines as that with DepSec-Def, the military situation was discussed in more detail in these

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lengthier meetings. Minister Chavez-Mena and LTC Golcher emphasized that the military situation was now favorable, with the guerrillas controlled for the present, although heavy fighting is occurring in Morazan Department. The Military Attache pointed out that the logistic shortcomings of the Government forces precluded sustained operations, permitting guerrillas to return to areas from which they have been driven, thus giving the guerrillas an image of strength that was largely illusory. The infiltration of arms and supplies had to be terminated, however, or the war could drag on for years. Popular support for the Government would lag if violence continues, with the Government unable to defeat the guerrillas conclusively. Tactical intelligence was likewise highlighted as an area where more training was vitally needed.

Approved by:



Date: 12 May 1981

NOEL C. KOCH

Acting Assistant Secretary of
Defense (ISA)

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