S/NM

DEPARTMENT OF STATE

ACTION MEMORANDUM

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June 1, 1977

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TO : The Secretary

FROM: S/NM - Mathea Falco
ARA - William H. Luers, Acting

Narcotics Control: Helicopters for Colombia

Issue for Decision

The delivery of three helicopters to Colombia under our narcotics control program is being held up pending the raising of the issue of serious corruption with the President of Colombia. ARA believes that steps should be taken to deliver the helicopters prior to Mrs. Carter's visit (June 9-10). S/NM disagrees.

Background/Analysis

On May 3 we sent you a memorandum outlining the background of the corruption issue which led to the decision to withhold the helicopters (Tab 1). You approved the course of action outlined in that memorandum, which provided for Ambassador Todman to express the high priority you and the President attach to the drug abuse problem, and to request that President Lopez meet with Ms. Mathea Falco to discuss in depth the effectiveness of our drug control program.

Any questions regarding the helicopters were to be answered by informing the President that delivery is now being delayed pending Ms. Falco's review of the overall effectiveness of the program.

Although in his May 9 meeting with the Colombian President, Ambassador Todman raised the narcotics issue and referred to Ms. Falco's planned trip, he did not follow the course outlined above in regard to our specific concerns nor did he respond to President Lopez's questions regarding the helicopters, probably because of other problems in Colombia of which you are aware.

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The Deputy Secretary subsequently approved and revised the course of action (Tab 2), whereby the Embassy was instructed to seek an appointment in late June with President Lopez for Ms. Falco and for Dr. Peter Bourne, the Special Assistant to the President and Director of the Office of Drug Abuse Policy, and to advise the Colombian Government that delivery of the helicopters was being delayed pending their visit.

On May 23, Ambassador Todman discussed with you his views on the need for immediate steps to effect delivery of the helicopters (i.e. signing a contract, etc.) on the grounds that our relations with Colombia are presently so tenuous that failure to commit ourselves to deliver the helicopters prior to Mrs. Carter's visit to Bogota (June 9-10) could jeopardize the success of her visit. He believes that delivery of the helicopters should not be contingent upon our efforts to deal with the issue of corruption. ARA feels that if President Lopez perceives that the helicopters are being withheld as leverage on the corruption issue, the highly sensitive President could take action which would weaken rather than strengthen our narcotics control program. S/NM considers that the present situation in Colombia renders the program ineffective. Furthermore, ARA believes that other U.S. interests would suffer. At a minimum, ARA is not sanguine about the effectiveness of the helicopters as leverage. On the other hand, delivery of the helicopters would set the stage for a less confrontational approach on the corruption issue.

S/NM does not concur. Apart from the loss of leverage which would result from delivery of the helicopters, there are overriding policy considerations arguing against delivery. A decision to deliver the helicopters now without taking any action on confirmed reports of extensive involvement of Colombian officials in cocaine trafficking could jeopardize our entire international narcotics control program, particularly in light of Congressional interest in corruption in host governments.

Furthermore, the Foreign Assistance Act provides for the President to suspend aid whenever he determines that the government of a recipient country has failed to take adequate steps to control production and traffic

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of narcotic drugs. While we do not envisage such drastic action, S/NM feels that delivery of the helicopters at this time without discussions with President Lopez would fly in the face of Congressional intent. Dr. Bourne strongly backs S/NM's position.

ARA proposes that Mrs. Carter be authorized to indicate that the helicopters will be delivered, that she allude to the corruption issue, and that she try to pave the way for the visit of Dr. Bourne and Ms. Falco.

S/NM proposes that Mrs. Carter express our concern, urge President Lopez to receive Dr. Bourne and Ms. Falco and if asked confirm that the helicopters are being delayed pending their meeting with him. S/NM's suggested talking points for Mrs. Carter are at Tab 3.

Recommendations

ARA recommends that steps be taken to deliver the helicopters to Colombia forthwith. S/NM believes we should maintain our previous position of withholding delivery pending the outcome of the Bourne-Falco visit.

Deliver helicopters _____

Withhold delivery ✓ JUN 3 1977

Attachments:

Tab 1 - Memorandum of May 3.
Tab 2 - State 107303.
Tab 3 - Talking Points for Mrs. Carter.

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Concurrence: ARA/AND:RBarnebey/DCox (draft)

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