S/NM - Mr. Cheshes

Colombia

CONFIDENTIAL

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

PARTICIPANTS: Brig. General Francisco Afanador, Deputy Secretary General, Ministry of Defense
Donald A. Johnston, Political Counselor

DATE: July 1, 1977

PLACE: Hotel Tequendama Restaurant

SUBJECT: 1) Possibilities for High Command Changes;
2) Cessation of State of Siege Benefits

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Following my luncheon invitation of the previous week, Afanador reciprocated the invitation in order to discuss arrangements he was making for me in the Cartagena area over the long 4th of July weekend.

Possibilities for High Command Changes.

From a general discussion of retirement practices in our respective services, the conversation focused on possible retirements and promotions in the Colombian military hierarchy. Afanador believed it unlikely that the Defense Minister, General Varon Valencia, would retire or would be permitted to retire by President Lopez before the end of Lopez' term in August 1978. Varon enjoys Lopez' complete confidence and is fully responsive to the President's wishes. He also discounted rumors that Commander of the Armed Forces, General Camacho Leyva, would retire during this administration. Upon the end of the Lopez administration and Varon Valencia's certain retirement, Camacho Leyva would be next in line to become Defense Minister, a position which, he said, the ambitious Camacho has long coveted. Nevertheless, Camacho's Conservative family connections could be an obstacle to his appointment as Defense Minister if another Liberal President were to succeed Lopez, which Afanador believed probable. This would be especially true if Turbay were to be elected, since Turbay would be more pliable to pressures from Liberal politicians not to appoint Camacho than, for example, Carlos Lleras might be. After Camacho, other officers in line for Minister, by seniority, would be General Matallana, Chief of the Joint Staff, Admiral Diaz, Navy Commander, and General Sarmiento, Army Commander. Although Afanador had made clear on previous occasions that during long years of association, sometimes close, with Camacho, he had never grown to like the man, Afanador believed that Camacho would be by far the best choice as Minister of Defense. He described Camacho as a man

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of "rightist" leanings although not an extremist, much as Afanador himself, well prepared-he is a lawyer-and possessing "scope."

Matallana, according to Afanador, is a rude soldier ("soldadote"), a "detective," extremely suspicious. He again referred to Matallana's use of a seer or psychic, when Chief of DAS, to locate kidnapped Sear's executive, Donald Cooper. He quoted President Lopez as saying, "that man is beginning to bore me," when DAS Chief Matallana habitually brought to the President unfounded rumors and gossip, and would then go on to counsel the President on economic policy. Admiral Diaz and General Sarmiento he also discounted, although he personally admires the latter officer, as lacking breadth and the force of personality to "project" themselves.

Cessation of State of Siege Benefits.

Afanador remarked that the military no longer accrued any benefits from states of siege. As of March, and using delegated powers under a presidential decree authorized by a law to reform the military career structure, the military itself had abolished the system whereby double time for retirement was accrued under states of siege. This had created havoc in the career system, allowing some officers to retire while still in their thirties. Afanador himself, at 48 years of age, had accrued 42 years toward retirement.

Afanador said that he was not aware of any effect on Armed Forces morale as a result of this change.

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