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NOTE FOR THE RECORD

Question of UNSG: Discussion with Mr. Ricardo Alarcon, Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs, Cuba (in charge of policy analysis and planning) - Tuesday, 5 August 1980

During my official visit to Cuba as President of the General Assembly I had, among other things, extensive meetings with Vice Minister Ricardo Alarcon. Ricardo had for more than 8 years been Cuba's Permanent Representative to the United Nations. The meeting took place at the residence where I was staying and lasted from 8:55 p.m. to 11:40 p.m. At this meeting we discussed a number of issues. The last topic which was discussed and extensively so was the question of my possible candidature for the post of Secretary-General of the United Nations.

I told Ricardo that while in New York, first Ambassador Raul Roa-Kouri and later Foreign Minister Malmierca had raised this question with me and told me that while in Havana Fidel was likely to raise the matter with me. Ambassador Rao-Kouri had been specific in expressing Cuba's support for my candidature \* should I decide to contest. I said that in the circumstances of today's meeting with Fidel, it was not possible to discuss this issue. While I knew that he would inform Fidel of our discussion, I wanted to also have the opportunity to get Ricardo's own assessment of the situation, bearing in mind his experience in the United Nations and also his multitude of contacts.

I briefed him on the various approaches made and the different contacts I have had so far. I emphasized that while there has been support expressed in different quarters, these so far had been either in the third world or by some representatives or Ministers of those countries in Europe,



both East and West, who are not permanent members of the Security Council. I had not discussed with any of the five permanent members since my position has always been not to take the initiative.

It is clear however, in the final analysis, that it is the five permanent members whose position is pivotal. Of the five, it is common knowledge that the Soviet Union and the United States are very crucial, particularly bearing in mind their own known "conservative" stance in respect to such questions. They are always guarded and invariably they make their decision at the last moment. It was however important for me, at some point, to know of their views. In this respect, I thought Cuba and other close friends of the Soviet Union could be most helpful in giving me a frank assessment and also in using their good offices, vis-a-vis Moscow.

Vice Minister Alarcon's views and reaction can be summarised as follows:-

(a) He, himself, and several others in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, have discussed the issue and it is their assessment that I have a very good chance;

(b) In his judgment, and he was saying so not as a compliment, there is no personality in the third world at the moment with my credentials and recognition. If there was to be a third world nominee, I had the best prospects;

(c) He had no doubt of Cuba's support for my candidature. He knows of Fidel's positive and favourable disposition towards me. In any case, he would also discuss the matter with Fidel.

He agreed totally with my approach of not making any statements and asserted that those who support me, which can be found in all the regions,



should themselves also do a lot of work. It was his personal conviction that in the present international situation, a third world candidate and more specifically myself, would be an ideal person.

Earlier on, I had briefed Ricardo about some of the ideas of some Ministers, African and Asian, who felt that perhaps the matter could be taken up both at the Non-Aligned Conference in Havana and also at the OAU meeting. I told him of my reservation on the advisability of having any endorsement by either of the two groups. It was my concern that such an endorsement could bring about a confrontational situation. On the other hand, there was no harm, I believed, in the African and the Non-Aligned Ministers and representatives making their position informally and even dropping a hint or so here and there concerning the need for a third world (and for that matter) an African candidate.

Ricardo agreed with this position and stated that one should be cautious in taking formal decisions because such decisions could be taken with strong reservations by both the Soviet Union and the United States. He said that the Soviets would be concerned at the concept that the seat should be filled by a particular region or a representative of a particular group of countries because implicit in such a situation is the concept of rotation which the Soviets definitely loathe. He believed the Americans would also not subscribe to the idea of rotation. Consequently, while it was vital to get the support of Africa and the third world countries, it was his view, particularly in respect to the Non-Aligned Movement, that it would not be prudent to go in for a formal endorsement.

I agreed with Ricardo on this and added that the problem of such an



endorsement is that it also has the ramification of being perceived as a form of regionalizing the office of the Secretary-General. The Secretary-General is the representative of all nations and all groups. Yet the support of Africa and the third world is vital.

Finally, Ricardo said that he would talk with Fidel and provide me with a feed-back as soon as possible.

Tuesday, 5 August 1980  
SAS/amg

OBSERVATIONS:

My discussions with Vice Minister Alarcon confirmed what various Cuban officials, including the Ambassador to the United Nations, have already intimated to me, namely Cuba's support for my possible candidature. Ricardo said that he was going to raise the matter with Fidel and obviously with the Foreign Minister. In my stay in Cuba, I had not raised the matter myself either with the Minister or with Fidel, but the Foreign Minister did something on the eve of my departure which was, in my opinion, a clear and unequivocal commitment on Cuba's part for my candidature.

I refer here to the informal dinner which the Foreign Minister, H.E. Mr. Isidora Malmierca Peoli hosted for us on Saturday, 9 August at the famous and historic Bodequita el Medio restaurant. The function took place from 9 p.m. to 10:30 pm. Those who were at the dinner in addition to the Foreign Minister included Mrs. Malmierca, Ambassador Oscar Oramas, Ambassador Lazaro Mora and the interpreter, Mrs. Marta Herrera. On our side there was Suedi and Angela.

The Bodequita is renown not only for its historic significance, but also for the graffiti which has been done over the years on the walls of the restaurant. Indeed all famous and not so famous personalities who have visited the place have invariably written something. Towards the end of the dinner the Foreign Minister asked me whether I would mind if he wrote something also. Of course I had no objections. I was naturally surprised when what he wrote on the wall related to the question of the Secretary-Generalship. He wrote the following in spanish: "Aqui estuvo el proximo Secretario General de la O.N.U. Salim Ahmed Salim - 9/viii/80 (Signed)." Briefly translated the inscription read "Here was the next Secretary-General of the United Nations, Salim Ahmed Salim (date and signature)" In a sense this was a public endorsement of my possible candidature and it was, I suppose, a definite response to the Cuban position.