

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

January 13, 1979

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2379

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

FROM: ZBIGNIEW BRZEZINSKI
ROBERT LIPSHUTZSUBJECT: Puerto Rican Prisoners

*Hold this in
Debit
a keyance -
let it gain
bureaucratic
momentum
J*

You may recall that you requested comments from the Attorney General on a recommendation made by Representative Robert Garcia and eleven other representatives to commute the sentences of the four Puerto Rican prisoners. In response to your request, the Attorney General sent the attached response (Tab A), but this was before meeting with us as set out below. (c)

The Attorney General's principal concern was the procedural difficulty of commuting the sentences of criminals who are unwilling to request clemency because of their political beliefs. In a memorandum of December 21, the Attorney General noted that he would "not object to being overruled" on this procedural point, and he also noted that he would not oppose the release of these prisoners "as part of a prisoner exchange, or for some other foreign policy grounds." (c)

Subsequently, we met with him and he agreed that the foreign policy considerations and political considerations might justify the release of these prisoners. Specifically, these considerations are: (c)

- (a) Lolita Lebron and three male Puerto Rican nationalists have been in federal prison for 24 years. No other woman in the Hemisphere has been in prison on such charges for so long a period; a fact which Communist critics of your human rights policy are fond of pointing out. (c)
- (b) If the four are released, they will no doubt be used by independent groups as symbols of their struggles, but we believe they will be the source of less criticism of the U.S. if they are released than if they remain in prison. (c)

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Review 1/12/85

SANITIZED

E.O. 12356, Sec. 3.4

PER 6/5/82 NSC H/RE MB-NLC-40-7
BY *[Signature]* NARS DATE 12/1/82

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- (c) Commuting the sentences of these prisoners will not only be welcomed as a compassionate and humanitarian gesture by virtually everyone in Puerto Rico, but also throughout Latin America. Cy supports it. (Tab B) ~~(C)~~
- (d) Release of these prisoners will remove from the agenda of the United Nations and other international forums a propaganda issue which is used each year against us, and is increasingly used as an example of the inconsistency of our human rights policy. We can expect that Castro will exploit this issue this year, particularly during the Non-Aligned Summit.

[REDACTED]
(See Tab C.) ~~(C)~~

We were preparing a memorandum for you along these lines when we received a letter from the Governor of Puerto Rico (Tab D). He makes a very strong case for not releasing the prisoners, and he has given that case to The Washington Star which published a story on January 11, 1979, (Tab E). ~~(C)~~

We believe that the Governor is virtually alone in this position. You may recall that Jose Granados, currently the Majority Leader of Puerto Rico's House of Representatives, wrote you a letter on June 28, 1978, which urged you to

[REDACTED] release the Puerto Ricans independently because "they have paid their price" and because this would demonstrate that you are "responsive to domestic public opinion in Puerto Rico." ~~(C)~~

However, before making a recommendation to you, we would like to wait a couple of weeks to see the response in Puerto Rico to the Governor's letter. If, as we expect, the Governor finds himself completely isolated in his opposition, then a decision by you will be much easier. ~~(C)~~

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Zbigniew Brzezinski and Robert Lipshutz's memo to President Carter on the Attorney General's comments on recommendation of Rep. Robert Garcia to commute sentences of four Puerto Rican prisoners. White House, 13 Jan. 1979. U.S. Declassified Documents Online, link.gale.com/apps/doc/CK2349059597/USDD?u=roosesc&sid=bookmark-USDD&pg=1. Accessed 21 Mar. 2023.