

MEMORANDUM

NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL

~~SECRET/GDS~~

September 26, 1978

1035

MEMORANDUM FOR: ZBIGNIEW BRZEZINSKI
DAVID AARON

FROM: ROBERT PASTOR *RP*

SUBJECT: Lolita Lebron

After discussions with David, I held a number of talks with people in the Justice Department and requested from them a dossier on Lolita Lebron and her colleagues. The basic issue is whether we should ask the President to reconsider his original decision not to pardon Lolita Lebron. You will recall that Castro has said that he would free Lawrence Lunt and the three other U.S. citizens in Cuban prisons if the President pardoned Lolita Lebron and the two other Puerto Ricans in U.S. prisons.

Townsend Hoopes and John Wainwright made the case that Lebron has "disavowed violence" and she therefore would not be a political risk if she were released. Two of the questions I asked of Justice were whether Hoopes' statement and his conclusion were accurate.

The record confirms the authenticity of the statement and suggests that the conclusion may be correct as well. Lebron has maintained a clear conduct record in prison for the entire time she has been in prison since 1954. She espouses non-violence and says that while she hopes for her country's liberation, she also hopes no more blood will be shed. Though eligible for parole since 1969 she will not apply because she knows that one of the restrictions will be non-involvement in the Puerto Rican independence movement. However, her prison report indicates that "if she returned to her community in Puerto Rico, it is probable that she would visit each little group and make her little talk and she would no longer be in such demand." She has become a religious recluse, and after reading through her record, I am doubtful that she would even participate very much in any political activities. It is true that she did not fire at the Congress like her cohorts, and may have always believed in non-violence. She was granted a trip to New York and Puerto Rico in March 1977 to attend her daughter's funeral. The prison reported that her trip went very well.

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Of the original team, there are only two others who remain in prison. Rafael Cancel Miranda has an excellent work record, and the staff evaluation is that "he would cause no problem if he were released from prison."

Irving Flores Rodríguez is described as "extremely quiet, a loner, and has virtually no relations with anybody." The staff reports that he is "not violent, not an advocate, and at most mentally lazy."

The Justice Department official who has been working on this case believes that if they were released, they would "receive a splash of attention for a short period of time and then they will fade into obscurity..." He feels that they also would not accept any conditions imposed on their release.

COMMENT:

After reading through the voluminous record on these three individuals, I am struck at how pathetic these three cases are, and at how compassionate the decision would be to release these three individuals. One can never say with certainty whether or not they would be violent, but frankly, after 25 years in prison, these three individuals seem broken. I have come to believe that the risks of releasing them unconditionally are minimal, while the benefits -- as a humanitarian, compassionate gesture -- are considerable. I also believe that the President would obtain considerable political benefit in Puerto Rico as there is widespread support for such a move there. A decision around Christmas time would be appropriate.

Before proceeding, we should ask the Attorney General for a recommendation. You may also want to discuss this with the President first, since he has already made a decision on it. Would you like me to draft a memo from you to the President providing this additional information and informing him that you are asking the Attorney General for a recommendation?

Yes _____

No _____

RECOMMENDATION:

That you sign the memorandum attached at Tab I and forward it to the Attorney General.

Approve _____

Disapprove _____

At Tab II is a letter from David Aaron to Townsend Hoopes in response to his earlier letter.

Memorandum from Robert Pastor for Zbigniew Brzezinski and David Aaron regarding a request that President Jimmy Carter reconsider his original decision not to pardon Lolita Lebron. Lebron has been in jail for twenty-five years as a political prisoner. Her release will benefit Carter's political standing in Puerto Rico. National Security Council, 26 Sept. 1978. U.S. Declassified Documents Online, link.gale.com/apps/doc/CK2349140154/USDD?u=roosesc&sid=bookmark-USDD&pg=2. Accessed 21 Mar. 2023.