

Document: CIAA -0000 213355 Subject: APPRAISAL OF SITUATION: THREATS TO THE GOVERNMENT  
OF PRESIDENT JOSE NAPOLEON DUARTE C 21648CIAA 213355 MSO85-6150087

MIDB

D COMET 850110

CIA-213355C0185 1

UPID

\*\*\* [redacted] \*\*\*

~~SECRET~~

FRP: ,2, ,4, , , ,

(b)(1)

(b)(3) NatSecAct

MILITARY

[redacted]

(b)(1)

(b)(3) NatSecAct

85 6150087 MSO

PAGE 001

TOT: 101937Z JAN 85

CIA 213355

~~SECRET~~ NOFORN

[redacted]

(b)(3) NatSecAct

101937ZCIA 213355

TO: IMMEDIATE DIRNSA, DEPT OF STATE, DIA, TREASURY DEPT,  
SECRET SERVICE, FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION,  
WHITE HOUSE SITUATION ROOM, NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL STAFF,

[redacted]

(b)(1)

(b)(3) NatSecAct

[redacted]

STATE FOR INR AND SY/TAG;

SECRET SERVICE FOR ID.

(b)(1)

(b)(3) NatSecAct

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

[redacted]

(b)(3) NatSecAct

DIST: 10 JANUARY 1985

COUNTRY: EL SALVADOR

SUBJ: APPRAISAL OF SITUATION: THREATS TO THE GOVERNMENT  
OF PRESIDENT JOSE NAPOLEON DUARTE

[redacted]

(b)(1)

(b)(3) NatSecAct

SUMMARY: MANY --WE THINK PROBABLY MOST-- SENIOR SALVADORAN  
MILITARY OFFICERS STILL ASSOCIATE IDEOLOGICALLY WITH THE  
CONSERVATIVE POLITICAL PARTY "ARENA" AND/OR DISTRUST PRESIDENT  
DUARTE AND THE CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATS. THE DECEMBER 1984 CONFRONTATION  
BETWEEN THE MILITARY AND DUARTE OVER THE LOPEZ NUILA ISSUE WAS  
SERIOUS, ALTHOUGH EVIDENCE OF SPECIFIC COUP PLOTTING IS MUCH

(b)(1)

(b)(3) CIAAct

(b)(3) NatSecAct

[redacted]

~~SECRET~~

LESS CERTAIN. OTHER CRISES BETWEEN THE MILITARY AND DUARTE COULD OCCUR OVER ELECTORAL LAW MANEUVERING AND THE PEACE DIALOGUE WITH THE INSURGENTS. AN EVENTUAL COUP PLAN COULD DEVELOP WITHOUT MUCH PUBLIC WARNING, BUT A "CONSTITUTIONAL" TAKEOVER OR ASSASSINATION ATTEMPT MAY BE MORE LIKELY IN A SHOWDOWN SITUATION.

TEXT: 1. THE SALVADORAN MILITARY OFFICER CORPS IS THE MOST COHESIVE INSTITUTION IN EL SALVADOR. NEARLY 50 YEARS OF OFTEN ABSOLUTE MILITARY RULE MADE THE OFFICER CORPS RELUCTANT TO TURN OVER POWER TO A CONSTITUTIONAL, CIVILIAN GOVERNMENT. THIS WAS ALL THE MORE DIFFICULT BECAUSE MANY --WE THINK PROBABLY A MAJORITY OF-- SENIOR OFFICERS CONSIDER PRESIDENT JOSE NAPOLEON ((DUARTE)) AND HIS CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATIC PARTY TO BE "LEFTISTS," IF NOT WORSE; AND/OR THEY STILL ASSOCIATE IDEOLOGICALLY WITH THE CONSERVATIVE POLITICAL PARTY KNOWN AS "ARENA," ALTHOUGH NOT

NECESSARILY WITH ITS EXTREME RIGHT WING LEADER ROBERTO D'AUBUISSON. THIS INHERENT DISTRUST OF DUARTE BY MILITARY TRADITIONALISTS, COMBINED WITH SOME SERIOUS MISTAKES THE PRESIDENT IS JUDGED TO HAVE ALREADY MADE, HAS RESULTED IN AN INTERNAL POLITICAL BALANCE OF CONTINUING DELICACY. THE POSSIBILITY OF A CONFRONTATION BETWEEN PRESIDENT DUARTE AND THE MILITARY HAS NEVER BEEN FAR FROM THE SURFACE. A SHOWDOWN WAS THREATENED IN LATE DECEMBER AND COULD OCCUR AGAIN WITHOUT MUCH PUBLIC WARNING.

2. ONE BURNING CONTROVERSY REACHED A CLIMAX IN LATE DECEMBER OVER MILITARY PERCEPTIONS OF DUARTE'S ATTEMPT TO PROMOTE TO GENERAL HIS FRIEND AND SUPPORTER, VICE MINISTER OF DEFENSE FOR PUBLIC SECURITY COL. REYNALDO ((LOPEZ)) NUILA. NEARLY ALL MIDDLE-SENIOR GRADE MILITARY OFFICERS (CAPTAIN AND ABOVE) OPPOSED THE PROMOTION OF LOPEZ NUILA. THEY REGARD LOPEZ NUILA AS DUARTE'S "PENETRATION" OF THE MILITARY AND CONSIDER HIM TO BE UNQUALIFIED, AS A NON-COMBAT OFFICER, TO BE A GENERAL IN THE SALVADORAN ARMED FORCES. A CRISIS OVER THIS ISSUE WAS AVERTED ONLY ON 28/29 DECEMBER WHEN DUARTE, AFTER HAVING BEEN APPROACHED BY HIS MINISTER OF DEFENSE GENERAL CARLOS EUGENIO ((VIDES)) CASANOVA, SIGNED THE ORDER FOR ONLY THE TWO COLONELS RECOMMENDED BY THE MILITARY REVIEW COMMISSION TO BE PROMOTED TO GENERAL: CHIEF OF THE JOINT GENERAL STAFF ADOLFO ONECIFERO ((BLANDON)) AND AIR FORCE COMMANDER JUAN RAFAEL ((BUSTILLO)).

3. THE SENSE OF CRISIS OVER THE LOPEZ NUILA PROMOTION POSSIBILITY WAS "REAL"; EVIDENCE OF SPECIFIC COUP PLOTTING AGAINST DUARTE OVER THIS ISSUE IS MUCH LESS CERTAIN. THERE CAN--AND SHOULD--BE MORE SKEPTICISM OVER AVAILABLE INFORMATION ON THE EXTENT OF ACTIVE COUP PLOTTING WITHIN RIGHT-WING CIRCLES. AT A MINIMUM, SOME RIGHTIST CIVILIANS AND MILITARY OFFICERS WERE AT LEAST DISCUSSING THE POSSIBILITY OF MOUNTING A COUP ATTEMPT IF DUARTE SUCCEEDED IN HAVING LOPEZ NUILA PROMOTED. THERE IS CONFLICTING REPORTING WHETHER CIVILIANS, I.E., ARENA PARTY EXTREMISTS, OR OFFICERS, E.G., COMMANDER OF THE FOURTH BRIGADE LT. COL.

SIGIFREDO ((OCHOA)) PEREZ, WERE LEAD ELEMENTS IN SUCH PLOTTING. OUR LATEST VIEW IS THAT ARENA CIVILIANS, POSSIBLY NOT AWARE OF THE BROADLY COORDINATED MILITARY ACTIVITY AGAINST LOPEZ NUILA'S PROMOTION, WERE THE LEADERS IN TRYING TO DISTORT THE DELIBERATELY ORCHESTRATED MILITARY PRESSURE ON DUARTE. IN ANY EVENT, AS LONG

~~SECRET~~

~~SECRET~~

AS THERE ARE MILITARY AND CIVILIAN RIGHT-WING EXTREMISTS WHO TEND TO THINK THE SAME WAY, THERE WILL BE A PROPENSITY TO COOPERATE. THIS OFFICE CONCLUDES THAT A RELATIVELY SMALL GROUP OF CIVILIAN AND MILITARY "PLOTTERS" MAY HAVE WANTED TO DEVELOP A SPECIFIC COUP PLAN IN CONNECTION WITH THE LOPEZ NULLA ISSUE BUT THAT SUCH PLANNING WAS NEVER FAR ADVANCED AND DID NOT INCLUDE A MAJORITY --OR EVEN MANY-- OF THE MILITARY OFFICERS. SHOULD RELATIONS BETWEEN DUARTE AND THE MILITARY DETERIORATE AGAIN, HOWEVER, THE CHANCE FOR A COUP AGAINST THE PRESIDENT --OR, PERHAPS MORE LIKELY, AN ASSASSINATION ATTEMPT-- CANNOT BE DISCOUNTED.

4. AT THE SAME TIME THE LOPEZ NULLA CASE WAS CAUSING DISCONTENT AMONG MILITARY OFFICERS, DUARTE MADE THE TACTICAL MISTAKE OF EXECUTING A LINE-ITEM VETO OF A LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY PASSED BILL. THIS PARTIAL VETO, WHICH EXCISED AN ARTICLE PROHIBITING RELATIVES OF THE PRESIDENT FROM HOLDING ELECTIVE OFFICE, HAS BROUGHT CHARGES THAT DUARTE CONTRAVENED THE CONSTITUTION. IT SHOULD BE NOTED THAT DUARTE'S SON, ALEJANDRO, IS CURRENTLY MAYOR OF SAN SALVADOR AND WANTED TO RUN IN THE MARCH ELECTIONS FOR THIS OFFICE. THESE CHARGES HAVE COME NOT ONLY FROM POLITICAL PARTIES IN OPPOSITION TO DUARTE IN THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY, WHICH HAS SINCE REPASSED ITS BILL IN THE ORIGINAL FORMAT, BUT ALSO FROM MILITARY OFFICERS. THESE OFFICERS, POSSIBLY A MAJORITY, STATE THAT THEY WILL SUPPORT THE PRESIDENT ONLY AS LONG AS HE ACTS "WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF THE CONSTITUTION." SOME, PERHAPS MANY, ANTI-DUARTE MILITARY OFFICERS WHO WOULD NOT PARTICIPATE IN A COUP WOULD BE PLEASED IF A "CONSTITUTIONAL" WAY WERE FOUND TO REMOVE OR SUSPEND THE PRESIDENT FROM OFFICE. DUARTE IS WELL AWARE OF THIS AND PRESUMABLY WILL BE CAREFUL NOT TO LET HIMSELF BE SUBJECTED TO ANY IMPEACHMENT OR OTHER PARLIAMENTARY-JUDICIAL PROCEDURE WHICH COULD JEOPARDIZE HIS POSITION.

5. THE "PEACE DIALOGUE" BETWEEN THE GOVERNMENT AND THE FDR/FMLN INSURGENTS HAS ALSO BEEN A CONTROVERSIAL ISSUE WITHIN THE MILITARY SINCE PRESIDENT DUARTE MADE THE PROPOSAL DURING HIS UNITED NATIONS SPEECH. THIS PROPOSAL TOOK MOST MILITARY OFFICERS BY SURPRISE; DUARTE HAD DISCUSSED THIS IDEA WITH ONLY A FEW SENIOR MILITARY OFFICIALS JUST BEFORE LEAVING FOR NEW YORK. MANY MILITARY OFFICERS SEE THESE TALKS AS PLAYING INTO THE HANDS OF THE INSURGENTS BY AFFORDING THEM AN INTERNATIONAL MEDIA PLATFORM AS WELL AS GIVING THE INSURGENT CAUSE AN APPEARANCE OF LEGITIMACY BY "RECOGNIZING" THEM AS A POLITICAL FORCE. EVEN WORSE IN THE EYES OF THE MILITARY OFFICERS IS THE POSSIBILITY THAT DUARTE WILL ESCALATE THE TALKS TO A NEGOTIATION LEVEL IN WHICH THE GOVERNMENT MIGHT MAKE CONCESSIONS TO THE INSURGENTS. SHOULD DUARTE ATTEMPT TO MOVE THE TALKS TO THIS LEVEL WITHOUT OBTAINING IN ADVANCE SOLID, WIDESPREAD SUPPORT FROM HIS MILITARY OFFICER CORPS, IT IS OUR OPINION THAT HE AGAIN WOULD FACE THE PROSPECT OF A SHOWDOWN WITH THE MILITARY, WHICH COULD LEAD TO HIS OUSTER FROM THE PRESIDENCY.

6. THE LACK OF COUNTERINTELLIGENCE INFORMATION IN THE INTELLIGENCE AND SECURITY SERVICE WITHIN THE OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENCY (S-II) WAS REVEALED DURING THE RECENT CRISIS PERIOD. THE PRESIDENTIAL S-II OFFICE DOES NOT REGULARLY RECEIVE REPORTS FROM ANY OTHER SALVADORAN GOVERNMENT S-II SECTIONS, EITHER THE MILITARY OR PUBLIC SECURITY ORGANIZATIONS. S-II HAS TO

~~SECRET~~

~~SECRET~~

RELY ON ITS OWN LIMITED RESOURCES TO KEEP ABREAST OF PLOTTING OR OTHER COUNTERINTELLIGENCE MATTERS WITHIN THE ARMED FORCES. AS OF LATE DECEMBER, THE PRESIDENTIAL S-II WAS JUDGING THAT A COUP ATTEMPT AT THAT TIME WAS UNLIKELY BUT WAS NOT BASING THIS JUDGEMENT ON ANY HARD INFORMATION. UNLESS THIS SITUATION IS IMPROVED, A COUP ATTEMPT COULD TAKE PLACE IN THE FUTURE WITH LITTLE LIKELIHOOD OF THE PRESIDENTIAL S-II BEING AWARE THAT SUCH A THREAT EXISTED.

7. IN ADDITION TO THE ELECTORAL LAW AND PEACE DIALOGUE ISSUES, ANOTHER CRITICAL TIME COULD ARISE WHEN VIDES CASANOVA AND PROBABLY HIS VICE MINISTER RAFAEL ((FLORES)) LIMA RESIGN FROM THE MILITARY. THEIRS HAVE BEEN TWO OF THE MOST MODERATE VOICES WITHIN THE MILITARY HIGH COMMAND. THEY HAVE OFTEN ACTED AS A BUFFER BETWEEN THE PRESIDENCY AND THE MILITARY. BOTH MAY HAVE BEEN UNDERRATED IN THE PAST, YET THEY PROVED THEIR

EFFECTIVENESS DURING THE LOPEZ NULLA CRISIS. THEIR REPLACEMENTS WOULD PROBABLY BE BUSTILLO AND BLANDON. BLANDON IS A PRAGMATIST WHO PROBABLY WOULD BE THE EQUAL OF VIDES CASANOVA AS THE MINISTER OF DEFENSE. BUSTILLO IS MORE VOLATILE AND, REPUTEDLY, "RIGHTIST." ONE PROBLEM MAY ARISE OVER BUSTILLO'S PROFESSED RELUCTANCE TO GIVE UP OPERATIONAL COMMAND OF THE AIR FORCE.

8. OUR CONCLUSION IS THAT IF PRESIDENT DUARTE HAD NOT BACKED DOWN ON THE LOPEZ NULLA ISSUE, A COUP ATTEMPT COULD HAVE EVENTUALLY RESULTED. MOST OF THE SALVADORAN MILITARY, INCLUDING THE LEADERSHIP, WERE NOT ACTIVELY PLOTTING AT THAT TIME. THEY MUCH PREFERRED TO ACHIEVE THEIR OBJECTIVES BY OTHER, NON-VIOLENT MEANS. ONE OF THE REPORTED WOULD-BE PLOTTERS STATED DURING THE CRISIS PERIOD IN DECEMBER THAT THE ISSUE OF POSSIBLE CESSATION OF U.S. GOVERNMENT ASSISTANCE TO EL SALVADOR WAS NO LONGER AN OVERRIDING ELEMENT IN DECISIONS WHICH AFFECT THE MILITARY INSTITUTION IN EL SALVADOR. THIS MAY BE PURE CHEST-THUMPING, AND WE THINK THAT MOST SALVADORAN OFFICERS DO NOT SHARE HIS VIEW. SEVERAL SOURCES HAVE, HOWEVER, GIVEN STATEMENTS WHICH

~~SECRET~~

~~SECRET~~

WE DO CONSIDER TO BE REFLECTIVE OF THE VIEWS OF MANY IN THE MILITARY: THE MILITARY IS THE ULTIMATE GUARDIAN OF THE CONSTITUTION IN EL SALVADOR; IF DUARTE OR ANY OTHER PRESIDENT VIOLATES THE CONSTITUTION AND DEFIES SELF-CORRECTING POLITICAL-LEGAL MECHANISMS, IT WOULD BE INCUMBENT ON THE MILITARY TO INSURE THAT HE IS REMOVED.

9. (AMBASSADOR'S COMMENT: IN GENERAL, THE ABOVE REFLECTS IN A FAIR WAY THE DEGREE OF FRAGILITY OF THE PRESENT SITUATION. DUARTE IN MY RECENT TALKS HAS SHOWN SERIOUS CONCERN ABOUT MILITARY REACTIONS IN ALL OF THE AREAS MENTIONED: THE LOPEZ NUILA AFFAIR, THE VETO, THE DIALOGUE, TO NAME THE MAJOR ONES. HE INSISTS HE WAS NOT PRESSING TO HAVE LOPEZ NUILA PROMOTED; THERE IS A PAUCITY OF EVIDENCE ON THE POINT -- THE SELECTION BOARD DID MEET A SECOND TIME. NEVERTHELESS, THE KEY FACTOR IS THAT MANY IN THE MILITARY THOUGHT HE WAS DOING SO. IT IS PROBABLE THAT THE RIGHTIST CIVILIANS IN CONTACT WITH THE MILITARY DID MUCH TO AGITATE THE ISSUE. THERE IS A PAUCITY OF GOOD INFORMATION IN EL SALVADOR AND OF METHODS TO DISSEMINATE IT. THE INEFFECTIVENESS OF THE PRESIDENTIAL S-II OPERATION IS

FRIGHTENING. I AGREE THAT THE SENSE OF CRISIS PROBABLY OUTWEIGHED THE DEGREE TO WHICH REAL COUP PLANNING WAS GOING FORWARD. WE WILL EVALUATE SOME COUP SCENARIOS TO TRY TO DETERMINE THE ESSENTIAL INGREDIENTS. I DO NOT BELIEVE ONE CAN CLEARLY CONCLUDE THAT MOST OR A MAJORITY OF OFFICERS ARE INFLUENCED BY THE RIGHT -- TWO OUT OF THREE "OFFICERS" ARE CADETS AND PROBABLY NOT POLITICALLY COMMITTED. PROBABLY MANY MIDDLE AND SENIOR OFFICERS ARE RIGHTISTS, BUT WE SHOULD BE CAREFUL ABOUT TOO GLIB CONCLUSIONS. THE HIGH COMMAND IN PARTICULAR IS SIGNIFICANT AND IS NOT SO COMMITTED.)

(b)(1)

(b)(3) NatSecAct

~~SECRET~~