

PTQ4532

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PAGE 01 SAN SA 01152 01 OF 03 010510Z
ACTION ARA-01

INFO LOG-00 ACDA-10 ACDE-00 CIAE-00 OASY-00 DODE-00 SRPP-00
DS-00 H-01 TEDE-00 INR-00 LAB-01 L-01 ADS-00
MMP-00 M-00 NSAE-00 NSCE-00 OIG-04 OMB-01 OPIC-01
PA-00 PM-00 PRS-00 P-00 CIO-00 SP-00 SSO-00
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FM AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 2274
INFO USCINCSO QUARRY HEIGHTS PM
ALCA COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 SAN SALVADOR 001152

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/13/07
TAGS: PGOV, KPRP, ES
SUBJECT: ARENA AND THE ELECTIONS: SOME SLIPPAGE, BUT CONFIDENT

REF: A. SAN SALVADOR 332, B. SAN SALVADOR 1038,
C. SAN SALVADOR 1105, D. 96 SAN SALVADOR 5956,
E. 96 SAN SALVADOR 6660, F. 96 SAN SALVADOR 6278

1. (U) CLASSIFIED BY GREGORY B. SPROW, POLITICAL COUNSELLOR.
REASON: 1.5 (B AND D)
2. (U) THIS REPORT FULFILLS A REPORTING REQUIREMENT UNDER THE
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REVIEW AUTHORITY: Oscar Olson, Senior Reviewer

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PAGE 02 SAN SA 01152 01 OF 03 010510Z
POST REPORTING PLAN (REF A).

3. (C) SUMMARY: DESPITE THE DEFECTIONS OF SOME WELL-KNOWN
ARENA FIGURES OVER THE LAST SIX MONTHS AND OPINION POLLS
SUGGESTING THAT THE FMLN HAS OVERTAKEN THE RULING PARTY IN THE
RUN-UP TO THE IMPENDING LEGISLAQAND MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS,
ARENA'S LEADERSHIP IS CONFIDENT THAT THE PARTY WILL DO RELATIVELY

WELL AT THE POLLS ON MARCH 16. PRIVATELY, AND AFTER PRODDING, THEY ACKNOWLEDGE THAT THEY WILL LIKELY LOSE SEATS IN THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY, BUT BELIEVE THEIR LOSSES WILL BE MINIMAL. ACCORDING TO ARENA'S LATEST TRACKING POLL, THE PARTY SHOULD WIN ABOUT 36 SEATS IN THE ASSEMBLY (DOWN FROM THE 39 THEY WON IN 1994). THEIR PROFESSED MAJOR CONCERN IS THAT IN THE AFTERMATH OF WHAT THEY SEE AS MANIPULATED POLLS AND THE UNFOUNDED, HEIGHTENED EXPECTATIONS OF THE FMLN, ARENA WILL BE CHARGED WITH VOTE FRAUD BY THE OPPOSITION WHEN THE RULING PARTY EMERGES FROM THE ELECTIONS AS THE STILL DOMINANT POLITICAL FORCE. ARENA PRESIDENT GLORIA SALGUERO GROSS HAS ASSURED US THAT THE ARENA RANK AND FILE ARE UNDER ORDERS TO BEHAVE AND AVOID CONFRONTATION. END SUMMARY

SIGNS OF DIVISION WITHIN ARENA

4. (C) WITH INTERNAL SPLITS AND SQUABBLING THE ORDER OF THE DAY FOR THE LEADING POLITICAL PARTIES HERE -- NOTE THE FMLN/PD BREAKUP AND THE AMOEBA-LIKE DIVISIONS OF THE PDC -- THE OPPOSITION PARTIES HAVE LOOKED EXPECTANTLY FOR SIMILAR TRAVAILS TO BESET THE COUNTRY'S MOST FORMIDABLE PARTY APPARATUS, ARENA. INDEED, SIGNS OF INTERNAL PROBLEMS SEEMED REAL ENOUGH IN MID-1996, WHEN FORMER D'AUBUISSON ASSOCIATE (AND ALLEGED DEATH SQUAD LEADER), VICTOR ANTONIO CORNEJO ARANGO, BEGAN TO AGITATE FOR A
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POSITION FOR HIMSELF ON THE RULING PARTY'S GOVERNING BOARD (THE "COENA"), ACCUSING THE PARTY LEADERSHIP OF TURNING ITS BACK ON THE PARTY'S RANK AND FILE AND CORRUPTING THE PARTY'S FOUNDING PRINCIPLES. THIS AGITATION COINCIDED WITH THE ABRUPT RESIGNATION OF THEN PARTY PRESIDENT JUAN JOSE DOMENECH IN SEPTEMBER, LEADING TO WIDESPREAD SPECULATION THAT ARENA WAS IN THE MIDST OF A SERIOUS INTERNAL DISPUTE. HOWEVER, THE PARTY RALLIED AROUND NEW PRESIDENT GLORIA SALGUERO GROSS AND BLOCKED THE ASPIRATIONS OF CORNEJO (REF D). IN NOVEMBER, "EL MANEQUE," AS CORNEJO IS POPULARLY KNOWN, FORMALLY LEFT ARENA AND JOINED THE NATIONAL RECONCILIATION PARTY (PCN) THE TRADITIONAL PARTY OF THE MILITARY AND CONSERVATIVE AGRARIAN AND BUSINESS SECTORS (REF E).

5. (C) THE SECOND SHOE DROPPED IN JANUARY 1997 WHEN THREE PROMINENT "ARENEROS" -- FORMER VICE PRESIDENT JOSE FRANCISCO MERINO; FORMER SUPREME COURT PRESIDENT MAURICIO GUTIERREZ CASTRO; AND RETIRED COL. SIGIFREDO OCHOA PEREZ -- DRAMATICALLY SPLIT WITH ARENA AND ENLISTED IN THE PCN JUST AS THE OFFICIAL ELECTION CAMPAIGN PERIOD BEGAN. ALL THREE DECLARED THAT ARENA HAD LOST SIGHT OF ITS ORIGINAL PRECEPTS AND HAD BECOME A CLOSED, AUTHORITARIAN ORGANIZATION. ARENA SPOKESMEN SCOFFED AT THE EXPLANATIONS OF THE THREE DEFECTORS AND CHARGED THAT THEIR

DEPARTURES WERE THE RESULT OF THEIR DISPLEASURE OVER THEIR DIMINISHED ROLE AND INFLUENCE IN THE PARTY. THIS MARGINALIZATION WAS PARTICULARLY EVIDENT IN THE CASE OF MERINO: THE ARENA LEADERSHIP HAD INTERVENED IN OCTOBER TO DENY HIM THE PRESIDENCY OF THE CENTRAL AMERICAN PARLIAMENT (REF F), AND APPARENTLY LATER REFUSED HIS DEMAND TO BE NAMED TO THE SUPREME ELECTORAL TRIBUNAL (TSE).

BUT ELECTORAL IMPACT OF THE DEFECTIONS UNCERTAIN
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6. (C) HOW MANY VOTES THESE EX-ARENEROS TAKE FROM ARENA AND BRING TO THE PCN IS FAR FROM CLEAR. NONETHELESS, CUMULATIVELY THE EFFECT HAS BEEN TO REINFORCE THE IMPRESSION THAT ARENA IS DIVIDED AND WEAKENED, AND HENCE VULNERABLE (AND, CORRESPONDINGLY, TO CREATE THE IMPRESSION THAT THE PCN IS ON THE REBOUND AFTER YEARS OF ELECTORAL SLIDE). THE DEFECTIONS HAVE NOT BEEN ACCOMPANIED BY ANY MASSIVE SHIFTS IN LOYALTY BY THE PARTY'S MID-LEVEL LEADERSHIP OR MOVES BY ARENA MAYORS OR DEPUTIES TO FOLLOW IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF CORNEJO, MERINO, ET AL AS REPEATEDLY PREDICTED BY CORNEJO. (COMMENT: THERE HAVE BEEN A HANDFUL OF DEFECTIONS BY ARENA MAYORS, BUT GENERALLY AFTER THESE OFFICIALS HAD BEEN INFORMED THE PARTY WOULD NOT SUPPORT THEM FOR RE-ELECTION. END COMMENT). INDEED, MANY WITHIN ARENA WERE PRIVATELY GLAD TO SEE "EL MANEQUE," MERINO, AND GUTIERREZ GO, ARGUING THAT THEIR DUBIOUS REPUTATIONS IMPOSED A POLITICAL BURDEN ON THE PARTY.

7. (C) MORE BROADLY, THE DEFECTIONS ARE GENERALLY REFLECTIVE OF THE DISENCHANTMENT WITH ARENA FELT BY SOME BUSINESS AND AGRICULTURAL ELEMENTS, WHO BELIEVE THAT THEIR ECONOMIC INTERESTS HAVE NOT BEEN WELL SERVED BY THE GOVERNMENT'S ECONOMIC POLICIES AND SUPPORT FOR MODERNIZATION AND FREE MARKETS (REF B).

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 02 OF 03 SAN SALVADOR 001152

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THE ARENA CAMPAIGN

8. ARENA'S ELECTION CAMPAIGN HAS CENTERED AROUND FIVE PLEDGES:
TO COMBAT POVERTY; TO CONFRONT CRIME WITH TOUGH LEGAL AND LAW
ENFORCEMENT MEASURES; TO PROVIDE MORE JOBS; TO REACTIVATE THE
AGRICULTURAL SECTOR; AND TO WORK WITH AND THROUGH THE
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MUNICIPALITIES TO PROMOTE LOCAL DEVELOPMENT. MORE POINTEDLY, THE
PARTY'S MASSIVE MEDIA EFFORT HAS: (A) UNDERLINED THE COUNTRY'S
PROGRESS, UNDER TWO ARENA GOVERNMENTS, IN RESTORING THE ECONOMY
AND REBUILDING INFRASTRUCTURE AFTER THE WAR; AND (B) ATTACKED THE

FMLN BY PORTRAYING THE PRINCIPAL OPPOSITION FORCE AS UNRECONSTRUCTED REVOLUTIONARIES WITH TIES TO INTERNATIONAL TERRORISTS. THE MORE POSITIVE ARENA ADS STRESSED THAT THE GOVERNMENT HAD GENERATED THE INTERNATIONAL CONFIDENCE NECESSARY TO SECURE FOREIGN INVESTMENT, GENERATE JOBS, AND REBUILD THE COUNTRY. HOWEVER, AS POLLS INDICATED THAT THE FMLN'S FOCUS ON ARENA'S ECONOMIC POLICIES AND THE VAT AS THE CAUSES OF THE "HIGH COST OF LIVING" WERE MEETING WITH POPULAR ACCEPTANCE, ARENA HARDENED ITS APPROACH. STEPPING UP THEIR NEGATIVE AD CAMPAIGN, ARENA RETALIATED WITH EVER NASTIER TV/RADIO ADS LINKING THE FMLN TO ARMS TRAFFICKING AND A WEAPONS CACHE DISCOVERED OUTSIDE MANAGUA. MOREOVER, THEY ARGUED THAT THE DESTRUCTION ENGENDERED BY THE FMLN'S GUERRILLA WAR WAS THE REAL REASON FOR THE 1995 INCREASE IN THE VAT AND THE ECONOMIC BURDEN PLACED ON THE COUNTRY. (ARENA EVEN WENT SO FAR AS TO CLAIM THAT AN FMLN VICTORY WOULD MEAN THE COLLAPSE OF THE SALVADORAN ECONOMY ALA THE SANDINISTA EXPERIENCE IN NICARAGUA.)

OF POLLS AND CREDIBILITY

9. (C) STUNG BY POLLS SHOWING IT RUNNING BEHIND THE FMLN, ARENA HAS ATTACKED THE PUBLIC OPINION POLLS AS UNRELIABLE AND POLITICALLY MOTIVATED. INDEED, THE HIGH PERCENTAGE OF "UNDECIDEDS" STRONGLY SUGGEST TO US THAT THE POLLS RELEASED TO DATE ARE OF LIMITED VALUE IN PROJECTING THE OUTCOME OF THE MARCH 16 ELECTIONS IN TERMS OF HOW THE PARTIES WILL DO IN THE
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INDIVIDUAL MAYORAL AND LEGISLATIVE CONTESTS (REF B).

10. (C) BEYOND QUESTIONING THE IMPARTIALITY OF THE POLLING INSTITUTES, ARENA ASSERTS THAT CONSERVATIVE VOTERS TEND NOT TO RESPOND TO QUESTIONS POSE BY POLLSTERS, THUS ARGUING THAT A DISPROPORTIONATE SHARE OF THE "UNDECIDEDS" ARE ACTUALLY ARENA SUPPORTERS WHO REFUSE TO IDENTIFY THEMSELVES AS SUCH TO THOSE CONDUCTING THE SURVEYS. (COMMENT: INDEED, THERE IS A GENERAL RECOGNITION HERE THAT THE SUPPORTERS OF THE LEFT TEND TO DECLARE THEMSELVES EARLY WHILE THE FENCE-SITTERS, IN THE END, TEND TO VOTE RIGHT. END COMMENT). MOREOVER, ARENA LEADERS FROM PARTY PRESIDENT SALGUERO GROSS ON DOWN INSIST THAT SUBJECTIVE INDICATORS -- THE SIZE AND ENTHUSIASM OF THE CROWDS AT THEIR CAMPAIGN RALLIES -- TELL THEM THAT THEY WILL DO WELL ON MARCH 16.

ARENA'S LATEST INTERNAL POLL

11. (C) IN A MARCH 12 MEETING WITH SEVERAL MEMBERS OF COENA,

INCLUDING SALGUERO GROSS, ARENA SHARED WITH US THE RESULTS OF THE LATEST TRACKING POLL CONDUCTED FOR THE PARTY BY AN ARGENTINE POLLSTER (THE POLL ENCOMPASSES 66 MUNICIPALITIES IN ALL 14 DEPARTMENTS -- ACCOUNTING FOR 67 PERCENT OF THE POPULATION). THE POLL PREDICTS ARENA WILL RECEIVE 42.8 PERCENT OF THE LEGISLATIVE VOTE VERSUS 26.2 FOR THE FMLN AND 12.6 FOR THE PDC. IN TERMS OF THE ALLOCATION OF 84 SEATS IN THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY, THE POLL INDICATES THAT ARENA SHOULD CONTROL 36-39 DEPUTIES VERSUS 23-25 FOR THE FMLN. THE PCN COULD WIN AS MANY AS 9-12 SEATS, WHILE THE FIGURES INDICATE THAT THE PDC WILL DO SURPRISINGLY WELL, PULLING DOWN AS MANY AS 12-15 SEATS (OUR ARENA INTERLOCUTORS EXPRESSED SURPRISE AT THE PDC SHOWING AND SUGGESTED THAT ANOMALIES RELATED

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TO THE SELECTION OF THE MUNICIPALITIES WHERE THE POLL WAS CONDUCTED OVERSTATE PDC STRENGTH). WITH RESPECT TO THE KEY SAN SALVADOR MAYORAL CONTEST, THE TRACKING POLL INDICATES THAT ARENA CANDIDATE MARIO VALIENTE HOLDS A SIGNIFICANT 10-12 PERCENT LEAD OVER THE FMLN/CD/MU CANDIDATE, HECTOR SILVA.

12. (C) THESE RESULTS DO NOT DIFFER RADICALLY FROM OUR OWN EXPECTATIONS (REF C). AS ONE WOULD ANTICIPATE, THE ARENA POLL MAY OVERSTATE THE NUMBER OF DEPUTIES WHICH ARENA WILL WIN, AND QUITE POSSIBLY UNDERESTIMATE THE FMLN OUTCOME.

COMMENT: WHAT IF WE WIN AND NO ONE BELIEVES US?

13. (C) THERE ARE NUMEROUS VARIABLES AT PLAY, INCLUDING THE EXTENT OF VOTER PARTICIPATION ON MARCH 16 AND THE PERFORMANCE OF THE MINOR PARTIES (THE VOTE FOR THESE PARTIES IS HARD TO CAPTURE IN THE POLLS BUT GIVEN THE SYSTEM USED HERE TO ALLOCATE LEGISLATIVE SEATS, COULD EFFECT, ON THE MARGINS, THE NUMBERS OF DEPUTIES WHICH ARENA AND THE FMLN WIN). OVERALL, IT APPEARS THAT ARENA WILL LOSE SOMETHING ON THE ORDER OF 4-5 SEATS IN THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY, DOWN TO 34-35 FROM THE 39 IT WON IN 1994. NONETHELESS, ARENA SHOULD STILL REMAIN THE LARGEST PARTY IN THE LEGISLATURE. ALTHOUGH THE FMLN LEADERSHIP TOLD CHARGE ON MARCH

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 03 OF 03 SAN SALVADOR 001152

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13 THAT THEY WILL WIN NO LESS THAN 28 SEATS AND POSSIBLY 38,
THEIR COMMENTS SUGGESTED THAT THEY WERE MAKING THEIR PROJECTIONS
ON THE BASIS OF SUBJECTIVE INDICATORS AND DRAWING ON THE
UNIVERSITY POLLS PUBLISHED SEVERAL WEEKS AGO WHICH WE BELIEVE
HAVE FLAWS.

14. (C) THE CONTINUING DISCREPANCY BETWEEN ARENA'S AND THE
FMLN'S EXPECTATIONS AS TO THE OUTCOME OF THE MARCH 16 ELECTION,
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UNDERLINES WHAT ARENA INDICATES IS ITS MAJOR CONCERN:

UNWARRANTED ACCUSATIONS OF FRAUD. THIS CONCERN IS BASED ON ARENA'S ASSESSMENT THAT THE PARTY WILL NOT DO AS POORLY IN THE ELECTIONS AS MANY BELIEVE, NOR WILL THE FMLN DO AS WELL AS THEY SEEM TO BELIEVE. THUS, IN THE AFTERMATH OF WHAT ARENA VIEWS AS MANIPULATED POLLS AND THE UNFOUNDED, HEIGHTENED EXPECTATIONS OF THE FMLN, ARENA WILL BE CHARGED WITH VOTE FRAUD BY THE OPPOSITION. AND, OF COURSE, THIS TENDENCY TO SEE FRAUD AROUND EVERY CORNER IS IN PART THE RESULT OF ARENA'S USE OF ITS CONTROL OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY TO PRESSURE THE TSE AND TO SECURE LAST-MINUTE CHANGES IN THE ELECTORAL RULES OF THE GAME TO HELP THE PDC AND DEMOCRATIC PARTY (REF C)

15. (C) WE DO NOT BELIEVE THAT THE MARCH 16 RESULTS WILL GENERATE DISTURBANCES, BUT THE HEIGHTENED EXPECTATIONS AND THE WEAKENING OF THE CREDIBILITY OF THE TSE MAY LEAD TO TENSIONS ON ELECTION DAY, ESPECIALLY IF THE TSE EXPERIENCES SIGNIFICANT DELAY IN MAKING THE PRELIMINARY RESULTS PUBLIC AND/OR IF SOME KEY CONTESTS (THE MAYORAL RACE IN SAN SALVADOR) ARE ESPECIALLY TIGHT. ARENA PRESIDENT GLORIA SALGUERO GROSS ASSURED US ON MARCH 12 THAT THE ARENA RANK AND FILE HAVE BEEN INSTRUCTED TO COMPORT THEMSELVES PROPERLY AND AVOID CONFRONTATION. IN A SEPARATE CONVERSATION ON MARCH 13, WE UNDERLINED TO THE FMLN LEADERSHIP THAT IT IS THEIR RESPONSIBILITY AND VERY MUCH IN THEIR INTEREST TO ASSURE THAT THERE ARE NO INCIDENTS ON ELECTION DAY.

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GOVERNMENT HAD GENERATED THE INTERNATIONAL CONFIDENCE NECESSARY
TO SECURE FOREIGN INVESTMENT, GENERATE JOBS, AND REBUILD THE
COUNTRY. HOWEVER, AS POLLS INDICATED THAT THE FMLN'S FOCUS ON
ARENA'S ECONOMIC POLICIES AND THE VAT AS THE CAUSES OF THE "HIGH
COST OF LIVING" WERE MEETING WITH POPULAR ACCEPTANCE, ARENA
HARDENED ITS APPROACH. STEPPING UP THEIR NEGATIVE AD CAMPAIGN,
ARENA RETALIATED WITH EVER NASTIER TV/RADIO ADS LINKING THE FMLN
TO ARMS TRAFFICKING AND A WEAPONS CACHE DISCOVERED OUTSIDE
MANAGUA. MOREOVER, THEY ARGUED THAT THE DESTRUCTION ENGENDERED
BY THE FMLN'S GUERRILLA WAR WAS THE REAL REASON FOR THE 1995
INCREASE IN THE VAT AND THE ECONOMIC BURDEN PLACED ON THE
COUNTRY. (ARENA EVEN WENT SO FAR AS TO CLAIM THAT AN FMLN

VICTORY WOULD MEAN THE COLLAPSE OF THE SALVADORAN ECONOMY ALA THE SANDINISTA EXPERIENCE IN NICARAGUA.)

OF POLLS AND CREDIBILITY

9. (C) STUNG BY POLLS SHOWING IT RUNNING BEHIND THE FMLN, ARENA HAS ATTACKED THE PUBLIC OPINION POLLS AS UNRELIABLE AND POLITICALLY MOTIVATED. INDEED, THE HIGH PERCENTAGE OF "UNDECIDEDS" STRONGLY SUGGEST TO US THAT THE POLLS RELEASED TO DATE ARE OF LIMITED VALUE IN PROJECTING THE OUTCOME OF THE MARCH 16 ELECTIONS IN TERMS OF HOW THE PARTIES WILL DO IN THE
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INDIVIDUAL MAYORAL AND LEGISLATIVE CONTESTS (REF B).

10. (C) BEYOND QUESTIONING THE IMPARTIALITY OF THE POLLING INSTITUTES, ARENA ASSERTS THAT CONSERVATIVE VOTERS TEND NOT TO RESPOND TO QUESTIONS POSE BY POLLSTERS, THUS ARGUING THAT A DISPROPORTIONATE SHARE OF THE "UNDECIDEDS" ARE ACTUALLY ARENA SUPPORTERS WHO REFUSE TO IDENTIFY THEMSELVES AS SUCH TO THOSE CONDUCTING THE SURVEYS. (COMMENT: INDEED, THERE IS A GENERAL RECOGNITION HERE THAT THE SUPPORTERS OF THE LEFT TEND TO DECLARE THEMSELVES EARLY WHILE THE FENCE-SITTERS, IN THE END, TEND TO VOTE RIGHT. END COMMENT). MOREOVER, ARENA LEADERS FROM PARTY PRESIDENT SALGUERO GROSS ON DOWN INSIST THAT SUBJECTIVE INDICATORS -- THE SIZE AND ENTHUSIASM OF THE CROWDS AT THEIR CAMPAIGN RALLIES -- TELL THEM THAT THEY WILL DO WELL ON MARCH 16.

ARENA'S LATEST INTERNAL POLL

11. (C) IN A MARCH 12 MEETING WITH SEVERAL MEMBERS OF COENA, INCLUDING SALGUERO GROSS, ARENA SHARED WITH US THE RESULTS OF THE LATEST TRACKING POLL CONDUCTED FOR THE PARTY BY AN ARGENTINE POLLSTER (THE POLL ENCOMPASSES 66 MUNICIPALITIES IN ALL 14 DEPARTMENTS -- ACCOUNTING FOR 67 PERCENT OF THE POPULATION). THE POLL PREDICTS ARENA WILL RECEIVE 42.8 PERCENT OF THE LEGISLATIVE VOTE VERSUS 26.2 FOR THE FMLN AND 12.6 FOR THE PDC. IN TERMS OF THE ALLOCATION OF 84 SEATS IN THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY, THE POLL INDICATES THAT ARENA SHOULD CONTROL 36-39 DEPUTIES VERSUS 23-25 FOR THE FMLN. THE PCN COULD WIN AS MANY AS 9-12 SEATS, WHILE THE FIGURES INDICATE THAT THE PDC WILL DO SURPRISINGLY WELL, PULLING DOWN AS MANY AS 12-15 SEATS (OUR ARENA INTERLOCUTORS EXPRESSED SURPRISE AT THE PDC SHOWING AND SUGGESTED THAT ANOMALIES RELATED
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TO THE SELECTION OF THE MUNICIPALITIES WHERE THE POLL WAS
CONDUCTED OVERSTATE PDC STRENGTH). WITH RESPECT TO THE KEY SAN
SALVADOR MAYORAL CONTEST, THE TRACKING POLL INDICATES THAT ARENA
CANDIDATE MARIO VALIENTE HOLDS A SIGNIFICANT 10-12 PERCENT LEAD
OVER THE FMLN/CD/MU CANDIDATE, HECTOR SILVA.

12. (C) THESE RESULTS DO NOT DIFFER RADICALLY FROM OUR OWN
EXPECTATIONS (REF C). AS ONE WOULD ANTICIPATE, THE ARENA POLL
MAY OVERSTATE THE NUMBER OF DEPUTIES WHICH ARENA WILL WIN, AND
QUITE POSSIBLY UNDERESTIMATE THE FMLN OUTCOME.

COMMENT: WHAT IF WE WIN AND NO ONE BELIEVES US?

13. (C) THERE ARE NUMEROUS VARIABLES AT PLAY, INCLUDING THE
EXTENT OF VOTER PARTICIPATION ON MARCH 16 AND THE PERFORMANCE OF
THE MINOR PARTIES (THE VOTE FOR THESE PARTIES IS HARD TO CAPTURE
IN THE POLLS BUT GIVEN THE SYSTEM USED HERE TO ALLOCATE
LEGISLATIVE SEATS, COULD EFFECT, ON THE MARGINS, THE NUMBERS OF
DEPUTIES WHICH ARENA AND THE FMLN WIN). OVERALL, IT APPEARS
THAT ARENA WILL LOSE SOMETHING ON THE ORDER OF 4-5 SEATS IN THE
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY, DOWN TO 34-35 FROM THE 39 IT WON IN 1994.
NONETHELESS, ARENA SHOULD STILL REMAIN THE LARGEST PARTY IN THE
LEGISLATURE. ALTHOUGH THE FMLN LEADERSHIP TOLD CHARGE ON MARCH

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ACTION ARA-01

INFO LOG-00 ACDA-10 ACDE-00 CIAE-00 OASY-00 DODE-00 SRPP-00
DS-00 H-01 TEDE-00 INR-00 LAB-01 L-01 ADS-00
MMP-00 M-00 NSAE-00 NSCE-00 OIG-04 OMB-01 OPIC-01
PA-00 PM-00 PRS-00 P-00 CIO-00 SP-00 SSO-00
TRSE-00 USIE-00 FMP-00 PMB-00 DSCC-00 DRL-09 G-00
/029W

-----A48AD1 141821Z /38

O 141912Z MAR 97
FM AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 2276
INFO USCINCSO QUARRY HEIGHTS PM
ALCA COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 03 OF 03 SAN SALVADOR 001152

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/13/07
TAGS: PGOV, KPRP, ES
SUBJECT: ARENA AND THE ELECTIONS: SOME SLIPPAGE, BUT CONFIDENT

13 THAT THEY WILL WIN NO LESS THAN 28 SEATS AND POSSIBLY 38,
THEIR COMMENTS SUGGESTED THAT THEY WERE MAKING THEIR PROJECTIONS
ON THE BASIS OF SUBJECTIVE INDICATORS AND DRAWING ON THE
UNIVERSITY POLLS PUBLISHED SEVERAL WEEKS AGO WHICH WE BELIEVE
HAVE FLAWS.

14. (C) THE CONTINUING DISCREPANCY BETWEEN ARENA'S AND THE
FMLN'S EXPECTATIONS AS TO THE OUTCOME OF THE MARCH 16 ELECTION,
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UNDERLINES WHAT ARENA INDICATES IS ITS MAJOR CONCERN:
UNWARRANTED ACCUSATIONS OF FRAUD. THIS CONCERN IS BASED ON
ARENA'S ASSESSMENT THAT THE PARTY WILL NOT DO AS POORLY IN THE
ELECTIONS AS MANY BELIEVE, NOR WILL THE FMLN DO AS WELL AS THEY
SEEM TO BELIEVE. THUS, IN THE AFTERMATH OF WHAT ARENA VIEWS AS
MANIPULATED POLLS AND THE UNFOUNDED, HEIGHTENED EXPECTATIONS OF
THE FMLN, ARENA WILL BE CHARGED WITH VOTE FRAUD BY THE
OPPOSITION. AND, OF COURSE, THIS TENDENCY TO SEE FRAUD AROUND
EVERY CORNER IS IN PART THE RESULT OF ARENA'S USE OF ITS CONTROL
OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY TO PRESSURE THE TSE AND TO SECURE
LAST-MINUTE CHANGES IN THE ELECTORAL RULES OF THE GAME TO HELP
THE PDC AND DEMOCRATIC PARTY (REF C)

15. (C) WE DO NOT BELIEVE THAT THE MARCH 16 RESULTS WILL
GENERATE DISTURBANCES, BUT THE HEIGHTENED EXPECTATIONS AND THE
WEAKENING OF THE CREDIBILITY OF THE TSE MAY LEAD TO TENSIONS ON

ELECTION DAY, ESPECIALLY IF THE TSE EXPERIENCES SIGNIFICANT DELAY IN MAKING THE PRELIMINARY RESULTS PUBLIC AND/OR IF SOME KEY CONTESTS (THE MAYORAL RACE IN SAN SALVADOR) ARE ESPECIALLY TIGHT. ARENA PRESIDENT GLORIA SALGUERO GROSS ASSURED US ON MARCH 12 THAT THE ARENA RANK AND FILE HAVE BEEN INSTRUCTED TO COMPORT THEMSELVES PROPERLY AND AVOID CONFRONTATION. IN A SEPARATE CONVERSATION ON MARCH 13, WE UNDERLINED TO THE FMLN LEADERSHIP THAT IT IS THEIR RESPONSIBILITY AND VERY MUCH IN THEIR INTEREST TO ASSURE THAT THERE ARE NO INCIDENTS ON ELECTION DAY.

DAWSON

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