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ACTION SS-25

RELEASE IN FULL

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6542

C O N F I D E N T I A L SAN SALVADOR 8588

EXDIS

E. O. 12065: RDS-1 11/10/01 (HINTON, DEANE R.) OR-M  
TAGS: PINS PINT SHUM ES  
SUBJECT: SALVADORAN ARMY TACTICS

REF: SAN SALVADOR 8518

1. (C - ENTIRE TEXT.)

2. BISHOP RIVERA Y DAMAS, DURING LUNCH AT NUNCIATURA NOVEMBER 9, TOLD NUNCIO, FONMIN AND ME OF HIS CONCERN ABOUT BRUTAL ARMY TACTICS DURING RECENT OPERATION IN URULUTAN. IN RESPONSE TO MY FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS, RIVERA Y DAMAS SAID THERE IS NO QUESTION IN HIS MIND ABOUT WHAT HAD HAPPENED. DURING HIS LAST VISIT TO HIS PARISH IN SANTIAGO DE MARIA HE HAD HEARD FIRST-HAND ACCOUNTS FROM PARISH PRIESTS WHO HAD HEARD MANY STORIES FROM SURVIVORS. THE BISHOP SAID THE AREA BETWEEN SAN AUGUSTIN AND BERLIN AND WEST TO RIO LEMPA HAS BEEN TOTALLY UNDER INSURGENT CONTROL FOR SOME CONSIDERABLE TIME. HE THOUGHT THERE WERE PERHAPS AS MANY AS 10 OR 12 FORTIFIED GUERRILLA CAMPS IN THIS AREA, EACH OF WHICH WAS BASE FOR PERHAPS 40 TO 70 ARMED MEN. THE FPL, ERP AND PRTC (CENTRAL AMERICAN COMMUNIST PARTY) ALL HAD FORCES IN THE AREA. THE ARMY, IN ATTACKING, HAD SUFFERED CONSIDERABLE LOSSES WITHOUT MUCH SUCCESS AGAINST HEAVILY ARMED GUERRILLAS ALTHOUGH THERE WAS WIDESPREAD KILLING OF CAMP FOLLOWERS--WOMEN  
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AND CHILDREN. HE IS NOT CERTAIN BUT HE ATTRIBUTES THIS MORE TO TROOP FRUSTRATION THAN TO COMMAND DECISION. HE BELIEVES THAT THERE WERE AT LEAST 200 CIVILIAN NON-COMBATANTS KILLED BUT HE RECOGNIZES THAT THEY WERE PART OF OR RELATED TO THE GUERRILLA FORCE SUPPORT NETWORKS.

REVIEW AUTHORITY:  
Alan Flanigan, Senior  
Reviewer

3. HE TOLD US HE ENCOUNTERED SOME SOLDIERS RETURNING TO THE CUARTELS AFTER THE OPERATION, ASKED WHAT HAD HAPPENED AND WAS TOLD, "HEMOS LIMPIADO LA ZONA." (WE CLEANED UP THE AREA). THE BISHOP SAID HE FEARED THAT THAT WAS LITERALLY CORRECT.

HE SAID NOW THAT THE ARMY HAD WITHDRAWN, THE GUERRILLAS HAD RETURNED TO RESUME CONTROL OF THE AREA. ASKED BY THE NUNCIO IF ANY PRISONERS HAD BEEN TAKEN, RIVERA Y DAMAS REPLIED THAT REGRETTABLY NEITHER SIDE SEEMED TO TAKE PRISONERS IN SUCH OPERATIONS.

4. AT BREAKFAST WITH FONMIN NOVEMBER 10, I ASKED HIM FOR HIS REACTION TO THE BISHOP(S) ACCOUNT. HE SAID THAT UNFORTUNATELY HE HAD BEEN HEARING COLLABORATIVE EVIDENCE FROM OTHER SOURCES. FOR EXAMPLE, TWO OF HIS BODYGUARDS HAD LOST BROTHERS LIVING IN THE AREA OF THE SWEEP WHO ALLEGEDLY WERE NOTHING MORE THAN SIMPLE CAMPESINOS WITH NO POLITICAL INTERESTS. ONE OF HIS BODYGUARDS HAD GONE TO THE AREA AFTER THE OPERATION TO TRY TO FIND HIS BROTHER'S BODY. HE FAILED SINCE APPARENTLY THE KILLED WERE BURIED IN COMMON GRAVES. THE STORIES THIS INDIVIDUAL HAD TOLD THE FONMIN UPON HIS RETURN WERE "BAD." EVEN HE AND HIS FELLOW HACIENDA POLICE OFFICER WERE REPELLED BY THE LEVEL OF VIOLENCE. THE FONMIN RECOGNIZES FULL WELL THE POTENTIAL IMPACT ON WORLD OPINION OF SUCH EVENTS AS THEY BECOME PUBLIC KNOWLEDGE, AS IN PART IS ALREADY THE CASE IN THE USULUTAN OPERATION. CHAVEZ MENA CAN, I THINK, WITHIN CAREFULLY SUBSCRIBED LIMITS, BE COUNTED UPON TO COUNSEL THE HIGH CONFIDENTIAL

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COMMAND AGAINST A REPETITION OF SUCH ACTIONS.

4. ACTION REQUEST: ADVISE CONCERNING DISCUSSIONS WITH COL. GARCIA ON THIS SUBJECT AS REQUESTED REFTEL.  
HINTON

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