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Subject: LATEST ASSESSMENT OF SITUATION IN EL SALVADOR C  
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TO: IMMEDIATE DIRECTOR.

WNINTEL INTEL SUBJECT: LATEST ASSESSMENT OF SITUATION IN EL SALVADOR

REF: DIRECTOR 202394

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1. [Redacted] ASSESSMENT ON STATUS OF  
CONFRONTATION BETWEEN MILITARY OFFICER CORPS AND PRESIDENT  
DUARTE, BASED ON INFO AVAILABLE HERE AS OF 1630 LOCAL  
30 DECEMBER:

A. A SERIOUS CONFRONTATION AT YEAR END HAS BEEN AVERTED,  
AT LEAST TEMPORARILY, BETWEEN SALVADORAN MILITARY OFFICERS AND  
PRESIDENT JOSE NAPOLEON DUARTE.

B. THE BURNING ISSUE WAS DUARTE'S DESIRE TO HAVE HIS  
CONFIDANT, VICE MINISTER OF DEFENSE FOR PUBLIC SECURITY, COL.  
CARLOS REYNALDO LOPEZ NULLA, PROMOTED TO GENERAL. MOST SENIOR  
SALVADORAN OFFICERS OPPOSED THIS IDEA, SOME INCREASINGLY  
VEHEMENTLY, ON THE GROUNDS THAT LOPEZ NULLA WAS "TOO CLOSE TO  
DUARTE" AND WAS ALSO A "SERVICE" OFFICER (IN THIS CASE A LAWYER),  
NOT A COMBAT-LINE OFFICER. THIS ISSUE HAD BEEN SIMMERING  
FOR WEEKS. BY MID-DECEMBER, SOME HARDLINE, ANTI-DUARTE OFFICERS,  
SUCH AS FOURTH BRIGADE COMMANDER LT. COL. OCHOA, FUELED  
BY RIGHT WING EXTREMISTS OF THE ARENA POLITICAL PARTY, WERE  
TRYING TO USE THE LOPEZ NULLA PROMOTION POSSIBILITY--AND  
SPECULATION THAT HE WAS DUARTE'S FAVORITE TO BE THE NEXT MINISTER  
OF DEFENSE -- TO GAIN SUPPORT FOR A COUP AGAINST THE PRESIDENT.  
KEY SALVADORAN OFFICERS, INCLUDING CHIEF OF STAFF BLANDON  
AND AIR FORCE COMMANDER BUSTILLO, DECIDED TO USE OTHER TACTICS.  
THEY MAY HAVE LISTENED TO THE WOULD-BE COUP MAKERS, AND IN SOME  
CASES THEIR NAMES MAY HAVE BEEN USED BY THE EXTREMISTS TO GAIN  
FURTHER SUPPORT FOR THE PLOTTING; BUT IN THE END THEIR CONSENSUS  
WAS TO CONFINE THEIR IMMEDIATE OBJECTIVE TO GETTING DUARTE TO  
REMOVE LOPEZ NULLA FROM PROMOTION CONSIDERATION. THIS THEY  
ACHIEVED AS OF 29 DECEMBER, WHEN MINISTER OF DEFENSE VIDES  
CASANOVA REPORTEDLY TOLD SENIOR OFFICERS THAT PRESIDENT DUARTE  
WOULD NOT PUSH FURTHER FOR LOPEZ NULLA'S PROMOTION, ONLY TWO

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WILL BE PROMOTED TO GENERAL: BLANDON AND BUSTILLO.

C. DUARTE REMAINS WITH LITTLE POWER BASE IN THE SALVADORAN MILITARY. THERE ARE OTHER UNDERLYING TENSIONS BETWEEN THE PRESIDENT AND THE OFFICER CORPS, E.G., THE OUTCOME OF THE ELECTORAL LAW DISPUTE IN THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY AND THE QUESTION OF PEACE NEGOTIATIONS WITH THE INSURGENT GUERRILLAS. WE EXPECT THAT THE DEBATE AND POLITICAL MANEUVERING OVER THE ELECTORAL LAW COULD CONTINUE FOR AT LEAST A COUPLE MORE WEEKS. WE ALSO EXPECT THAT ROUND THREE IN THE SALVADORAN GOVERNMENT'S DIALOGUE WITH THE INSURGENTS WILL NOT BE HELD FOR SEVERAL WEEKS AT A MINIMUM. ANOTHER MILITARY - PRESIDENCY CONFRONTATION, OVER ONE OR BOTH OF THESE ISSUES, MAY THEREFORE NOT OCCUR UNTIL MID-LATE JANUARY, IF THEN. DUARTE MUST FEEL STUNNED OVER THE LOPEZ NUILA CASE, HOWEVER, AND IS STILL VULNERABLE TO CONTINUED RIGHT WING PLOTTING OF SOME TYPE. A REVIVAL OF REPORTED PLANS TO ASSASSINATE THE PRESIDENT MAY BE MORE LIKELY THAN ANOTHER EARLY ATTEMPT TO MOUNT A COORDINATED COUP BY LARGE NUMBERS OF MILITARY PERSONNEL. IN THE EYES OF THE RIGHTIST EXTREMISTS, BOTH MILITARY AND CIVILIAN, AN ASSASSINATION COULD ALSO HAVE THE ADVANTAGE OF A MORE AMENABLE PRESIDENT COMING TO OFFICE "LEGALLY."

2. HQS MAY USE FOREGOING ASSESSMENT AS APPROPRIATE. ABOVE HAS NOT BEEN COORDINATED WITH AMBASSADOR. HE IS RETURNING LATER THIS EVENING FROM TEN DAY VACATION AND CHARGE IS AT AIRPORT TO MEET HIM.

3. NO FILE.

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