

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 SAN SA 03769 01 OF 02 142304Z
ACTION ARA-01

INFO LOG-00 ACDA-17 CIAE-00 C-01 OASY-00 DODE-00 HA-09
H-01 TEDE-00 INR-00 L-03 ADS-00 NSAE-00 NSCE-00
OMB-01 PA-01 PM-02 PRS-01 P-01 SNP-00 SP-00
SS-00 TRSE-00 T-00 USIE-00 /038W

-----B35B05 142304Z /38

P 142306Z APR 93
FM AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR
TO AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES PRIORITY
INFO SECSTATE WASHDC 3739
USCINCSO QUARRY HTS PM

RELEASED IN FULL

REVIEW AUTHORITY: Oscar Olson, Senior
Reviewer

CONFIDENTIAL SECTION 01 OF 02 SAN SALVADOR 003769

E.O. 12356: DECL: OADR
TAGS: PREL, PINR, ES
SUBJECT: SIGIFREDO OCHOA: SALVADOR'S NEW AMBASSADOR TO
ARGENTINA

1. (C) SUMMARY: COL. SIGIFREDO OCHOA PEREZ'S POSTING IN
BUENOS AIRES AS AMBASSADOR IS THE LATEST OF MANY TRIPS
INTO "GOLDEN EXILE" FOR THE HIGHLY OUTSPOKEN FORMER
MILITARY COMMANDER. AFTER A CONTROVERSIAL MILITARY
CAREER, PUNCTUATED BY SEVERAL FORCED STINTS ABROAD AS A
MILITARY ATTACHE, OCHOA ENTERED POLITICS WITH THE RULING
ARENA PARTY. HOWEVER, HIS INTERNAL ATTACKS ON PARTY
PRESIDENT ARMANDO CALDERON SOL AND PUBLIC CRITICISM OF
PRESIDENT CRISTIANI'S HANDLING OF THE AD HOC COMMISSION'S
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CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 SAN SA 03769 01 OF 02 142304Z
RECOMMENDED DISMISSAL OF ESAF OFFICERS WAS THE LAST STRAW
FOR HIS FELLOW PARTY MEMBERS AND HE WAS SENT ABROAD.
OCHOA HAS HAD MORE POLITICAL LIVES THAN A CAT AND WILL
LIKELY RETURN TO SALVADORAN NATIONAL POLITICS IN THE NOT
TOO DISTANT FUTURE. HOWEVER, UNTIL THAT TIME, ARGENTINA
CAN EXPECT A FRANK AND OUTSPOKEN SALVADORAN AMBASSADOR.
END SUMMARY.

2. (U) ON MARCH 25, SALVADORAN FOREIGN MINISTER JOSE
MANUEL PACAS CASTRO SWORE IN COL. SIGIFREDO OCHOA PEREZ
(RET.) AS EL SALVADOR'S NEW AMBASSADOR TO ARGENTINA.
OCHOA IS A MEMBER OF THE RULING ARENA PARTY, LEAVING HIS
SEAT IN THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY TO TAKE THE DIPLOMATIC
POST. PREVIOUSLY, HE SERVED AS THE PRESIDENT OF THE
SALVADORAN ELECTRIC COMPANY (CEL) DURING A PERIOD OF
DROUGHT-INDUCED ELECTRICITY RATIONING WHICH LED TO,
PERHAPS, THE HARSHTEST CRITICISM OF THE COMPANY IN ITS

HISTORY. WHILE AN ACTIVE DUTY MILITARY OFFICER, OCHOA SERVED AS A DEFENSE ATTACHE IN SAN JOSE, WASHINGTON, AND CARACAS. OCHOA WAS BORN ON APRIL 2, 1942 IN SAN MIGUEL, EL SALVADOR. HE ATTENDED THE MEXICAN MILITARY ACADEMY, GRADUATING IN 1964. HE IS MARRIED TO THE FORMER NIDIA ESPERZANA GOMEZ AND HAS THREE CHILDREN.

3. (C) OCHOA'S POSTING IN BUENOS AIRES IS THE LATEST OF MANY TRIPS INTO "GOLDEN EXILE" FOR THE HIGHLY QUIXOTIC AND OUTSPOKEN FORMER MILITARY COMMANDER. IN 1982, OCHOA MADE HIS REPUTATION AS AN EFFECTIVE MILITARY COMMANDER AS HEAD OF THE SECOND MILITARY DETACHMENT IN CABANAS. HE DISTINGUISHED HIMSELF WITH AGGRESSIVE COUNTER-INSURGENCY TACTICS, CIVIC ACTION PROGRAMS, AND A HEALTHY DOSE OF
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 SAN SA 03769 01 OF 02 142304Z
SELF PROMOTION. LARGELY THROUGH OCHOA'S LEADERSHIP, THE ESAF WAS ABLE TO ALMOST ENTIRELY WREST CONTROL OF THE DEPARTMENT FROM THE FMLN. HOWEVER, WHILE IN THAT POST, OCHOA BEGAN A STREAM OF HARSH CRITICISM OF THEN-MOD GEN. JOSE GUILLERMO GARCIA AND HIS MANAGING OF THE WAR. GARCIA ATTEMPTED TO REASSIGN OCHOA TO URUGUAY, PROVOKING THE LATTER'S OPEN REBELLION; AND INSUBORDINATION BY INITIALLY REFUSING TO LEAVE HIS COMMAND IN CABANAS. OCHOA FAILED TO OUST GARCIA IMMEDIATELY, BUT WON THE CONCESSION OF THE ATTACHE JOB IN WASHINGTON. SHORTLY THEREAFTER, GARCIA WAS REPLACED BY CONSENSUS CANDIDATE GEN. VIDES CASANOVA.

4. (C) IN 1984, VIDES CASANOVA BROUGHT OCHOA BACK TO EL SALVADOR TO TAKE CHARGE OF MILITARY OPERATIONS IN THE HIGHLY CONFLICTIVE CHALETANANGO DEPARTMENT. AS FOURTH BRIGADE COMMANDER, HOWEVER, OCHOA SHOWED NO SIGNS OF MODERATING HIS BEHAVIOR. DESPITE A FAILURE TO REPEAT THE MILITARY SUCCESS HE ENJOYED IN CABANAS, OCHOA WAS SHARPLY CRITICAL OF THE ESAF HIGH COMMAND, PRESIDENT JOSE NAPOLEON DUARTE, AND THE GOES IN GENERAL. OCHOA RESERVED SPECIAL CRITICISM FOR DUARTE'S NEGOTIATIONS WITH THE FMLN FOR THE RELEASE OF HIS KIDNAPPED DAUGHTER, WHICH HE CONSIDERED TREASON. NONETHELESS, OCHOA'S SUPPORT AMONG THE RIGHT-WING GREW AND HE RECEIVED VARIOUS OFFERS TO ENTER POLITICS. IN MARCH 1986, OCHOA WAS REMOVED FROM HIS POST AND SENT ONCE AGAIN AS ATTACHE TO WASHINGTON.

5. (C) IN JUNE 1987, OCHOA RETURNED TO EL SALVADOR, REQUESTED HIS DISCHARGE, AND JOINED THE ARENA PARTY. OCHOA REPORTEDLY RECEIVED A 200,000 DOLLAR "SIGNING
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 04 SAN SA 03769 01 OF 02 142304Z
BONUS" FOR HIS DECISION TO JOIN ARENA. AS ARENA'S NEWEST
POLITICAL STAR, OCHOA INCREASED HIS ATTACKS ON THE DUARTE
REGIME. OCHOA'S HUMBLE BACKGROUND, MILITARY RECORD, AND
POPULIST FLAIR MADE HIM AN IMMEDIATE SUCCESS IN POLITICS
AND HE WAS ELECTED TO THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY IN 1988.
OCHOA'S HISTORY OF FIREBRAND TACTICS AND CONTINUED
CRITICISM OF THE PROSECUTION OF THE WAR EARNED HIM THE
ENMITY OF "THE TANDONA" (THE DOMINANT 1966 MILITARY
ACADEMY CLASS). OCHOA AND THE ESAF, UNDER TANDONA
CONTROL, BICKERED REGULARLY FOLLOWING THE FORMER'S
RETURN.

6. (C) FOLLOWING ARENA'S 1989 ELECTORAL VICTORY,
PRESIDENT CRISTIANI NAMED OCHOA AS PRESIDENT OF THE
SALVADORAN NATIONAL ELECTRIC COMPANY (CEL). OCHOA'S TERM
WAS CHARACTERIZED BY PUBLIC DISCONTENT WITH SERVICE,
CHARGES OF CORRUPTION, AND HIS USE OF THE INSTITUTION TO
BUILD HIS OWN POLITICAL BASE. THOUGH MANY OF CEL'S
PROBLEMS DURING OCHOA'S TENURE WERE OUTSIDE HIS CONTROL
(E.G., POWER RATIONING CAUSED BY A DROUGHT AND LACK OF
MAINTENANCE DURING THE DUARTE REGIME), IT IS WIDELY

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PAGE 01 SAN SA 03769 02 OF 02 142304Z
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 02 OF 02 SAN SALVADOR 003769

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CHARGED THAT OCHOA USED CEL RESOURCES FOR PARTY AND PERSONAL GAIN. OCHOA WAS ALSO IMPLICATED IN THE KIDNAPPING OF ARENA RIVAL GUILLERMO "BILLY" SOL BANG WHO WAS THEN SLATED TO REPLACE OCHOA AT CEL AND EVENTUALLY DID. HOWEVER, THE CHARGES WERE NEVER SUBSTANTIATED. THROUGHOUT IT ALL, OCHOA CONTINUED TO SPEAK OUT OF TURN, OFTEN ANGERING HIS FELLOW PARTY MEMBERS.

7. (C) ON SEPTEMBER 1, 1992, OCHOA RESIGNED FROM CEL
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 SAN SA 03769 02 OF 02 142304Z
HAVING WEATHERED FIERCE CRITICISM FROM ALL SIDES FOR HIS TENURE. OCHOA THEN RETURNED TO HIS SEAT IN THE ASSEMBLY AND CONTINUED HIS ATTEMPTS TO BUILD A LARGER BASE IN THE PARTY. HIS INTERNAL CRITICISMS OF PARTY PRESIDENT ARMANDO CALDERON SOL AND EFFORTS TO DERAIL HIS PRESIDENTIAL NOMINATION, BROUGHT INTERNAL PARTY WRATH. MEANWHILE, OCHOA'S PUBLIC CRITICISM OF PRESIDENT CRISTIANI'S HANDLING OF THE DISMISSALS OF ESAF OFFICERS (PRINCIPALLY TANDONA MEMBERS) RECOMMENDED BY THE PEACE ACCORD CREATED "AD HOC COMMISSION" WAS THE LAST STRAW FOR HIS FELLOW PARTY MEMBERS. IN JANUARY, THE ARENA LEADERSHIP DECIDED TO SEND OCHOA INTO GOLDEN EXILE AS PUNISHMENT FOR HIS INSUBORDINATION. OCHOA ACCEPTED THE DECISION, HOPING TO RETURN TO THE PARTY SOMETIME IN THE FUTURE.

8. (C) COMMENT: OCHOA HAS HAD MORE POLITICAL LIVES THAN A CAT AND WILL LIKELY RETURN TO SALVADORAN NATIONAL POLITICS IN THE NOT TOO DISTANT FUTURE. HE HAS A FAVORABLE VIEW OF THE UNITED STATES AND OFTEN SEEKS OUT EMBASSY OFFICERS FOR AN EXCHANGE OF VIEWS. OCHOA IS WELL AWARE THAT HIS MOUTH HAS GOTTEN HIM INTO TROUBLE A NUMBER OF TIMES, BUT HAS SHOWN NO SIGNS OF BEING ABLE TO CONTROL IT. IN THE SAME VEIN, OCHOA IS NORMALLY STRAIGHTFORWARD WITH EMBASSY INTERLOCUTORS. HOWEVER, HIS MOTIVES SHOULD BE EXAMINED CAREFULLY WHEN HE DISCUSSES ISSUES THAT DIRECTLY AFFECT HIM. ROMERO

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