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INFO LOG-00 ACDA-08 ACDE-00 INLB-01 CIAE-00 INL-01 DODE-00  
SRPP-00 DS-00 OIGO-01 H-01 TEDE-00 INR-00 LAB-01  
L-01 ADS-00 DCP-01 NSAE-00 NSCE-00 OMB-01 OPIC-01  
PA-00 PM-00 PRS-00 P-00 SP-00 TRSE-00 T-00  
USIE-00 ASDS-01 PMB-00 DSCC-00 DRL-02 G-00 FDIC-01  
SAS-00 /022W

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P 052044Z FEB 99  
FM AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9114  
INFO USCINCSO MIAMI FL  
ALCA COLLECTIVE

RELEASED IN FULL

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 SAN SALVADOR 000403

REVIEW AUTHORITY: Oscar  
Olson, Senior Reviewer

E.O. 12958: DECL: 2/5/09  
TAGS: PGOV, KCRM, ES  
SUBJECT: RUN UP TO THE MARCH 1999 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS:  
NUMBER 4.

REF: (A) SAN SALVADOR 0239, (B) SAN SALVADOR 0151, (C) SAN  
SALVADOR 0034

(U) CLASSIFIED BY GREGORY B. SPROW, POLCOUNS. REASON: 1.5 (B  
AND D)

1. (U) THIS IS THE FOURTH IN A SERIES OF OCCASIONAL CABLES  
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COVERING ISSUES RELATED TO THE MARCH 7, 1999 PRESIDENTIAL  
ELECTIONS.

- 2. (U) CONTENTS:
  - A) CAMPAIGNS PICK UP, ATMOSPHERE REMAINS RESPECTFUL
  - B) KIDNAPPING CASES INTRUDE ON ELECTIONS
  - C) ARENA'S FLORES MEETS WITH ELECTORAL PROSECUTOR
  - D) ARENA AND FMLN OPPOSE PROPOSED CHANGE TO ELECTORAL  
CODE
  - E) PARTIES SEEK SUPPORT IN THE U.S.
  - F) MUSICAL CHAIRS

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A. CAMPAIGNS PICK UP, ATMOSPHERE REMAINS RESPECTFUL  
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3. (U) WITH JUST THIRTY DAYS TO GO BEFORE THE MARCH 7  
PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS, THE HITHERTO SLUGGISH CAMPAIGNS  
OF THE MAJOR CONTENDERS ARE BECOMING MORE ANIMATED.  
THERE HAS BEEN A NOTABLE INCREASE IN POLITICAL ACTIVITY

OVER THE LAST TWO WEEKS, BOTH IN TERMS OF RALLIES IN THE DEPARTMENTAL CAPITALS AND OTHER MUNICIPALITIES, PAID PUBLICITY, AND PRESS COVERAGE OF THE ACTIVITIES AND PROPOSALS OF THE CANDIDATES. THE CAMPAIGNS HAVE BEEN LARGELY UNBLEMISHED WITH VIOLENCE OR SCUFFLES AMONG PARTY ACTIVISTS SUCH AS MARRED EARLIER ELECTIONS. IN PARTICULAR, THE MAJOR PARTIES -- FMLN AND ARENA -- HAVE DELIBERATELY TAKEN THE HIGH ROAD AND ABIDED BY THE GENTLEMEN'S AGREEMENT TO ESCHEW MUD-SLINGING AND CONFRONTATION. INDEED, THE POLITICS OF POLITENESS HAS BEEN SUCH THAT A RECENT EDITORIAL PUBLISHED BY THE  
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JESUIT-RUN CENTRAL AMERICAN UNIVERSITY (UCA) CAME CLOSE TO CRITICIZING THE PARTIES FOR BEING MORE COMMITTED TO COURTESY AND MAINTAINING GOOD FORM THAN TO CHALLENGING THE PROPOSALS AND DISCOURSE OF THEIR OPPONENTS.

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B. KIDNAPPING CASES INTRUDE ON ELECTIONS  
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4. (C) ONE SOUR NOTE IN THE PROCEEDINGS HAS BEEN THE RECENT RE-EMERGENCE OF CHARGES THAT ELEMENTS OF THE FORMER COMMUNIST PARTY (PC), ONE OF THE FIVE COMPONENT GROUPS COMPRISING THE FMLN, WERE INVOLVED IN A SERIES OF KIDNAPPINGS THAT TOOK PLACE IN 1991-92 AND 1994-96 (THE MOST RECENT AND WELL-KNOWN BEING THE 1995-96 KIDNAPPING OF THEN 15-YEAR OLD ANDRES SUSTER -- SEE 97 SAN SALVADOR 4529). THE INVESTIGATION OF THE CASES DRAGGED ON FAIRLY QUIETLY THROUGH MOST OF 1998. A RECENT DEPOSITION BY FORMER FMLN COMMANDER JOAQUIN VILLALOBOS, HOWEVER, ALLEGED THAT EX-PC BOSS AND CURRENT FMLN LEGISLATIVE LEADER SCHAFIK HANDAL ADMITTED RESPONSIBILITY FOR ONE OF THE 1991 CASES. THIS HAS GENERATED A MEDIA FEEDING FRENZY. HANDAL HAS CHARGED THAT THE ENTIRE CASE AGAINST HIM IS MOTIVATED BY POLITICAL CONSIDERATIONS, ACCUSING THE GOES, THE ARENA PARTY, ARENA PRESIDENT CRISTIANI, AND THE NATIONAL BUSINESSMEN'S ASSOCIATION (ANEP) OF MANIPULATING THE CASE TO UNDERMINE THE FMLN'S ELECTION PROSPECTS. BOTH PRIVATELY AND PUBLICLY, FMLN LEADERS (INCLUDING PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE FACUNDO GUARDADO AND FORMER FMLN COORDINATOR GENERAL SALVADOR SANCHEZ CEREN) HAVE WARNED  
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THAT IF THE CAMPAIGN AGAINST HANDAL DOES NOT CEASE THEY WILL RETALIATE IN KIND BY RAISING ACCUSATIONS AGAINST ARENA OFFICIALS FOR ACTS OF CORRUPTION.

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C. ARENA'S FLORES MEETS WITH ELECTORAL PROSECUTOR  
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5. (U) ARENA PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE FRANCISCO FLORES MET WITH ELECTORAL PROSECUTOR ARTURO CRUZ SALGADO ON JANUARY 22. THIS CAME AS PART OF THE PROSECUTOR'S ONGOING INVESTIGATION OF THE PARTICIPATION OF CENTRO NACIONAL DE REGISTROS (CNR - THE GOVERNMENT OFFICE WHICH REGISTERS REAL PROPERTY AND TRADEMARKS) EMPLOYEES IN AN ARENA RALLY DURING WORKING HOURS. CRUZ SALGADO'S DECISION TO QUESTION FLORES (WHO IS ALSO THE ARENA CAMPAIGN MANAGER) EARLIER DREW THE IRE OF ATTORNEY GENERAL MANUEL CORDOVA, WHO THREATENED TO FIRE THE ELECTORAL PROSECUTOR FOR ACTING WITHOUT THE ATTORNEY GENERAL'S PERMISSION (SEE REF A).

6. (U) CRUZ SALGADO SUMMONED FLORES TO HIS OFFICE TO MAKE A FORMAL DECLARATION REGARDING THE CNR AFFAIR IN A PRIVATE MEETING OF APPROXIMATELY TWENTY MINUTES. AFTERWARDS FLORES DECLINED TO OFFER REPORTERS SPECIFIC DETAILS OF THE

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P 052044Z FEB 99  
FM AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9115  
INFO USCINCSO MIAMI FL  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 02 OF 03 SAN SALVADOR 000403

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CONVERSATION, SAYING THAT CRUZ SALGADO WOULD RELEASE THE STATEMENT TO THE PUBLIC "WHEN HE CONSIDERS IT APPROPRIATE." FLORES ALSO TOLD REPORTERS THAT ARENA DID NOT ORDER CNR EMPLOYEES TO PARTICIPATE IN THE MEETING. FOR HIS PART, CRUZ SALGADO DEFENDED HIS DECISION TO SUMMON FLORES, ARGUING THAT A STATEMENT FROM FLORES, AS THE ARENA CAMPAIGN MANAGER, IS "NECESSARY TO THE INVESTIGATION." THE ELECTORAL PROSECUTOR

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IS EXPECTED TO RELEASE HIS FINDINGS TO THE PUBLIC SOMETIME IN THE COMING WEEK.

7. (C) COMMENT: THE ATTORNEY GENERAL ESSENTIALLY GAVE FRANCISCO FLORES THE OPPORTUNITY TO SKIP THE SESSION WITH CRUZ SALGADO. FLORES, WANTING TO SHOW THAT HE WAS NOT "ABOVE THE LAW," CHOSE TO GO AND OFFER HIS STATEMENT. IN THE END, THE CNR AFFAIR WILL HAVE VIRTUALLY NO IMPACT ON THE ELECTION. END COMMENT.

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D. ARENA AND FMLN OPPOSE PROPOSED CHANGE TO ELECTORAL CODE  
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8. (U) ARENA REMAINS ADAMANTLY OPPOSED TO THE CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATIC PARTY(PDC) AND NATIONAL CONCILIATION PARTY (PCN) EFFORTS TO AMEND THE ELECTORAL CODE TO ALLOW PARTIES TO CHANGE CANDIDATES AND NEGOTIATE NEW COALITIONS BETWEEN THE FIRST AND SECOND ROUNDS OF A PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION. (SEE REF A FOR DETAILED DISCUSSION.)

9. (U) PDC AND PCN DEPUTIES ONCE AGAIN RAISED THE ISSUE OF AMENDING THE ELECTORAL CODE DURING LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY SESSIONS DURING THE WEEK OF JANUARY 21. PDC GENERAL SECRETARY RONAL UMANA AND PCN LEGISLATOR DAGOBERTO MARROQUIN HAVE APPARENTLY PERSUADED LIBERAL DEMOCRATIC PARTY (PLD) LEGISLATOR KIRIO WALDO SALGADO TO SUPPORT THE MEASURE, AND HAVE SOUGHT TO ENLIST THE FMLN'S SUPPORT. (COMMENT: THE CONFIGURATION OF POLITICAL PARTIES IN THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY REQUIRES FMLN SUPPORT IF THE PROPOSAL IS TO BE APPROVED. END COMMENT.) THE PDC'S UMANA ONCE AGAIN DEFENDED  
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THE PROPOSED CODE CHANGE TO THE MEDIA, CONTENDING THAT IT WOULD OFFER "WIDER LATITUDE TO NEGOTIATE AND INCREASE THE POSSIBILITY OF IMPROVED GOVERNMENT."

10. (U) ARENA LEGISLATORS VOWED TO FIGHT THE PROPOSED CODE CHANGE. FACTION LEADER WALTER ARAUJO SAID THAT THE MEASURE WOULD "MAKE A JOKE OUT OF THE ELECTORAL PROCESS, AND NEGATE THE INVESTMENT THAT EACH POLITICAL PARTY HAS MADE DEFINING ITS PRESIDENTIAL PLATFORM." ARAUJO WENT ON TO CHARACTERIZE THE PROPOSED REFORM AS "POLITICAL GANG WARFARE," AND ASSERTED THAT ALL 29 ARENA DEPUTIES ARE UNITED AGAINST THE PROPOSAL. HE ALSO NOTED THAT THE ARENA FACTION "WOULD NOT HESITATE" TO REQUEST THAT PRESIDENT ARMANDO CALDERON SOL VETO THE MEASURE SHOULD THE OPPOSITION MUSTER SUFFICIENT VOTES FOR PASSAGE.

11. (C) WITH THE FMLN PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN LAGGING (FMLN CANDIDATE GUARDADO TRAILS ARENA CANDIDATE FLORES BY 20-22 POINTS IN THE POLLS), THERE HAD BEEN SOME SPECULATION THAT THE FMLN MIGHT AGREE TO SUPPORT THE ELECTORAL LAW MODIFICATION. THE FIRST PUBLIC COMMENTS BY FMLN LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY LEADER SCHAFIK HANDAL ON THE PCN/PDC PROPOSAL WERE SOMEWHAT AMBIGUOUS. HOWEVER, THE FMLN'S SECRETARY FOR ORGANIZATION, SALVADOR SANCHEZ CEREN, TOLD POLOFFS ON

JANUARY 27 THAT THE FMLN WOULD OPPOSE THE CHANGE, CHARACTERIZING THE PROPOSAL AND ITS TIMING -- JUST WEEKS BEFORE THE ELECTION -- AS DETRIMENTAL TO THE CREDIBILITY OF THE ELECTORAL PROCESS.

12. (C) COMMENT: THE PDC AND PCN ARE ONCE AGAIN TRYING TO IMPROVE THEIR DEAL-MAKING LEVERAGE IN THE EVENT OF A SECOND  
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ROUND. THE PCN IS IN REAL DANGER OF FAILING TO SECURE THE MINIMUM THREE PERCENT OF THE VOTE NECESSARY TO MAINTAIN ITS STANDING AS A LEGAL PARTY AND MAY SEE IN THE PROPOSAL A MECHANISM WHICH WOULD ASSURE THEIR POLITICAL SURVIVAL. ARENA, OF COURSE, WOULD PREFER TO RENDER THE ENTIRE ISSUE MOOT WITH A FIRST ROUND ELECTORAL VICTORY. END COMMENT.

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E. PARTIES SEEK SUPPORT IN THE U.S.  
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13. (U) ARENA VICE PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE CARLOS QUINTANILLA SCHMIDT TRAVELED TO LOS ANGELES ON JANUARY 27 TO PRESS THE FLESH AMIDST THAT CITY'S SIZABLE SALVADORAN POPULATION. QUINTANILLA SCHMIDT, WHO WAS WELCOMED BY THE LOS ANGELES-BASED EL SALVADOR-CALIFORNIA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE, EXPLAINED ARENA'S PLAN OF GOVERNMENT AND URGED FURTHER "COMMERCIAL INTEGRATION" BETWEEN THE U.S. AND EL SALVADOR. FOR THEIR PART, THE FMLN IS SENDING CANDIDATE FACUNDO GUARDADO AND FORMER PARTY LEADER SALVADOR SANCHEZ CEREN TO THE U.S. LATER IN THE MONTH. FMLN LEADERS HAVE TOLD US THAT A MAJOR COMPONENT OF THESE TRIPS WILL INVOLVE FUNDRAISING.

14. (U) COMMENT: GIVEN THAT THE SALVADORAN POPULATION IN THE

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USIE-00 ASDS-01 PMB-00 DSCC-00 DRL-02 G-00 FDIC-01  
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P 052044Z FEB 99  
FM AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9116  
INFO USCINCSO MIAMI FL  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 03 OF 03 SAN SALVADOR 000403

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U.S. IS APPROXIMATELY ONE-SIXTH AS LARGE AS THAT IN EL SALVADOR, IT IS NOT SURPRISING THAT SOME CANDIDATES SHOULD TAKE THEIR MESSAGE TO SALVADORANS RESIDENT IN THE U.S. WHILE SALVADORANS HAVE NO PROVISION FOR ABSENTEE VOTING, SALVADORAN EMIGRES ARE IMPORTANT: THEY RETAIN CLOSE CONTACT TO RELATIVES IN EL SALVADOR; MEETING WITH THEM SHOWS A PARTY'S COMMITMENT TO THE "HERMANOS LEJANOS" - A POTENT  
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CAMPAIGN THEME; AND THEY PROVIDE CAMPAIGN CONTRIBUTIONS. END COMMENT.

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F. MUSICAL CHAIRS  
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15. (U) ANOTHER CHARACTERISTIC OF THE SALVADORAN ELECTORAL SCENE IS THE MOVEMENT OF POLITICIANS FROM ONE PARTY TO ANOTHER. SINCE THE NEW YEAR SEVERAL MAYORS AND PARTY ACTIVISTS HAVE JUMPED FROM ONE PARTY TO ANOTHER, WITH THE RECEIVING PARTY TYPICALLY TRUMPETING THE ACQUISITIONS AS PROOF THAT POLITICAL MOMENTUM IS ON THEIR SIDE. OVER THE LAST TWO WEEKS SEVERAL FAIRLY PROMINENT LEGISLATIVE FIGURES HAVE JOINED THE GAME OF MUSICAL CHAIRS. FORMER PCN DEPUTY SIGIFREDO OCHOA PEREZ FORMALLY REJOINED ARENA AFTER MONTHS OF ESTRANGEMENT FROM THE PCN. SHORTLY THEREAFTER HE WAS JOINED BY PCN ALTERNATE DEPUTY ANTONIO CORNEJO ARANGO. (NOTE: BOTH OCHOA PEREZ AND CORNEJO ARANGO HAD BOLTED FROM ARENA BEFORE THE 1997 ELECTIONS). JORGE BARRERA, THE FORMER PDC LEGISLATIVE BLOC LEADER WHO BROKE WITH PDC LEADER UMANA, ANNOUNCED ON FEBRUARY 2 THAT HE WOULD JOIN THE LEGISLATIVE FACTION OF THE SOCIAL CHRISTIAN UNION (USC), THE ELECTORAL ALLIES OF THE FMLN. ANOTHER PDC DEPUTY, JULIO SAMAYOA, ANNOUNCED HE WOULD JOIN THE BLOC OF DEPUTIES ASSOCIATED WITH THE UNITED DEMOCRATIC CENTER (CDU) OF RUBEN ZAMORA.

16. (C) COMMENT: WHILE THE PARTIES LIKE TO PUBLICIZE THE ADDITION OF PROMINENT NEW ADHERENTS ON THE EVE OF ELECTIONS, NONE OF THE DEPUTIES SWITCHING PARTIES ARE LIKELY TO HAVE ANYTHING MORE THAN A MARGINAL EFFECT ON THE PRESIDENTIAL  
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ELECTIONS. THE IMPORTANCE OF THE SHIFTS IS RELATED TO THE LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS IN 2000. THE DEPUTIES INVOLVED, ON THE OUTS WITH THEIR FORMER PARTIES, ARE SEEKING TO SITUATE THEMSELVES WITH THEIR NEW PARTIES IN HOPES OF ASSURING A PLACE FOR THEMSELVES ON THE LEGISLATIVE BALLOT FOR NEXT YEAR'S ELECTIONS. END COMMENT.

PATTERSON

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