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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 SAN SALVADOR 03377

EXDIS

DECAPTIONED

REVIEW AUTHORITY: Oscar Olson, Senior
Reviewer

E.O. 12356: DECL: OADR

TAGS: PGOV, PINR, ES

SUBJECT: GEARING UP TOWARD 1989; THE OCHOA FACTOR

1. (CONFIDENTIAL - ENTIRE TEXT)

2. SUMMARY: FIDEL CHAVEZ MENA TOLD PRESIDENT DUARTE AND ME THAT COLONEL OCHOA, OSTENSIBLY ABOUT TO DEPART ONCE AGAIN INTO EXILE AS SALVADORAN MILITARY ATTACHE IN WASHINGTON, HAD ASKED TO SEE HIM AND HAD RE-VIEWED WHAT TURNED OUT TO BE ONLY AN EXCEEDINGLY THINLY-DISGUISED POLITICAL AGENDA. OCHOA SAID HE SOUGHT AN INTERVIEW WITH PRESIDENT DUARTE IN ORDER TO CLEAR HIS NAME OF SUSPICION OF DISLOYALTY; IN FACT, OCHOA WAS THROWING DOWN THE GAUNTLET OF THE PROSPECT OF A UNIFIED FRONT AGAINST THE CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATS IN 1988 AND 1989. END SUMMARY.

3. ON BOARD THE USS IOWA YESTERDAY, IN A PRIVATE MOMENT, PLANNING MINISTER FIDEL CHAVEZ MENA TOLD PRESIDENT DUARTE AND ME THAT COLONEL SIGIFREDO OCHOA PEREZ HAD COME AROUND TO SEE HIM IN THE PRECEDING WEEK -- TO DISCUSS POLITICS. DUARTE'S EYES BULGED BUT THERE WERE TOO MANY PEOPLE (INCLUDING SALVADORAN CONFIDENTIAL

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MILITARY, PRIVATE SECTOR, AND CONSERVATIVE POLITICAL FIGURES) STANDING AROUND TO GO OVER THE DETAILS IN THAT SETTING; FIDEL COVERED IT ALL FOR ME AT BREAK-FAST THIS MORNING, AND THEN LEFT FOR THE CASA PRESIDENCIAL TO TELL DUARTE.

4. OCHOA CAME IN FRANKNESS (OR SO HE TOLD CHAVEZ MENA). HE SAID HE WAS CONCERNED ABOUT THE UNTRUTHS BEING SPREAD ABOUT HIS CHARACTER. HE PROTESTED HIS LOYALTY TO THE ARMED FORCES AS AN INSTITUTION, TO THE CONSTITUTION, AND TO THE PRESIDENT. HE SAID HE WAS A SIMPLE SOLDIER WHO HAD NEVER WANTED TO DO MORE THAN SERVE HIS COUNTRY. HE SAID HE THOUGHT THAT

WHEN HE WAS 4TH BRIGADE COMMANDER, IN CHALATENANGO, HE HAD DONE THE BEST JOB HE COULD (AND HE SAID HE THOUGHT HE WAS PROBABLY THE BEST COMMANDER IN THE ARMED FORCES...), AND HE SAID HE THOUGHT THAT AS 4TH BDE COMMANDER, HE HAD BEEN BEST USED IN HIS COUNTRY'S FIGHT TO SAVE ITSELF FROM A COMMUNIST TAKEOVER.

5. HE REGRETTED THAT HE HAD BEEN SUMMARILY SACKED, AND ASCRIBED THIS TO HIS THREE MOST RECENT CONTRE-TEMPS WITH THE PRESIDENT -- OVER THE KIDNAPPING OF THE PRESIDENT'S DAUGHTER LAST OCTOBER, THE TRUCE/ PEACE MARCH OVER CHRISTMAS, AND THE PRESIDENT'S "ECONOMIC REFORM PACKAGE" IN FEBRUARY. HE SAID THAT, BEING AN HONEST AND FORTHRIGHT PERSON, WHEN THE PRESIDENT MET WITH ESAF OFFICERS AND ASKED FOR THEIR VIEWS, HE HAD SPOKEN UP. HE WAS BEING ACCUSED OF DISLOYALTY, BUT IN FACT HE WAS ONLY GIVING HIS "BEST AND MOST LOYAL ADVICE AND COUNSEL."

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6. THEN OCHOA GOT INTO THE MEAT. HE SAID THAT ALTHOUGH HE REALLY WANTED ONLY TO STAY IN THE ARMED FORCES, THE TRANSFER INTO GOLDEN EXILE (AS SALVADORAN MILITARY ATTACHE IN WASHINGTON) WOULD EFFECTIVELY END HIS MILITARY CAREER. HE WOULD LIKE TO BE ABLE TO RETURN FROM WASHINGTON TO REASSUME A FIELD COMMAND, BUT HE KNEW HE WAS UNLIKELY TO BE ALLOWED TO DO THIS BY THE PRESENT GOVERNMENT. AS A PRACTICAL MATTER, HE HAD ONLY FIVE MORE YEARS' SERVICE BEFORE HE HAD TO RETIRE. HE WAS THUS LEFT, DESPITE HIS OWN PERSONAL PREFERENCES, WITH LITTLE ALTERNATIVE BUT TO CONSIDER ANOTHER FUTURE. HE SAID HE HAD BEEN APPROACHED BY A LARGE NUMBER OF HIS COLLEAGUES IN THE MILITARY WHO URGED HIM TO RUN FOR OFFICE AGAINST THE CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATIC GOVERNMENT IN 1988 (LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY) OR 1989 (PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS). HE SAID HE WAS ALSO BEING IMPORTUNED BY "ALL OF THE PARTIES ON THE RIGHT" TO TAKE THE ROLE OF NATURAL AND LEGITIMATE SUCCESSOR TO ROBERTO D'AUBUISSON. ALTHOUGH THIS WAS HIGHLY FLATTERING AND VERY ATTRACTIVE TO HIM, OCHOA REPEATED TO CHAVEZ MENA AT LEAST ONCE MORE -- DOUBTLESS FOR EFFECT -- THAT, LEFT TO HIS OWN CHOICES, HE WOULD FAR PREFER CONTINUING SERVING AS A FIELD COMMANDER IN THE ARMED FORCES.

7. BUT HE HAD TO LOOK NOT ONLY TO HIS OWN FUTURE BUT TO THAT OF HIS COUNTRY AS WELL. THERE WERE THREE OBVIOUS CANDIDATES AMONG THE CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATS: IN PERSONAL TERMS, HE WOULD VERY MUCH ENJOY THE MATCHING OF WITS AGAINST FIDEL CHAVEZ MENA, WHOM HE TOLD HE THOUGHT WAS AN HONORABLE AND CAPABLE

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MAN. IN FACT, HE (OCHOA) COULD THINK OF NO BETTER "DREAM TICKET" THAN OCHOA FOR PRESIDENT AND CHAVEZ MENA (PRESUMABLY AS AN INDEPENDENT) FOR VICE PRESIDENT. HE (OCHOA) WOULD RELISH THE INTELLECTUAL FASCINATION OF A BATTLE TO THE FINISH AGAINST (PDC SECRETARY GENERAL, MAYOR OF SAN SALVADOR, AND THE CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATS' PREMIER THEOLOGIST) ANTONIO MORALES EHRlich, AND NOTHING WOULD GIVE HIM GREATER PERSONAL PLEASURE THAN TO GUT AND PHYSICALLY DESTROY (MINISTER OF COMMUNICATIONS) JULIO ADOLFO REY PRENDES.

8. HIS POINT TO FIDEL WAS THE SOMEWHAT INCREDIBLE ONE, FOLLOWING THIS PERFORMANCE, OF ASKING FIDEL TO RUN INTERFERENCE FOR HIM IN SEEKING AN INTERVIEW BETWEEN OCHOA AND DUARTE IN WHICH OCHOA PROPOSED TO TELL THE PRESIDENT THAT HE "DID NOT WANT TO BECOME THE PRESIDENT'S ENEMY, AND PLEASE NOT TO BOX HIM IN AND FORCE HIM INTO BECOMING A POLITICAL OPPONENT." OCHOA SAID HE HAD SECURED (ESAF CHIEF OF STAFF) GENERAL BLANDON'S AND (MINISTER OF DEFENSE) GENERAL VIDES' PERMISSION TO TALK WITH THE PRESIDENT. FIDEL SAID OCHOA MADE CLEAR AT ONE POINT THAT ONE OF HIS PURPOSES WAS TO TELL THE PRESIDENT THAT HE SHOULD NOT PLACE HIS CONFIDENCE IN VIDES' AND BLANDON'S "REPRESENTATIVENESS" OF ARMED FORCES' CONFIDENTIAL

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SENTIMENT.

9. FIDEL SAID HE HAD BEEN A BIT BEMUSED BY OCHOA'S PERFORMANCE AS WELL AS CONSCIOUS OF THE LONGER-TERM POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS. HE SAID HE WAS DISINCLINED TO RECOMMEND THAT THE PRESIDENT MEET WITH OCHOA; THERE WAS ABSOLUTELY NO LIKELIHOOD OF ANY USEFUL PURPOSE BEING SERVED BY SUCH A MEETING, AND A HIGH PROBABILITY OF A STRONG CLASH BETWEEN THE TWO MEN. WITH RESPECT TO THE CHALLENGE OCHOA PRESENTED TO

THE CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATS, FIDEL ACKNOWLEDGED THAT (EXCEPT FOR FIDEL CHAVEZ JOINING AN OCHOA TICKET) THE SCENARIO PAINTED BY OCHOA WAS A PLAUSIBLE ONE. THE RIGHT IS CLEARLY CASTING AROUND FOR A POLITICALLY VIABLE REPLACEMENT FOR ROBERTO D'AUBUISSON, WHOM CHAVEZ MENA CONSIDERED A SPENT FORCE WITH NEXT TO NO CHANCE OF RECOVERY. WHETHER OCHOA HAS THE POTENTIAL TO UNIFY THE RIGHT IS NOT YET APPARENT: FIDEL AGREED THAT OCHOA WAS HIGHLY LIKELY TO RETIRE BY JUNE (BY WHICH TIME HE MUST DO SO IN ORDER TO CONSTITUTIONALLY BE ELIGIBLE TO RUN FOR PRESIDENT IN 1989).

10. I COMMENTED THAT THE DEGREE TO WHICH A THREAT EMERGED FROM OCHOA WOULD BE AT LEAST AS DEPENDENT ON ACTIONS THE CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATS THEMSELVES TAKE AS ON ANYTHING OCHOA MIGHT DO: IF THE CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATS ARE ABLE TO GET THEIR ACT TOGETHER, START GOVERNING EFFECTIVELY, CLEAN UP THE CORRUPTION PROBLEMS, AND PROVE TO THE PEOPLE OF THE COUNTRY THAT A DEMOCRATIC GOVERNMENT OFFERS SOME PROSPECTS FOR SERIOUSLY ADDRESSING THE PROBLEMS THE COUNTRY FACES, THEN THE CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATS WILL BE ABLE TO MOUNT
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A CREDIBLE CAMPAIGN. IF THEY CANNOT OR IF THEY MANAGE TO TEAR THEMSELVES APART THROUGH IN-FIGHTING, AND IF THE CONSERVATIVE SIDE OF THE POLITICAL SPECTRUM IS ABLE TO PULL ITSELF TOGETHER BEHIND A STRONG AND PERSUASIVE CANDIDATE SUCH AS OCHOA COULD BECOME, THEN THE RIGHT TOO WILL HAVE THE POSSIBILITY OF MOUNTING A PERSUASIVE ELECTORAL CAMPAIGN. FIDEL CONCLUDED, HE SAID, THAT -- ALL THINGS CONSIDERED -- IT WAS PROBABLY BETTER TO SEND OCHOA OUT OF THE COUNTRY AT THIS TIME THAN TO RISK HIS CONTINUAL INSUBORDINATION AND ATTEMPTS AT POLITICAL DESTABILIZATION BOTH WITHIN THE ARMED FORCES AND IN THE BODY POLITIC THAN TO RISK LEAVING HIM HERE.

11. COMMENT: OCHOA KEEPS PROTESTING HIS INTENTION TO GO TO WASHINGTON; THIS CITY KEEPS WONDERING IF HE WILL. WHETHER HE DOES OR NOT, THERE IS A CLEARLY GROWING CONVICTION THAT THE STAGE IS BEING SET FOR AN OCHOA DEPARTURE FROM THE ARMED FORCES AND ENTRY INTO POLITICS. THIS COUNTRY HAS A STRONG CONSERVATIVE STREAK AND THERE IS NO DOUBTING THE POTENTIAL FOR A REAL CONTEST BETWEEN THE POPULIST PROGRAM AND IDEOLOGY OF THE CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATS, AND A PRIVATE ENTERPRISE ANTI-COMMUNIST CONSERVATIVE OPPOSITION. THERE IS NO PARTICULAR MERIT IN SPECULATING ABOUT THE OUTCOME AT THIS TIME, BUT THE OPENING SHOTS IN THE 1988/1989 POLITICAL CAMPAIGNS ARE CLEARLY BEING LOADED

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AND, IF NOTHING ELSE, EL SALVADOR STANDS A GOOD CHANCE
OF BEING A LIVELY EXAMPLE OF THE DEMOCRATIC PROCESS
AT WORK.

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