

PTQ5303

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ACTION ARA-01

INFO LOG-00 ACDA-08 ACDE-00 CIAE-00 OASY-00 DODE-00 SRPP-00
DS-00 H-01 TEDE-00 INR-00 LAB-01 L-01 ADS-00
M-00 NSAE-00 NSCE-00 OMB-01 OPIC-01 PA-00 PM-00
PRS-00 P-00 CIO-00 SP-00 TRSE-00 T-00 USIE-00
PMB-00 DSCC-00 DRL-04 G-00 /018W
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R 201939Z SEP 97
FM AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3958
INFO USCINCSO QUARRY HEIGHTS PM
ALCA COLLECTIVE

RELEASED IN FULL

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STATE FOR ARA/CEN - J. FEELEY

E.O. 12958: DECL:9/20/07
TAGS: PGOV, ES
SUBJECT: PCN FIRES CAUCUS LEADER -- LEFT SEES ARENA
MANEUVER

REF: 96 SAN SALVADOR 6660

(U) CLASSIFIED BY GREGORY E. PHILLIPS, ACTING POLCOUNS.
REASON: 1.5 (B) AND (D).

1. (C) AT FIRST GLANCE, PERHAPS, THE MOVE BY EL
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REVIEW AUTHORITY: Oscar Olson, Senior Reviewer

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SALVADOR'S THIRD LARGEST PARLIAMENTARY PARTY TO CHANGE
ITS FLOOR LEADER MAY SEEM TO MERIT LITTLE NOTICE. THE
FACTS ARE STRAIGHTFORWARD: SIGIFREDO OCHOA PEREZ, A
RETIRED COLONEL AND FORMER ARENA MEMBER WHO, ALONG WITH
OTHER DISAFFECTED CONSERVATIVES, LEFT THE GOVERNING
PARTY LAST FALL FOR THE RIGHTIST PARTY OF NATIONAL
CONCILIATION (PCN), TOOK ON THE PARTY LEADERSHIP -- AND

LOST. OCHOA PEREZ, NAMED PCN CAUCUS LEADER AFTER THE PARTY ALMOST TRIPLED ITS LEGISLATIVE STRENGTH IN THE MARCH 1997 ELECTIONS, IMMEDIATELY BEGAN TAKING THE PARTY IN A NEW DIRECTION. WHERE PCN DEPUTIES WERE ONCE COUNTED AS "SAFE" VOTES FOR THE GOVERNMENT, OCHOA PEREZ SOUGHT COMMON CAUSE WITH THE OPPOSITION.

2. (C) MATTERS CAME TO A HEAD AS THE PARLIAMENT CONSIDERED THE FATE OF CENTRAL BANK PRESIDENT ROBERTO ORELLANA MILLA. PCN SECRETARY GENERAL CIRO CRUZ ZEPEDA HAD DETERMINED THAT THE PARTY WOULD NOT CALL FOR ORELLANA'S HEAD. HOWEVER, OCHOA PEREZ LED THE CHARGE AGAINST ORELLANA, AND ON SEPTEMBER 4, DELIVERED NINE OF HIS PARTY'S ELEVEN VOTES IN FAVOR OF A MOTION TO RECOMMEND HIS FIRING. THEN, IN AN INTERVIEW WHICH APPEARED ON SEPTEMBER 15, OCHOA PEREZ PROCLAIMED THAT HE WAS THE CAUCUS LEADER; THAT CRUZ ZEPEDA WAS "JUST ANOTHER DEPUTY;" AND THAT "NOT EVEN THE SECRETARY GENERAL" COULD CHALLENGE HIS MANAGEMENT OF THE VOTE.

3. (C) CRUZ ZEPEDA ACTED QUICKLY: THE NEXT DAY, WHILE OCHOA PEREZ WAS IN WASHINGTON, THE SECRETARY GENERAL OBTAINED A VOTE OF THE PARTY LEADERSHIP TO REMOVE THE CAUCUS LEADER. OCHOA PEREZ SEEMS FIRST TO HAVE HEARD
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OF THE MOVE WHEN A SALVADORAN NEWSPAPER CALLED HIM FOR A REACTION. ON THAT, CRUZ ZEPEDA TOLD THE PRESS, "WE'RE NOT GOING TO TRAVEL (TO WASHINGTON) TO ASK HIM ABOUT IT.... THAT'S WHAT THE MEDIA'S FOR."

3. (C) WHAT MIGHT OTHERWISE BE SEEN AS A TEMPEST IN A TEAPOT TAKES ON A SOMEWHAT LARGER SIGNIFICANCE IN VIEW OF THE FOLLOWING:

-- WITHIN THE PARTY, THIS EPISODE MAY REPRESENT THE FULFILLMENT OF THE FEARS OF DISCORD WHICH SURFACED LAST NOVEMBER WHEN VICTOR ANTONIO CORNEJO ARANGO BEGAN THE DEFECTION OF DISGRUNTLED ARENA MEMBERS TO THE PCN (SEE REFTTEL). CRUZ ZEPEDA TOLD US SEPTEMBER 18 THAT OCHOA PEREZ'S STATEMENTS HAD CHALLENGED PARTY AUTHORITY, WITHOUT WHICH HE COULD NOT FUNCTION AS SECRETARY GENERAL. OCHOA PEREZ HAS NOT BEEN THROWN OUT OF THE PARTY, AND HAS ALREADY RECEIVED EXPRESSIONS OF SUPPORT FROM SUCH EX-ARENA PCN DEPUTIES AS HUMBERTO RIOS.

-- THE FMLN AND OTHER OPPOSITION PARTIES HAVE ALREADY CALLED FOUL, AND THE HEADLINE IN THE LEFT-WING "CO-

LATINO" CALLS THE MOVE "AN ARENA MANEUVER." (COMMENT: IRONICALLY, MANY OBSERVERS HAD CHARGED THAT THE ARENA "DEFLECTIONS" WERE PART OF AN ARENA PLOT TO "TAKE OVER" OTHER PARTIES. THAT THE FALL OF OCHOA PEREZ -- ONE OF THE SUPPOSED "PLANTS" -- SHOULD BE SEEN AS ANOTHER WELL-CALCULATED MOVE IN THE SAME STRATEGY SEEMS, TO US, INCONSISTENT. END COMMENT.)

-- REGARDLESS OF MOTIVES, THE FMLN AND OTHERS ARE
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LIKELY CORRECT REGARDING THE POLITICAL EFFECT OF THE MOVE. NEW PCN CAUCUS LEADER ALEX AGUIRRE, WHOM THE PRESS CALLS A "TRADITIONAL" PCN MEMBER, WILL NOT CONTINUE OCHOA PEREZ'S POLICY OF SEEKING TO FORGE A CONSENSUS AGAINST ARENA. THIS WILL MAKE IT HARDER FOR THE OPPOSITION IN PARLIAMENT TO KEEP THE INITIATIVE.

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