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ACTION WHA-01

INFO LOG-00 ACDA-08 ACDE-00 ACQ-01 CIAE-00 SRPP-00 DS-00
H-01 IM-01 TEDE-00 INR-00 LAB-01 L-01 ADS-00
NSAE-00 NSCE-00 OMB-01 OPIC-01 PA-00 PM-00 PRS-00
P-00 SP-00 TRSE-00 T-00 USIE-00 PMB-00 DSCC-00
PRM-01 DRL-02 G-00 SAS-00 /019W
-----97316C 150028Z /38

P 150027Z JAN 99
FM AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8852
INFO ALCA COLLECTIVE
USCINCSO MIAMI FL
DIA WASHDC
HQUSSOUTHAF DAVIS MONTHAN AFB AZ

RELEASED IN PART
B1,1.4(D)

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 SAN SALVADOR 000152

E.O. 12958: DECL:1/13/09
TAGS: MARR, PGOV, ES
SUBJECT: RUMBLINGS CONTINUE ON PRESIDENTIAL DISMISSAL
OF DEFENSE MINISTER -- BUT NO LASTING IMPACT EXPECTED

REVIEW AUTHORITY: Oscar Olson,
Senior Reviewer

REF: (A) SAN SALVADOR 18, DTG 052339Z JAN 99,
(B) 98 SAN SALVADOR 4921, DTG 301725Z DEC 98,
(C) 98 SAN SALVADOR 4919 (IIR 6 829 0049 99,
DTG 301548Z DEC 98)

Classified by DAS M Grafeld, A/GIS, DoS on
4/20/15 ~ Class: CONFIDENTIAL ~ Reason: 1.4(D)
~ Declassify on: 01/14/2024

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

1. (C) SUMMARY: THE PRESIDENT'S SACKING OF HIS
DEFENSE MINISTER AND VICE MINISTER IN THE AFTERMATH OF
HIS FAILED ATTEMPT TO SECURE PROMOTIONS FOR TWO
COLONELS CONTINUES TO GENERATE HEAVY MEDIA PLAY, BUT IS
UNLIKELY TO HAVE LONG TERM IMPACT. THE PRESS, HAVING
BEEN FED INFORMATION BY MILITARY INSIDERS, HAS MOST OF
THE SALIENT DETAILS. HOWEVER, THERE HAS BEEN A MARKED
TENDENCY IN MEDIA REPORTING TO EXAGGERATE THE EXTENT TO
WHICH DISGRUNTLED MILITARY OFFICERS SERIOUSLY
CONSIDERED TAKING EXTRA-LEGAL STEPS. INDEED,
THE FACT THAT THE MILITARY HAS ACCEPTED THE SITUATION
UNDERLINES HOW MUCH THE ARMED FORCES HAVE CHANGED AND
THE POSITIVE EVOLUTION IN THE MILITARY/GOVERNMENT
RELATIONSHIP IN RECENT YEARS. END SUMMARY

MEDIA PLAYS UP MILITARY DISCONTENT

2. (C) THE CONTROVERSY SURROUNDING PRESIDENT ARMANDO CALDERON SOL'S END-OF-THE-YEAR DISMISSAL OF HIS DEFENSE MINISTER AND VICE MINISTER IS STILL FRONT-PAGE NEWS. THE CONSERVATIVE "DIARIO DE HOY" HAS BEEN ESPECIALLY ACTIVE IN KEEPING THE POT BOILING ON THE ISSUE.



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IN PARTICULAR, "DIARIO" HAS ALLEGED THAT DISGRUNTLED
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MILITARY OFFICERS MET TO CONSIDER TAKING SOME SORT OF
ACTION AGAINST THE GOES.

3. (C) ON JANUARY 12, HOWEVER, THE "PRENSA GRAFICA" LED THE CHARGE WITH A TWO-PAGE SPREAD. THE CENTERPIECE OF THE REPORT WAS AN INTERVIEW IN WHICH AN UNNAMED MEMBER OF THE ARMY PROMOTION BOARD STATES CATEGORICALLY THAT THE PRESIDENT THREATENED TO TAKE ACTION AGAINST BOARD MEMBERS IF THEY FAILED TO PROMOTE TWO OF THE PRESIDENT'S FAVORITES, COLONELS RICARDO ARANGO MACAY AND SIDNEY RENDON YUDICE, TO BRIGADIER GENERAL. WHEN THE BOARD IGNORED THE PRESIDENT'S WISHES AND RECOMMENDED THE PROMOTION OF TWO OTHER OFFICERS (COLONELS SEGOVIA AND MUNGIA), THE PRESIDENT RETALIATED BY BLOCKING THOSE PROMOTIONS AND DISMISSING DEFENSE MINISTER GUZMAN AND VICE MINISTER VAQUERANO. THE SOURCE, BELIEVED BY SOME TO BE VAQUERANO, QUOTES PRESIDENTIAL ADVISOR BENJAMIN CESTONI AS TELLING MEMBERS OF THE BOARD, "IF YOU DON'T PROMOTE THOSE TWO, YOU'LL LAND IN THE S..." THE ANONYMOUS SOURCE ACKNOWLEDGED, HOWEVER, THAT THE PRESIDENT'S DECISION TO HOLD UP THE PROMOTIONS OF MUNGIA AND SEGOVIA WAS LEGAL. MOREOVER, IN A SECOND INTERVIEW ON JANUARY 13, THE SAME SOURCE AFFIRMED THAT WHILE CALDERON SOL MAY HAVE ACTED "IRRESPONSIBLY," THE MILITARY HAD ACCEPTED THE SITUATION.

PRESIDENT DENIES EXISTENCE OF CRISIS

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4. (U) THE PRESIDENT ADDED TO THE CONTROVERSY BY RESPONDING ANGRILY TO REPORTERS' QUESTIONS ON THE ISSUE AND ACCUSING THE MEDIA OF "SENSATIONALISM." BEYOND DENYING THAT HE HAD ATTEMPTED TO PRESSURE THE PROMOTION BOARD TO PROMOTE ARANGO MACAY AND RENDON, HE REFUSED TO EXPLAIN HIS ACTIONS OTHER THAN TO REAFFIRM HE HAD ACTED IN ACCORDANCE WITH HIS PREROGATIVES AS COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF. CALDERON SOL FURTHER THREATENED TO TAKE

DISCIPLINARY ACTION AGAINST OFFICERS WHO, REPORTEDLY, HAVE SOUGHT THE ADVICE OF OPPOSITION LEGISLATORS AND FORMER MILITARY OFFICERS, INCLUDING ONE-TIME CHIEF OF STAFF ADOLFO BLANDON (NOW MAYOR OF THE DEPARTMENT CAPITAL OF COJUTEPEQUE, AND A RECENT CONVERT TO ARENA).

OPPOSITION LEGISLATORS SEEK TO ENTER FRAY

5. (C) THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY HAS TAKEN UP THE ISSUE, WITH THE UNLIKELY COMBINATION OF THE FMLN AND THE CONSERVATIVE NATIONAL CONCILIATION PARTY (PCN) DEMANDING A FULL ACCOUNTING. THE FMLN'S POSITION IS INTERESTING: CLEARLY, THE FMLN COULD BE EXPECTED TO

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 02 OF 02 SAN SALVADOR 000152

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REF: (A) SAN SALVADOR 18, DTG 052339Z JAN 99,
GRAB HOLD OF ANY ISSUE ON WHICH THE PRESIDENT AND, BY
EXTENSION, ARENA ARE VULNERABLE. HOWEVER, IT STRIKES
SOME AS IRONIC THAT THE PARTY OF FORMER GUERRILLAS IS
NOW IN THE POSITION OF DEFENDING THE ARMED FORCES AS AN
INSTITUTION AGAINST POLITICAL ENCROACHMENT. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] ALMENDARIZ AND FMLN LEGISLATOR MANUEL MELGAR, THE CHAIRMAN OF THE PUBLIC SECURITY COMMITTEE AND A FORMER GUERRILLA LEADER, WILL REPORTEDLY COLLABORATE IN HOLDING HEARINGS ON THE SITUATION.

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6. (C) COMMENT: THE GOVERNING ARENA PARTY, SUPPORTED BY THE CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATIC PARTY, CONTINUES TO RESIST THE FMLN/PCN CALL TO HOLD LEGISLATIVE HEARINGS. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED]
END COMMENT

OCHOA PEREZ DOWNPLAYS LONG TERM CONSEQUENCES

7. (C) IN A CONVERSATION WITH POLCOUNS ON JANUARY 13, ARENA LEGISLATOR SIGIFREDO OCHOA PEREZ, A RETIRED ARMY COLONEL WHO GAINED RENOWN FOR A SIX-DAY MUTINY HE STAGED IN 1983, PREDICTED THE CONTROVERSY WOULD FADE AWAY SHORTLY WITHOUT ANY LONG TERM CONSEQUENCES. A FORMER PCN DEPUTY WHO RECENTLY RETURNED TO THE RANKS OF ARENA, OCHOA PEREZ HAS PUBLICLY DEFENDED THE ACTIONS OF CALDERON SOL [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED]
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[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] CALDERON SOL'S DECISION TO BLOCK THE PROMOTION OF THE TWO OFFICERS RECOMMENDED BY THE PROMOTION PANEL WAS, ACCORDING TO OCHOA PEREZ, LEGAL ALBEIT ILL-ADVISED. HE SUGGESTED THAT A DEAL HAD BEEN ARRANGED THAT WOULD GIVE MUNGIA AND SEGOVIA THEIR PROMOTIONS IN JUNE, AFTER CALDERON SOL'S PRESIDENTIAL TERM HAD EXPIRED (AND WHEN, PRESUMABLY, THE FRONT-RUNNING ARENA CANDIDATE WOULD BE IN OFFICE).

COMMENT

8. (C) REGARDLESS OF THE HEARTBURN FELT OVER THE ISSUE IN MANY QUARTERS, WE BELIEVE IT WILL HAVE LITTLE OR NO PRACTICAL IMPACT OVER THE LONG TERM. CALLS TO THE MILITARY BY THE ARCHBISHOP AND BLANDON NOT TO CONSIDER A COUP D'ETAT COULD BE TAKEN AS AN INDICATION THAT SUCH A STEP WAS CONTEMPLATED, BUT IT NOW SEEMS CLEAR THAT THIS WAS NEVER THE CASE. WHILE OFFICERS MET AND COMPLAINED AND MUTTERED ABOUT WHAT STEPS TO

TAKE TO EXPRESS THEIR DISCONTENT, NOTHING HAPPENED. INDEED, THE FACT THAT THE MILITARY HAS ACCEPTED THE SITUATION IS A DEMONSTRATION OF HOW MUCH THE ARMED FORCES AND THE MILITARY/GOVERNMENT RELATIONSHIP HAS CHANGED HERE IN RECENT YEARS. AS OCHOA PEREZ COMMENTED TO US, HAD THIS SAME SCENARIO UNFOLDED TEN YEARS AGO,
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IT IS ALMOST CERTAIN THAT THE MILITARY WOULD HAVE RESPONDED.

9. (C) AS FOR A POLITICAL IMPACT, IT IS DIFFICULT TO IMAGINE THAT THIS INCIDENT WOULD COST ARENA SIGNIFICANT SUPPORT AMONG THE VOTING PUBLIC. THE REAL IMPACT OF THESE EVENTS MAY INVOLVE WHAT MANY OBSERVERS HAVE ALLEGED TO BE THE MILITARY'S PREDISPOSITION TO SUPPORT THE PARTY OF GOVERNMENT. TO THE EXTENT TO WHICH THAT WAS EVER TRUE, IT IS LIKELY MUCH LESS SO NOW.

PATTERSON

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