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FROM SAN JOSE 311600Z MARCH 84

TO IMMEDIATE FCO

TELEGRAM NUMBER 120 OF 31 MARCH

INFO PRIORITY: WASHINGTON TEGUCIGALPA UKMIS NEW YORK DEPT OF  
TRADE MINISTRY OF DEFENCE

INFO ROUTINE: PANAMA CITY MEXICO CITY TOKYO

NICARAGUA: MINING OF SHIPS

1. A JAPANESE FREIGHTER, THE TAUSHIRO-MARU REPORTEDLY STRUCK A MINE IN CORINTO YESTERDAY EVENING. FIRST REPORTS SUGGEST DAMAGE WAS SERIOUS. THIS FOLLOWED AN ATTACK ON CORINTO BY AT LEAST THREE PIRANA LAUNCHES THE PREVIOUS NIGHT WHEN MINES WERE PROBABLY LAID. PUERTO SANDINO WAS ALSO ATTACKED YESTERDAY BY THREE HELICOPTER GUNSHIPS.
2. THE TOLL IS NOW FOUR MERCHANT VESSELS DAMAGED IN LAST MONTH PLUS TWO NICARAGUAN FISHING BOATS. ONE OF THE LATTER, WHICH WAS HIT YESTERDAY, IS REPORTEDLY SINKING.
3. SPECULATION IN MANAGUA IS THAT MINES HAVE SO FAR BEEN DOCTORED SO THAT DAMAGE TO LARGE VESSELS IS LIKELY TO BE LIMITED. THE IVOR CHASER HAD ADDITIONAL GOOD LUCK THAT MINE APPARENTLY STRUCK ANCHOR CHAIN, NOT HULL. NICARAGUAN MOD HAVE ISSUED COMMUNIQUE SAYING MINES ARE US MANUFACTURED, AND ARE LAID BY CIA USING SOPHISTICATED SURFACE AND UNDERWATER TECHNIQUES.
4. NICARAGUANS ATTEMPTS TO CLEAR MINES BY USING NETS STRUNG BETWEEN FISHING BOATS HAVE MET WITH NO SUCCESS. THEY WOULD NOW APPEAR TO HAVE SERIOUS INTEREST IN OBTAINING MINESWEEPERS FROM SOVIET UNION OR NORTH KOREA (THOUGH SUCH HELP SEEMS UNLIKELY TO BE QUICKLY FORTHCOMING). MEANWHILE, WE UNDERSTAND THAT SHIPPING LINES ARE BEGINNING TO SUSPEND CALLS AT NICARAGUAN PORTS BY FREIGHTERS DOING CENTRAL AMERICAN RUNS.

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5. THERE HAS ALSO BEEN A RECENT UPSURGE IN CONTRA LAND OPERATIONS, INCLUDING SABOTAGE ATTEMPTS AGAINST A GOLD MINE (BONANZA AREA) AND A DAM. SANDINISTA CASUALTIES ARE NOW RUNNING AT ABOUT 14 A DAY.

FCO PLEASE PASS ALL

SUMMERSCALE

[REPEATED AS REQUESTED]

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