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TO IMMEDIATE F C O

TELEGRAM NUMBER 457 OF 12 NOV

INFO PRIORITY WASHINGTON, MEXICO CITY, HAVANA, UKDEL NEW YORK,
UKDEL NATO, MOSCOW.

NICARAGUA.

SUMMARY

1. A STATE OF NATIONAL ALERT HAS BEEN DECLARED. SANDINISTA JITTERS NOT ENTIRELY EASY TO EXPLAIN. THERE MAY BE NERVOUSNESS THAT LIMITS OF U S TOLERANCE WITH REGARD TO ACQUISITION OF NEW WEAPONS SYSTEMS MAY ALREADY BE AT TESTING POINT.

DETAIL

2. TENSION RESULTING FROM THE INCIDENTS OFF CORINTO ON 7 NOVEMBER AND SPECULATION AS TO WHAT ARMS THE SOVIET VESSEL WAS CARRYING REMAINS HIGH. PRESUMED OVERFLIGHTS BY U S 'SPY PLANES' CONTINUE WITH TWO SUCH (AUDIBLE) FLIGHTS ON 10 NOVEMBER AND FURTHER 3 ON 11 NOVEMBER. (THE NICARAGUANS CLAIM THAT ONE OF THESE LATTER WAS A RC 135 WHICH OVERFLEW THE PACIFIC COAST).

3. THE NICARAGUAN MINISTRY OF DEFENCE ANNOUNCED A 'STATE OF NATIONAL ALERT' LATE ON 11 NOVEMBER. THIS WAS FOLLOWED BY SIMILAR COMMUNIQUE FROM CIVIL DEFENCE AUTHORITIES REQUESTING CITIZENS TO DIG TRENCHES, RE-INTRODUCE CIVIL DEFENCE TRAINING, BE PREPARED FOR AIR RAIDS ETC. WE UNDERSTAND THAT ARMS ARE BEING DISTRIBUTED TO SOME SECTIONS OF THE POPULACE TODAY. IN MANAGUA ITSELF THERE ARE SIGNIFICANTLY MORE TROOPS VISIBLE AND A NUMBER OF TANKS MADE AN APPEARANCE DURING THE NIGHT OF 11/12 NOVEMBER. THESE ARE NOW POSITIONED ON MAIN ROADS, AND OTHER STRATEGIC POINTS IN THE CAPITAL. HOWEVER, THE MOOD OF THE BULK OF THE CITY'S POPULATION (AS DISTINCT FROM FSLN ACTIVISTS) IS RELATIVELY CALM. THERE HAS AS YET BEEN NO SIGN OF TRENCH-DIGGING ON ANY SCALE.

4. THE OFFICIAL PRESS CONTINUES TO DRAMATIZE THE SITUATION, THOUGH THIS MUST ALSO BE SEEN AS A REFLECTION OF GRAVITY WITH WHICH THE FSLN LEADERSHIP VIEWS THESE LATEST DEVELOPMENTS. (A VICE-MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE AND MINISTER OF TOURISM CONFIRMED TO OWEN OVER DINNER ON 9 NOVEMBER THAT THE NATIONAL DIRECTORATE WAS INDEED 'EXTREMELY WORRIED'). AT THE SAME TIME HOWEVER THE SANDINISTAS APPEAR TO BE MILKING THE SITUATION FOR ALL ITS PROPAGANDA SPIN-OFFS.

5. IT IS NOT EASY, ON THE EVIDENCE AVAILABLE HERE, TO EXPLAIN THE SANDINISTA JITTERS. THE U S AMBASSADOR IN SAN JOSE HAS TOLD ME THAT HE RECKONS THE SANDINISTAS HAVE SOMETHING TO HIDE, AND THAT THE CUBANS ARE ALSO VERY NERVOUS PROBABLY FOR THE SAME REASON. WINSOR ADDED THAT U S CONCERN EXTENDED TO NICARAGUAN ACQUISITION OF HIND ATTACK HELICOPTERS AND OF SAM 3 OR SAM 8 MISSILES, BOTH OF WHICH MAY ALREADY HAVE BEEN DELIVERED. IT COULD BE THAT THE SANDINISTAS FEAR THAT, EVEN THOUGH NO MIGS ARE NOW BEING DELIVERED, THEY MAY ALREADY BE AT THE POINT OF TESTING THE LIMIT OF U S TOLERANCE WITH REGARD TO OTHER SOPHISTICATED WEAPONS SOME OF WHICH MAY PERHAPS BE INTENDED TO PAVE WAY FOR LATER ARRIVAL OF FIGHTER AIRCRAFT. THEY WILL HAVE PAID CAREFUL HEED TO RECENT U S STATEMENTS WHICH COULD BE INTERPRETED AS MEANING THAT THE THRESHOLD OF TOLERANCE IS NOW COMING DOWN.

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6. IT WOULD BE INTERESTING TO HAVE AN ACCOUNT OF LATEST REACTION
IN HAVANA.

SUMMERSCALE

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