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El Salvador

FM TEGUCIGALPA 152015Z FEB 82

TO IMMEDIATE FCO
TELNO 34 OF 15 FEBRUARY

INFO SAN JOSE, WASHINGTON AND MEXICO CITY.

M.I.P.T. EL SALVADOR.

1. EL SALVADOR IS ON THE BRINK OF CIVIL WAR. NEITHER THE JUNTA NOR THE GUERRILLAS IS ABLE TO WIN MILITARILY OR WILLING TO MEET THE OTHER'S CONDITIONS FOR A POLITICAL SETTLEMENT. THE CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATS AND ARMY SEEK LEGITIMACY THROUGH ELECTIONS AND THUS INCREASED U.S. AID AND OVERSEAS ACCEPTANCE.

THE F.D.R./F.M.L.N. ARE TRYING TO UNDERMINE THE ELECTIONS BOTH BY REFUSING TO PARTICIPATE AND BY THREATENING THOSE WHO DO. THE ARMED FORCES ^{CHAFE} ~~CHAE~~ UNDER FOREIGN CRITICISM OF EXCESSES OF SOME OF THEIR UNITS AND NEED 6 MONTHS TO A YEAR BEFORE THE IMPACT OF THE NEW US TRAINED BATTALIONS WILL TAKE EFFECT. THE PUBLIC IS WEARY OF VIOLENCE, UNACCUSTOMED TO HONEST ELECTIONS AND FACING INCREASED ECONOMIC HARDSHIP. THE SITUATION IS GETTING WORSE NOT BETTER.

2. ARMED FORCES. DIFFICULT TO ASSESS MORALE OF THE ARMED FORCES BUT ROLE SO FAR HAS BEEN LARGELY DEFENSIVE WITH SENIOR OFFICERS DESKBOUND. OPERATIONS ARE OFTEN KNOWN WELL IN ADVANCE. RECENT ATTACK ON THE ILOPANGO BASE WAS A SERIOUS BLOW TO CONFIDENCE. ATTACK MOUNTED FROM INSIDE THE BASE WITHOUT CASUALTIES DESTROYED 6 HELICOPTERS, 5 OURAGANS AND 5 C47 AIRCRAFT - HALF THE AIR FORCE. THE US HAS REPLACED THE HELICOPTERS. THE ATTACK, PRESS CRITICISM AND A FLOW OF FOREIGN (MAINLY US) POLITICIANS EXPECTING STANDARDS THE ARMY KNOWS CANNOT ALWAYS BE MET IS CREATING SOMETHING OF A SIEGE MENTALITY.

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3. ELECTIONS. DUARTE SEEMS CONFIDENT BUT WILL BE LUCKY TO WIN A CLEAR MAJORITY. IT IS DIFFICULT TO ASSESS HOW INTIMIDATION WILL AFFECT RESULT BUT AT THIS POINT POLLS SUGGEST CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATS AND RIGHT WING BLOCK OF PARTIES ARE RUNNING EQUAL WITH ABOUT ONETHIRD OF THE VOTES UNCOMMITTED. IF DUARTE WINS MAJORITY HE WILL BE IN STRONGER POSITION WITH ARMY AND FDR. IF RIGHT WING COALITION EMERGES US ADMINISTRATION WILL HAVE MORE DIFFICULT CHOICE FROM WHICH THEY MAY SEEK TO EXTRICATE THEMSELVES IN THE FACE OF MOUNTING CONGRESSIONAL CRITICISM. IN THAT CASE RIGHT WING AND ARMY MIGHT FORGE ANOTHER CIVILIAN/MILITARY JUNTA AND EL SALVADOR WOULD SLIDE INTO A REAL CIVIL WAR.

4. JUNTA SHOULD BE REPLACED WITH MORE DEMOCRATIC PROCESS TOWARDS WHICH PROPOSED ELECTIONS FLAWED AS THEY ARE OFFER A START. THEY WILL ALSO SHOW EXTENT OF NON FDR SUPPORT AND PROVIDE BETTER NEGOTIATING BASE FOR FUTURE TALKS WHICH MUST COME. CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATS ARE I THINK WILLING FOR LATTER BUT ARMY REFUSES INTEGRATION OF FORCES WITH FMLN AND FDR SEEKS DIRECT NEGOTIATION OF POWER RATHER THAN ELECTIONS. THERE SEEMS LITTLE CHANCE THAT THIS IMPASSE CAN BE BROKEN UNTIL AFTER ELECTIONS.

5. OBSERVERS. NEITHER PRESIDENT NOR MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS RAISED PARTICIPATION WITH ME (ALTHOUGH SECRETARY GENERAL OF CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATIC PARTY DID). PROBLEM IS NOT TECHNICAL ARRANGEMENTS WHICH ARE GOOD AS CAN BE EXPECTED BUT ABSENCE OF FDR, LACK OF UP TO DATE ELECTORAL REGISTER AND LIKLIHOOD OF VIOLENCE TO CANDIDATES (AND INDEED VOTERS). HOWEVER FDR DECISION IS THEIR OWN, SAFETY OF CANDIDATES CANNOT BE GUARRANTEED IN ANY SALVADOREAN ELECTION (VIP. GUERRILLA THREATS) AND UP TO DATE ELECTORAL RECORDS ARE NOT COMMON IN LATIN AMERICAN ELECTIONS. QUESTION IS WHETHER THIS MOVE TOWARDS BEGINNING OF DEMOCRATIC PROCESS IS BETTER THAN (A) PRESENT DE FACTO REGIME WHICH INADEQUATELY REPRESENTS THOSE WHO ARE BOTH LEFT AND RIGHT OF CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATS OR (B) CONTINUATION OF FIGHTING UNTIL ONE SIDE IS FORCED TO AGREE TO OTHER CONDITIONS. NEITHER OF LATTER ALTERNATIVES WILL HELP THE GROWTH OF STABILITY AND DEMOCRACY IN THE AREA. THE ELECTIONS MIGHT DO SO. HOWEVER WE SHOULD BE CLEAR THAT ONE CANNOT EXCLUDE RISKS TO OBSERVERS OR INDEED MYSELF IF WE PARTICIPATE.

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6. MASSACRES. TRUTH IS DIFFICULT TO ASCERTAIN.

IN CASE OF EL MOZOTE AND NUEVA TRINIDAD THE ARMY AND THE FMLN RESPECTIVELY ATTACKED VILLAGES HELD BY THEIR OPPONENTS AND DECKOIIDED THEM KILLING MANY INHABITANTS IN THE PROCESS. WITH EL MOZOTE THERE MAY HAVE BEEN EXCESSES AFTERWARDS. NUMBERS SUGGESTED IN BOTH CASES SEEM EXAGGERATED (POPULATION OF BOTH 3-400 WITH ELMOZOTE SWOLLEN BY FMLN SUPPORTERS). IN NUEVA TRINIDAD 15 SOLDIERS AND ABOUT 40 CIVILIANS DIED IN GUERRILLA ATTACK (PRESS REPORTS SUGGESTED 200). EL MOZOTE IS STILL IN GUERRILLA HELD AREA AND OBSERVERS FROM ICRC, UNHCR, AND CHURCH APPARENTLY WERE NOT INVITED. I REMINDED DUARTE AND GARCIA OF IMPORTANCE OF BRINGING TO JUSTICE PERSONS RESPONSIBLE FOR EXCESSES. THEY AGREED BUT CLAIMED INTERNATIONAL LEFT WING CAMPAIGN TO EXAGGERATE CASES , POINTED TO CASE OF NUNS AS EXAMPLE OF JUSTICE AND SAID THAT IN BLOODY GUERRILLA WAR WITH INEXPERIENCED TROOPS WHOSE FAMILIES WERE SOMETIMES KILLED BY GUERRILLAS IT WAS DIFFICULT TO BE PERFECT. AS WITH DEMOCRACY IT WAS A GOAL TOWARDS WHICH THEY WERE WORKING.

7. AS IT IS DIFFICULT IN EL SALVADOR TO EXPLORE POLITICAL OPTIONS OUTSIDE CENTRE RIGHT I SUGGEST THAT EMBASSY

IN MEXICO CITY SHOULD BE ASKED TO DEVELOP CONTACT WITH UNGO, MAJANO ETC ON INFORMAL BASIS.

DANISH AMBASSADOR (WHO OFFERED ME LUNCH WITH UNGO IF I PASSED THAT WAY) MIGHT BE USEFUL STARTING POINT.

MY POSITION LIMITS MY ACTIVITIES IN EL SALVADOR BUT EVENTS ARE MOVING TOO QUICKLY FOR US TO RESTRICT KNOWLEDGE OF FDR THINKING TM THEIR OCCASIONAL PROPAGANDA VISITS TO EUROPE.

FCO PASS TO SAN JOSE, WASHINGTON AND MEXICO CITY.
SHARKEY

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