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TELEGRAM NUMBER 57 OF 21 MARCH

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CARACAS, BOGOTA, HAVANA, BELMOPAN, UKMIS NEW YORK AND EC POSTS

EL SALVADOR: PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS

SUMMARY

THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION NEXT SUNDAY IS UNLIKELY TO PRODUCE AN ABSOLUTE MAJORITY AND A SECOND ROUND MAY BE NECESSARY. THE ELECTION PROCEDURE, ALTHOUGH IMPERFECT SHOULD BE ACCEPTABLE IF IT IS COMPLETELY AND IMPARTIALLY IMPLEMENTED ON ELECTION DAY. IF VIOLENCE INTERFERES WITH THE ELECTION THE GUERRILLAS WILL BE TO BLAME. THE ELECTION WILL NOT SOLVE THE COUNTRY'S DEEP SEATED PROBLEMS BUT SHOULD DEMONSTRATE THE PEOPLE'S WISH FOR CONSTITUTIONAL GOVERNMENT IN A COUNTRY MORE USED TO DICTATORSHIP THAN DEMOCRACY.

1. ON 25 MARCH THE SALVADOREAN PEOPLE WILL GO TO THE POLLS TO ELECT A NEW PRESIDENT AND VICE PRESIDENT. IF NO PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE WINS MORE THAN 50% OF THE VOTES THE TWO LEADERS WILL CONTEST A SECOND ELECTION WITHIN A MONTH. THIS WILL BE DECIDED BY SIMPLE MAJORITY PROBABLY ON 29 APRIL OR 6 MAY. THE NEW PRESIDENT WILL TAKE OFFICE ON 1ST JUNE.

2. EIGHT PARTIES HAVE PROPOSED CANDIDATES BUT ONLY THREE HAVE ANY CHANCE. THESE ARE NAPOLEON DUARTE FOR THE LEFT OF CENTRE CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATS, ROBERTO D'AUBUISSON FOR THE EXTREME RIGHT WING ARENA AND FRANCISCO GUERRERO FOR THE RIGHT OF CENTRE CONCILIACION NACIONAL. THEY WILL PROBABLY FINISH THE FIRST ROUND IN THAT ORDER WITH NONE OF THEM WINNING MORE THAN 50% OF THE VOTE. THE OTHER FIVE PARTIES ARE PARTICIPATING ONLY TO SHOW THEIR RELATIVE SUPPORT. TWO SMALL PARTIES REPRESENTING THE UNION OF THE EXTREME LEFT (FDR) AND THE GUERRILLAS (FMLN) HAVE REFUSED TO TAKE PART IN THE ELECTION.

3. THE ELECTORAL CAMPAIGN HAS FEATURED TWO THEMES - THE CIVIL WAR AND THE ECONOMY. POLICIES TO DEAL WITH BOTH ARE SIMPLISTIC. DUARTE FAVOURS DIALOGUE WITH THE FDR/FMLN AND A QUOTE SOCIAL PACT UNQUOTE TO DEAL WITH ECONOMIC PROBLEMS. D'AUBUISSON WOULD PROMOTE HARSHER MEASURES AGAINST THE FMLN AND ITS SUPPORTERS AND RETURN THE ECONOMY TO THE PRIVATE SECTOR. THE PRAGMATIC GUERRERO WILL SUPPORT WHATEVER IS POLITICALLY VIABLE. ELECTORAL PROPAGANDA HAS BEEN PREDICTABLY ABUSIVE WITH DUARTE A PARTICULAR TARGET FOR THE RIGHT WING ATTACK.

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4. THE UNITED STATES WOULD PREFER DUARTE OR GUERRERO BUT WILL ACCEPT WHOEVER IS ELECTED. HOWEVER ITS MILITARY AND ECONOMIC AID TO THE NEW PRESIDENT WILL DEPEND ON THE EXTENT TO WHICH HIS POLICIES ARE ACCEPTABLE IN THE UNITED STATES. A WIN BY D'AUBUISSON WOULD PRESENT THE REAGAN ADMINISTRATION WITH SERIOUS PROBLEMS IN AN ELECTION YEAR.

5. ALTHOUGH THERE HAVE BEEN SOME ISOLATED REPORTS OF FAVOURITISM BY ARMY COMMANDERS TOWARDS CERTAIN PARTIES, THE ARMY IS UNLIKELY TO INTERFERE WITH VOTING. THE FMLN WILL TRY TO DO SO. THEY HAVE BEEN CONFISCATING IDENTITY CARDS ON COUNTRY BUS ROUTES TO PREVENT PEOPLE FROM VOTING AND HAVE SET OFF BOMBS IN THE CAPITAL. FOUR RIGHT WING POLITICIANS HAVE BEEN ASSASSINATED DURING THE ELECTORAL CAMPAIGN. DESPITE REPORTS THAT THEY WOULD NOT INTERFERE WITH THE ELECTIONS THE FMLN HAS REFUSED TO HAVE A CEASEFIRE ON ELECTION DAY AND HAVE PROMISED TO INTENSIFY THEIR ATTACKS BEFORE, DURING AND AFTER THE ELECTIONS. HOWEVER IT SEEMS UNLIKELY THAT THEY WILL BE ABLE TO PREVENT OR SERIOUSLY INTERFERE WITH THE ELECTION PROCESS. THE TEST WILL BE THE SIZE OF THE VOTE.

6. THE ELECTIONS ARE CONTROLLED BY A CENTRAL ELECTION COUNCIL COMPOSED OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE POLITICAL PARTIES. THESE ENSURE POLITICAL SUPPORT BUT SQUABBLE MORE THAN THEIR PREDECESSORS WHO WERE INDEPENDENT. THE NEW ELECTORAL LAW SEEMS FAIR, PARTICULARLY BY LATIN AMERICAN STANDARDS. IF VOTING IS IMPARTIALLY CONTROLLED ON ELECTION DAY THE RESULT SHOULD BE ACCEPTABLE.

7. TECHNICAL ASPECTS OF THE ELECTORAL PROCESS WHICH MAY ATTRACT CRITICISM ARE:-

(A) THE ELECTORAL REGISTER'S DATA BASE (IDENTITY CARDS CHECKED AGAINST BIRTH/DEATH RECORDS) IS NOT 100% ACCURATE. MUNICIPAL RECORDS ARE NOT ALWAYS KEPT EFFICIENTLY IN CENTRAL AMERICA.

HOWEVER THE ELECTORAL REGISTER IS CONSIDERED SATISFACTORY BY THE INTERNATIONAL FIRM OF ACCOUNTANTS DELOITTE, HASKINS, SELLS LTD. ALTHOUGH THEY WOULD HAVE PREFERRED MORE TIME TO VERIFY THE BASE DATA. NEVERTHELESS IT MIGHT HAVE BEEN BETTER TO USE A FIRM NOT SO CLOSELY IDENTIFIED WITH THE UNITED STATES.

(B) THE ELECTORAL REGISTER INCLUDES AN ESTIMATED 600,000/800,000 SALVADOREANS WHO HAVE LEFT EL SALVADOR. AS THERE IS NO PROVISION FOR VOTING AT EMBASSIES OR BY POST THEY WILL BE UNABLE TO PARTICIPATE.

HOWEVER OVERSEAS VOTING IS NOT ACCEPTABLE IN CENTRAL AMERICAN COUNTRIES (AND IS NOT PROVIDED FOR IN NICARAGUA'S NEW ELECTORAL LAW). THE OPPORTUNITIES FOR FRAUD ARE PROBABLY TOO GREAT. EMIGRES MAY RETURN TO VOTE AND THE PREVIOUS SALVADOREAN LAW WAS NOT CHANGED TO EXCLUDE THEM.

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(C) TO REDUCE FRAUD, CITIZENS MUST VOTE IN THE MUNICIPALITY IN WHICH THEY OBTAINED THEIR IDENTITY CARDS. HOWEVER SEVERAL HUNDRED THOUSAND PERSONS HAVE BEEN FORCED BY THE VIOLENCE TO MOVE TO OTHER PARTS OF EL SALVADOR AND WILL BE UNABLE TO DO SO.

SPECIAL VOTING STATIONS WILL BE SET UP TO DEAL WITH THIS PROBLEM. HOWEVER THERE WILL BE SOME LOSS OF VOTES DUE TO THIS DISTORTION OF THE NORMAL VOTING PATTERN. IT ALSO PROVIDES PERHAPS THE ONLY OPPORTUNITY FOR PERSONS TO VOTE MORE THAN ONCE. THEIR NAMES WILL BE ON BOTH THEIR ORIGINAL CONSTITUENCY VOTING LIST AND ON THOSE AVAILABLE FOR DISPLACED PERSONS.

(D) THE ELECTORAL COUNCIL ESTIMATES THAT OF THE COUNTRY'S 261 MUNICIPALITIES, VOTING WILL NOT BE POSSIBLE IN 22 WHICH ARE CONTROLLED BY THE GUERRILLAS (MANY OF THEM NO MORE THAN VILLAGES). MOREOVER MUNICIPAL RECORDS WERE DESTROYED IN A NUMBER OF TOWNS BRIEFLY OCCUPIED BY THE GUERRILLAS.

GUERRILLA CENTRES ARE MOSTLY IN THINLY POPULATED AREAS FROM WHICH MOST OF THE POPULATION HAS FLED. IT IS THE NUMBER OF VOTERS, NOT MUNICIPALITIES, WHICH COUNTS. DISPLACED PERSONS WILL BE ABLE TO VOTE UNDER (B) ABOVE. THE ELECTORAL COUNCIL ALREADY HOLDS DUPLICATES OF DESTROYED MUNICIPAL RECORDS WITH WHICH TO PREPARE NEW RECORDS. IN THE 1982 ELECTIONS 28 MUNICIPALITIES WERE AFFECTED BY GUERRILLA ACTION. THE ELECTORAL COUNCIL CONSIDERS THAT ONLY 20,000 - 30,000 VOTES WILL BE LOST BUT DOUBLE THAT NUMBER SEEMS MORE LIKELY.

(E) SOME OF THE ESTIMATED 40,000 CIVILIANS KILLED IN THE RECENT YEARS ARE UNKNOWN AND ARE THEREFORE STILL INCLUDED IN THE ELECTORAL REGISTER. AN ESTIMATED 30,000 MEMBERS OF THE ARMED FORCES INCLUDED IN THE ELECTORAL REGISTER WILL NOT VOTE TO DEMONSTRATE THE POLITICAL ROLE OF THE ARMED FORCES.

THIS SHOULD REDUCE THE TOTAL BY ANOTHER 50,000.

(F) DELOITTE, HASKINS, SELLS LTD. ESTIMATES THAT THERE ARE AT LEAST 40,000 DUPLICATE IDENTITY CARDS.

8. ACCORDING TO THE NEW ELECTORAL REGISTER THE THEORETICAL ELECTORATE IS 2.6 MILLION VOTERS. FROM THIS ONE MUST DEDUCT ABOUT 800,000 VOTES BECAUSE OF (A) TO (F) ABOVE TO OBTAIN A REALISTIC POTENTIAL VOTE OF ABOUT 1.8 MILLION. IT IS IMPORTANT TO DECIDE THE SIZE OF THE POTENTIAL ELECTORATE AS A POLL OF SAY, 1.27 MILLION VOTES, COULD BE PRESENTED AS EITHER 49% OR 70% OF THE ELECTORATE.

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9. THERE WILL BE A LARGE TURNOUT FOR THE ELECTION - PROBABLY 1.5 MILLION. DUARTE SHOULD RECEIVE 40% PLUS OF THE VALID VOTES, D'AUBUISSON AND GUERRERO SHOULD SHARE ABOUT 50% AND THE OTHER FIVE CANDIDATES DIVIDE UP TO 10%. SPOILED VOTES, OFTEN SEEN AS REFLECTING SUPPORT FOR THE GUERRILLAS, SHOULD NOT EXCEED 10%.

10. IF THERE IS A SECOND ROUND THE RIGHT WING WOULD COMBINE AGAINST DUARTE. HOWEVER D'AUBUISSON'S UNPOPULARITY IN THE UNITED STATES AND THE POSSIBLE EFFECT OF THIS ON ESSENTIAL U.S. MILITARY AND ECONOMIC AID, MAY CAUSE SOME RIGHT WING VOTERS TO ABSTAIN. THE FINAL RESULT WOULD THEN BE CLOSE. KEY FACTORS WILL BE THE EXTENT BY WHICH DUARTE AND D'AUBUISSON CAN EXCEED 40% AND 30% RESPECTIVELY IN THE FIRST ROUND.

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