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ACTION

EXCISELLA

DEPARTMENT OF STATE ARA/NEA REARCS

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ACTION: ES (07)

INFO: DCEM (01) LARA (01) MCO (01) REG (01) JS (01) RJ (01) SPA (01)
ARA (01) PPC (01) OAS (01) PPA (01) MK (01)

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ACTION ARA-00

INFO LOG-00 ACDA-13 ADS-00 CIAE-00 C-01 FBIE-00 NA-09
H-01 INRE-00 INR-01 JUSE-00 L-03 NSAE-00 NSCE-00
OMB-01 PA-01 PH-00 PRS-01 P-02 SNP-00 SP-00
SS-00 TRSE-00 T-01 USIE-00 /039V

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P 182230Z MAR 91
FM AMEMBASSY SAM SALVADOR
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 5947
INFO RHLBAAA/USCINCSO QUARRY HTS PM
SECDEF WASHDC
JCS WASHDC

S E C R E T SAM SALVADOR 03372

FOR ARA/CEN

NOFORM

E.O. 12356: DECL: OADR
TAGS: KJUS, PHUM, PINS, ES
SUBJECT: JESUIT UPDATE -- PONCE INITIATIVE CREATES NEW
OPTIONS

REF: SAM SALVADOR 0001

1. (C) SUMMARY: MOD PONCE'S FEBRUARY 22 LETTER
REQUESTING THE MINISTER OF JUSTICE TO AMPLIFY THE
INVESTIGATION INTO THE 11/15 MEETING AT THE MILITARY

ACADEMY HAS RAISED EXPECTATIONS FOR PROGRESS IN THE
JESUIT CASE. WHILE THE ESAF'S MOTIVES ARE UNCLEAR IT
APPEARS THAT WORRIES ABOUT FUTURE MILITARY FUNDING AND
PRESSURE FROM DOMESTIC AND INTERNATIONAL GROUPS HAVE
HAD THEIR EFFECT. IT IS NOT CLEAR HOWEVER THAT THE
GOES APPRECIATES THE RISKS IF IT FAILS TO SATISFY THESE
EXPECTATIONS. MANY QUESTION WHY THIS INITIATIVE WAS
FIFTEEN MONTHS COMING AND WHETHER THE SCOPE OF THE
REQUEST IS ADEQUATE. RUMORS PERSIST OF AN 11/15 MORNING
MEETING AT THE MILITARY ACADEMY ATTENDED BY A HANDFUL
OF HIGH-RANKING MILITARY OFFICERS. THESE AND OTHER
ISSUES WILL HAVE TO BE FULLY AIRED BEFORE SUSPICIONS
ARE LAID TO REST. END SUMMARY.

PONCE'S INITIATIVE

2. (C) REFTEL REPORTS AN ESAF INITIATIVE ASKING THE
MINISTER OF JUSTICE TO REVISIT THE INVESTIGATION INTO
THE 11/15/89 MEETING AT THE MILITARY ACADEMY IN WHICH
BENAVIDES ALLEGEDLY GAVE THE ORDER TO ASSASSINATE THE
JESUITS. POST'S JESUIT TASK FORCE MET ON 3/12 TO
ANALYZE THE NEW DEVELOPMENT AND DISCUSS POSSIBLE
INDEPENDENT INITIATIVES WE COULD TAKE TO MONITOR AND
BETTER COVER PROGRESS IN THE INVESTIGATION.

3. (C) SOME ASPECTS OF THE NEW INITIATIVE ARE
POSITIVE; AMONG THOSE LISTED IN PONCE'S LETTER AS
ATTENDING THE 11/15 EVENING MEETING IS LT. COL. CAMILO
HERNANDEZ. WE AND OTHERS HAVE LONG SUSPECTED THAT HE
WAS IMPORTANT IN PLANNING THE MURDERS BUT FEARED THAT
HE ENJOYED THE PROTECTION OF GENERAL PONCE AND WAS

IMMUNE FROM PROSECUTION. CLARIFYING HERNANDEZ' ROLE
WOULD BE A SIGNIFICANT STEP FORWARD, ALTHOUGH IT WILL

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NOT SATISFY CRITICS CONVINCED OF HIGH COMMAND
INVOLVEMENT.

4. (C) MINISTER OF JUSTICE HERNANDEZ VALIENTE HAS
CONFIRMED RECEIPT OF THE MOD REQUEST, AND THE SIU HAS
BEGUN TO QUESTION THOSE WHO THE HIGH COMMAND ALLEGE
ATTENDED THE 11/15 MEETING. SIU DIRECTOR IS ALSO AWARE
OF THE LETTER, BUT DOES NOT APPEAR TO HAVE INITIATED
ANY ACTION. ALSO DISCUSSED THE LETTER WITH JUDGE ZAMORA
AT THEIR 11/13 MEETING (REPORTED SEPTEL).

RUMORS/LEADS

5. (S) MULTIPLE SOURCES HAVE RESURRECTED THE RUMOR OF
A POSSIBLE 11/15/89 MORNING MEETING AT THE MILITARY
ACADEMY. THE MOST RECENT ACCOUNT WAS RELATED TO THE
AMBASSADOR ON 3/8 BY COL. CARLOS PINEDA GUERRA
(PROTECT), DIRECTOR OF THE TREASURY POLICE (PHI).
PINEDA TOLD THE AMBASSADOR THAT LT. ESPINOZA, SENIOR
ATLACATL LIEUTENANT AT THE UC ON 11/15/89) CONFIDED TO
HIM THAT SEVERAL HIGH-LEVEL ESAF OFFICERS ATTENDED A
MEETING AT THE MILITARY ACADEMY ON THE MORNING OF
11/15. ACCORDING TO PINEDA, ATTENDEES INCLUDED INTER
ALIA: MOD PONCE, AIR FORCE GEN'L BUSTILLO, V-M OF
DEFENSE ZEPEDA, AND COL. BENAVIDES. THE ALLEGATION IS
THAT THE DECISION TO MURDER THE JESUITS WAS FINALIZED
AT THIS MEETING RATHER THAN THE LATER MEETINGS AT THE
ESTADO MAYOR OR THE MILITARY SCHOOL.

6. (S/NOFORM) PINEDA'S VERSION TRACKS CLOSELY WITH
OTHER SOURCES DATING BACK TO
IN JUNE 1990 FINSI RAISED THE ISSUE OF A
POSSIBLE EARLY MORNING MEETING AT THE MILITARY SCHOOL.
SUBSEQUENT REPORTS HAVE FOLLOWED A SIMILAR FACTUAL
PATTERN AND ULTIMATELY HAVE BEEN SOURCED TO LT.
ESPINOZA MAKING HIM AN INCREASINGLY IMPORTANT FIGURE.
DCM RAISED THE ISSUE WITH PONCE IN JULY 1991, WHO
DENIED THAT HE HAD GONE TO SUCH A MEETING. HE OFFERED

TO CHECK VEHICLE LOGS OF OTHER OFFICERS AND LATER SAID
THE LOGS WERE INCONCLUSIVE.

7. (C) SINCE EARLY IN THE INVESTIGATION WE HAVE
DEBATED WHETHER ONE OF THE LIEUTENANTS COULD OR SHOULD
BE PERSUADED TO TALK. GROWING EVIDENCE OF A SECOND
MEETING AT THE MILITARY SCHOOL MADE US REVISIT THE
ISSUE DURING THE TASK FORCE MEETING. IS IT FEASIBLE
TRY AND MAKE CONTACT WITH ESPINOZA? THERE ARE MANY
RISKS WITH SUCH AN UNDERTAKING. FOR EXAMPLE, SHOULD
THE CONTACT BECOME KNOWN, DEFENSE COUNCILS COULD BLAME
THE EMBASSY FOR INTERFERENCE WITH THE JUDICIAL PROCESS
AND REQUEST A MISTRIAL. YET A US ROLE COULD BE VITAL
ESPINOZA IS NOT LIKELY TO TALK UNLESS HE HAS CERTAIN
GUARANTEES: SPECIFICALLY HE COULD WANT ASSURANCES THAT
IN EXCHANGE FOR HIS COOPERATION HE WOULD BE GIVEN
CONSIDERATION BY THE COURT AND THAT HE AND HIS FAMILY

WOULD BE RELOCATED TO THE US.

8. WE WILL REVISIT THE FEASIBILITY OF AN INDEPENDENT
APPROACH TO ESPINOZA ONLY AFTER WE SEE HOW THE MOST
RECENT MOD INITIATIVE PANS OUT. WE REMAIN HOPEFUL THAT
REOPENING THE INVESTIGATION WILL PROVIDE SOME ANSWERS
TO OUTSTANDING QUESTIONS.

WALKER

SECRET

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