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SECTION 01 OF * TEGUCIGALPA 12589

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E.O. 12356: DECL: OADR
TAGS: * PREL, XA
SUBJECT: CONTADORA TACTICS: POOR OMENS FOR CENTRAL AMERICA

1. - ENTIRE TEXT

2. SUMMARY: CONTADORA TACTICS ARE SUPPORTIVE OF NICARAGUAN STRATEGY. CONTADORA PROCEDURES ARE OFFENSIVE TO AND PATRONIZING TOWARDS CORE FOUR. CONTADORA DRAFTS ARE LIKELY TO BE MORE UNACCEPTABLE TO CORE FOUR THAN TO NICARAGUA. INDEED, IF MEXICAN THINKING IS ALLOWED TO PREVAIL, IMMEDIATE OPERATIVE PROVISIONS ARE LIKELY TO BE DIRECTED ENTIRELY AT USG AND HONDURAS, WHILE WIDELY HAILED DEMOCRATIZATION PROVISIONS WILL BE IN FORM OF DISTANT COMMITMENTS. HONDURAN ALTERNATIVE OF WORKING GROUPS TO DISCUSS TWENTY-ONE OBJECTIVES AND RELATED ISSUES BEFORE WORKING UP TREATY LANGUAGE SEEMS TO BE BEST ALTERNATIVE TO UNFORTUNATE COURSE UPON WHICH EVENTS NOW SEEM TO BE HEADED. FAILING SUCH ALTERNATIVE, OUTCOME OF PRESENT COURSE OF ACTION COULD BE A CONTADORA OUTCOME ADVERSE TO OUR INTERESTS WHICH ISOLATES USG, HONDURAS AND POSSIBLY EL SALVADOR AND WHICH, BY PUBLICLY PAINTING US INTO CORNER OF THOSE OBSTRUCTING REGIONAL PEACE, COULD UNDERMINE PUBLIC AND CONGRESSIONAL SUPPORT FOR OUR SECURITY AND ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE POLICIES. PRESENCE OF CORE FOUR AND CONTADORA FOREIGN MINISTERS IN WASHINGTON THIS WEEK PROVIDES OPPORTUNITY FOR SECRETARY TO DEMONSTRATE SUPPORT FOR CENTRAL AMERICAN INTERESTS AND RUN SOME INTERFERENCE WITH CONTADORA GROUP. END SUMMARY.

3. NO ONE WILL ACCUSE THIS EMBASSY OF INCONSISTENCY IN ITS SCEPTICISM TOWARDS THE COURSE ON WHICH THE CONTADORA FOUR ARE EMBARKED. FROM AN ADMITTEDLY LIMITED PERSPECTIVE, WE SEE THE DYNAMIC AS FOLLOWS. NICARAGUA FAVORS THE BILATERAL APPROACH WHICH SEEKS TO PAINT USG ACTIONS AND HONDURAS/NICARAGUA BORDER SITUATION AS PRINCIPAL CAUSES OF TENSION IN THE REGION. NICARAGUANS HAVE TABLED FOUR DRAFT TREATIES SUPPORTIVE OF THEIR IDEAS WHOSE BASIC TRUST WOULD BE TO END SUPPORT FOR COUNTERREVOLUTIONARY ACTIVITIES FROM ABROAD, END U.S. MILITARY EXERCISES AND TRAINING ACTIVITIES IN CENTRAL AMERICA AND TERMINATE ASSISTANCE TO LEGITIMATE GOES WITHOUT ANY MEANINGFUL CORRESPONDING OR RECIPROCAL MEASURES BY NICARAGUA.

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4. WITHIN THE CONTADORA PROCESS ITSELF, OBJECTIVE CONSEQUENCE OF MEXICAN APPROACH IS TO BE FULLY SUPPORTIVE OF NICARAGUAN POSITION. BY SEPULVEDA'S OWN ADMISSION MEXICANS FAVOR A STEP-BY-STEP APPROACH WITH FIRST STEPS BEING AN END TO COUNTERREVOLUTIONARY ACTIVITIES AND AN END TO MILITARY SUPPORT FOR GOES, IN EXCHANGE FOR WHICH HE HAS IMPLIED TO AMBASSADOR STONE THAT NICARAGUANS MAY BE PREPARED TO SET DATE FOR THEIR ELECTIONS, WHICH WILL PROBABLY BE MEANINGLESS IN ANY EVENT. OTHER PROponents OF STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS APPEAR TO BE COLOMBIAN AND PANAMANIAN FOREIGN MINISTERS, ALTHOUGH LATTER'S PRESIDENT SEEMS A BIT MORE SKEPTICAL ABOUT THE WHOLE PROCESS. VENEZUELAN'S SEEM TROUBLED BY THE PROCEEDINGS BUT NOT SUFFICIENTLY SO TO BLOCK CONTADORA CONSENSUS. WITH ELECTIONS UPCOMING, THEY SEEM PREPARED TO LEAVE MEXICANS IN DRIVER'S SEAT.

5. HOW WILL THE STEP-BY-STEP APPROACH BE ENSHRINED? WELL, THE INTELLIGENCE IS LESS THAN PERFECT SINCE TO THIS EMBASSY'S KNOWLEDGE WE HAVEN'T BEEN ABLE TO GET OUR HANDS ON THE DRAFTS FROM ANY OF THE CONTADORA FOUR; BUT THE INDICATIONS SEEM CLEAR. THE CONTADORA GROUP PLANS TO WORK UP A DRAFT TREATY IMPLEMENTING THE TWENTY-ONE OBJECTIVES. IT WILL BE AN UMBRELLA AGREEMENT WITH ACCOMPANYING "BILATERAL" PROTOCOLS. IT WOULD BE PRUDENT TO ASSUME THAT THE OBLIGATIONS IN THE UMBRELLA AGREEMENT WILL FAVOR NICARAGUAN APPROACH, PROBABLY BY DISTINGUISHING BETWEEN IMMEDIATE AND FUTURE COMMITMENTS. MORE IMMEDIATE ONES WILL PROBABLY BE USG'S AND HONDURAS'; MORE REMOTE WILL BE NICARAGUANS. IF THERE ARE BILATERAL PROTOCOLS, THEY WILL INCLUDE PROVISION FOR A HONDURAS/NICARAGUA TREATY WHICH HONDURANS HAVE REPEATEDLY SAID WOULD BE UNACCEPTABLE. CONTADORA DRAFTS WILL PROBABLY NOT MENTION REMOVAL OF ADVISORS AND RESTORING MILITARY EQUILIBRIUM AS ISSUES WHICH NEED TO BE RESOLVED IN FIRST ROUND. AT BEST, THERE WILL BE COMMITMENT TO DISCUSS THESE ISSUES IN THE FUTURE.

6. WHILE PURSUING FOREGOING STRATEGIES, CONTADORA GROUP HAVE ALSO FOLLOWED POLICY OF DIVIDING THE CORE FOUR. GREATEST COUP HAS BEEN CO-OPTION OF COSTA RICA,

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IN OUTCOME DRAMATIZED BY MONGE TRIP TO MEXICO, UPCOMING NEUTRALITY STATUTE AND VOLIO RESIGNATION. COSTA RICANS HAVE BEEN PAYING LIP SERVICE TO URGENCY OF REACHING CONCRETE ACCORDS WITHOUT FACING UP TO HARD REALITY THAT ONLY CONCRETE ACCORDS WHICH SEEM TO BE EMERGING COULD WELL BE INIMICAL TO CENTRAL AMERICAN INTERESTS. ALSO, REPORTS HAVE BEEN CIRCULATED TO EFFECT THAT OTHER COUNTRIES ARE PREPARING THEIR OWN DRAFT TREATIES. IT HAS BEEN ALLEGED BY BOTH MEXICANS AND PANAMANIAN THAT HONDURANS ARE DRAFTING THEIR OWN TREATY; AS PREVIOUSLY REPORTED, WE HAVE EXPLICITLY ASKED ABOUT THIS AND HONDURANS DENY ANY SUCH ACTIVITY. WE THEREFORE SURMISE THAT ALLEGATIONS TO SUCH EFFECT BY MEXICO AND PANAMA ARE DESIGNED TO JUSTIFY CONTADORA'S OWN DRAFTING EXERCISE.

7. THIS BRINGS US TO SUBSTANCE OF HONDURAN CONCERN THAT, IN ADDITION TO BEING PATRONIZING, BASIC CONTADORA APPROACH IS FLAWED. CONTADORA GROUP HAS ARROGATED TO ITSELF RIGHT TO PRESENT DOCUMENTS AND CONVOKÉ MEETINGS AT TIME AND PLACE OF THEIR OWN CHOOSING. NOTIFICATION AND OTHER PROCEDURES ARE COMPLETELY (AND IN OUR VIEW INTENTIONALLY) AD HOC WITH PRINCIPAL PURPOSE OF KEEPING CORE FOUR OFF BALANCE AND CONFUSED. NO EFFORT SEEMS TO HAVE BEEN MADE TO ELICIT TRUE CONSENSUS AS TO PROCEDURES BEING FOLLOWED. MEANWHILE, IMPRESSION IS ALSO CAUSED THAT NICARAGUAN POSITION MAY BE RECEIVING GREATER WEIGHT AND ATTENTION. FOR EXAMPLE, D'ESCOTO JUST HAPPENED TO BE IN PANAMA WHEN CONTADORA VICE FOREIGN MINISTERS WERE MEETING TO PREPARE THEIR DRAFTS; AND ORTEGA HAS JUST BEEN RECEIVED IN CONTADORA FOUR CAPITALS WHERE IT WOULDN'T SURPRISE US IN THE LEAST IF HE WERE GIVEN A COPY OF CONTADORA HANDIWORK.

8. UNDER FOREGOING CIRCUMSTANCES, IT IS HARDLY SURPRISING TO US THAT GOH SHOULD BE DISTRESSED BY COURSE OF EVENTS. THEIR EXASPERATION HAS REACHED POINT WHERE GOH HAS SENT FORMAL NOTE TO MEXICAN GOVERNMENT PROTESTING MEXICO'S LACK OF BALANCE IN DEALING WITH CENTRAL AMERICAN COUNTRIES. GOH HAS TAKEN UNPRECEDENTED STEP OF OPENLY ACCUSING MEXICO OF TAKING NICARAGUA'S SIDE. WHEN, ON NOVEMBER NINE, FOREIGN MINISTER PAZ BARNICA ALERTED AMBASSADOR TO DESPATCH OF NOTE, HE COMMENTED, "SOMETIMES MEXICO IS WORSE THAN NICARAGUA".

9. HONDURANS HAVE THEIR OWN ALTERNATIVE IDEAS AS TO HOW TO PROCEED WITHIN CONTADORA PROCESS WHICH WE HAVE REPORTED AT VARIOUS TIMES IN THE PAST. ITS ORIGINS ARE IN THE GOH 1982 PEACE PROPOSAL TO OAS AND 1982 SAN JOSE DOCUMENT. THEY WENT ALONG, ALBEIT RELUCTANTLY, WITH TWENTY-ONE OBJECTIVES WITH PROVISIO THAT ISSUES BE DEALT WITH SIMULTANEOUSLY, COMPREHENSIVELY AND REGIONALLY. PROCEDURALLY, THEY FAVOR DISCUSSION OF ISSUES IN WORKING GROUPS AS BEST NEXT STEP. (SEE TEGUCIGALPA 9673, AMONG OTHERS, FOR ELABORATION OF HONDURAN APPROACH.) THEY BELIEVE IT PREMATURE TO WORK ON LEGAL INSTRUMENTS BEFORE REAL SUBSTANTIVE HURDLES ARE OVERCOME. THEY FEAR THAT CLEVER PSYCHOLOGICAL TACTICS ARE BEING USED BY CONTADORA TO MAKE WORLD, INCLUDING USG, BELIEVE THAT CONTADORA APPROACH WILL SAVE CENTRAL AMERICANS FROM EVEN WORSE NICARAGUAN DRAFTS. IN FACT, CORE FOUR IS BEING

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TEGUCIGALPA 12589/2

MANEUVERED TOWARDS ACCEPTING A CONTADORA DRAFT WHOSE PRACTICAL EFFECT COULD BE EVERY BIT AS BAD AS NICARAGUAN STRAW MAN. NOT TOO DIFFERENT FROM THE WAY THINGS JUST WORKED AT UNGA DEBATE ON CENTRAL AMERICA.

10. ULTIMATE DANGER OF COURSE IS THAT, UNLESS REMEDIAL MEASURES ARE TAKEN, CONTADORA COULD PAINT USG, HONDURAS AND POSSIBLY EL SALVADOR INTO A CORNER WHEREBY WE ARE ACCUSED OF OBSTRUCTING REGIONAL PEACE. THIS IN TURN COULD CONFRONT US WITH UNATTRACTIVE ALTERNATIVE OF PRESSURING OUR FRIENDS INTO MAKING DISADVANTAGEOUS CONCESSIONS OR RISKING LOSS OF IMPORTANT PUBLIC AND CONGRESSIONAL SUPPORT.

11. FORTHCOMING WEEK IN WASHINGTON WOULD APPEAR TO OFFER AN OPPORTUNITY TO ADDRESS SOME OF THESE ISSUES WITH CORE FOUR AND CONTADORA FOREIGN MINISTERS. WE WOULD RECOMMEND USING OPPORTUNITY FIRST OF ALL TO QUESTION CONTADORA PROCEDURE OF INITIATING DRAFTS. WE WOULD ARGUE THAT IT IS MORE COMPATIBLE WITH A GOOD OFFICES ROLE TO LEAVE THIS ACTIVITY TO OTHERS, AT LEAST IN INITIAL STAGES. NEXT WE WOULD SUGGEST THAT DRAFTING OF CONCRETE AGREEMENTS IS PREMATURE AND THAT BEST NEXT STEP MIGHT BE FORMATION OF MECHANISM TO ANALYZE ISSUES GENERATED BY TWENTY-ONE OBJECTIVES. IT IS POINTLESS TO DRAFT TREATIES WHEN SUCH FUNDAMENTAL DIFFERENCES OF APPROACH EXIST. THEY MUST BE TALKED THROUGH AND RECONCILED FIRST. FINALLY, WE WOULD RECOMMEND A MORE

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TEGUCIGALPA 12589/2

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TEGUCIGALPA 12589/3

ACTIVE BEHIND-THE-SCENES ROLE IN HELPING FORGE AND SUPPORTING CORE FOUR UNITY. WE WOULD ALSO RECOMMEND THAT SECRETARY CONSIDER RUNNING SOME INTERFERENCE WITH AT LEAST VENEZUELAN AND COLOMBIANS TO POINT OUT INEQUITIES OF CURRENT CONTADORA APPROACH.

12. THIS IS NOT, IN OUR VIEW, A MATTER OF GETTING AN ADJUSTMENT HERE OR AN ADJUSTMENT THERE. IT IS A QUESTION OF INFLUENCING CONTADORA TOWARDS A FUNDAMENTALLY DIFFERENT APPROACH. OTHERWISE, WE SEE A RISK OF LOSING AT THE NEGOTIATING TABLE WHAT NICARAGUA AND ITS SUPPORTERS HAVE BEEN UNABLE TO WIN ON THE GROUND.

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