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AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY OTTAWA
AMEMBASSY PARAMARIBO
AMEMBASSY PORT OF SPAIN
AMCONSUL MARTINIQUE
AMCONSUL TORONTO

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EXDIS

E.O. 12065: RDS-4 8/13/2000 (ROBERTS, GEORGE B.) OR-M
TAGS: PEPR, PINT, EAID, GY
SUBJ: RODNEY DEATH - THE CASE AGAINST THE GOG

1. (S) SUMMARY: CIRCUMSTANTIAL EVIDENCE HAS COME TO THE ATTENTION OF EMBASSY GEORGETOWN WHICH INDICATES THAT THE GOVERNMENT OF GUYANA IS IMPLICATED IN THE KILLING OF WALTER RODNEY. THE HURRIED GOG-ASSISTED DEPARTURE OF MATERIAL WITNESSES AND THE NATURE OF THE BOMB FRAGMENTS AT THE SCENE OF THE DEATH ARE THE MOST TELLING INDICATORS OF OFFICIAL INVOLVEMENT. THE EMBASSY BELIEVES THAT WITH GUYANA'S FORTHCOMING ELECTIONS IN MIND, WE SHOULD AVOID PUBLIC IDENTIFICATION WITH THE GOG, WE SHOULD DELAY ANY NEW AID PROJECTS, AND WE SHOULD INCLUDE THE ISSUE IN OUR 1980 HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT ON GUYANA. END SUMMARY.

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2. (S) INFORMATION HAS COME TO EMBASSY GEORGETOWN'S ATTENTION SINCE THE JUNE 13 DEATH BY EXPLOSION OF GUYANESE OPPOSITION LEADER WALTER RODNEY WHICH LEADS TO THE STRONG PRESUMPTION THAT THE GOVERNMENT OF GUYANA IS IMPLICATED IN THE KILLING. MOST OF THIS INFORMATION HAS ALREADY BEEN REPORTED TO THE DEPARTMENT, BUT IT SEEMS USEFUL TO PULL IT TOGETHER, PRESENT THE CASE, AND RECOMMEND AN APPROPRIATE U.S. COURSE OF ACTION WHICH WILL TAKE INTO ACCOUNT THE FORTHCOMING GUYANESE ELECTIONS.

3. (U) BACKGROUND.

A. (S) IN THE COURSE OF A CONVERSATION WITH ME ON FEBRUARY 6, GUYANESE PRIME MINISTER FORBES BURNHAM SAID THAT RODNEY'S POLITICAL PARTY, THE WORKING PEOPLE'S ALLIANCE (WPA), ACCEPTED THE USE OF VIOLENCE. BURNHAM ADDED THAT IF THE WPA SHOULD USE VIOLENCE, HE WOULD BE VERY FIRM. "AND IF I AM FIRM, AMBASSADOR, I DO NOT WANT ANY LECTURES FROM YOU ON HUMAN RIGHTS" (GEORGETOWN 0574, PARA 21).

B. (S) LAST DECEMBER, RODNEY INDICATED TO THE EMBASSY'S POLITICAL OFFICER THAT HE WAS CONTEMPLATING THE USE OF VIOLENCE AND THAT HE HAD PREMONITIONS OF HIS OWN VIOLENT DEATH (79 GEORGETOWN 5493). IN A CONVERSATION WITH ME ON JANUARY 15, HOWEVER, RODNEY DID NOT DIRECTLY MENTION THE POSSIBILITY OF THE USE OF VIOLENCE BY THE WPA, THOUGH HE DID SAY HIS PARTY MIGHT HAVE TO GO UNDERGROUND (GEORGETOWN 0274).

C. (S) ON FEBRUARY 19, AN ALLEGED WPA ACTIVIST, DAVID HINDS, WAS ARRESTED AT GUYANA'S TIMEHRI INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT AND CHARGED WITH ATTEMPTING TO SMUGGLE WEAPONS INTO THE COUNTRY (GEORGETOWN 828). (THERE ARE REPORTS THAT HINDS WAS A GOG PLANT. IF SO, THE INCIDENT IN-
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VOLVING HIM IS STILL GERMANE AND PERHAPS EVEN MORE SIGNIFICANT.)

D. (U) SUBSEQUENTLY, THE GUYANESE GOVERNMENT ANNOUNCED THAT INCIDENTS OF SABOTAGE HAD TAKEN PLACE ON SUGAR ESTATES. THE GOG MAINTAINED THAT THERE WAS A "PLOT" TO UNDERMINE THE COUNTRY'S ECONOMY AND DESTABILIZE ITS POLITICS (GEORGETOWN 2539, 2599, 2627, 2695, AND 3269).

4. (U) RODNEY'S DEATH.

-. (U) ON JUNE 13, WALTER RODNEY WAS KILLED BY AN EXPLOSION WHILE SITTING IN A CAR PARKED NEAR THE GEORGETOWN PRISON. HIS BROTHER, DONALD RODNEY, WHO WAS WITH HIM IN THE CAR AT THE TIME, SAID THAT RODNEY WAS IN THE PROCESS OF TESTING A WALKIE-TALKIE RADIO WHICH HAD BEEN GIVEN TO HIM BY ONE GREGORY SMITH. ACCORDING TO DONALD RODNEY, SMITH HAD IDENTIFIED HIMSELF TO THE WPA AS AN EX-SERGEANT IN THE GUYANA DEFENSE FORCE, WELL-VERSED I

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ELECTRONICS, WHO WOULD BE ABLE TO ASSIST THE WPA IN COMMUNICATIONS AND OTHER TECHNICAL MATTERS (GEORGETOWN 2761 AND 2989).

5. (U) EVENTS FOLLOWING THE DEATH.

A. (U) THE GOVERNMENT TOOK THE LINE THAT DONALD RODNEY WAS LYING: BOTH HE AND HIS LATE BROTHER KNEW THAT THEY HAD A BOMB, THE WALKIE-TALKIE STORY WAS A FABRICATION, AND THERE WAS NOT SUCH PERSON AS EX-SERGEANT GREGORY SMITH. DONALD RODNEY WAS ARRESTED AND CHARGED WITH THE POSSESSION OF EXPLOSIVES (GEORGETOWN 2902).

B. (U) THE CATHOLIC STANDARD, AN OPPOSITION WEEKLY NEWSPAPER, MAINTAINED THAT THERE HAD BEEN A GREGORY SMITH ON GDF ROLLS, BUT HE WAS ONLY AN ACTING SERGEANT AND PERMANENT CORPORAL. ACCORDING TO THE STANDARD, THE GDF DENIAL THAT THERE WAS A SERGEANT SMITH WAS THUS SECRET

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TECHNICALLY ACCURATE BUT WAS AN OBVIOUS EFFORT TO MISLEAD THOSE TRYING TO INVESTIGATE RODNEY'S DEATH (GEORGETOWN 2989).

C. (LOU) THE CATHOLIC STANDARD FURTHER REPORTED THAT ONE JOAN MELVILLE OR MELVIN, A CLOS ASSOCIATE OF SMITH, HAD BEEN HURRIEDLY TRANSFERRED FROM THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH TO THE MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND EQUALLY HURRIEDLY TRANSFERRED OUT OF THE COUNTRY TO THE GUYANESE CONSULATE IN TORONTO. A CHECK OF EMBASSY GEORGETOWN'S VISA FILES INDICATED THAT A JOAN MELVIN,

WITH THE SAME ADDRESS AND DATE OF BIRTH OF EX-SERGEANT SMITH'S PURPORTED FRIEND, HAD BEEN TRANSFERRED TO THE MFA IN JUNE AND GRANTED A U.S. VISA AS A RESULT OF A GUYANESE FOREIGN MINISTRY NOTE STATING THAT SHE WISHED TO TRANSIT THE UNITED STATES ON THE WAY TO HER NEW ASSIGNMENT IN TORONTO (GEORGETOWN 3236).

D. (S) AN EMBASSY SOURCE TOLD US JULY 23 THAT A FRIEND OF HIS IN THE SHRIMP BUSINESS HAD BEEN APPROACHED BY GDF CHIEF OF STAFF BRIGADIER NORMAN MCLEAN ASKING THE FRIEND'S ASSISTANCE IN EMPLOYING A PERSON WAS APPARENTLY EX-SERGEANT SMITH IN CAYENNE. THE FRIEND, WILLIAM CHARRON (PARAMARIBO 1439) SAID THAT UNKNOWN TO THE OWNER OF THE SHRIMP COMPANY, SMITH NOW WORKING FOR THE CAYENNE FIRM (GEORGETOWN 3454).

E. (S) ALSO ON JULY 23, BURNHAM DENIED TO ME THAT THE GOG HAD KILLED RODNEY AND POINTED OUT THAT HIS GOVERNMENT HAD NO INTEREST IN MAKING A MARTYR. NEVERTHELESS, BURNHAM COMMENTED THAT RODNEY HAD BEEN ENGAGED IN ILLEGAL ACTIVITY, SINCE EVEN IF HE HAD HAD A WALKIE-TALKIE, AS DONALD RODNEY HAD CLAIMED, SUCH EQUIPMENT WAS ILLEGAL. BURNHAM ALSO CLAIMED, THAT RODNEY HAD WANTED TO OBTAIN EXPLOSIVES. IN A SOMEWHAT STRAINED SIMILE, BURNHAM POINTED OUT THAT A PERSON WHO PROVIDED
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MONEY WHICH WAS ULTIMATELY STOLEN COULD NOT BE HELD GUILTY OF THEFT (GEORGETOWN 3452, PARAS 14 AND 15). BURNHAM CLAIMED HE KNEW NOTHING OF THE OFFICIAL REQUEST FOR MS. MELVILLE/MELVIN'S VISA (GEORGETOWN 3471). F. (S) THE BRITISH BMOB EXPERT'S REPORT, WHICH HAS BEEN PROVIDED TO BY A CONFIDENTIAL LOCAL SOURCE, INDICATES THAT FRAGMENTS POSITIVELY IDENTIFIABLE AS PARTS FROM A WALKIE-TALKIE WERE FOUND IN THE WRECKAGE OF RODNEY'S CAR. THESE FRAGMENTS CREATE THE STRONG PRESUMPTION THAT DONALD RODNEY IS TELLING THE TRUTH AND THAT HE AND HIS BROTHER THOUGHT THEY HAD A RADIO AND NOT A BOMB. THE FRAGMENTS CREATE AN EQUALLY STRONG PRESUMPTION THAT THE GOVERNMENT IS LYING WHEN IT MAINTAINS THAT RODNEY KNEW HE HAD A BOMB.
6. (U) CONCLUSIONS.

A. (S) THE FOREGOING IS ALL ADMITTEDLY CIRCUMSTANTIAL. THE MOST IMPORTANT INDICATORS WOULD APPEAR TO BE THE RADIO PARTS IN THE WRECKAGE OF THE CAR AND THE GOG'S HURRIED REMOVAL OF EX-SERGEANT SMITH AND MS. MELVILLE/MELVIN FROM GUYANA. THE LATTER FACT IS DOCUMENTED IN OUR VISA FILES AND THE FORMER IN THE BRITISH BOMB EXPERT'S REPORT. (PLEASE STRICTLY PROTECT THE FACT THAT WE HAVE A BOOTLEG COPY OF DR. SKUSE'S REPORT.) SMITH'S WHEREABOUTS AND HOW HE GOT THERE HAVE NOT BEEN CONCLUSIVELY ESTABLISHED. THE REPORTS OF WPA ACTIVITIES PRIOR TO THE KILLING PROVIDE THAT GOG WITH A MOTIVE (SINCERE OR OTHERWISE). BURNHAM'S STATEMENTS

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IN FEBRUARY SHOW A PROPENSITY FOR VIOLENT ACTION AGAINST THE WFA, AND BURNHAM'S STATEMENTS AFTER THE INCIDENT SHOW A DESIRE TO RATIONALIZE WHAT HAPPENED. B. (S) THE EMBASSY IS THUS CERTAIN THAT BURNHAM'S GOVERNMENT IS INVOLVED IN A COVER-UP AND NINETY PERCENT CERTAIN THAT THE GOG IS IMPLICATED IN THE KILLING OF WALTER RODNEY. PART OF THE REMAINING TEN PERCENT OF DOUBT CENTERS AROUND THE IDENTITY AND PRESENT LOCATION OF EX-SERGEANT SMITH. IN ADDITION, WE DO NOT KNOW WHETHER RODNEY DIED AS THE RESULT OF A CONSCIOUS PLAN DEVELOPED AT A HIGH LEVEL IN THE GOG OR WHETHER LOWER-LEVEL OFFICIALS OVER-REACTED TO SENIOR-LEVEL IRRITATION WITH RODNEY.

7. (U) U.S. RESPONSE.

A. (S) THE GOG IS NEITHER THE FIRST NOR THE LAST REGIME
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TO BE IMPLICATED IN MURDER. NEITHER IS IT THE FIRST NOR THE LAST REGIME ASSOCIATED IN THE PUBLIC EYE WITH THE U.S. TO BE SO IMPLICATED. THERE HAS BEEN AND WILL PROBABLY CONTINUE TO BE FAR LESS POLITICAL VIOLENCE HERE THAN IN BOLIVIA OR, FOR THAT MATTER, IN JAMAICA. NEVERTHELESS, AS DISCUSSED IN GEORGETOWN 3550 THERE WOULD NOT APPEAR TO BE A LOT TO GAIN AT THE PRESENT TIME IN FOLLOWING A POLICY WHICH ASSOCIATES US TOO CLOSELY WITH THE GOG. THERE IS ALSO THE CONSIDERATION THAT AN OVERLY FRIENDLY OR EVEN NORMAL STANCE TOWARD BURNHAM'S GUYANA COULD FEED THE SUSPICION THAT WE WERE SOMEHOW INVOLVED IN RODNEY'S DEATH. WE DID, FOR EXAMPLE, GIVE MS. MELVILLE/MELVIN A VISA (ALBEIT UNKNOWINGLY AND EVEN THOUGH WE PRESUME SHE IS NOW IN CANADA), AND THE CAYENNE SHRIMPING FIRM, SAHLMAN, FOR WHICH SMITH IS REPORTEDLY WORKING, IS AN AMERICAN COMPANY.

B. (S) AN OBVIOUS MOVE ON OUR PART WOULD BE TO INCLUDE AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE OF WHAT WE KNOW OF THE KILLING IN OUR FORTHCOMING HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT. WE WILL HAVE TO LABEL SUSPICIONS AS ONLY SUSPICIONS, AND WE WILL HAVE TO BE CAREFUL NOT TO GO BEYOND WHAT CAN BE REASONABLE ESTABLISHED. IT WOULD THUS BE USEFUL IF WE COULD GET A FIRM FIX ON THE CURRENT WHEREABOUTS OF SMITH AND MELVILLE/MELVIN (PERHAPS MARTINIQUE AND TORONTO COULD HELP). IN THIS CONNECTION, SMITH IS SAID TO HAVE USED THE NAME WILLIAM PETER SMITH AS WELL AS GREGORY SMITH.

C. (S) OUR HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT WOULD BE MUCH MORE CONVINCING IF WE COULD OBTAIN A COPY OF THE BOMB EXPERT'S REPORT WHICH WE COULD OPENLY CITE. ON AUGUST 12, WE ASKED THE PERMANENT SECRETARY IN THE GUYANESE MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS IF WE COULD BE PROVIDED WITH A COPY
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OF THE REPORT. WE REMINDED THE PERMANENT SECRETARY OF THE BACKGROUND ON THE GOG'S REQUEST TO US AND THE BRITISH FOR EXPERT OUTSIDE ASSISTANCE. WE HAD TURNED THE REQUEST DOWN SINCE WE WERE BEING ACCUSED OF COMPLICITY IN THE INCIDENT (GEORGETOWN 2755, STATE 160217, AND GEORGETOWN 2787). SINCE WE WERE STILL BEING SUBJECTED TO ACCUSATIONS, WE ASKED IF WE MIGHT BE PROVIDED WITH COPIES OF THE BRITISH BOMB AND FORENSIC REPORTS. (WE DID NOT TELL HIM WE ALREADY HAD BOTH.) THE PERMANENT SECRETARY IMMEDIATELY ACKNOWLEDGED OUR LEGITIMATE INTEREST IN SEEING THE DOCUMENTS AND SAID THAT HE WOULD TRY TO OBTAIN COPIES FOR US FROM THE POLICE. IF HE IS SUCCESSFUL, WE WILL NOT BE RESTRICTED IN OUR ABILITY TO USE THE INFORMATION WE ALREADY HAVE. BURNHAM WILL NOT LIKE BEING "LECTURED" AS HE SAID TO ME ON FEBRUARY 6, BUT IF OUR 1980 GUYANA HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT IS TO HAVE ANY CREDIBILITY, WE CANNOT OVERLOOK

THE RODNEY CASE.

D. (S) THE HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT WILL NOT BE PUBLISHED, HOWEVER, UNTIL AT LEAST JANUARY. WITH GUYANA'S ELECTIONS NOW RUMORED TO BE SET FOR OCTOBER, WE CAN EXPECT THAT IN THE VERY NEAR FUTURE WE WILL BE SUBJECTED TO A BROAD EFFORT BY THE GOG TO DRAW US INTO A POSITION OF APPARENT SUPPORT FOR BURNHAM'S PNC. I HAVE BEEN INVITED, FOR EXAMPLE, TO APPEAR WITH ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT MINISTER HOYTE AT AN AUGUST 17 RIBBON-CUTTING CEREMONY AT PORT MOURANT (CHEDDI JAGAN'S HOME TOWN) FOR A USAID SPECIAL DEVELOPMENT FUND PROJECT. WITH ELECTIONS ON

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THE WAY AND WITH THE STRONG POSSIBILITY THAT THEY MIGHT BE RIGGED, I WOULD NORMALLY BE CAREFUL ABOUT SUCH AN APPEARANCE. KNOWING WHAT WE NOW KNOW ABOUT THE RODNEY INCIDENT, HOWEVER, I THINK IT WOULD BE UNWISE FOR ME TO APPEAR ON THE SAME PLATFORM AT THIS TIME WITH A GUYANESE GOVERNMENT MINISTER.

E. (S) IN ADDITION, THERE IS THE OPTION OF NOT SIGNING ANY NEW AID COMMITMENTS. BUDGETARY PROBLEMS WITH THE FOREIGN ASSISTANCE ACT APPEAR TO BE MAKING THIS NECESSARY ANYWAY, BUT PERHAPS WE CAN TURN THIS NECESSITY TO OUR ADVANTAGE BY DELAYING SIGNING THE AGRICULTURAL CREDIT

PROJECT (WHICH BURNHAM VERY MUCH WANTS). I HAVE ASKED OUR USAID STAFF TO PROCEED WITH THE INTERNAL ARRANGEMENTS NECESSARY TO PREPARE THIS LOAN FOR SIGNATURE IN FY 80 SINCE IT IS ALWAYS POSSIBLE THAT THERE COULD BE A SATISFACTORY EXPLANATION FOR THE CIRCUMSTANTIAL CASE AGAINST THE GOG.

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F. (S) THERE ARE RISKS IN THIS THREE-FOLD COURSE OF ACTION. THE GUYANESE ECONOMY IS SHAKY, AND A SLOWDOWN IN AID COULD DO SOME DAMAGE. HOWEVER, THE RECENTLY CONCLUDED IMF AGREEMENT (GEORGETOWN 3558) CAN CUSHION THE ECONOMIC SHOCK IN THE SHORT RUN, EVEN THOUGH THE EFFECT OF AID DELAYS COULD UNDERMINE SOME OF THE ASSUMPTIONS ON WHICH THE IMF PROGRAM AND THE PROGRAMS OF OTHER DONORS ARE BASED. ANOTHER RISK IS THE POSSIBILITY THAT CHEDDI JAGAN'S PPP, WHICH IS STILL THE BEST ORGANIZED ALTERNATIVE TO BURNHAM'S PNC, COULD MAKE POLITICAL CAPITAL OUT OF OUR ACTIONS. JAGAN IS STILL UNACCEPTABLE TO US, AND HE DID NOTHING TO CHANGE THIS ESTIMATE IN HIS AUGUST 5 CONVERSATION WITH ME (GEORGETOWN 3623). ON THE OTHER HAND, JAGAN AND THE PPP HAVE LOST SO MUCH CREDIBILITY IN RECENT YEARS THERE IS SOME DOUBT THEY COULD WIN AN ELECTION EVEN IF BURNHAM WERE WEAKENED AND EVEN IF THE PNC DID NOT RIG THE POLLS.

G. (S) IN SUM, THEN, A REFUSAL TO ASSOCIATE OURSELVES PUBLICLY WITH THE GOG, A DELAY IN SIGNING THE NEW AGRICULTURAL CREDIT PROJECT, AND A FRANK HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT WOULD SEEM TO BE THE BEST INITIAL RESPONSE TO THE RODNEY MURDER AS WELL AS TO THE POSSIBILITY OF RIGGED ELECTIONS. WE CAN ALSO LET IT BE KNOWN THAT IT WILL BE DIFFICULT TO SPEAK ENTHUSIASTICALLY TO PROSPECTIVE PRIVATE INVESTORS IN THE UPPER MAZARUNI AS LONG AS THE GOG'S HUMAN RIGHTS PERFORMANCE CONTINUES TO DETERIORATE. THERE ARE RISKS, BUT JAGAN'S WEAKNESS AND THE IMF'S MONEY WILL COVER OUR FLANKS TO SOME EXTENT. IN ANY EVENT, THE RISKS ARE LESS THAN THOSE WHICH WOULD ATTEND OUR PROCEEDING WITH BUSINESS AS USUAL KNOWING WHAT WE NOW KNOW ABOUT THE DEATH OF WALTER RODNEY.

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