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TEXT OF TELEGRAM 80PANAMA009297

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AMEMBASSY MANAGUA
AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE
AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR
AMEMBASSY TEGUCIGALPA
AMEMBASSY MEXICO

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E.O. 12065: GDS, 11/29/86
TAGS: MARR, PN, US
SUBJ: CRITICISM OF US MILITARY ASSISTANCE FROM PANAMA

REFS: (ALL NOTAL)
- A. PANAMA 8008, B. FBIS PA 211636Z AUG 80,
- C. PANAMA 8880, D. PANAMA 7954, E. PANAMA 7901,
- F. USCINCSO 022101Z OCT 80

1. [redacted] ENTIRE TEXT)

2. SUMMARY: CRITICISM OF US MILITARY ASSISTANCE TO EL SALVADOR FROM OUR BASES IN PANAMA HAS INCREASINGLY QUESTIONED THE USG TREATY RIGHT TO ENGAGE IN SUCH
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ACTIVITY. THE CRITICISM REFLECTS CONCERTED LEFTIST ATTEMPTS TO RAISE POLITICAL PRESSURE IN ORDER TO STOP US MILITARY ASSISTANCE TO EL SALVADOR, THE PANAMANIAN GOVERNMENT'S BELIEF THAT THE 1977 CANAL TREATIES DO NOT AUTHORIZE SUCH ACTIVITIES, AND THE LONG HELD OPPOSITION OF MODERATE POLITICAL GROUPS TO THE PRESENCE AND ACTIVITIES OF OUR BASES. WHILE LEFTIST EFFORTS HAVE TAPERED OFF RECENTLY, THERE HAVE BEEN STATEMENTS BY BOTH PANAMANIAN OFFICIAL AND NON-LEFTIST OPPOSITION

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ELEMENTS THIS MONTH WHICH DISAPPROVE OF OUR USE OF BASES HERE FOR MILITARY ASSISTANCE PURPOSES, INCLUDING ONE OFFICIAL STATEMENT ACCUSING US OF A TREATY "VIOLATION." WE BELIEVE THAT IT IS TIME TO REVIEW OUR MILITARY ACTIVITIES HERE IN LIGHT OF THE NEW POLITICO/LEGAL ENVIRONMENT SURROUNDING OUR BASES (SEE SEPTEL). END SUMMARY.

FOCUS ON CANAL TREATY RIGHTS

3. IN RECENT MONTHS, CRITICISM OF US SUPPORT FROM PANAMA FOR THE SALVADORAN MILITARY HAS EXPANDED FROM GENERALIZED POLITICAL COMPLAINTS IN AND OUT OF PANAMA TO INCLUDE REFERENCES TO US MILITARY TREATY RIGHTS HERE. MEDIA COMMENTARY ORIGINALLY EMANATED FROM CONSISTENTLY ANTI-US SOURCES LIKE THE CUBAN PRELA NEWS SERVICE. IN EARLY SEPTEMBER, HOWEVER, THE GOP-CONTROLLED PANAMANIAN STUDENT FEDERATION (FEP) HELD A SEMINAR OF LATIN AMERICAN "STUDENTS" HERE DEVOTED TO "IMPERIALIST MILITARY BASES", AT WHICH THE GOP MINISTER OF GOVERNMENT AND JUSTICE REPORTEDLY TOLD THE STUDENTS THAT US BASES WERE OBJECTIONABLE IN PRINCIPLE TO PANAMA. THE SEMINAR ADOPTED A RESOLUTION DENOUNCING BASES USED BY THE US AGAINST "SALVADORAN AND OTHER

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PEOPLES" AND CONDEMNING THE CONTINUING "VIOLATIONS" OF THE PANAMA CANAL TREATY (REF A).

4. SHORTLY BEFORE THE SEMINAR, A MORE PRECISE LEGAL REFERENCE TO U.S. MILITARY ACTIVITIES BASED IN PANAMA HAD APPEARED. AN ARTICLE IN THE GOP DAILY "LA REPUBLICA" (REF. E), BY SECUNDINO TORRES, A REPUTABLE LAWYER CLOSE TO THE GOVERNMENT AND CONSIDERED BY SOME HERE AS A TREATY "WATCH DOG", REFERRED TO PUBLIC CHARGES THAT US TROOPS IN PANAMA WERE TO BE USED TO STRENGTHEN THE SALVADORAN GOVERNMENT. TORRES CITED ARTICLE IV OF THE PANAMA CANAL TREATY OF 1977, AND ASSERTED THAT QUOTE THE PLACING OF TROOPS DESTINED FOR EL SALVADOR OR ANY OTHER COUNTRY... FOR THE SAKE OF NATIONAL DEFENSE IS... A VIOLATION OF THE TREATY. IN THAT TERRITORY WHICH WE SHARE MILITARILY UNTIL THE YEAR 2,000, THERE CAN BE ONLY TROOPS DESTINED TO PROTECT AND DEFEND THE CANAL. THERE CANNOT BE MILITARY FORCES DESTINED TO RENDER SUPPORT TO ANY GOVERNMENT OF THE AREA. END QUOTE. THE TORRES ARTICLE FOCUSED ATTENTION ON TREATY QUESTIONS WHICH COULD BE RAISED SHOULD THE US WISH TO USE PERSONNEL FROM PANAMANIAN BASES IN OTHER LATIN AMERICAN COUNTRIES. ALTHOUGH WE HAD NO INDICATION WHETHER TORRES WAS SPEAKING FOR THE GOP IN THAT INSTANCE, WE HAVE LITTLE DOUBT THAT THE GOVERNMENT SHARES HIS LEGAL

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INTERPRETATION SINCE PANAMA HAS, FOR DECADES, CONSIDERED THE U.S. MILITARY PRESENCE IN PANAMA A VIOLATION OF THE 1903 TREATY AND SUBSEQUENT TREATIES AND AGREEMENTS RELATING TO THE PANAMA CANAL. IT WOULD BE A PREDICTABLE STEP FROM THE POSITION EXPRESSED IN THAT ARTICLE TO ONE DEMANDING

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THAT ANY FORM OF ASSISTANCE TO SUCH COUNTRIES FROM US BASES IN PANAMA WOULD BE ILLEGAL UNLESS AUTHORIZED BY THE GOP, AND THIS IS A POSITION ON WHICH THE CURRENT PANAMANIAN GOVERNMENT AND OPPOSITION ELEMENTS WOULD AGREE.

CONCERTED ANTI-US PROPAGANDA

5. IN SEPTEMBER, A PROPAGANDA ORGANIZATION OF OSTENSIBLY SALVADORAN BUT AS YET UNKNOWN ORIGIN, CALLING ITSELF THE "ANASTASIO AQUINO SPECIAL BRIGADE", BEGAN OPERATIONS HERE AND SENT A SERIES OF THREATENING LETTERS TO US OFFICIALS (REFS C, D AND E). MORE IMPORTANT, IT SUCCEEDED IN RAISING STILL FURTHER
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THE PUBLIC PROFILE OF U.S. MILITARY ASSISTANCE FOR EL SALVADOR BY HAVING ITS PROPAGANDA HANDOUTS PUBLISHED AND COMMENTED UPON WIDELY. COLUMNISTS WRITING IN THE GOP-OWNED DAILIES "MATUTINO" (9/17 AND 9/27) AND "CRITICA" (9/13) CHARGED THAT THE U.S. WAS GUILTY OF "OPEN VIOLATION OF THE PANAMA CANAL NEUTRALITY TREATY...IN USING ITS MILITARY BASES IN THE PANAMA CANAL AREA TO REENFORCE THE GOVERNMENT...OF EL SALVADOR"; IDENTIFIED PANAMA-BASED UNITS AND PER-

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SONNEL BY NAME; QUERIED WHETHER THE GOP WOULD PERMIT THE U.S. TO LAUNCH A "WAR AGAINST CENTRAL AMERICA" FROM PANAMA; AND CHARGED "THE U.S. MISSION AND THE OFFICERS OF THE PENTAGON WHO ARE WORKING IN PANAMA" WITH SENDING WAR MATERIEL FROM PANAMA TO EL SALVADOR (FBIS PA 280433Z SEPT 80, PA 172223Z SEPT 80). REF. F CONTAINS A SUMMARY OF LOCAL AND FOREIGN PROPAGANDA AND PRESS ATTENTION AS OF THE END OF SEPTEMBER.

6. DURING OCTOBER, LOCAL PRESS ATTENTION TO US MILITARY ASSISTANCE FOR EL SALVADOR FROM PANAMA HAS CONTINUED, THOUGH THE GOP SEEMS TO HAVE REINED IN ITS PRESS SOMEWHAT. A "CRITICA" COLUMNIST CHARGED ON OCTOBER 8 THAT THE US PLANS TO PROVIDE HELICOPTER PILOT TRAINING TO SALVADORANS IN PANAMA, BUT ON THE OTHER HAND THAT WRITER PROFESSED HIS ASSURANCE THAT NO "SALVADORAN GUERRILLA FRONT IS BEING OPENED IN PANAMANIAN TERRITORY NOR WOULD PRO-GUERRILLA ACTIVITY IN PANAMA INCLUDE SABOTAGE OR TERRORISM" (FBIS PA 081756Z OCT 80). LOCAL PRESS COVERAGE WAS ALSO STIMULATED RECENTLY BY PUBLIC RELEASES BY AMBASSADOR WHITE AND SOUTHCOM PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICERS, AS WELL AS BY LOCALLY PUBLISHED EXCERPTS FROM THE WASHINGTON POST ARTICLE OF OCTOBER 9 AND THE

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DEPARTMENT'S NOON PRESS BRIEFING THE SAME DAY. THE VARIOUS US EXPLANATIONS OF AID TO EL SALVADOR WERE GENERALLY CARRIED HERE IN A STRAIGHTFORWARD MANNER. A PROMINENT TV COMMENTATOR, MARIO VELAZQUEZ, WHO OFTEN REFLECTS GOP VIEWS, OPINED THAT, ALTHOUGH TRAINING OF SALVADORANS (WHICH HE DETAILED ACCURATELY, USING INFORMATION PROVIDED BY SOUTHCOM) WAS PERMITTED BY THE TREATIES, IT WAS "UNTIMELY" AND "NOT IN LINE WITH THE PEACEFUL GOALS OF THE CANAL" (FBIS PA 110202 AND FBIS PA 110328Z OCT 80). THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE STAR AND HERALD NOTED OCTOBER 11 THAT "SOME OBSERVERS" BELIEVE THAT "THE USE OF PANAMANIAN TERRITORY TO TRAIN ARMED FORCES, ESPECIALLY IN THE CASE OF EL SALVADOR... IS A VIOLATION OF THE NEUTRALITY OF THE PANAMA CANAL," AND IT QUESTIONED WHETHER SUCH TRAINING HAD THE "APPROVAL OR FOREKNOWLEDGE OF THE PANAMANIAN GOVERNMENT."

PANAMANIAN SENTIMENT: GOVERNMENT AND DEMOCRATIC OPPOSITION

7. PANAMANIAN OFFICIAL REACTION TO US MILITARY ASSISTANCE FROM PANAMA TO EL SALVADOR HAS BEEN SLOW IN COMING AND MIXED. GIVEN THE PRESS ATTENTION, IT WAS GENERALLY EXPECTED THAT PRESIDENT ROYO WOULD TOUCH ON USARSA'S TRAINING, OR AT LEAST MENTION THE

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STATUS OF US BASES IN PANAMA, WHEN HE SPOKE TO THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY ON OCTOBER 11. A LOCAL STUDENT GROUP AND AN OPPOSITION NEWSPAPER HAD DEMANDED THAT HE EXPLAIN WHERE PANAMA STOOD. INSTEAD, THE PRESIDENT SPOKE BEFOREHAND TO A REPORTER FROM THE GOP-OWNED NEWSPAPER "LA REPUBLICA", WHICH ATTRIBUTED THE

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FOLLOWING REMARK TO HIM ON OCTOBER 10: "ANY TRAINING DIRECTED TOWARD REPRESSION...CANNOT COUNT ON THE MORAL OR POLITICAL CONSENT OF MY GOVERNMENT". HE MADE NO REFERENCE TO US BASES OR TRAINING ACTIVITIES IN HIS OCTOBER 11 SPEECH, AND SINCE THEN REFERENCES TO US FORCES' ACTIVITIES IN THE OFFICIAL PRESS HAVE BEEN RARE AND MUTED. THE BRIEF COMMENTARY OF ONE NEWSPAPER COLUMNIST COULD EVEN BE READ AS CONTRADICTING PRESIDENT ROYO'S REPORTED POSITION; HE WONDERED WHY "SUCH A FUSS IS BEING MADE OVER THE PRESENCE OF SALVADORAN OFFICERS IN THE SCHOOL OF THE AMERICAS" (MATUTINO 10/13).

8. ON THE OTHER HAND, INCOMING NATIONAL ASSEMBLY
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PRESIDENT LUIS DE LEON ARIAS, DURING A PASSAGE IN HIS OCTOBER 11 SPEECH WHICH ALLEGED SEVERAL US TREATY VIOLATIONS, WARNED THAT "USE OF THE MILITARY BASES TO INTERVENE IN THE CONFLICTS OF CENTRAL AMERICA VIOLATES THE NEUTRALITY PACT UNDER THE PRINCIPLE OF PEACEFUL USE OF THE INSTALLATIONS AND THE CANAL." PERHAPS SHOWING SOME SENSITIVITY TO EARLIER PUBLISHED THREATS OF VIOLENCE AGAINST US INSTALLATIONS, ARIAS WENT ON TO DENOUNCE "ALL MILITARY MANIPULATIONS THAT

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EXTEND FROM OUR TERRITORY OCCUPIED BY THE NORTH AMERICAN FORCES DIRECTED TO INTERVENE AND VIOLATE THE TERRITORIES OF THE LATIN AMERICAN COUNTRIES, SINCE THIS PUTS IN DANGER THE PEACE AND SECURITY OF THE CONTINENT, AND PARTICULARLY THAT OF THE PANAMANIAN PEOPLE." ARIAS WAS ALSO AMONG THE SPEAKERS WHO ADDRESSED A SMALL ANTI-US RALLY HERE OCTOBER 15 DEVOTED TO SIMILAR CRITICISM, REPORTEDLY ORGANIZED BY VARIOUS STUDENT GROUPS, "OFFICIAL" AND OTHERWISE, AND THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF THE PEOPLE.

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9. OPPOSITION TO THE PRESENCE OF OUR BASES AND SCRUTINY OF HOW WE USE THEM ALSO HAS COME FROM THE DEMOCRATIC OPPOSITION, NOT ONLY HISTORICALLY BUT IN RECENT DAYS. THE WELL KNOWN POSITION OF THE CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATIC PARTY, TO THE EFFECT THAT THE 1977 TREATIES ARE OBJECTIONABLE BECAUSE THEY WERE ARRIVED AT IN SECRET, APPROVED BY PLEBISCITE IN AN UNDEMOCRATIC ENVIRONMENT, AND LEGITIMIZED THE US MILITARY PRESENCE HERE FOR THE FIRST TIME, FOUND EXPRESSION IN AN EDITORIAL IN THE OPPOSITION "LA PRENSA" OF OCTOBER 23. ALSO, THE FACT THAT THE CANAL TREATIES WERE NOT A MAJOR ISSUE IN THE SEPTEMBER ELECTION, IN WHICH POLITICAL PARTIES TOOK PART, SHOULD NOT BE TAKEN TO MEAN THAT THE DEMO-

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CRATIC OPPOSITION IS UNOPPOSED TO OUR MILITARY ACTIVITIES FROM BASES IN PANAMA. RATHER, THERE IS AN UNFORTUNATELY BROAD CONSENSUS HERE THAT THE BASES ARE UNWELCOME AND THAT THEIR ACTIVITIES ARE SUSPECT, A CONSENSUS WHICH MODERATES OF VARIOUS PERSUASIONS SHARED LONG BEFORE THERE WAS AN ANTI-US RADICAL LEFT IN PANAMA.

COMMENT

10. IN A SEPARATE MESSAGE WE MAKE RECOMMENDATIONS ON DEFINING AND PROTECTING VITAL US MILITARY FUNCTIONS, BOTH THOSE IN PANAMA AND THOSE INVOLVING FORCES OPERATING OR SUPPORTED FROM PANAMA. WHILE WE HAVE RECEIVED NO OFFICIAL DEMAND OR INQUIRY FROM THE GOP REGARDING THE LEGALITY OF MILITARY ASSISTANCE TO OTHER LATIN AMERICAN COUNTRIES UNDER THE TERMS OF THE 1977 TREATY AND SOFA, WE BELIEVE THAT IT IS TIME TO REVIEW THE SCOPE AND NATURE OF MILITARY ACTIVITIES HERE IN LIGHT OF THE CURRENT POLITICO/LEGAL ENVIRONMENT IN WHICH OUR BASES EXIST. PANAMANIAN OFFICIAL ATTENTION TO MILITARY AID FOR EL SALVADOR INVOLVING THESE INSTALLATIONS HAS MADE SUCH A REVIEW MORE URGENT. MOSS

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