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Document [redacted] Subject: ASSESSMENT OF RECENT CONFRONTATION BETWEEN
SIGIFREDO OCHOA PEREZ AND JOSE GARCIA [redacted] ACR83-0385056
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WNINTEL [redacted] SUBJECT: ASSESSMENT OF RECENT CONFRONTATION BETWEEN
SIGIFREDO OCHOA PEREZ AND JOSE GARCIA

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2. THE EARLY JANUARY 1983 CONFRONTATION BETWEEN MINISTER OF DEFENSE JOSE GUILLERMO GARCIA AND COLONEL SIGIFREDO ((OCHOA)) PEREZ WAS ONLY THE MOST RECENT CONFLICT INVOLVING GARCIA AND FAR RIGHT WING ELEMENTS IN EL SALVADOR. COL. OCHOA HAS BEEN A STAUNCH SUPPORTER OF ROBERTO ((D'AUBUISSON)) AND ASSISTED THE ARENA PARTY IN THE LAST ELECTIONS. THUS OCHOA AND D'AUBUISSON HAVE FORMED A CLOSE RELATIONSHIP. IN ADDITION, OCHOA WAS RECEIVING FAVORABLE PRESS REPORTING IN THE U.S. AND HIS EFFECTIVE MILITARY TACTICS AGAINST THE COMMUNIST INSURGENTS MADE HIM A FAVORITE AMONG U.S. MILITARY ADVISORS. THESE FACTORS COMBINED TO MAKE OCHOA, FROM GARCIA'S POINT OF VIEW, A GENUINE THREAT TO GARCIA'S POWERFUL POSITION AS DEFENSE MINISTER. [redacted] SIGNS OF STRAIN BETWEEN GARCIA AND OCHOA WERE ALREADY EVIDENT IN JULY 1982. DURING AN INTERVIEW WITH A U.S. VISITOR, GARCIA WAS ASKED WHETHER OCHOA WAS INDEED THE GREAT TROOP COMMANDER PRESS REPORTS HAD MADE HIM OUT TO BE. GARCIA REPLIED THAT OCHOA WAS GOOD, BUT SO WERE OTHER SALVADORAN TROOP COMMANDERS WHO WERE RECEIVING LITTLE NOTICE. REGARDING THE PUBLICITY THAT OCHOA WAS RECEIVING, GARCIA CHARACTERIZED IT AS PURE "HOLLYWOOD." GARCIA RESPONDED TO OCHOA'S THREAT BY EMPLOYING A PREVIOUSLY EFFECTIVE TACTIC DESIGNED TO TAKE A POTENTIAL POLITICAL ADVERSARY OUT OF THE PICTURE. HE POSTED OCHOA AS DEFENSE ATTACHE TO URUGUAY. GARCIA WAS PROBABLY VERY SURPRISED WHEN OCHOA REFUSED THE ASSIGNMENT.

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3. AT THE HEIGHT OF THE CONFRONTATION, OCHOA'S POSITION WAS

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SUPPORTED BY D'AUBUISSON, AIR FORCE COMMANDER RAFAEL ((BUSTILLO)), TROOP COMMANDER ADOLFO ((BLANDON)) AND TROOP COMMANDER JAIME ((FLORES)). MOST OF THE OTHER TROOP COMMANDERS SUPPORTED GARCIA'S POSITION. ALTHOUGH THERE WAS MUCH RESENTMENT AGAINST GARCIA AMONG RANKING TROOP COMMANDERS, HE WAS SUPPORTED IN THIS CONFLICT FOR THE FOLLOWING REASONS: A. HAD OCHOA AND D'AUBUISSON PROVEN POWERFUL ENOUGH TO TOPPLE GARCIA, IT MIGHT WELL HAVE PRESAGED AN INCREASE IN INFLUENCE FOR THE FAR RIGHT IN REGULAR MILITARY AFFAIRS. THIS WOULD HAVE RESULTED IN THE ARMY BEING TASKED TO PURSUE COUNTERINSURGENCY OPERATIONS MUCH MORE AGGRESSIVELY THAN THE OFFICERS WERE PREPARED TO DO; B. AN INCREASE IN RIGHT WING POWER WOULD ALSO HAVE STRENGTHENED THE ROLE OF THE NATIONAL GUARD AND ORDERED DEATH SQUADS IN AREAS WHERE TROOP COMMANDERS NOW HAVE FREE REIGN; C. A RESURGENCE OF VIOLENT RIGHT WING ACTIVITY MADE POSSIBLE BY ARENA CONTROL OF THE MILITARY (AS THE TROOP COMMANDERS FEARED WOULD HAPPEN) WOULD HAVE MADE CERTIFICATION BY THE U.S. CONGRESS VERY DIFFICULT, THUS CUTTING OFF THE FLOW OF NEEDED SUPPLIES AND MATERIEL.

4. A COMPROMISE WAS NECESSARY TO BRING THE CONFRONTATION TO AN END. GARCIA WAS FORCED TO AGREE TO STEP DOWN AS DEFENSE MINISTER WITHIN A REASONABLE TIME PERIOD (TWO-THREE MONTHS). THIS HE WILL PROBABLY DO AS IT HAS BECOME OBVIOUS THAT HIS POWER IS WANING. OCHOA AGREED TO ACCEPT AN ASSIGNMENT AS INTER AMERICAN DEFENSE ATTACHE IN WASHINGTON. ALTHOUGH THIS IS A PRESTIGIOUS POST, IT WILL EFFECTIVELY ELIMINATE HIM FROM THE POLITICAL PICTURE IN EL SALVADOR, AT LEAST FOR THE PRESENT. AS FOR A POSSIBLE REPLACEMENT FOR GARCIA, PRESIDENT ALVARO ((MAGANA)) WILL CHOOSE A NEW DEFENSE MINISTER ONLY AFTER CAREFUL CONSULTATION WITH BOTH THE MILITARY AND ARENA. THIS WILL PROBABLY RESULT IN A COMPROMISE CANDIDATE WHO IS ACCEPTABLE TO ALL, AND WHO WILL OF NECESSITY CONTINUE GARCIA'S ROLE AS MODERATOR OF CONFLICTING POLITICAL ATTITUDES.

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