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TAGS: PGOV PREL NU US
SUBJECT: CODEL DECONCINI: MEETING WITH ACTING FOREIGN MINISTER

1. ~~CONFIDENTIAL~~ ENTIRE TEXT.

2. SUMMARY: IN A FRANK MEETING WITH CODEL DECONCINI, ACTING FOREIGN MINISTER VICTOR TINOCO REVIEWED NICARAGUAN NEGOTIATING POSITIONS. HE INDICATED THE GRN'S RECOGNITION OF USG SECURITY CONCERNS, STRESSED ITS WILLINGNESS NOT TO ACCEPT FOREIGN BASES, AND CLAIMED THAT THE DEPARTURE OF SALVADORAN LEADERS WAS A SIGNAL OF THE GRN'S WILINGNESS TO NEGOTIATE SERIOUSLY WITH THE U.S. HE ALSO DEFENDED THE ELECTORAL PROCESS IN THE FACE OF SENATOR DECONCINI'S SKEPTICISM ABOUT IT. END SUMMARY.

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3. CODEL DECONCINI AND AMBASSADOR CALLED ON ACTING FOREIGN MINISTER VICTOR TINOCO, FEBRUARY 16. ALSO PRESENT ON THE NICARAGUAN SIDE WAS SAUL ARANA, DIRECTOR FOR NORTH AMERICAN AFFAIRS. TINOCO OPENED THE MEETING BY COMMENTING THAT COMMUNICATION AND DIALOGUE WERE THE BEST WAYS TO PROMOTE MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING. THE SENATOR AGREED AND SAID THAT THIS DIALOGUE WAS GOING ON IN THE CONTADORA PROCESS. HE NOTED U.S. SUPPORT FOR THIS PROCESS AND ASKED TINOCO FOR HIS ASSESSMENT OF ITS PROGRESS.

4. TINOCO SAID THAT BEFORE ANSWERING DIRECTLY, HE WISHED TO REVEIL THE HISTORY OF NICARGUA'S POSITION. HE POINTED TO THE GRN'S FOUR DRAFT TREATIES, WHICH HAD BEEN PRESENTED TO THE CONTADORA COUNTRIES AND TO THE U.S. ON OCTOBER 15. HE STRESSED THE DATE, NOTING THAT THESE PROPOSALS WERE MADE TEN DAYS BEFORE GRENADA. THE USG, HE SAID, SHOULD NOT CONFUSE CAUSE AND EFFECT. NICARAGUA, IN THESE PROPOSALS, HAD TRIED TO ADDRESS U.S. CONCERNS, EVEN THOUGH THE GRN THOUGHT SOME WERE ONLY PRETEXTS. SPECIFICALLY, NICARAGUA HAD MADE CLEAR IT WOULD NOT BECOME A SOVIET BASE OR A THREAT TO U.S. STRATEGIC INTERESTS. THE DRAFT BILATERAL TREATY HAD MADE CLEAR NICARAGUA WOULD NOT ALLOW ANY MILITARY BASE ON ITS TERRITORY, IF THE U.S. SUSPENDED ITS AGGRESSION AND COVERT ACTION. THE CONTADORA FOUR WOULD GUARANTEE THIS AGREEMENT AND, AS NECESSARY, CARRY OUT IN SITU INSPECTION OF ALLEGED VIOLATIONS.

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5. NICARAGUA, HE WENT ON, ALSO WAS WILLING TO ADDRESS THE ACCUSATION THAT IT WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR WHAT WAS HAPPENING IN EL SALVADOR. IT WAS PREPARED TO REACH AN AGREEMENT TO SUSPEND ALL ARMS SHIPMENTS IN ORDER TO CREATE CONDITIONS FOR A DIALOGUE. IN RESPONSE TO A QUESTION ABOUT A POSSIBLE CUBAN ROLE, TINOCO SAID THAT WHILE CUBA HAD NOT BEEN ASKED TO JOIN IN THIS AGREEMENT, NICARAGUA WOULD HAVE NO OBJECTION TO ITS DOING SO. AS IN THE FIRST AGREEMENT, THE CONTADORA COUNTRIES COULD SUPERVISE THE ACCORD AND INVESTIAGE ANY VILATIONS.

6. FINALLY, NICARAGUA WAS WILLING TO ADDRESS THE ALLEGATIONS THAT IT WAS TRYING TO EXPORT ITS REVOLUTION AND WAS THREATENING ITS NEIGHBORS. NICARAGUA WAS TIRED OF DENYING THESE CHARGES, SO IT HAD PUT FORWARD A REGIONAL ACCORD UNDER WHICH ALL CENTRAL AMERICAN COUNTRIES WOULD UNDERTAKE NOT TO TRY TO OVERTHROW THE GOVERNMENTS OF ITS NEIGHBORS OR USE FORCE AGAINST THEM, OR ENGAGE IN ANY TRAFFICKING IN ARMS. ONCE AGAIN, CONTADORA COULD BE THE GUARANTOR.

7. UNFORTUNATELY, TINOCO ASSERTED, THE ONLY USG RESPONSE HAD BEEN TO SAY THAT THE PROPOSALS WERE NOT CREDIBLE AND WERE INSUFFICIENT BECAUSE THEY DID NOT ADDRESS THE ARMS BUILD-UP. SO NICARAGUAN HAD MADE NEW PROPOSALS ON DECEMBER 1. IT HAD SUGGESTED A FREEZE ON THE IMPORTATION OF ARMAMENTS INTO THE REGION AND A RECIPROCAL WITHDRAWAL OF ALL MILITARY ADVISORS. IN RESPONSE, THE U.S. HAD RAISED INTERANL ISSUES. NICARAGUA HAD NO PROBLEM IF THE COUNTRIES OF THE REGION WISHED TO REITERATE THEIR COMMITMENT TO ELECTIONS, BUT NICARAGUA WAS NOT WILLING TO SIGN A TREATY REQUIRING ELECTIONS. WITH RESPECT TO THE IDEA OF AN ARMS FREEZE, BOTH HONDURAS AND GUATEMALA HAD REJECTED THE IDEA. EL SALVADOR AND HONDURAS DID NOT WANT AN EARLY DEPARTURE OF ADVISORS. HOWEVER, FROM THE GRN'S POINT OF VIEW, THE U.S. WAS THE CRITICAL DIMENSION. THE CONTADORA COUNTRIES COULD NOT GET THE U.S. ADVISORS OUT OF THE REGION WITHOUT U.S.

AGREEMENT. THE SAME WAS TRUE ABOUT LIMITING THE ARMS BUILD-UP, SINCE NEITHER HONDURAS NOR EL SALVADOR HAD THE POLITICAL INDEPENDENCE TO TAKE THESE DICSIIONS.

8. SENATOR DECONCINI EXPRESSED APPRECIATION FOR THIS DETAILED EXPALNATION. NICARAGUA'S SUBSTANTIVE PROPOSALS SHOULD BE DISCUSSED WITHIN THE CONTADORA GROUP WITHOUT THE U.S. TRYING TO IMPOSE ITS WILL. TINOCO AGREED, BUT SAID THE U.S. WOULD HAVE TO BE WILLING TO ACCEPT SOLUTIONS PROPOSED BY CONTADORA. AT THE MOMENT, IT WAS WORKING AGAINST CONTADORA BY ESTABLISHING A BASE IN HONDURAS. UNFORTUNATELY, CONTADORA WAS ALSO MOVING VERY SLOWLY, WHILE PREPARATIONS FOR WAR ACCELERATED. THERE WAS A LACK OF CONFIDENCE AND A FEAR OF THE GAME THE OTHER SIDE WAS PLAYING. DECONCINI URGED TINOCO TO PUT PARANOIA ASIDE AND PUT FORWARD CONSTRUCTIVE PROPOSALS. TINOCO AGREED, BUT SAID THAT THE CRITICAL STEP SHOULD BE FOR THE U.S. TO END ITS COVERT PROGRAM AND FOR HONDURAS NOT TO ALLOW ITS TERRITORY TO BE USED FOR THESE PURPOSES BY THE U.S.

9. THE SENATOR THEN TURNED THE CONVERSATION TO ELECTIONS. RECOGNIZING THE SENSITIVITY OF THE ISSUE, HE ASKED WHAT ASSURANCES THERE WOULD BE THAT ELECTIONS WOULD BE FREE. TINOCO SAID HE HAD NO DOUBT THEY WOULD BE FREE. DIFFERENT PARTIES WITH DIFFERENT IDEOLOGIES WOULD COMPETE. THE STATE OF EMERGENCY, WITH A FEW SPECIAL EXCEPTIONS, WOULD BE LIFTED. PARTIES, AS IN OTHER COUNTRIES, WOULD HAVE ENOUGH TIME TO COMPETE. EVEN IF THE U.S. THOUGHT NICARAGUA WAS TOTALITARIAN, THE FACTS SHOWED OTHERWISE. THERE WERE OPPOSITION PARTIES. THE REVOLUTON HAD NOT CHANGED, HE WOULD NOT SAY IT HAD BECOME MORE RADICAL, ALTHOUGH IT HAD BEEN AFFECTED BY WAR.

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10. REVERTING TO SECURITY ISSUES, THE SENATOR EXPRESSED CONCERN ABOUT NICARAGUA'S ACQUISITION OF HEAVY ARMAMENTS SUCH AS TANKS AND APCs FROM CUBA AND THE USSR AND ITS EXPANSION OF AIRFIELDS. HE SAID THAT TO HIM AND TO MANY AMERICANS, THESE SEEMED TO EXCEED NATIONAL DEFENSE NEEDS. TINOCO RESPONDED THAT THIS WAS A SUBJECTIVE PROBLEM, SINCE EACH COUNTRY HAD ITS OWN VIEW OF WHAT IT NEEDED FOR DEFENSE. ONE COULD CALL NICARAGUA PARANOID, BUT HE DID NOT THINK THAT WOULD BE FAIR. THE U.S. WAS TRYING TO DESTROY AND DESTABILIZE THE REVOLUTION. NICARAGUA WAS NOT THINKING OF CONFRONTING THE U.S., BUT HAD TO DEVELOP A POPULAR ARMY TO DEFEND AGAINST THE U.S. NICARAGUA'S REGULAR ARMY WAS THE SAME SIZE AS THAT OF EL SALVADOR. NICARAGUAN MILITARY DOCTRINE WAS FUNDAMENTALLY DEFENSIVE. IT HAD THE WEAKEST AIR FORCE IN CENTRAL AMERICA. IT HAD NO COMBAT AIRCRAFT AND THE AIR FORCE HAD EMPHASIZED DEFENSIVE ASPECTS. DECONCINI SAID THE U.S. HAD WATCHED CUBA'S MILITARY BUILD-UP WITH GREAT CONCERN. ANOTHER BUILD-UP OF THAT TYPE WOULD BE MOST THREATENING TO U.S. INTERESTS. TINOCO SAID NICARAGUA UNDERSTOOD U.S. SECURITY CONCERNS AND HAD NO INTENTION OF ALLOWING ANY FOREIGN MILITARY BASE IN NICARAGUA.

11. MR. FREEDMAN TURNED THE CONVERSATION TO THE SUBJECT OF EL SALVADOR AND ASKED IF THERE WERE NOT SOME GESTURE NICARAGUA COULD MAKE TO CONVINCe THE U.S. TINOCO SAID THE GRN HAD BEEN TRYING TO GIVE SIGNALS. LEADERS OF THE FMLN HAD LEFT LAST YEAR. THIS WAS A SIGN THAT NICARAGUA WAS READY TO TALK. THE USG ASSUMED THAT THESE SIGNALS WERE THE RESULT OF PRESSURE; PERHAPS THEY WERE. HOWEVER, ELECTIONS SHOULD NOT BE PUT IN THIS SAME CONTEXT. THE



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12. COMMENT: TINOCO REITERATED STANDARD GRN POSITIONS ON NEGOTIATIONS, ALTHOUGH IT WAS INTERESTING TO NOTE THAT HE ACKNOWLEDGED THE POSSIBILITY THAT USG PRESSURE HAD HAD SOMETHING TO DO WITH THE CHANGE IN NICARAGUA'S NEGOTIATING STANCE OVER THE LAST SIX MONTHS.
QUAINTON

END OF MESSAGE

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