

[REDACTED]

COUNTRY: EL SALVADOR

SUBJECT: 1. DETENTION OF ARMED FORCES OFFICER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATION ON ORDER OF THE SALVADORAN MINISTER OF DEFENSE.  
2. PROTEST OF THIS ARREST BY JUNIOR OFFICERS.

DOI: MID-AUGUST 1983

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DURING EARLY AUGUST 1983, MINISTER OF DEFENSE GENERAL CARLOS EUGENIO ((VIDES)) CASANOVA ORDERED THE ARREST OF CAPTAIN SALVADOR ((FIGUEROA)) MORALES, AN OFFICER OF MILITARY DETACHMENT SIX IN SONSONATE DEPARTMENT, FOR ALLEGED PARTICIPATION IN THE 22 FEBRUARY 1983 MURDER OF 18 PEASANTS ON A COOPERATIVE FARM NEAR SONSONATE CITY. VIDES ORDERED THE ARREST OF FIGUEROA IN THE FACE OF GROWING INTEREST IN THE CASE ON THE PART OF HUMAN RIGHTS ORGANIZATIONS AND THE INTERNATIONAL PRESS. VIDES ADVISED CONFIDANTS DURING THE WEEK OF 14 AUGUST THAT HE HAD BEEN COMPELLED TO HAVE FIGUEROA ARRESTED DUE TO THE ABSOLUTE REFUSAL OF FIGUEROA'S COMMANDING OFFICER, COLONEL ELMER ((GONZALEZ)) ARAUJO TO INVESTIGATE OR RESOLVE THE INCIDENT.

ACCORDING TO VIDES, GONZALEZ HAD VIRTUALLY COMMITTED INSUBORDINATION BY REFUSING TO PURSUE AN

INVESTIGATION OF FIGUEROA'S ACTIONS AND VIDES FELT IT NECESSARY TO DEMONSTRATE HIS AUTHORITY. ON VIDES ORDERS, FIGUEROA WAS DETAINED AT THE GENERAL STAFF BUILDING IN SAN SALVADOR AND IS BEING HELD PRISONER. ALTHOUGH VARIOUS OFFICERS OF THE GENERAL STAFF ARE AWARE OF FIGUEROA'S SITUATION, VIDES ORDERED THAT THE AFFAIR NOT BE DISCUSSED WITH FIELD COMMANDERS OR JUNIOR OFFICERS. VIDES CONFIDED TO CLOSE FRIENDS THAT HE IS CONCERNED THAT GONZALEZ MAY ATTEMPT TO SOW DISSENSION WITHIN THE ARMED FORCES USING THE FIGUEROA CASE AND VIDES' ASSOCIATION WITH DIALOGUE WITH THE INSURGENTS AS A TOOL. VIDES NOTED THAT RIGHTIST OFFICERS WITHIN THE ARMED FORCES ALREADY HAVE LET IT BE KNOWN THAT THEY ARE OPPOSED TO A DIALOGUE WITH THE INSURGENTS AND WOULD ALMOST CERTAINLY REGARD THE ARREST OF FIGUEROA AS A MOVE DIRECTED AGAINST THE RIGHT.

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[REDACTED] VIDES HAD NOT DECIDED ON WHAT FURTHER ACTION TO TAKE WITH FIGUEROA, INCLUDING THE ISSUE OF WHETHER OR NOT FIGUEROA SHOULD BE PROSECUTED FOR HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS. VIDES EXPRESSED CONCERN THAT THE FIGUEROA INCIDENT MIGHT PROMPT RIGHTIST OFFICERS TO CONSIDER INITIATING A COUP TO FORCE VIDES FROM OFFICE.

[REDACTED] COMMENT: ALTHOUGH VIDES DID NOT MENTION ANY PARTICULAR OFFICERS AS BEING LIKELY TO LAUNCH A COUP, THE RIGHTIST OFFICERS OF WHICH HE SPOKE CERTAINLY INCLUDE COLONEL GONZALEZ; LIEUTENANT COLONEL RENE ((PONCE)), CHIEF OF THE MOTOR VEHICLES DEPARTMENT OF THE NATIONAL POLICE; COLONEL ANTONIO FRANCISCO ((MORAN)), CHIEF OF THE EXECUTIVE HYDROELECTRIC COMMISSION OF THE RIO LEMPA (CEL); COLONEL NICOLAS ((CARRANZA)), CHIEF OF THE TREASURY POLICE; LIEUTENANT COLONEL MAURICIO ((STABEN)), EXECUTIVE OFFICER OF THE CAVALRY REGIMENT, AND LIEUTENANT COLONEL JOAQUIN ((ZACAPA)), EXECUTIVE OFFICER OF THE SIXTH MILITARY DETACHMENT.)

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[REDACTED] GENERAL RAFAEL ((FLORES)) LIMA, SUBSECRETARY OF DEFENSE, SAID SAID THAT ON 8 AUGUST THE OTHER CAPTAINS IN FIGUEROA'S GRADUATION CLASS FROM THE MILITARY ACADEMY "MARCHED ON THE OFFICE OF GENERAL VIDES CASANOVA", AND VIGOROUSLY PROTESTED FIGUEROA'S ARREST. THE CAPTAINS STATED THAT THE ARREST WAS ILLEGAL AND THAT FIGUEROA WAS INNOCENT OF WRONGDOING. FLORES LIMA SAID THAT HE AND VIDES WERE ABLE TO PLACATE THE GROUP AND THE CAPTAINS LEFT SATISFIED THAT "JUSTICE WILL BE DONE".

[REDACTED] FLORES REMARKED THAT THE ARREST HAD BEEN MADE BECAUSE OF PRESSURES BROUGHT TO BEAR BY THE U.S. GOVERNMENT. HE ALSO SAID THAT THE CAPTAINS WERE CORRECT IN ASSERTING THAT FIGUEROA'S ARREST WAS ILLEGAL BECAUSE THE ARMY OFFICERS ARRESTED HIM WITHOUT GIVING HIM FORMAL NOTIFICATION OF THE PURPOSE OF THE ARREST. FURTHERMORE, HE IS BEING HELD IN A MILITARY DETENTION AREA BUT UNDER THE JURISDICTION OF THE JUDGE OF THE FIRST INSTANCE IN THE CIVIL LEGAL SYSTEM IN SONSONATE. FLORES ADDED THAT THE CASE IS FURTHER COMPLICATED BY THE FACT THAT FIGUEROA IS A HIGHLY RESPECTED, DECORATED, DEDICATED FIGHTING OFFICER WHO HAS SUSTAINED AT LEAST FIVE

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BATTLE WOUNDS. HE ALSO SAID THAT THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF THE CASE ARE UNCLEAR AND IT IS BY NO MEANS CERTAIN THAT FIGUEROA IS GUILTY OR, IF HE IS, THAT IT CAN BE PROVEN THAT HE IS GUILTY OF THE CHARGES.

( [REDACTED] COMMENT: RIGHTISTS WITHIN THE ARMED FORCES HAVE IN THE PAST BITTERLY OPPOSED ANY EFFORT TO PROSECUTE OR OTHERWISE PUNISH MILITARY OFFICERS ACCUSED OF POLITICAL CRIMES. ACCORDINGLY, VIDES' FEAR OF EVOKING THE ACTIVE DISPLEASURE OF THESE OFFICERS APPEARS WELL-FOUNDED. THIS IS, HOWEVER, THE FIRST INDICATION THAT VIDES IS AT ALL CONCERNED OVER THE SECURITY OF HIS POSITION AS MINISTER OF DEFENSE.)

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