SECRET

PAGE 01  GUATEMALA 0683  0423142

70
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INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DOE-00 PM-07 H-03 INR-10 L-03
NSAE-00 NSC-10 PA-04 RSC-01 PRS-01 SPC-03 S-20
USIA-15 SAM-01 NEA-11 AID-20 EB-11 SCA-01 IC-01
SCS-03 DRC-01 /147 H

SECRET	GUATEMALA 0683
E.O., 116521 XGDS
TAGS: PINS, GT
SUBJECT: INTERNAL SECURITY: "DEATH SQUAD" STRIKES

1. THE CLANDESTINE "DEATH SQUAD" (ESCUADRON DE MUERTE) HAS RESUMED ITS ACTIVITIES WITH THE SHOOTING OF SIX ALLEGED CRIMINALS FEBRUARY 1-2. NOTES AFFIXED TO FOUR BODIES FOUND IN ESCUINTLA, ONE IN CHIMALTENANGO AND ANOTHER IN THE CAPITAL STATED THAT THE "DEATH SQUAD" HAD EXECUTED THE VICTIMS BECAUSE THEY WERE GUILTY OF EXTORTION OR ROBBERY. AN ANONYMOUS PHONE CALL FOLLOWING A SEVENTH SLAYING, OF A SAN CARLOS UNIVERSITY ECONOMICS STUDENT, IDENTIFIED THAT ACTION AS ALSO BY THE "DEATH SQUAD." THE CLANDESTINE GROUP HAD CIRCULATED A PRESS STATEMENT ON THE AFTERNOON OF FEBRUARY 1 ANNOUNCING THAT IN VIEW OF THE "INCAPACITY" OF THE POLICE AND COURTS TO CONTROL THE WAVE OF CRIMES THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY, THE "DEATH SQUAD" WOULD "MERCILESSLY" ACT AGAINST ALL CRIMINALS AND DELiQUENTS. THE POLICE PREDICTABLY DECLARED THEY WOULD TAKE ACTION AGAINST THE "DEATH SQUAD" FOR ITS UNAUTHORIZED METING OUT OF JUSTICE.

2. THE RECENT ASSASSINATIONS ARE THE FIRST ESCUADRON ACTIVITY SINCE SEPTEMBER 1973 WHEN THE "SQUAD" SENT A
THREATENING LETTER TO THE UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' ASSOCIATION LEGAL ADVISER WARNING HIM HE WOULD BE SHOT IF HE DID NOT CEASE SUPPORTING A STRIKE BY MEAT DISTRIBUTORS. IN JUNE GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS CLANDESTINELY DISTRIBUTED ECUADORAN LEAFLETS AT SAN CARLOS UNIVERSITY PROMISING TO ELIMINATE STUDENTS LINKED WITH THE GUERRILLAS.

3. EARLIER MULTIPLE EXECUTIONS OF COMMON CRIMINALS, SUCH AS THE KNIFING OF TEN INDIVIDUALS OCTOBER 13, 1972, WERE CARRIED OUT IN THE NAME OF THE "AVENGER VULTURE" (BUITRE JUSTICIERO), WHICH GOVERNMENT SOURCES TOLD US WAS A "SMOKE-SCREEN" FOR POLICE EXTRA-LEGAL ACTIVITIES. THE CURRENT "DEATH SQUAD" KILLINGS HAVE ALL THE SIGNS OF ANOTHER POLICE OPERATION AGAINST NON-POLITICAL DELINQUENTS.

4. IN AN APPARENTLY UNRELATED INCIDENT AT MID-MORNING FEBRUARY 3, EXPLOSIONS IN THE BASEMENT OF THE MAYA EXCELSIOR HOTEL IN DOWNTOWN GUATEMALA CITY INJURED THREE PERSONS, INCLUDING ONE AMERICAN TOURIST, AND CAUSED AN ESTIMATED $20,000 DAMAGE. ALTHOUGH THE PRESS HAS SPECULATED THAT TERRORIST SABOTAGE MAY HAVE BEEN INVOLVED, POLICE EXPERTS CONCLUDED THAT GAS TANKS IN THE CELLAR OF THE HOTEL WERE RESPONSIBLE. WE HAVE NO INDICATION THE EXPLOSION WAS POLITICALLY MOTIVATED.

MELOY