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FM AMEMBASSY TEGUCIGALPA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8547
BT
~~SECRET~~ TEGUCIGALPA 31122

CLASS: ~~SECRET~~
CHRG: PROG 21/25/85
APPRV: POL:ABARR
DRFTD: POL:AFARR
CLEAR: AME:JDN2GKOPCN
DISTR: AMB DCM POL
DAO MILGP SA

~~SECRET~~ **DECAPTIONED**

Dept. of State, RPS/IPS, Margaret P. Grafeld, Dir
() Release (X) Excise () Deny () Declassify
Date 9/22/00 Exemption 31

E.O. 12356: DECL: OADR
TAGS: PINR, MOPS, HO, NU
SUBJECT: **SANDINISTA FORCES THREATEN FDN FORWARD BASE**

REF:

1. ~~SECRET~~ - ENTIRE TEXT.

2. SUMMARY: THAT THE SANDINISTAS HAVE MOVED AS MANY AS 2000 TROOPS WITH TWO BM-21 ROCKET LAUNCHERS TO A LOCATION WITHIN 20-25 KILOMETERS OF AN FDN BASE AREA LOCATED JUST INSIDE THE HONDURAN BORDER. THE FDN HAVE SENT RECONNAISSANCE PARTIES TO DEVELOP BETTER INFORMATION ON THE REPORTED SANDINISTA BUILD-UP AND MOVEMENTS. MEANWHILE, FDN COMBATANT PRESENCE INSIDE HONDURAS HAS BEEN REDUCED TO 5000 FROM A 7000 LEVEL ONE WEEK AGO AND RECENTLY ARRIVED SUPPLIES, ESPECIALLY AMMUNITION, SHOULD PERMIT A FURTHER REDUCTION OF THAT PRESENCE TO 2000 SOMETIME NEXT WEEK. MEANWHILE, THE REPORTED SANDINISTA BUILD-UP AND THE PROSPECT OF AN ARTILLERY BARRAGE AGAINST THE FDN BASES OF LAS VEGAS AND BANCO GRANDE RAISE THE ISSUE OF THE VIABILITY OF THOSE LOCATIONS AS FDN SANCTUARIES. END SUMMARY.

3. REFERENCED MESSAGE DESCRIBES MOVEMENT BY SANDINISTA ARMED FORCES TOWARDS HONDURAN BORDER IN VICINITY OF FDN FORWARD BASE AT LAS VEGAS, HONDURAS. MESSAGE REPORTS THAT UP TO 2000 SANDINISTA TROOPS ARE ATTEMPTING TO EMLACE TWO BM-21 MULTIPLE ROCKET LAUNCHERS WITHIN RANGE OF THE LAS VEGAS BASE. THE BM-21, WITH A MAXIMUM RANGE OF 20.5 KILOMETERS, COULD HIT THE LAS VEGAS BASE FROM POSITIONS INSIDE NICARAGUA.

4. MISSION HAS TAKEN STEPS TO REQUEST RECONNAISSANCE SUPPORT TO ATTEMPT TO LOCATE AND ESTIMATE THE SIZE OF SANDINISTA FORCES, ESPECIALLY THE ROCKET LAUNCHERS. WE ALSO NEED A BETTER APPRECIATION OF THE COMPOSITION OF THE SANDINISTA FORCES INVOLVED IN ORDER TO BE ABLE TO BETTER ASSESS NICARAGUAN INTENT. AT THIS MOMENT, WE DOUBT THAT THE SANDINISTAS WOULD ATTEMPT A CROSS BORDER GROUND ATTACK ON LAS VEGAS. RATHER, WE WOULD EXPECT THAT THE BM21S WOULD BE FIRED AT CLOSE

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TO MAXIMUM RANGE (HOWEVER INACCURATE) TO CAUSE WHATEVER PHYSICAL DAMAGE TO THE BASE (WHICH INCLUDES PART OF THE FDN HOSPITAL) IF POSSIBLE, BUT ALSO TO INFLECT PSYCHOLOGICAL DAMAGE ON THE FDN AT A TIME WHEN THE FDN IS ALREADY EXPERIENCING CONSIDERABLE DIFFICULTIES.

5. THE FDN PRESENTLY HAS CLOSE TO 5000 TROOPS IN THE LAS VEGAS AREA--3500 NEAR LAS VEGAS AND 1500 NEAR THE BORDER AT BANCO GRANDE. SOME 7000 FDN TROOPS WERE IN THE LAS VEGAS AREA RECENTLY, BUT AFTER RESUPPLY, 2000 WENT BACK INTO NICARAGUA. ADDITIONAL SUPPLIES FOR THE FDN HAVE ARRIVED IN HONDURAS, AND WITHIN THE NEXT SEVERAL DAYS, IF THE RESUPPLY EFFORT GOES SMOOTHLY, AN ADDITIONAL 3000 FDN TROOPS COULD GO BACK INTO NICARAGUA. BECAUSE OF LOGISTICS PROBLEMS, WE EXPECT SOME 2000 FDN TROOPS WILL HAVE TO REMAIN IN THE LAS VEGAS AREA INDEFINITELY. THE TROOPS PRESENTLY IN THE LAS VEGAS AREA HAVE DISPERSED AS A PRECAUTION.

6. IN THE SHORT TERM, THE FDN WILL ATTEMPT TO DESTROY OR DISABLE THE BM-21S, BUT THEY PROBABLY DO NOT AT THE MOMENT HAVE THE SUPPORT WEAPONS (RPG-7S) TO SUCCESSFULLY ATTACK SANDINISTA ARTILLERY POSITION. IN THE LONGER TERM, THE SANDINISTA MOVEMENT BRINGS INTO QUESTION THE VIABILITY OF LAS VEGAS AS A LOCATION FOR A FORWARD BASE. NEGROPONTE

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