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E.O. 12356: DECL: OADR  
TAGS: SHUM, HO, NU  
SUBJECT: MEETING WITH GENERAL LOPEZ AFTERNOON OF FEB. 6:  
- ALLEGED ANTI-SANDINISTA HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS

1. ~~(S)~~ - ENTIRE TEXT)
2. SUMMARY. AMBASSADOR MET WITH ARMED FORCES CHIEF GENERAL LOPEZ ON FEBRUARY 6. MEETING COVERED RECENT PRESS REPORTS IN U.S. AND HONDURAS ATTRIBUTED TO HONDURAN MILITARY SOURCES ALLEGING ANTI-SANDINISTA INVOLVEMENT IN HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS. LOPEZ STATED THAT INVESTIGATION TO DATE HAD CONFIRMED VIOLATIONS BACK TO 1980, BUT TESTIMONY OF SOURCES HAD NOT YET BEEN COMPILED INTO A REPORT. LOPEZ AGREED WITH AMBASSADOR THAT PRESS HAS CREATED AN EXAGGERATED AND DISTORTED PICTURE AT A TIME WHEN HONDURAS' OWN HUMAN RIGHTS RECORD IS GREATLY IMPROVED. END SUMMARY.
3. AMBASSADOR CALLED ON GENERAL WALTER LOPEZ AFTERNOON FEBRUARY 6 TO DISCUSS A VARIETY OF MATTERS. ONE OF THE QUESTIONS RAISED WAS THE ISSUE OF ALLEGED HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS BY ANTI-SANDINISTA FORCES OPERATING FROM HONDURAS. AMBASSADOR POINTED OUT THAT RECENT REPORTING SUCH AS THAT BY NEWSWEEK IN ITS FEBRUARY 4 EDITION HAD CONVEYED THE IMPRESSION THAT, FIRST, THERE HAVE BEEN MORE THAN 200 DISAPPEARANCES IN HONDURAS SINCE 1981 AND, SECOND, THAT THE ANTI-SANDINISTAS WERE RESPONSIBLE FOR MANY OF THESE. IN ADDITION, THE REPORTING, OF WHICH NEWSWEEK IS BUT ONE EXAMPLE, HAS BEEN VERY VAGUE AND GENERAL IN NATURE AND HAS NOT MADE ANY DISTINCTIONS BETWEEN HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS WHICH MIGHT HAVE BEEN COMMITTED SEVERAL YEARS AGO AND THE HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION NOW. AS A RESULT, INSTEAD OF HONDURAS GETTING CREDIT FOR AN IMPROVING HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION, THE RESULT IS IN FACT PRECISELY THE OPPOSITE. THE IMPRESSION HAS BEEN CONVEYED THAT HONDURAS TODAY HAS A SERIOUS PROBLEM WITH DEATH SQUADS.
4. THE AMBASSADOR SAID THAT HE WOULD BE INTERESTED IN KNOWING THE REAL TRUTH OF THE MATTER. WHAT INFORMATION DOES THE ARMED FORCES REALLY HAVE WITH RESPECT TO THESE ALLEGED HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS? LOPEZ RESPONDED THAT HE UNDERSTOOD THAT THE RECENT PRESS REPORTING HAD CREATED A VERY EXAGGERATED PICTURE

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OF THE SITUATION. HE ALSO AGREED THAT THE HUMAN RIGHTS RECORD IN HONDURAS HAD IMPROVED SUBSTANTIALLY IN RECENT YEARS. FOR EXAMPLE, HE NOTED THAT THERE HAVE BEEN ONLY ONE OR TWO ALLEGED DISAPPEARANCES OF ANY SORT IN THE PAST ELEVEN MONTHS. ALSO, TALK OF THE EXISTENCE OF "DEATH SQUADS" IS COMPLETELY WITHOUT FOUNDATION. HE DID SAY THAT THE ARMED FORCES HAD BEEN CONDUCTING AN INVESTIGATION INTO ALLEGED VIOLATIONS OVER THE PAST FOUR OR FIVE YEARS. TESTIMONY HAD BEEN TAKEN FROM MANY MILITARY PERSONNEL AND THERE WAS CONFIRMATION OF SOME HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES GOING BACK AS FAR AS THE TIME WHEN COL. LEONIDAS TORRES ARIAS HAD BEEN THE G-2 OF THE ARMED FORCES. LOPEZ SAID THAT THE TESTIMONY WHICH HAD BEEN TAKEN FROM VARIOUS OFFICERS AND OTHER MILITARY PERSONNEL HAD NOT BEEN COMPILED IN ACTUAL REPORT. HE DID EXPECT A SUMMARY REPORT TO BE PREPARED IN THE ENSUING WEEKS AND HE PROMISED TO APPRISE US OF ITS CONCLUSIONS. MEANWHILE, AMBASSADOR UNDERTOOK TO SEND LOPEZ A COPY OF THE FEBRUARY 4 NEWSWEEK ITEM WHICH LOPEZ HAD HEARD OF BUT NOT SEEN PREVIOUSLY AS AN EXAMPLE OF THE KIND OF REPORTING IN THE U.S. ON THIS ISSUE.

5. COMMENT. WE BELIEVE HUMAN RIGHTS PICTURE IN HONDURAS HAS IMPROVED SIGNIFICANTLY IN PAST 12 MONTHS AS OUTLINED IN HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT CONTAINED STATE 29112. THUS FAR GOH HAS PROVIDED US NOTHING WHICH WOULD SUBSTANTIATE CLAIMS IN SOME NEWSPAPER ARTICLES TO THE EFFECT THAT ANTI-SANDINISTAS ARE ENGAGED IN GROSS AND CONSISTENT HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS. WE DO KNOW THAT FDN HAD SOME PROBLEMS ON A VERY LIMITED AND LOCALIZED SCALE IN 1982 AND TOOK STEPS TO REMEDY SITUATION BY PURGING RESPONSIBLE FORMER NATIONAL GUARD OFFICERS FROM ITS RANKS. ALTHOUGH SOME ABUSES NO DOUBT HAVE OCCURRED, FDN RECORD IN RECRUITING VOLUNTEERS INSIDE NICARAGUA AND APPARENTLY FRIENDLY RELATIONS WITH LOCAL INHABITANTS WOULD TEND TO BELIEVE CLAIMS OF WIDESPREAD ABUSE. IN LAST ANALYSIS WE WILL HAVE TO WAIT AND SEE WHAT, IF ANYTHING, GOH COMES UP WITH BY WAY OF CREDIBLE EVIDENCE.

6. SOME ELEMENTS OF GOH MILITARY HAVE PROBABLY CONTRIB-

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WTFED TO PRESS SPECULATIONS ABOUT ALLEGED ANTI-SANDINISTA HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS THROUGH BACKGROUNDING THE PRESS THEMSELVES ON THIS SUBJECT. IT IS NOT BEYOND THE REALM OF POSSIBILITY THAT SOME HAVE IN MIND BLAMING THE "CONTRAS" FOR VIOLATIONS THEY THEMSELVES CARRIED OUT IN YEARS PAST. OTHERS MAY BE MORE FOCUSED ON DISCREDITING THE ANTI-SANDINISTA PROGRAM ITSELF. AND IT COULD WELL BE, OF COURSE, THAT SOME ARE ENGAGING IN LOOSE SPECULATION WITHOUT APPRECIATING THE IMPACT THAT SUCH STORIES MIGHT HAVE ON THE INTERNATIONAL IMAGE OF THE ANTI-SANDINISTA MOVEMENT. ON TOP OF ALL THIS, WE CAN ONLY ASSUME THAT THE PROPAGANDISTS AND DISINFORMATION SPECIALISTS IN HAVANA AND MANAGUA ARE HAVING A FIELD DAY BUILDING ON STORIES WHICH INITIATED FROM GOH MILITARY INQUIRY INTO THESE ALLEGED HUMAN RIGHTS PROBLEMS.

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