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Embassy of the United States of America

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Lima, Peru

October 4, 1988

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MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

DATE : September 20, 1988

PARTICIPANTS:

[Redacted]

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~~Garrard Bennett~~, Political Officer

LOCATION :

[Redacted]

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SUBJECT : HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES ON THE INCREASE

DISTRIBUTION: AMB DCM POL(2) ECON USIS DAO
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I called on [Redacted] to introduce myself, present my own Human Rights credentials, and to generally probe his view of the current Human Rights situation in Peru. The scenario he painted in the following one hour and a half meeting was as dreary as the typical Lima weather, but without the promise of an eventual summer.

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Economic Bust Equals Terrorist Boom

He discounted completely recent published opinions that Sendero is in eclipse. He disagreed with that prognostication, both in the short and the long term. Rather than seeing the movement of SL into Lima as a sign of its failed campaign in the interior, [Redacted] says it is the opposite. He says the SL's urban campaign is not a new strategy meant to replace an old, failed one, but a new tactic in support of the same strategy: disruption of the economic, political, and social infrastructure of Peru. In the countryside, according to [Redacted] the "popular war" is not meant to win friends among the campesinos; it is meant to intimidate them. Abimael Guzman's published statements on the popular uprising does not mean that the indian and mestizo populations of the Sierra will ever line the paths of the outback to lay palm fronds at the feet of marching SL fighters. To the contrary, the more the peasants become frightened into migrating into the urban ghettos, leaving their fields, changing patterns of purchase and barter, etc., the more the SL strategy is effective.

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[] says the same is true in Lima. The goal is to disrupt, to do that in the urban areas SL infiltrates and coerces. That gives the impression that SL is now trying to win friends. Only a tactic, says [] The strategy is to influence the labor unions, and the students, and the grassroots organizations in the pueblos jóvenes, into taking to the streets. The goal is confrontation, violence, more disruption. He warns that the Embassy and others should not be lulled into thinking that the power of SL is on the wane. According to [] the opposite is true.

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And he argues that Peru's financial mess, and the way the Government is handling it, is playing into SL's hands. He notes that though the Peruvian people are opposed to violence, they are becoming desperate. He showed me several recent surveys published in the September "Peru Reports". One survey showed that Peruvians who in June 1986 considered terrorism a more serious problem than the economy (60 percent to 43 percent) now think the opposite is true. 57 percent now view the economy as the more serious issue; only 47 percent think it is terrorism. He argued that there are now more angry citizens, more citizens willing to take to the streets, and thus more people ripe to becoming the unwitting dupes of SL. Just as SL would prefer to have the military come in and slaughter civilians as it did in Cayara, rather than having to do it themselves, so would it rather have the GOP bash the heads of its own citizens than for SL to have to go to the trouble of setting off bombs and assassinating factory foremen in order to bring down the imperialist APRA and the revisionist IU.

[] further supports his view using the death totals for the first 18 days of September. According to official, but unpublished figures, Sendero has assassinated 78 people between September 1 and 18. He was told by one PIP source that an average of four a day are now being killed. I expressed my surprise and wondered why we were not reading these figures in the press. [] asserts it is because of two reasons: the military clamping down on the data flow from the emergency zones, and the press' tacit acquiescence to the GOP's request not to give so much publicity to the terrorists.

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Human Rights Abuses Will Also Increase

[] believes that Alan Garcia is now powerless to effect any major changes in Peru, especially in the Human Rights area where he, in any case, seems to display a genetic tendency to cower to the military. He laments that the first year of the Garcia administration was a lost opportunity on the HR front. Then,

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says [] Garcia had the power, based on his overwhelming popularity, to force some changes on the military. But the president just didn't have the will to do it. And absent any external pressure to effect change, says [] the military will never do it on its own.

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He described to me his participation in an August series of graduate seminars on the Peruvian reality. He said that most of the participants were middle to upper-grade military officers and career civilian employees from the Ministries. He found that he was able to initiate semi-intimate conversations with several of the military participants during the course of conferences. He learned a number of surprising things. He claims that the military is using a number of manuals which came out of the Viet Nam war on how to fight a local insurgency. He asserts that the officers have no conceptualization that a) the manuals were produced by an army which lost a war against insurgents, and that b) there are important distinctions between Viet Nam and Peru, not the least of which is that in Peru it is Peruvian soldiers killing Peruvian civilians.

He says his impression of the Peruvian military mind-set was reinforced when one officer showed him a strategy plan for use in the Ayacucho emergency zone. The plan outlined four areas of engagement, psychological, economic, political and (I have forgotten the fourth). Under political, the plan called for an identification of terrorists and terrorist sympathizers, such as Amnesty International. [] said that there is no military officer with any influence who, when the phrase "Human Rights" is spoken, does not automatically conjure up an image of a bearded, long-haired, leftist moralist with no understanding of the realities inside the emergency zones.

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Because of that mind-set, and because he believes that violence will continue to escalate, he argues that it is inevitable that human rights abuses also increase.

Police Investigations: Torture

By definition, says [] if someone is arrested for an alleged security violation, his rights will be abused. First the police. [] does not know if there are exact figures, but he and other attorneys he deals with estimate that at a minimum, ninety percent of those convicted of terrorism are convicted at least in part based on their own testimony, i.e., confession. Because the police have no modern investigative tools; no fingerprint files, no national computer data bank, no capable forensics experts, no ballistics analytic capability; the police must rely on confessions or on the testimony of collaborators, to get convictions. Self-confession means torture, he says.

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The police have no other technical way of getting evidence, plus, he suspects, torturing a victim into confessing is easier in any case. Under international human rights standards, according to [] most convictions obtained in security cases are won using fruit of the poison tree. B1,A9

In the case of the military, it is even easier to analyze. The military turn over few of their prisoners to civilian authorities for investigation or trial. The few who are given to the civilian police in the security zones are those who the military is convinced are innocent and they give them to the police for eventual release. If the police don't get a prisoner, it is because he is dead.

He supports this allegation from conversations with police in Ayacucho. He says he asked one police officer what he did. The civilian said that he and his staff are the police of last resort. They get the refuse from the military. In other words, the military detains someone. He is questioned (read: tortured). If there is any hint of suspicion, or even the feeblest evidence that the suspect has leftist leanings, he is killed. Only in the most unusual cases are these suspects turned over to the police.

Comment: There is some anecdotal as well as statistical evidence to support this claim. Of 121 disappearances thus far in 1988, only 19 have reappeared. Some were released directly by the military, most were turned over to the police and then released. End Comment.

We reviewed together the statistical tables related to human rights; disappearances, number of terrorist deaths, number of civilian and military deaths, number of political prisoners, etc. I noted the wide disparity among the various numbers published by different sources. [] says it is not just that there is contradictory documentation from competing sources. He opened to two charts published in the report by the Senate Commission on Violence and Pacification. Both were tables provided by the Ministry of Defense. Each showed different figures for the same periods for both civilian and military deaths. B1,A9

I commented that if my experience in the Army during the Viet Nam war were any indicator, there could be a tendency on the part of the army to over-report Sendero deaths, both to show the effectiveness of the job they are doing, as well as to show the seriousness of the terrorism problem and thus to justify the continued existence of the Emergency Zones and additional funding for military operations there. [] agreed. He said he had no doubt that anyone the military killed, including innocent civilians, were being added to the Sendero body count. B1,A9

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How else, he asked, can you explain the death figures for the past few years. Using DefMin data, the army has killed 6,348 subversives since 1980, (according to another DefMin chart the number is 4,487). [redacted] estimated that 95 percent of those killings occurred in the Department of Ayacucho. The population of that department is around 500,000. In other words, the military claims to have killed more than one out of every hundred residents of the area; an unlikely figure even if one assumes a large number of Sendero infiltration, from other Departments. [redacted] also persuasively argues that if one accepts as factual that the military has killed 6,300, or even 4,400 terrorists, then either the Sendero has been struck a mortal blow or the Sendero is far larger and more pervasive than even the most pessimistic intelligence estimates predict. B1,A9

Comment: As previous bio reporting has indicated, [redacted] is an impressive young man. He is nice looking, well-trimmed beard, and a natty but casual dresser. He is also a good communicator, speaks high-spanish, establishes direct eye contact when he speaks or listens, and is reserved in his humor. He was very pleased about his upcoming IVP, but unfortunately seemed to have a limited view of the possibilities of where he could or should go and with whom he should meet. Since his two primary interests were human rights and drug trafficking, I strongly urged that he get away from the three east coast cities currently on his itinerary (Boston, NYC, WashDC) and go to some of the border towns (for Drug enforcement issues) and to several state or federal penitentiary cities for HR issues. I thought it would also be useful from an HR perspective, for him to visit some of the cities that have recently (last decade) absorbed large refugee populations. B1,A9

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