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TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 2654

~~S E C R E T~~-SECTION 01 OF 02 GUATEMALA 09732

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E.O. 12356: DECL: OADR  
TAGS: PINS, PGOV, SHUM, GT  
SUBJECT: (S) POSSIBLE MASSACRE IN "DOS R'S", EL PETEN

REF: GUATEMALA 9670

1. S - ENTIRE TEXT.

2. SUMMARY: ON DECEMBER 30, THREE MISSION MEMBERS AND A THIRD COUNTRY DIPLOMAT VISITED POPTUN AND LAS CRUCES, EL PETEN, IN AN ATTEMPT TO CHECK AN ALLEGED MASSACRE AT "DOS R'S", NEAR LAS CRUCES. AS REPORTED BY SOURCE IN REFTEL, "DOS R'S" EXISTS; IT IS SOME 10-12 KMS. NORTHWEST OF LAS CRUCES BUT IS NOT REALLY A VILLAGE OR EVEN A HAMLET. DOS R'S CONSISTS OF SCATTERED HOUSES AND GROUPS OF HOUSES; THEY ARE ALL DESERTED AND MANY HAVE BEEN BURNT. ARMY OFFICIALS SAID GUERRILLAS "TOOK THE PEOPLE AWAY" EARLY IN DECEMBER, LOCAL CIVILIAN OFFICIALS IN LAS CRUCES CALLED IT A "MYSTERY", AND A SOURCE IN LAS CRUCES TOLD A MISSION MEMBER THAT THE ARMY WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE DISAPPEARANCE OF THE PEOPLE IN THE AREA. THIS SOURCE WAS TOLD TO STAY OUT OF THE AREA ON A CERTAIN DAY BECAUSE THE ARMY WAS GOING TO SWEEP THROUGH AND "CLEAN OUT" THE AREA. IN ANY CASE, THE SETTLEMENT CALLED "DOS R'S" IN EL PETEN HAS BEEN WIPED OUT.

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END SUMMARY.

3. THE MISSION TEAM FIRST VISITED THE ARMY BASE IN

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POPTUN, EL PETEN. THE OPERATIONS OFFICER THERE STATED THAT THE AREA NEAR LAS CRUCES WAS EXCEPTIONALLY DANGEROUS BECAUSE OF RECENT GUERRILLA ACTIVITY, INCLUDING SEVERAL AMBUSHES OF ARMY PATROLS. NOTE: THIS IS TRUE; THE PRESS REPORTED SUCH AMBUSHES BASED ON ARMY PRESS RELEASES IN OCTOBER AND NOVEMBER. END NOTE. MISSION MEMBERS WERE TOLD THAT DOS R'S HAD SUFFERED A GUERRILLA ATTACK IN EARLY DECEMBER. THE VAST MAJORITY OF THE PEOPLE IN THE AREA (SETTLERS FROM ALL AREAS OF GUATEMALA) WERE ALLEGEDLY "TAKEN AWAY", WITH A FEW SURVIVORS FLEEING TO LAS CRUCES. THE OFFICER INVITED THE MISSION MEMBERS TO VISIT LAS CRUCES, NOTING THAT DOS R'S COULD ALSO BE VISITED, BUT ONLY AT CONSIDERABLE RISK.

4. MISSION MEMBERS THEN FLEW DIRECTLY TO LAS CRUCES. USING THE DIRECTIONS PROVIDED BY REFTTEL'S SOURCE, THE MISSION TEAM EASILY LOCATED THE AREA IN QUESTION. THE SETTLERS HAD SPREAD OVER A FAIRLY WIDE AREA SOME 10-12 KILOMETERS NORTHWEST OF LAS CRUCES. ALL OF THE HOUSES IN THIS AREA WERE DESERTED; MANY HAD BEEN RAZED OR DESTROYED BY FIRE. AT THIS POINT, THE HELICOPTER PILOT REFUSED TO TOUCH DOWN. HE DID AGREE, HOWEVER, TO SWEEP LOW OVER THE AREA; THERE WERE NO SIGNS OF LIFE. IT WAS ONLY AT THIS POINT THAT THE MISSION TEAM WHEELED ABOUT AND FLEW INTO LAS CRUCES. HOUSES HAD ALSO BEEN DESTROYED WITHIN TWO OR THREE KIOLMETERS OF LAS CRUCES.

5. AT LAS CRUCES MISSION MEMBERS INQUIRED AFTER SURVIVORS FROM DOS R'S, STATING THAT WE UNDERSTOOD

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SEVERAL WERE TO BE FOUND THERE. THERE WERE NONE. ONE LADY HAD BEEN LIVING IN THE VICINITY BUT KNEW NOTHING. THE MAYOR OF LAS CRUCES, WHEN ASKED WHAT HAPPENED TO THE PEOPLE OF DOS R'S, SIMPLY STATED THAT IT WAS A "MYSTERY"; NO ONE COULD IMAGINE WHAT HAPPENED. THE PEOPLE OF DOS R'S, SOME 200 TO 500 IN NUMBER, HAD DISAPPEARED SOME 15 DAYS BEFORE. (NO ONE SEEMED CERTAIN ABOUT THE PRECISE NUMBER OF SETTLERS LIVING IN THE AREA.) A COUPLE LATER TOLD MISSION MEMBERS THAT THEY HAD LOST FIVE SONS IN THE AREA; ALL DISAPPEARED AROUND DECEMBER 4 AND ALL WERE LIVING IN LAS CRUCES BUT WORKING NEAR DOS R'S. IT WAS CLEAR THAT THE COUPLE THOUGHT THEIR CHILDREN DEAD.

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6. ANOTHER SOURCE IN LAS CRUCES, A CIVIL DEFENSE MEMBER AND APPARENT CONFIDANT OF THE ARMY IN THE AREA, TOLD A MISSION MEMBER THAT THE ARMY WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE DISAPPEARANCE OF THE PEOPLE OF DOS R'S. HE STATED HE WAS TOLD TO KEEP OUT OF THE AREA ON A CERTAIN DAY (APPARENTLY IN EARLY DECEMBER) BECAUSE THE ARMY WAS GOING TO SWEEP THROUGH. THE ARMY, HE SAID, HAD INDEED DONE SO AND WHATEVER HAD HAPPENED TO THE PEOPLE THERE HAD HAPPENED TO THEM AT THE HANDS OF THE ARMY. THE SOURCE SAID THE ARMY SWEEP THROUGH THE AREA IN CIVILIAN DRESS BUT WEARING STANDARD ISSUE COMBAT BOOTS AND CARRYING GALIL RIFLES. NOTE: THIS INFORMATION MATCHES CLOSELY WITH THE RUMORS CURRENTLY MAKING THE ROUNDS OF THE AREA AS REPORTED BY SOURCE OF REFTEL. END NOTE. THE SOURCE WENT ON TO SAY THAT THE PEOPLE OF THE AREA, PREVIOUSLY AT PEACE AND LIVING IN RELATIVE PROSPERITY,

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WERE NOW CAUGHT BETWEEN THE THREATS OF FAR GUERRILLAS AND THE FEROCITY OF ARMY REACTIONS TO GUERRILLA AMBUSHES. HE, AND OTHERS LIKE HIM, DO NOT KNOW WHAT TO DO. THEY ARE PRO-GOVERNMENT, HE STATED, BUT DO NOT LIKE TO SEE THE ARMY TAKING SUCH DRASTIC MEASURES IN ITS COUNTER-INSURGENCY CAMPAIGN.

7. COMMENT: THERE WAS A DEFINITE ATMOSPHERE OF FEAR IN LAS CRUCES. THE LOCAL ARMY COMMANDER, A LIEUTENANT, WAS NOWHERE TO BE FOUND. IT IS SOMEWHAT DIFFICULT TO BELIEVE THAT THE DISAPPEARANCE (AND POSSIBLE LIQUIDATION) OF HUNDREDS OF PEOPLE SO CLOSE TO LAS CRUCES COULD REMAIN A "MYSTERY" FOR WEEKS. BASED ON INFORMATION REPORTED BY SOURCE IN REFTEL AND ON-SITE OBSERVATIONS MADE ON DECEMBER 30, THE EMBASSY MUST CONCLUDE THAT THE PARTY MOST LIKELY RESPONSIBLE FOR THIS INCIDENT IS THE GUATEMALAN ARMY. END COMMENT.

8. A FINAL PROCEDURAL NOTE. THE THREE MISSION MEMBERS WERE DRAWN FROM THE THREE MISSION ELEMENTS MOST DEEPLY INVOLVED IN POLITICAL REPORTING. THEY FLEW IN A CIVILIAN HELICOPTER CHARTERED BY THE EMBASSY AND FLOWN BY A GUATEMALAN PILOT WHO IS, LIKE OTHER CIVILIAN PILOTS, A RESERVE OFFICER IN THE GUATEMALAN AIR FORCE. THE TRIP WAS CLEARED IN ADVANCE ON DECEMBER 29 BY THE

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GUATEMALAN GOVERNMENT (ARMY G-2) WHICH KNEW THE PLACES TO BE VISITED AND THE NAMES OF THE TRAVELERS. THE THIRD COUNTRY DIPLOMAT WHO ACCOMPANIED OUR OFFICERS WAS ALEXANDER GRAHAM, FIRST SECRETARY AND CONSUL OF THE CANADIAN EMBASSY. MR. GRAHAM COMMENTED AFTER THE TRIP THAT HE WAS UNSURE OF WHAT TO CONCLUDE FROM WHAT HE HAD SEEN AND SPECIFICALLY WAS RELUCTANT TO SPECULATE AS TO WHO MIGHT HAVE DESTROYED DOS R'S.

TAYLOR

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