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| 12065 | FROM AMEMBASSY TEGUCIG LPA | CLASSIFICATION CONFIDENTIAL UNCLASSIFIED | CN: 6109 |
| E.O. 12958X | GDS 7/24/88 (NEGROPONTE, JOHN D.) OR-M | | 7 |
| TAGS: | PEPR PINT HO NU MILI PTER | | |
| SUBJECT: | Escalation of Tension Along Honduran/Nicaraguan Border | | |
| ACTION: | SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY | | |
| INFO | AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA | | |
| | AMEMBASSY MANAGUA | | |
| | AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR | | |
| | AMEMBASSY PANAMA | | |
| | AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE | | |
| | AMEMBASSY BELIZE | | |
| | AMEMBASSY BOGOTA | | |
| | AMEMBASSY PARIS | | |
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| AMB | CONFIDENTIAL TEGUCIGALPA 6109 | | |
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| POL | REF: TEGUCIG LPA 6045 | | |
| MILGP | 1. Entire Entire Text | | |
| DAO | 2. SUMMARY: A number of recent developments make it | | |
| | likely that the recent heightened tensions and armed in- | | |
| | cidents on the Honduran/Nicaraguan border will continue; | | |
| | possibly at accelerating levels of violence. The security | | |
| | xxxxxx situation inside the border regions of Nicaragua | | |

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| DRAFTED BY: AMB: JDNegroponete | DRAFTING DATE XX24 JUL | TEL. EXT. 212 | CONTENTS AND CLASSIFICATION APPROVED BY: MB: JDNegroponete |
| CLEARANCES: | | | |

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appears to be worsening. At the same time, Honduran policy, including President Suazo's recent trip to Washington, has become increasingly unpalatable to Managua. The response has been a rising, well-coordinated, propaganda campaign designed to paint Honduras as an aggressor coupled with heightened Nicaraguan cross border violence which seems likely to continue. END

SUMMARY

3. Nicaragua has long acted with impunity in violating the Honduran border. Kidnappings have taken place as deep as 50 miles into the Mosquito region. Border villages have been harassed and Nicaraguan aircraft have been spotted flying into apparently unoccupied areas of the Mosquitia.

4. Recently, this violence appears to have increased somewhat. Two small villages in Southern Honduras were attacked with mortars and machine guns and Honduran air space was violated by Sandinista helicopters. Both these actions were formally protested by the GOH.

5. At the same time, the security situation within the border provinces of Nicaragua appears to be deteriorating. There has been a substantial movement of Sandinista troops into Zelaya province which borders the Mosquitia region of Honduras, and Nicara-

guan units in Zelaya have been placed on a heightened state of alert. Comandante Humberto Ortega has admitted to major confrontations between the Sandinista army and insurgent forces in recent weeks and to the recent loss of 40 Sandinista troops to insurgent forces. ~~Whether~~ Whether the Nicaraguan moves were solely to counter the growing threat of insurgent forces or whether heightened cross border action against Honduran targets is contemplated, the potential for violence along the border is growing.

6. These developments come at a time when Honduran actions define a policy of increasing opposition to the forces of the revolutionary left in the region. In the wake of Salvadoran President Magana's visit ~~to Tegucigalpa in~~ mid-June, ~~the Honduran Military~~ announced that it would no longer allow FMLN subversives to operate with impunity on Honduran soil. In this connection, GOH mounted a blocking operation in Honduran-claimed disputed area facing Salvador's Morazan province. GOH was careful to define operation as strictly in defense of Honduran sovereignty and in no way representing introduction of Honduran forces into Salvador as has been repeatedly and incorrectly alleged by Honduras' critics. In fact, the 1980 Peace Treaty with Salvador provides for

patrolling of disputed areas by either party. And, in a parallel move, the GOH intensified its campaign against FMLN controlled and supported subversive activity deep within Honduras itself, most notably a July 8 raid on an FMLN safe house and ~~XXXXXXXX~~ ^{virtual} command center in the middle of Tegucigalpa.

7. Meanwhile, on the Nicaraguan front, GOH plans progressed for the redeployment of the Honduran 5th Battalion into the Honduran Mosquitia. This move is designed to strengthen government control in this isolated area, and could also have effect of denying previous freedom of action of the Sandinistas in operating across the border.

8. All of the foregoing has taken place against the backdrop of a successful working visit to Washington by Doctor Suazo and his closest collaborators which has no doubt, temporarily at least, further bolstered GOH resolve to resist FMLN and Sandinista violations of Honduran sovereignty.

9. In addition to answering with increased violence (bombing of Tegucigalpa power plant, increased Sandinista cross-border incursions), there has also been a sharp increase in the stridency of the ~~the~~ propaganda campaign coordinated between Managua, Havana, and the FMLN to depict ~~XXXXXXXX~~/Honduras as (a) an aggressor against Nicaragua,

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(b) in league with El Salvador to repress the Salvadorean peasantry and (c) a tool of the Reagan administration. Efforts were made to paint the Honduran army operation in the Bolsones as a joint operation with the El Salvador army within El Salvador itself. In fact, ~~we~~ while the Honduran army was conducting a blocking operation as well as a sweep of the area, it was extremely careful not to depart from territory long regarded by the GOH as Honduran. Comandante Ortega went so far as to state in Madrid on July 15 that Nicaragua would support anti-government guerrillas in Honduras. From Havana, representatives of the Honduran communist party have commented that Dr. Suazo's trip to Washington cements the painful necessity to struggle against his government with violence. There seems little doubt ~~ax~~ that the Sandinistas will attempt to characterize the Combined Movement operation commencing on July 26 (REFTEL) in which the USAF assists in the redeployment of the Honduran 5th Battalion to the Mosquitia region as an aggressive action aimed at Nicaragua. The latest manifestation of growing political tension between the two countries was the Nicaraguan refusal to accept the Honduran delegation to the Nicaraguan National Day celebration by the GOH Minister of Defense, a dispute which ended in mutual recriminations.

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10. While attacking Honduras and raising the level of threat, the Sandinistas have attempted to paint the United States as an unreliable ally.

11. This concatenation of charges is no doubt aimed in considerable measure at attempting to pressure the Hondurans into changing their policies. In addition, however, a real possibility exists that, as the GOH has charged, the Sandinista ~~xx~~ statements and threats are an attempt to prefabricate a pretext for continued and heightened Sandinista and FMLN armed action against Honduras which, itself, will be designed to raise the level of pressure/against the Hondurans. It is hard to judge which of these motives predominates, but the potential for increased violence is present, and we will be following the situation closely.

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