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424

# EL SALVADOR DEATH SQUAD. (U)

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SUBJ EL SALVADOR DEATH SQUAD. (U)

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TEXT 1. (C/NF) [REDACTED] DETENTION OF CAPT AVILA AVILA, IMPLICATED IN THE 1981 AFL-CIO AFFILIATE MURDERS, AND RECENT STATEMENTS BY SALVADORAN COMMANDERS SUGGEST THE MILITARY IS TAKING INITIAL STEPS AGAINST RIGHTIST DEATH SQUADS.

2. (C/NF) ON 19 DECEMBER, THE NATIONAL POLICE ANNOUNCED THE ARREST OF AVILA, WHO HAD BEEN IMPLICATED IN THE JANUARY 1981 MURDER OF TWO US LABOR ADVISERS AND A SALVADORAN LAND-REFORM OFFICIAL. AVILA [REDACTED] WAS ARRESTED ON ORDERS FROM THE ARMY HIGH COMMAND. HE IS ALSO LISTED AS MILITARY DESERTER, AND IT IS STILL UNCLEAR WHAT CHARGES WILL BROUGHT AGAINST HIM OR WHETHER HE WILL BE TRIED IN A CIVIL OR A MILITARY COURT.

3. (C/NF) IN RELATED DEVELOPMENTS, THE SALVADORAN HIGH COMMAND ISSUED A GENERAL ORDER ON 14 DECEMBER TIGHTENING PROCEDURES FOR DETENTION OF SUSPECTED SUBVERSIVES. [REDACTED] THAT ONCE AN ARREST HAS BEEN MADE, THE HIGH COMNAND, THE INTERNATIONAL RED CROSS, THE HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION, AND THE DETAINEE'S RELATIVES MUST BE ADVISED AS SOON AS POSSIBLE. THE DIRECTIVE PROHIBITS TORTURE OR ANY MEANS OF COERCION AND STATES THAT FAILURE TO COMPLY "WILL ENTAIL THE IMPOSITION OF SEVERE SANCTIONS IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE LAW."

4. (U) THE SALVADORAN HIGH COMMAND ALSO ISSUED A COMMUNIQUE THAT APPEARED IN LOCAL NEWSPAPERS INDICATING THAT ALL NILITARY AND SECURITY FORCE COMMANDERS AT A 13 DECEMBER MEETING HAD AGREED UNANIMOUSLY TO GIVE DEFENSE MINISTER VIDES CASANOVA THEIR FULL SUPPORT IN HALTING DEATH SQUAD ACTIVITY. IT FURTHER URGED THE SALVADORAN PEOPLE TO REPORT ANY INFORMATION REGARDING THE DEATH SQUADS.

5. (C/NF) [REDACTED] THE ARREST OF CAPT AVILA IS THE FIRST INDICATION THAT THE MILITARY MAY TAKE ACTION AGAINST RIGHTIST DEATH SQUADS. AIR FORCE COMMANDER BUSTILLO'S RECENT STATEMENTS CONDEMNING DEATH SQUADS ARE ALSO SIGNIFICANT BECAUSE HE IS A KEY PLAYER IN THE HIGH COMMAND AND, LIKE OTHER COMMANDERS, HAS ACKNOWLEDGED THEIR EXISTENCE BUT HAS NEVER OPENLY CONDEMNED SUCH ACTIVITIES. WHETHER THESE INITIAL ACTIONS CAN BE SUSTAINED IS UNCLEAR. NEVERTHELESS, THESE ARE THE MOST POSITIVE SIGNS TO DATE.