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SUBJ

REUTER: DUARTE WEAKERS GOVERNMENT BY HANDLING KIDNAPPING

PAB91535

BUENOS AIRES REUTER IN ENGLISH TO REUTER LONDON 1507 GMT
9 OCT 85

(BY ROBERT BLOCK)

(TEXT), SAN SALVADOR, OCT 9, REUTER -- PRESIDENT JOSE
NAPOLEON DUARTE'S HANDLING OF HIS DAUGHTER'S KIDNAPPING HAS
WEAKENED HIS GOVERNMENT AND SHAKEN HIS RELATIONSHIP WITH THE ARMED
FORCES, MILITARY OFFICIALS, GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS AND DIPLOMATS
SAY.

THE RESULTS OF THE CRISIS, THEY ADDED, COULD BE THE LOSS OF
THE PRESIDENT'S AUTHORITY, A WAVE OF LEFTIST GUERRILLA SPONSORED
KIDNAPPINGS AND A WIDESPREAD ABUSE OF HUMAN RIGHTS BY THE ARMY
IN ITS SIX-YEAR-OLD CIVIL WAR AGAINST THE GUERRILLAS.

"THIS IS THE BIGGEST CRISIS WE HAVE EVER FACED. I DON'T THINK
THINGS ARE GOING TO BE QUITE THE SAME WITH THIS GOVERNMENT WHEN
IT IS ALL OVER," ONE GOVERNMENT INSIDER SAID.

THE SOURCES AGREED THAT THE PROBLEMS STEMMED FROM DUARTE'S
APPARENT IMPOTENCE IN THE NEGOTIATIONS WITH THE KIDNAPPERS AND
HIS WILLINGNESS TO GIVE IN TO THEIR DEMANDS.

MILITARY OFFICERS, IN PARTICULAR, EXPRESSED THEIR DISAGREEMENT
WITH THE PRESIDENT'S DISPOSITION TO HAND OVER 25 OF THE 24 REBEL
PRISONERS THE KIDNAPPERS WANT IN RETURN FOR INES GUADALUPE DUARTE
DURAN AND A WOMAN CAPTURED WITH HER LAST MONTH.

ARMY COMMANDERS INITIALLY SYMPATHIZED WITH DUARTE'S
PREDICAMENT AND BACKED A PLAN TO RELEASE A HANDFUL OF REBEL
PRISONERS. BUT THE POSITION HAS CHANGED IN RECENT DAYS AS IT
HAS BECOME APPARENT THAT DUARTE WAS READY TO COMPLY WITH NEARLY
ALL THE KIDNAPPERS WISHES.

DURING A RADIO CONTACT WITH THE KIDNAPPERS MONITORED BY
REPORTERS LAST SATURDAY, DUARTE SAID HE HAD ALREADY RELEASED
THREE PEOPLE ON THE KIDNAPPERS' LIST AND WAS READY TO FREE 22
MORE. HE ALSO ASKED THEM FOR HELP TO CLARIFY THE CASES OF NINE
OTHER REBELS THE GOVERNMENT COULD NOT ACCOUNT FOR.

MANY OFFICERS BELIEVE DUARTE WAS SOFT ON THE KIDNAPPERS AND
PLACED FAMILY CONCERNS ABOVE NATIONAL INTERESTS.

"AS A FATHER WE UNDERSTAND HIM, BUT AS A PRESIDENT THERE IS
ALSO THE BUSINESS OF NATIONAL SECURITY TO CONSIDER ... I ASK
MYSELF WHETHER THE INTERESTS OF THE COUNTRY ARE INVOLVED IN ALL

THIS," A HIGH-RANKING FIELD COMMANDER TOLD REUTERS.
ACCORDING TO MILITARY OFFICERS AND GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS,
DUARTE DURAN'S ABDUCTION BY LEFTIST GUERRILLAS APPEARS TO BE
AIMED AT WEAKENING DUARTE BY DRIVING A WEDGE BETWEEN HIS
CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATIC GOVERNMENT AND THE ARMED FORCES.

DUARTE'S ABILITY AS THE FIRST CIVILIAN PRESIDENT IN EL
SALVADOR IN 50 YEARS TO WIN THE CONFIDENCE OF THE TOP BRASS
HAS BEEN A KEY TO CONSOLIDATING POWER IN TURNING THE TIDE OF
THE COUNTRY'S CIVIL WAR AGAINST THE GUERRILLAS.

OFFICIALS NOW SAY THAT WITH THE KIDNAPPING OF DUARTE'S
FAVOURITE CHILD, THE GUERRILLAS MIGHT SUCCEED IN THEIR ATTEMPTS
TO REVERSE THIS PROCESS.

"IT WAS A GOOD BLOW THEY (THE GUERRILLAS) DEALT US. THE
TENSIONS ARE GOING TO OPEN RIFTS BETWEEN THE GOVERNMENT AND THE
ARMY. THE GOVERNMENT HAS ALREADY STARTED TO WEAKEN," A TOP
CHRISTIAN DEMOCRAT AND KEY GOVERNMENT OFFICIAL SAID.

THE OFFICIAL ADDED HIS MAIN FEAR WAS THAT HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES
IN EL SALVADOR, NOW ON THE DECLINE, WOULD INCREASE BECAUSE MANY
ARMY OFFICIALS ANGERED BY DUARTE'S DECISION MIGHT REFUSE TO
TAKE PRISONERS.

ONE TOP FIELD COMMANDER ALREADY TOLD REUTERS IT WAS 'NOT
WORTH THE TROUBLE' TO CAPTURE GUERRILLAS IN COMBAT ANY MORE IF
THE GOVERNMENT WAS ONLY GOING TO ARBITRARILY RELEASE THEM LATER.

OTHER OFFICIALS ALSO EXPRESSED CONCERN THAT DUARTE'S
NEGOTIATIONS WITH THE KIDNAPPERS MIGHT ENCOURAGE MORE ABDUCTIONS.

THE GOVERNMENT'S POSITION HAS TAKEN A DRAMATIC TURN SINCE
THE DAYS IMMEDIATELY AFTER THE SEPTEMBER 10 KIDNAPPING.

GOVERNMENTS FROM AROUND THE WORLD HAVE CONDEMNED THE REBEL
ACTION AND EXPRESSED SOLIDARITY WITH DUARTE, TURNING HIS PERSONAL
TRAGEDY INTO SOMETHING OF A SHORT-LIVED POLITICAL GOLD MINE.

"THEY (THE GOVERNMENT) HAD THE INITIATIVE BUT THEY DON'T
ANYMORE. IT WAS TURNED AROUND AND THEY LOST IT," ONE WESTERN
DIPLOMAT SAID.

OFFICIALS NOW SAY THE SITUATION CAN ONLY GROW WORSE AS THE
NEGOTIATIONS DRAG ON.

DEFENCE MINISTER CARLOS EUGENIO VIDES CASANOVA, NAMED BY
DUARTE TO A SPECIAL THREE-MAN COMMISSION TO ADVISE HIM ON
NEGOTIATION STRATEGY, TOLD REUTERS THAT THE PRESIDENT WAS AWARE
OF THE NEED TO RESOLVE THE CRISIS AS FAST AS POSSIBLE SO THE
GOVERNMENT COULD START TO REPAIR THE DAMAGE IT SUFFERED.

BUT SO FAR THERE ARE FEW SIGNS THAT THE KIDNAPPERS ARE WILLING
TO COOPERATE WITH DUARTE AND THEY HAVE ALREADY REJECTED SOME
OF HIS COUNTER-DEMANDS, SOURCES CLOSE TO THE TALKS SAY.

"NO MATTER WHAT THE RESULT, DUARTE IS GOING TO LOSE AUTHORITY.
WHEN THE WAR TOUCHED HIM HE BROKE. HOW CAN YOU HAVE AUTHORITY
AFTER THAT?" ONE YOUNG OFFICER SAID
(ENDALL) 091507 [REDACTED] 09/1557Z C-1

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Approved for Release
AUG 1994

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