

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

DIST: 17 AUGUST 1990

[REDACTED]

COUNTRY: EL SALVADOR

SUBJ: DISSATISFACTION IN THE OFFICER CORPS OVER THE FAILURE
OF CHIEF OF STAFF PONCE TO RESOLVE THE JESUIT CASE AND
REMOVE CORRUPT AND INCOMPETENT SENIOR OFFICERS

DOI: MID-AUGUST 1990

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

TEXT: 1. [REDACTED] A LARGE NUMBER OF OFFICERS ARE UNHAPPY WITH ENTRY OF STAFF COLONEL RENE EMILIO ((PONCE)) BECAUSE OF HIS FAILURE TO RESOLVE THE CASE OF THE NOVEMBER 1989 MURDERS OF JESUIT PRIESTS, AND TO REMOVE CORRUPT AND INCOMPETENT OFFICERS FROM SENIOR ARMY POSTS.

2. [REDACTED] THE DISSATISFIED SEGMENTS OF THE ARMY INCLUDE A GROUP OF CAPTAINS (THE SAME GROUP WHO PRESENTED A LIST OF COMPLAINTS TO PONCE IN LATE 1989), A GROUP OF MAJORS AND LIEUTENANTS WHO SHARE THEIR GOALS, AND A NUMBER OF LIEUTENANT COLONELS FROM THE 1970 AND 1971 TANDAS. [REDACTED] COMMENT: A TANDA IS A MILITARY ACADEMY GRADUATION CLASS.) THE SENIOR OFFICER SAID THAT AMONG THE LIEUTENANT COLONELS ARE THE COMMANDERS OF ALL THE IMMEDIATE REACTION BATTALIONS, AND THE EXECUTIVE OFFICERS OF MANY BRIGADES. THESE OFFICERS PLAN TO REMOVE PONCE AS DEFENSE MINISTER IF HE DOES NOT TAKE CLEAR AND DECISIVE STEPS TO RESOLVE THE JESUIT KILLINGS AND REMOVE THE CORRUPT SENIOR OFFICERS. [REDACTED] COMMENT: IT IS WIDELY BELIEVED THAT PONCE WILL BE NAMED MINISTER OF DEFENSE ON 31 AUGUST.)

3. [REDACTED] THESE OFFICERS BELIEVE COLONEL GUILLERMO ALFREDO ((BENAVIDES)) ACTED ON ORDERS FROM THE HIGH COMMAND WHEN HE KILLED THE JESUITS. ALTHOUGH NO CONCRETE INFORMATION ON SUCH INVOLVEMENT HAS YET EMERGED, THEY CLAIM THAT MANY OFFICERS ARE KNOWLEDGEABLE OF THE HIGH COMMAND'S INVOLVEMENT AND ARE BEGINNING TO TALK, NOT ONLY TO FELLOW OFFICERS BUT TO OTHERS OUTSIDE THE ARMED FORCES.

4. [REDACTED] THE JESUITS CLAIM TO HAVE "PROOF" THAT BENAVIDES ACTED ON ORDERS AND THAT THEY WILL MAKE THIS INFORMATION PUBLIC IF THE HIGH COMMAND DOES NOT. IN ADDITION, MANY AIR FORCE OFFICERS HAVE DISCUSSED A MEETING AT THE AIR FORCE ON THE EVENING OF 15 NOVEMBER 1989 (FOLLOWING THE COMMANDERS MEETING AT THE ESTADO MAYOR) AT WHICH THEN AIR FORCE COMMANDER GENERAL JUAN ((BUSTILLO)) REPORTEDLY SAID THAT THE DECISION HAD BEEN TAKEN TO KILL THE LEADERSHIP OF THE FARABUNDO MARTI NATIONAL LIBERATION FRONT (FMLN), SPECIFICALLY MENTIONING IGNACIO ((ELLACURIA)), "WHETHER OR NOT IT IS APPROVED BY THE PRESIDENT." [REDACTED] COMMENT: THERE HAVE BEEN RUMORS THAT BUSTILLO MENTIONED THE NEED/DESIREABILITY OF KILLING THE JESUITS AT A MEETING AT THE AIR FORCE ON THE NIGHT OF 15 NOVEMBER, BUT NO AIR FORCE OFFICER TO DATE HAS ADMITTED THIS.)

5. [REDACTED] WHEN ARMY INVOLVEMENT IN THE CASE BECAME KNOWN AS A RESULT OF STATEMENTS BY [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] [REDACTED]
TOT: 171506Z AUG 90 [REDACTED]

COLONEL CARLOS ((AVILES)), PONCE ANGRILY COMMENTED AT A COMMANDER'S MEETING THAT "AVILES IS A TRAITOR." AT A SEPARATE COMMANDER'S MEETING IN DECEMBER, PONCE COMMENTED THAT "NONE OF US WOULD BE HERE IF I HAD NOT MADE HARD DECISIONS." [REDACTED] COMMENT: THIS LATTER REMARK DID NOT APPEAR TO BE DIRECTLY RELATED TO THE JESUIT MURDERS AT THE TIME, ALTHOUGH IN RETROSPECT MANY OFFICERS NOW BELIEVE THAT PONCE WAS REFERRING TO THE JESUIT KILLINGS.)

6. SEPARATELY MANY OFFICERS ARE SAYING THAT THE U.S. CONGRESSIONAL REPORT ON THE JESUIT MURDERS IS ACCURATE. PRESIDENT ALFREDO ((CRISTIANI)) COMMENTED THAT THE REPORT CONTAINED ONLY ALLEGATIONS, AND THAT THE JUDICIAL SYSTEM WOULD EVENTUALLY UNCOVER THE TRUTH. A RELATIVE OF COLONEL BENAVIDES STATED THAT BENAVIDES IS READY TO NAME PONCE AS THE AUTHORITY WHO ORDERED THE MURDERS OF THE JESUITS. A SENIOR INTELLIGENCE OFFICER STATED THAT HE HAD BEEN TOLD (BY A SOURCE HE REFUSED TO IDENTIFY) THAT BENAVIDES IS READY TO NAME PONCE AS THE AUTHOR OF THE MURDERS. [REDACTED] COMMENT: THESE TWO REPORTS ARE ALMOST CERTAINLY CITING DIFFERENT SOURCES.)

7. [REDACTED] IN EARLY AUGUST, THE FATHER-IN-LAW OF AIR FORCE COMMANDER GENERAL RAFAEL ((VILLAMARIONA'S)) DAUGHTER STATED THAT THE ORDERS TO KILL THE JESUITS CAME FROM AN AMERICAN ADVISOR AND THAT BENAVIDES WAS SET UP TO TAKE THE BLAME FOR THE MURDERS. [REDACTED] COMMENT: THIS ALLEGATION HAS NO CREDIBILITY, BUT SHOWS HOW DESPERATE THE HIGH COMMAND HAS BECOME AND TO WHAT LENGTHS SOME ARE WILLING TO GO TO PROTECT THE PERPETRATORS OF THE CRIME.)

8. [REDACTED] COMMENT: BENAVIDES' PURPORTED WILLINGNESS TO IDENTIFY PONCE COULD WELL BE A RED HERRING, OR AN INDICATION OF A DESPERATE BENAVIDES WHO MAY FINALLY REALIZE THAT THE "TANDONA" (MILITARY ACADEMY CLASS OF 1966, OF WHICH BENAVIDES AND PONCE ARE MEMBERS) WILL NOT SAVE HIM. OBVIOUSLY, IF HE TESTIFIES THAT PONCE ORDERED THE MURDERS OF THE JESUITS, THE CASE WILL TAKE ON AN ENTIRELY NEW DIMENSION. FOR THE MOMENT, SUCH TESTIMONY BY BENAVIDES IS UNLIKELY. NOTWITHSTANDING THE INFORMATION ABOVE, THERE IS NO CONCRETE PROOF THAT ANYONE IN THE HIGH COMMAND GAVE THE ORDER WHICH RESULTED IN THE MURDER OF THE JESUITS. IT IS ALSO TRUE THAT MANY IN THE ARMED FORCES, FOR A VARIETY OF REASONS, DISLIKE THE TANDONA AND HAVE A STAKE IN SEEING ITS POWER IN THE UPPER ECHELONS OF THE MILITARY BROKEN.)

9. [REDACTED] THE OFFICERS SAY THAT PONCE MUST ALSO REMOVE CORRUPT OFFICERS AS HE PROMISED TO DO BEFORE DECEMBER 1989. THE OFFICERS PRESENTED HIM WITH A LIST OF IMPLICATED OFFICERS WHO WERE MAINLY MEMBERS OF THE "TANDONA." ALTHOUGH SOME OF THE MOST EGREGIOUS OFFENDERS HAVE BEEN REMOVED, THE REMAINING
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

OFFICERS WHO MUST BE REMOVED INCLUDE:

- A. SECOND BRIGADE COMMANDER COLONEL JOSE HUMBERTO ((GOMEZ));
- B. FIFTH BRIGADE COMMANDER COLONEL JOSE EMILIO ((CHAVEZ)) CACERES;
- C. SIXTH BRIGADE COMMANDER COLONEL HECTOR HERIBERTO ((HERNANDEZ));
- D. MILITARY DETACHMENT FIVE COMMANDER COLONEL ORLANDO ((CARRANZA));
- E. NATIONAL GUARD COMMANDER COLONEL JUAN CARLOS ((CARRILLO)) SCHLENKER;
- F. TREASURY POLICE COMMANDER COLONEL CIRO ((LOPEZ)) ROQUE;
- G. NATIONAL POLICE COMMANDER COLONEL DIONISIO ISMAEL ((MACHUCA));
- H. VICE MINISTER FOR PUBLIC SECURITY COLONEL INOCENTE ORLANDO ((MONTANO)).

[REDACTED] COMMENT: MACHUCA HAS A REPUTATION FOR HONESTY AND COMPETENCE. IT IS NOT CLEAR WHY HE WAS INCLUDED ON THE LIST OF SENIOR OFFICERS WHO MUST GO. [REDACTED]

10. [REDACTED] THE DISGRUNTLED OFFICERS HAVE DECIDED TO WAIT UNTIL THE PUBLICATION OF THE 31 AUGUST GENERAL ORDER BEFORE APPROACHING PONCE DIRECTLY. MANY ARE REPORTEDLY ARGUING THAT NOTHING SHOULD BE DONE UNTIL AFTER THE U.S. CONGRESS RECONVENES AND DECIDES THE MATTER OF U.S. MILITARY ASSISTANCE TO EL SALVADOR.

11. (AMBASSADOR'S COMMENT: I HAVE HEARD, DISCUSSED AND REPORTED ON MUCH THE SAME EXPRESSION OF RESENTMENT AND CALLS FOR CHANGE FROM OFFICERS BELOW THE TANDONA. WHILE IT IS TRUE THAT, TO DATE, NO ONE HAS COME FORWARD WITH "CONCRETE PROOF THAT ANYONE IN THE HIGH COMMAND" ORDERED THE KILLINGS, MUCH OF THE DEMAND FOR PERSONNEL CHANGE IS BASED, NOT ON PROVEN CULPABILITY IN THE KILLINGS, BUT ON GROSS INCOMPETENCE IN MANAGING THE ARMED FORCES' RESPONSE TO THE JESUIT CRISIS. MANY OFFICERS BELIEVE AND ARE BEGINNING TO SAY THAT THE PRESENT HIGH COMMAND, INCLUDING PONCE, IS GUILTY OF BRINGING THE INSTITUTION INTO DISREPUTE AND HUMILIATION BY ITS INEPT AND DANGEROUS

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

ATTEMPT AT COVERUP.)

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]