

ACTION WHA-00

INFO	LOG-00	EEB-00	AID-00	CIAE-00	INL-00	DODE-00	DS-00
	UTED-00	TEDE-00	INR-00	IO-00	L-00	MOFM-00	MOF-00
	NSAE-00	NSCE-00	OIC-00	OIG-00	PRS-00	P-00	SP-00
	SS-00	STR-00	TRSE-00	ASDS-00	DSCC-00	PRM-00	DRL-00
	G-00	SAS-00	FA-00	/000W			

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FM AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3737

INFO WHA CENTRAL AMERICAN COLLECTIVE  
 NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC  
 CIA WASHINGTON DC  
 AMEMBASSY MADRID

RELEASED IN PART  
 B6, B7(E)

UNCLAS GUATEMALA 000786

SENSITIVE

SBU

E.O. 13526: N/A

TAGS: PHUM, ASEC, PGOV, MARR, SNAR, GT

SUBJECT: Human rights leaders express concerns about state of siege  
 in Peten, and see echoes of Guatemala's internal armed conflict

REF: A) 11 GUATEMALA 77; B) 10 GUATEMALA 349;

1. (SBU) Summary: Reaction from some human rights/civil society leaders to the government's "State of Siege" declaration in the Peten has become increasingly negative despite cries from the general populace for greater security following the massacre of 27 people on a farm (ref A). Three leaders staunchly opposed the operation, convinced that it will fail to bring greater security to local citizens under assault by the Zetas, and at the same time will infringe on their rights and liberties. All three were quick to express concern that former members of the Guatemalan military with "Kaibil" (Ranger-like) training could have participated in the massacre. Despite these fears, Post has seen no evidence that the government is using the state of siege to abuse civil liberties in the Peten, nor that former military members with Kaibil training were involved in the recent massacre (although the latter is certainly possible). End Summary.

Initial Reactions to State of Siege

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2. (SBU) Reaction to the Government of Guatemala's May 16 "State of

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 REVIEW AUTHORITY: OSCAR J OLSON  
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Siege" declaration has been mixed. While initial reaction tended to be positive, negative reactions are now rolling in. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] described the declaration May 16 state of siege in the northern department of Peten as a reflection of Colom's weakness. He dismissed the operation as a "political show" (a term he also used to describe the two-month state of siege that the Government of Guatemala [GoG] implemented in Coban from December to February (ref B)), aimed at demonstrating that the governing National Unity of Hope (UNE) party is taking action to address the country's alarming security situation. Far from offering the local population protection, however, the state of siege (which allows for warrantless searches and the suspension of civil liberties) will make citizens more vulnerable to abuse by police and military authorities, [REDACTED] told Emboff. [REDACTED] claimed the May 15 massacre at the Los Cocos ranch (in which a band of Zetas reportedly looking for the farm's owner decapitated 27 of his farm hands) bore the hallmarks of a military operation - that the way in which it was carried out was strikingly similar to the modus operandi used by army forces during the armed internal conflict. [REDACTED] claimed that ultimately the state of siege is a huge misdirection of resources and will fail in terms of restoring government authority to the department. The resources being spent on this operation, [REDACTED] argued, could much more effectively be used to build the capacity of prosecutors and police to dismantle organized crime rings through effective investigation, prosecution, and convictions.

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3. (SBU) [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] noted that the Los Cocos massacre took place only kilometers from the town of Dos Erres, where in 1982 a special platoon composed of instructors from the "Kaibil" school which then existed in Poptun, Peten, and which provided Ranger-type training to the army, butchered over 250 men, women, and children in one of the internal armed conflict's most infamous massacres.

[REDACTED] was quick to charge that former Guatemalan "Kaibiles" reportedly had participated in the May 15 Zeta massacre at Los Cocos. (Note: Post has not seen any such reports. However, one former soldier who had "Kaibil" training reportedly was among the Zeta band that carried out the separate kidnapping and murder of three individuals which may have been linked to the massacre. End Note.) [REDACTED] assessment that the state of siege would only heighten the sense of terror and vulnerability of a local population already traumatized by the gruesome beheadings. It was as if the civil war was returning to the region, [REDACTED] said. Rather than using military forces in what essentially should be a police operation, the army should be used to help control Guatemala's porous borders, [REDACTED] asserted.

4. (SBU) [REDACTED]

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Defenders Organization (UDEFEQUA), expressed concern over reports that many warrantless searches are now taking place in the Peten and insisted that the "militarization" of the area was doomed to failure. Like [redacted] called for the government to put its resources into developing more effective criminal prosecutions. Rather than empowering the army, [redacted] suggested that it needs to be purged. In particular, [redacted] held, the government should eliminate the current school which provides "Kaibil" training and establish a new elite force that has no linkages to the legacy of the

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"Kaibiles" who were involved in the worse abuses of the internal armed conflict. [redacted] claimed that the current graduates of this training program continue to serve as ready recruits to drug-trafficking organizations (DTOs) today. (Note: [redacted])

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End note).

Some GoG Support

5. (SBU) [redacted]

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[redacted] noted that GAM traditionally has opposed the use of a state of siege because of the danger it presents to the exercise of human rights and liberties. The horrific massacre at Los Cocos, however, had convinced [redacted] in this case to support with conditions the president's decision to impose it: that the greater presence and activity of police and military forces in the region help to allay the fears of the local population rather than contribute to it; that the operation actually generates results in terms of arrests and convictions, and; that it leads to the permanent restoration of government authority in the department.

COMMENT

6. (SBU) Opposition from the human rights community in general to the use of a state of siege is no surprise given its deep, ingrained distrust of governmental authorities, particularly the army. Despite these fears, Post has seen no evidence to date that

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the government is using the state of siege to abuse civil liberties in the Peten, nor that former military members with Kaibil training were involved in the recent massacre (although the latter is certainly possible). It appears that the government has established much greater cooperation between the military, police, and prosecutors in the Peten than it did in the previous state of siege in Alta Verapaz. Like [ ] moreover, the general population seems to support the current police/military operation in the Peten given the demonstrated power and ruthlessness of the Zetas operating in that area. Similar concerns were raised by the human rights community during the 60-day state of siege in Coban, but no claims were presented that civil rights were abused by security forces. [ ]

[ ] a civil society group monitoring security issues, commented that the military has changed significantly since the days of the internal armed conflict and are far better trained in human rights. Representatives of [ ] another human rights organization, urged that the roles of the military and police be better defined to limit the military's authority, but they agreed that until the national civil police are better trained and equipped, military support was necessary to combat narcotrafficking.

7. (SBU) Comment continued: Public tolerance for the state of siege likely would erode if security forces abused their powers. Support for the resource allocation required to maintain the state of siege also may wane if it is seen as failing to improve security on the ground. The human rights community, in the meantime, will continue to look for evidence that demonstrates that former soldiers, particularly those with Kaibil training, are joining the ranks of the Zetas or other DTOs operating in Guatemala. Unfortunately, the human rights community has not offered practical alternative, near-term solutions for addressing the severe security problems Guatemala is facing. The USG is supporting medium- and long-term institutional strengthening, including police reform and a re-organization of the Counter Narcotics Police, through the Central America Regional Security Initiative (CARSI) and other bilateral programs, which should help the GoG move in the direction recommended by [ ] However, most security analysts believe that for the short term the GoG will have to use the military to support civilian authorities in combating DTOs because of the overall poor state of the police. Combating DTOs should be a largely civilian law enforcement problem, but Guatemala's police force is simply not up to the task yet. End Comment.

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