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C O N F I D E N T I A L PARAMARIBO 1762

JOINT STATE/DEFENSE MESSAGE

E.O. 12356: DECL: 08/24/88
TAGS: PINT, MILI, NS, US
SUBJ: POOR RICE FARMERS VS. CLUMSY SOLDIERS:
WILL THE ARMY EVER LEARN?

1. (C - ENTIRE TEXT).

2. SUMMARY: AS PART OF PROTEST OVER PRICE PAID FOR UNHUSKED RICE, A GROUP OF SMALL RICE FARMERS AND UNION MEMBERS AROUND NIEUW NICKERIE BLOCKED RUNWAY AT LOCAL AIRPORT AND ROADS LEADING TO DISTRICT CAPITAL. AT ABOUT SAME TIME, MILITARY CLAIM TO HAVE HEARD THAT FORMER SURINAMESE SOLDIER, CONSIDERED DANGEROUS POTENTIAL COUP LEADER, HAD BEEN SEEN IN NICKERIE AREA. GARRISON COMMANDER HORB TRAVELED TO NICKERIE AUGUST 17 WITH TWO ARMORED CARS AND ARMED MILITARY POLICE UNIT TO END FARMERS' ACTION AND CHECK OUT RUMOR. HORB'S BRUSQUE TREATMENT OF FARMERS' LEADER, MEMBER OF PRESIDIUM AND WHO HAD EARLIER LED HIS SMALL UNION INTO PARTICIPATION IN BOUTERSE'S NOW-DEFUNCT REVOLU-
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TIONARY FRONT, DEMONSTRATED AGAIN MILITARY'S TENDENCY TO OVER-REACT WITH FORCE IF NECESSARY TO GESTURES OF CRITICISM AND TO EARN, THEREBY, PUBLIC RESENTMENT.
END SUMMARY.

3. DURING AUG. 14-15, FEDERATION OF POOR FARMERS (FAL) ORGANIZED PROTEST IN DISTRICT OF NICKERIE OVER PRICE PAID FOR UNHUSKED RICE (PAD). PROTESTS ARE ANNUAL AFFAIR BUT WITH STORAGE FACILITIES STILL FULL OF LAST YEAR'S RICE AND NEW HARVEST ABOUT TO BE BROUGHT IN,

REVIEW AUTHORITY: Adolph Eisner, Senior Reviewer

TENSION SURROUNDING PROTESTS WAS CONSIDERABLY HIGHER THIS YEAR. FARMERS WENT BEYOND DEMONSTRATING TO ACTUALLY BLOCKADING NICKERIE AIRPORT AND MAIN ROAD TO CAPITAL. GOVERNMENT NEGOTIATING TEAM SENT OUT FROM PARAMARIBO WAS TEMPORARILY HELD HOSTAGE WHEN TALKS BECAME DEADLOCKED.

4. AT ABOUT SAME TIME, MILITARY CLAIM TO HAVE RECEIVED REPORTS OF PRESENCE IN NICKERIE OF "CERTAIN FOREIGNERS" AMONG WHOM WAS BELIEVED TO BE FORMER SOLDIER AND POTENTIAL COUP LEADER. AFTER DELIBERATING, MILITARY DETERMINED THAT GARRISON COMMANDER ROY HORB WOULD TRAVEL TO NICKERIE TO INVESTIGATE REPORTS, TO RESTORE PUBLIC ORDER AND ACCESS TO NICKERIE BY ROAD AND AIR OUT OF FEAR THAT MILITARY CAMP IN NICKERIE COULD BECOME ISOLATED. THERE WAS ALSO SUSPICION THAT FARMERS' ACTIONS MIGHT BE CONNECTED TO COUP PLAN.

5. HORB CONFRONTED PROTESTING FARMERS AT NICKERIE AIRPORT AND, BEFORE TV CAMERAS OF GOVERNMENT NEWS TEAM, READ THEM RIOT ACT IN AN EXCITED MANNER. HE DISPERSED THEM, USING HIS ARMED GUARD, AND LED THEIR LEADER AND OTHERS AWAY TO DETENTION IN PARAMARIBO.
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SHOWN ON TV FILM WAS SOME MANHANDLING BY ONE SOLDIER OF ONE OF THE PROTEST LEADERS (JIWAN SITAL) AND LEVELING OF WEAPONS BY SOLDIERS AT FARMERS. IN LATER REPLAY OF THE FILM AT HORB PRESS CONFERENCE COVERING THE INCIDENT, HORB ATTEMPTED, NOT VERY SUCCESSFULLY, TO PERSUADE AUDIENCE THAT ARMY'S ACTIONS WERE JUSTIFIED IN DEFENSE OF PUBLIC SAFETY. HE WOULD NOT GO INTO DETAILS, CLAIMING TO DO SO WOULD DISCLOSE MILITARY SECRETS.

6. IN UNRELATED BUT SIMULTANEOUS INCIDENT, MEMBERS OF DISTRICT COUNCIL OF COMMEWIJNE (JUST EAST OF PARAMARIBO) BLOCKADED FERRY CROSSING IN PROTEST OVER RECENT 100 PERCENT INCREASE IN FERRY RATES AND BRIDGE TOLLS. PROTEST AROSE AS LAST RESORT WHEN GOVERNMENT FAILED TO RESPOND TO LOCAL GRIEVANCES. MILITARY REACTED BY ARRESTING LEADER OF DISTRICT COUNCIL THEN RELEASING HIM LATER WITH PROMISE THAT HE AND POSSIBLY OTHERS WOULD BE BROUGHT BEFORE MAGISTRATE FOR "CRIMINAL ACTION". FERRY AREA WAS CLEARED WHEN ARMY THREATENED TO USE LIVE AMMUNITION IF DEMONSTRATORS DID NOT DISPERSE.

7. COMMENT: THESE EPISODES ILLUSTRATE SEVERAL ASPECTS OF CURRENT RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MILITARY AUTHORITY AND GENERAL PUBLIC:
-- A. MILITARY, PARTICULARLY HORB, ARE PREPARED TO GET TOUGH TO OPPOSE ANY CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE OR INTER-

REFERENCE WITH PUBLIC ORDER.

-- B. MILITARY ARE NOT BEYOND CONSUMING THEIR OWN CHILDREN, SO TO SPEAK. DISTRICT COUNCILS WERE CREATED BY MILITARY AS PART OF EFFORT TO ESTABLISH NEW DEMOCRATIC STRUCTURES TO REPLACE TRADITIONAL ONES. YET HORB MOVED HARSHLY AGAINST COUNCIL LEADERS, UNDERMINING THEIR AUTHORITY AND THUS THEIR UTILITY TO THE GOVERNMENT.

-- C. MILITARY ARE TOO QUICK TO TAKE MATTERS INTO THEIR OWN HANDS. LEAVING ASIDE RUMOR OF PLOTTING
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(WHICH PROVED TOTALLY UNFOUNDED -- SUSPECT ACCORDING TO DUTCH AMBASSADOR HAS NEVER LEFT HOLLAND WHERE HE NOW LIVES), INCIDENTS IN BOTH NICKERIE AND COMMEWIJNE WOULD HAVE BEEN APPROPRIATELY LEFT TO CIVILIAN POLICE.

-- D. CLUMSY HIGH-HANDEDNESS CONTINUES TO ALIENATE SECTORS OF SOCIETY WHOSE SUPPORT MILITARY BADLY NEED, IF THEY ARE EVER TO MOBILIZE NATION FOR LARGER TASKS OF SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT. SUCH BEHAVIOR FOSTERS RELUCTANCE WITHIN PUBLIC TO GIVE MILITARY LEADERS ANY GENUINE OR LASTING SUPPORT. IN THIS SPECIFIC CASE, AFFRONT WAS GIVEN TO SMALL BUT IMPORTANT GROUP OF RICE FARMERS (MOSTLY HINDUSTANI), AND TO PROMINENT LABOR LEADER (FRED DERBY OF C-47) WHO FELT OBLIGED TO SUPPORT FAL POSITION, EVEN THOUGH IN PAST HE HAS GIVEN LUKE WARM SUPPORT TO MILITARY AUTHORITY. END COMMENT. DUEMLING

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