

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 PARAMA 00517 181633Z
ACTION ARA-16

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ACDA-12 ICAE-00 SYE-00 SP-02 SPRS-02 /113 W
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C O N F I D E N T I A L PARAMARIBO 0517

E.O. 12065: GDS 03/18/88 (LA ROCHE, RICHARD R.)OR-M
TAGS:PINS PINT NS
SUBJECT: SURINAME COUP - RACIAL ASPECTS

REF: PARAMARIBO 0508

1. (C) - ENTIRE TEXT.

2. SUMMARY: AS OF MARCH 18, THE MILITARY AND POLITICAL POWER
ONCE AGAIN RESTS FIRMLY IN THE HANDS OF ARMY COMMANDER
BOUTERSE AND THE MILITARY AUTHORITY (MA). ALL THOSE BELIEVED
TO BE DIRECTLY INVOLVED IN THE COUP PLOT HAVE BEEN ARRESTED OR,
IN THE CASE OF SGT. HAWKER AND PROFESSOR OEMRAWSINGH, ARE
DEAD. THIS BRIEF CABLE IS AN ATTEMPT TO EXAMINE ONE ASPECT
OF THE COUP; THAT OF POTENTIALLY AGGRAVATED RACIAL DIVISIONS.
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 PARAMA 00517 181633Z

END SUMMARY.

3. ORIGINS OF THE COUP: FROM THE INFORMATION AVAILABLE, THE
LEADERS OF THE COUP ATTEMPT WERE INFLUENTIAL MEMBERS OF THE
HINDUSTANI COMMUNITY WITH SUPPORT FROM AMONG THE SMALL,
TIGHTLY-KNIT JAVANESE ETHNIC GROUP. IN PARTICULAR, FOUR
FORMER PARLIAMENTARIANS (PROF. OEMRAWSINGH, N. MAHADEWSING,
SALEH RASAM, SALAM SOMOHARDJO) AND SEVERAL BUSINESSMEN NOW
HAVE BEEN IMPLICATED. THIS GROUP CONSPIRED WITH EX-LT.
RAMBOCUS WHO THEN RECRUITED PREDOMINANTLY HINDUSTANI SOLDIERS

**REVIEW AUTHORITY: Leonard Kusnitz, Senior
Reviewer**

TO ASSIST IN THE PLOT. HE ALSO SET FREE FROM JAIL CERTAIN MILITARY MEN, AMONG THEM SGT. WILFRED HAWKER, WHO HAD BEEN SENTENCED AND CONFINED FOR ALLEGEDLY PLOTTING AN EARLIER COUP. IT IS RUMORED THAT TWO ATTEMPTS TO ASSASSINATE MEMBERS OF THE MA (BOUTERSE, HORB, FERNANDES) AT SEMI-PUBLIC GATHERINGS PRIOR TO MARCH 11 WERE PLANNED, BUT THE FIRST CONCRETE ACTIONS TOOK PLACE EARLY IN THE MORNING OF MARCH 11, WHEN RAMBOCUS CAPTURED MEMRE BOEKOE KASERNE. THE COUP COLLAPSED WHEN THE RAMBOCUS FORCES FAILED TO CAPTURE THE MA STRONGHOLD AT FORT ZEELANDIA AND SUPPORT FROM WITHIN THE MILITARY FAILED TO MATERIALIZE. THE CIVILIAN POPULATION STAYED SAFELY INDOORS AND LENT LITTLE HELP TO EITHER SIDE. NO INVOLVEMENT OF FOREIGN GOVERNMENTS OR GROUPS OUTSIDE SURINAME HAS YET BEEN EITHER UNCOVERED OR ALLEGED.

4. MOTIVATIONS: ATTEMPTS TO ANALYZE MOTIVES ARE ALWAYS DIFFICULT, BUT SOME GENERALIZATIONS CAN BE MADE. IN SPITE OF INITIAL, PREDICTABLE CHARACTERIZATIONS OF THE COUP-MAKERS BY THE BOUTERSE SIDE AS "RIGHTISTS" AND "REACTIONARIES," WE BELIEVE OEMRAWSINGH AND HIS COLLEAGUES WERE BASICALLY DEMOCRATS AND WERE FIGHTING FOR THE REINSTALLATION OF A DEMOCRATIC PROCESS. THE ORGANIZERS, MANY OF THEM FROM THE 'OLD POLITICAL ORDER,' HAD BEEN COMPLETELY FROZEN OUT OF THE POLITICAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 PARAMA 00517 181633Z

POWER STRUCTURE BY THE MA. (THE PRINCIPAL HINDUSTANI PARTY, VHP, HAD SERVED AS PARLIAMENTARY OPPOSITION FOR EIGHT YEARS PRIOR TO THE 1980 COUP.) THEY MAY HAVE SEEN THE RESTORATION THROUGH VIOLENCE OF AN ELECTORAL PROCESS (NEVER MIND THE LOGICAL INCONSISTENCIES) AS THEIR ONLY MEANS OF REGAINING THE MEASURE OF POWER THEY FELT THEY DESERVED. THE HINDUSTANI COMMUNITY ITSELF HAD INCREASINGLY COME TO VIEW THE BOUTERSE-LED GOVERNMENT AS ORIENTED TO SATISFYING THE NEEDS OF THE CREOLE PEOPLE TO THE DETRIMENT OF HINDUSTANIS, WHO FORM THE LARGEST ETHNIC GROUP IN THE COUNTRY. THE HINDUSTANIES FELT FURTHER THAT INCOMPETENCE AND ECONOMIC MISMANAGEMENT ON THE PART OF THE MILITARY AND ITS LEFT ADVISORS HAD ALREADY CAUSED SEVERE DAMAGE TO AN ECONOMY TO WHICH, IN THEIR OPINION, THEY ARE THE PRINCIPAL CONTRIBUTORS. (DEPARTMENT SEE PARAMARIBO CONFIDENTIAL MEMCON 1/5/82.) THE COUP EFFORT WAS, THEREFORE, LIKELY MOTIVATED BY ACUTE FRUSTRATION.

5. THE EMERGENCE OF THE RACIAL FACTOR HAS PARTICULAR SIGNIFICANCE SINCE BOUTERSE AND OTHER "REVOLUTIONARY" LEADERS HAVE REPEATEDLY SAID THAT THE OLD POLITICAL SYSTEM PERPETUATED ETHNIC DIVISIONS AND WAS THEREFORE BANKRUPT. WHETHER BY DESIGN OR NOT, MOST OF THE IMPORTANT POSITIONS IN THE MILITARY AND THE GOVERNMENT HAVE BEEN FILLED BY CREOLES. THE MA'S HANDLING OF THE INVESTIGATION OF THE COUP PLOT COULD HAVE A SIGNIFICANT EFFECT ON THE SOCIAL HARMONY WHICH BOUTERSE CLAIMS TO BE WORKING FOR. (HAWKER, A CREOLE, WAS SHOT SUMMARILY. THERE ARE NO VERIFIED REPORTS OF HUMAN

RIGHTS ABUSES IN CONNECTION WITH THE MILITARY'S HANDLING OF HINDUSTANI DETAINEES.) THERE ARE ALREADY SIGNS THAT THE HINDUSTANIS FEEL THEY ARE UNDER ATTACK AS A GROUP AND IF MORE OF THEIR COMMUNITY LEADERS ARE ARRESTED, IMPRISONED, AND/OR ABUSED, THEY ARE LIKELY TO GIVE UP HOPE IN BOUTERSE'S ABILITY TO RESTORE AND PROTECT WHAT THEY FEEL ARE THEIR LEGITIMATE INTERESTS. AT WORST, THIS HOPELESSNESS COMBINED WITH RESENTMENT COULD LEAD TO VIOLENT RACIAL CONFLICT OR MANIFESTATIONS OF CIVIL DISORDER (RECALL, FOR EXAMPLE, THE NUMEROUS

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 04 PARAMA 00517 181633Z

CASES OF ARSON WHICH OCCURRED JUST PRIOR TO INDEPENDENCE.) A LESS DRAMATIC POSSIBILITY IS THAT HINDUSTANIS MAY SIMPLY RESIST ANY ATTEMPT TO INCORPORATE THEM INTO THE "REVOLUTIONARY PROCESS," THEREBY FRUSTRATING THE MILITARY LEADERS' DECLARED EFFORT AT ACHIEVING CONSTRUCTIVE HARMONY AMONG THE RACES.

6. WHAT IS CLEAR AND DISTURBING IS THAT CONDITIONS NOW EXIST IN SURINAME FOR THE OPERATION OF A POTENTIALLY DISASTROUS SOCIAL DYNAMIC. SOME AMONG THE HINDUSTANI AND JAVANESE SET OUT TO DESTROY BOUTERSE AND FAILED. AS ONE CONSEQUENCE, THE MUTUAL DISTRUST AND DISLIKE BETWEEN THE TWO LARGEST RACIAL GROUPS (HINDUSTANI AND CREOLE), ALWAYS LATENT, HAS INTENSIFIED. UNLESS BOUTERSE HAS THE SKILL AND DETERMINATION TO CALM TEMPER AND REVERSE THIS TREND AND FURTHER, TO RELIEVE THE DEEP FRUSTRATIONS FELT BY THE HINDUSTANIS (ANY "CONCESSIONS" OF SIGNIFICANCE ARE DIFFICULT POLITICALLY BECAUSE OF LIKELY RESISTANCE FROM THE CREOLES), HE FACES THE POSSIBILITY OF FURTHER VIOLENT ATTEMPTS AT HIS OVERTHROW AND DEEPER CLEAVAGES BETWEEN THE RACES A LA GUYANA.

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