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TEXT

TAGS: PTER, ASEC, PGOV, CASC, KPRP, PE
COMBINE: COMPLETE

SUBJECT: THE MRTA UP FROM THE ASHES OF THE JAPANESE
RESIDENCE?

1. (U) CLASSIFIED BY HEATHER HODGES, CHARGE D'AFFAIRES,
EMBASSY LIMA. REASON: 1.5 (D).

2. (C) SUMMARY. ONE YEAR AFTER TAKING OVER 500 PERSONS

Dept. of State, RPS/IPS, Margaret P. Grafeld, Dir.
() Release (✓) Excise () Deny (✓) Declassify in part
Date 7/9/02 Exemption B1

Dept. of State, RPS/IPS, Margaret P. Grafeld, Dir.
() Classify as (✓) Extend as (S) Downgrade to
Date 7/9/02 Declassify on 25X1 Reason 1.5(4)

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HOSTAGE AT THE JAPANESE AMBASSADOR'S RESIDENCE, INCLUDING EIGHT U.S. OFFICIALS, THE TUPAC AMARU REVOLUTIONARY MOVEMENT (MRTA) IS STRUGGLING TO KEEP THE TERRORIST ORGANIZATION ALIVE. MRTA PROBABLY HAS FEWER THAN 100 PERSONS UNDER ARMS AND ITS MOST IMPORTANT LEADERS ARE EITHER DEAD OR BEHIND BARS. WHILE RUMORS ABOUND THAT MRTA WILL AVENGE THE GOP'S HOSTAGE RESCUE WITH AN ANNIVERSARY TERRORIST ATTACK IN LIMA, NO SPECIFIC THREAT INFORMATION EXISTS TO CORROBORATE THAT FEAR. LOCAL TERRORISM WATCHERS DO NOT BELIEVE MRTA IS CAPABLE OF A MAJOR URBAN OPERATION SIMILAR TO LAST YEAR'S HOSTAGE-TAKING OR OF A SUSTAINED VIOLENT CAMPAIGN, BUT BELIEVE THE GROUP IS STILL CAPABLE OF SMALLER, INDIVIDUAL TERRORIST ATTACKS. END SUMMARY.

ONE YEAR AGO

3. (C) MRTA'S DECEMBER 17, 1996 HOSTAGE-TAKING AT THE JAPANESE AMBASSADOR'S RESIDENCE WAS ITS MOST DAMAGING TERRORIST ACT IN ITS 13-YEAR OLD HISTORY AND CONTRASTED SHARPLY WITH THE RELATIVE WEAKNESS OF THE GROUP IN RECENT YEARS. THE ENERVATED MRTA MANAGED TO EMBARRASS THE FUJIMORI GOVERNMENT BY SEIZING OVER 500 HOSTAGES, INCLUDING EIGHT U.S. OFFICIALS AND SEVERAL DEPENDENTS, AND HOLDING ONTO 72 VIP'S, INCLUDING THE FOREIGN MINISTER, THE JAPANESE AMBASSADOR, AND SIX CONGRESSMEN, FOR OVER FOUR MONTHS. HOWEVER, THE PERUVIAN GOVERNMENT'S APRIL 22, 1997 RESCUE OPERATION, IN WHICH ONLY ONE OF THE 72 HOSTAGES DIED AND ALL 14 MRTA TERRORISTS WERE KILLED, DRAMATICALLY ENDED THE MRTA'S SHORT-LIVED EFFORTS TO EXPLOIT THE INTERNATIONAL MEDIA SPOTLIGHT.

MRTA COLUMNS HOLDING ON IN THE CENTRAL JUNGLE

4. (U) LOCAL TERRORISM WATCHERS ESTIMATE THAT IN THE WAKE OF THE HOSTAGE RESCUE THERE ARE FEWER THAN 100 ARMED MRTA MILITANTS LEFT, MOST OF WHOM MAKE UP COLUMNS THAT MOVE IN THE JUNGLES OF THE DEPARTMENTS OF JUNIN AND PASCO. MORE SPECIFICALLY, ALMOST ALL MRTA ACTIVITY AFTER THE LIMA HOSTAGE CRISIS HAS BEEN CONFINED TO THE PROVINCES OF SATIPO, CHANCHAMAYO, AND OXAPAMPA, BUT MRTA ATTACKS EVEN IN THOSE ISOLATED AREAS HAVE BEEN FEW AND FAR BETWEEN. EMBASSY LIMA REGISTERED 17 ALLEGED MRTA ATTACKS IN PERU DURING THE FIRST ELEVEN MONTHS OF 1997, COMPARED TO 22 IN ALL OF 1996 AND 24 IN ALL OF 1995. SENDERO LUMINOSO (SHINING PATH - SL), PERU'S MUCH LARGER BUT ALSO MUCH-WEAKENED TERRORIST ORGANIZATION, HAS COMMITTED ROUGHLY TEN TIMES THE NUMBER OF TERRORIST ATTACKS OVER EACH OF THE LAST THREE YEARS.

5. (U) THE MOST FREQUENT MRTA ACTIVITIES REPORTED ARE THE GROUP'S EFFORTS TO EXTORT "WAR TAXES," BUT THERE HAVE ALSO BEEN SOME INFREQUENT EXAMPLES OF MRTA CLASHES WITH SECURITY FORCES. RECENT EXAMPLES OF SUCH ENCOUNTERS INCLUDE THE

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FOLLOWING:

--- OCTOBER 25: MRTA MILITANTS FIRED ON A LOCAL JAIL IN CHANCHAMAYO, FACILITATING THE ESCAPE OF ONE MRTA TERRORIST (HE WAS LATER RECAPTURED);

--- SEPTEMBER 1: MRTA TERRORISTS OPENED FIRE AT A POLICE PATROL IN THE DISTRICT OF ALTO PINEDO BETWEEN LA MERCED AND CHANCHAMAYO PROVINCES, BUT NO INJURIES WERE REPORTED;

--- AUGUST 21: MRTA COLUMNS IN CHANCHAMAYO CONFRONTED A POLICE PATROL, KILLING ONE OFFICER.

--- MAY 10: MRTA TERRORISTS INTERCEPTED A VEHICLE TRANSPORTING THREE POLICEMEN AND TWO CIVILIANS ON THE ROAD BETWEEN LA MERCED AND SATIPO, INJURING ONE CIVILIAN.

MRTA'S LEADERSHIP VACUUM

6. (U) THE GOP'S COUNTERTERRORISM EFFORTS HAVE EFFECTIVELY DECIMATED MRTA'S LEADERSHIP. NESTOR CERPA CARTOLINI, WHO HAD BEEN MRTA'S MOST IMPORTANT LEADER OUTSIDE OF JAIL, WAS KILLED ALONG WITH THE OTHER 13 MRTA TERRORISTS DURING THE APRIL 22 HOSTAGE RESCUE. THE FACT THAT CERPA LED THE RISKY HOSTAGE-TAKING INDICATED HOW THIN MRTA'S LEADERSHIP WAS ALREADY STRETCHED EVEN BEFORE CERPA'S DEATH. MRTA'S FOUNDER, VICTOR POLAY, WAS RE-ARRESTED IN 1992 AFTER HE AND 46 OTHER MRTA TERRORISTS ESCAPED FROM A LIMA PRISON IN JULY 1990. HE IS SERVING A LIFE SENTENCE AT THE CALLAO NAVY BASE'S EIGHT-CELL, MAXIMUM SECURITY PRISON ALONGSIDE MRTA LEADERS PETER CARDENAS AND MARIA LUCERO CUMPA. FORMER MRTA SECOND-IN-COMMAND MIGUEL RINCON RINCON IS SERVING A LIFE SENTENCE AT PUNO'S YANAMAYO PENITENTIARY AFTER HE WAS CAPTURED IN 1995.

7. (SBU) THE GOP BELIEVES HUGO AVELLANEDA IS NOW THE MOST IMPORTANT MRTA LEADER AT LARGE AND IS OFFERING A REWARD OF USD 75,000 FOR INFORMATION LEADING TO HIS CAPTURE. AVELLANEDA HAD BEEN SERVING AS MRTA'S SPOKESMAN IN EUROPE, BUT PRIOR TO THE HOSTAGE CRISIS, HE TURNED OVER THE MEDIA ROLE TO ISAAC VELASCO, WENT UNDERGROUND, AND IS RUMORED TO HAVE RE-ENTERED PERU. AVELLANEDA, HOWEVER, IS WIDELY REGARDED AS AN MRTA POLITICAL STRATEGIST AND NOT AS SOMEONE CAPABLE OF SPEARHEADING MRTA TERRORIST ATTACKS IN THE WAY THAT CERPA DID. RODOLFO KLEINZ SAMANEZ, A FORMER MRTA LEADER WHO IN RECENT YEARS WAS LIVING IN NICARAGUA, IS ALSO FREQUENTLY MENTIONED BY THE MEDIA AS AN IMPORTANT MRTA LEGACY. IN A SOON-TO-BE-PUBLISHED INTERVIEW WITH A DESCO RESEARCHER, HOWEVER, KLEINZ ASSERTED THAT HE SEVERED HIS TIES WITH THE TERRORIST ORGANIZATION IN 1992.

8. (C) THE MRTA LEADERS-AT-LARGE CONFRONT A FINANCIAL CRISIS WITHIN THE ORGANIZATION AS WELL. MRTA REAPED SIZABLE RANSOMS FROM KIDNAPPINGS IN THE LATE 1980'S AND EARLY 1990'S, BUT ONLY A SMALL CIRCLE OF JAILED MRTA LEADERS, SUCH

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AS MRTA FOUNDER POLAY, REPORTEDLY HAVE ACCESS TO THE MRTA'S SECRET BANK ACCOUNTS. THE GROUP'S 1995 KIDNAPPING OF A WEALTHY BOLIVIAN BUSINESSMAN AND FORMER MINISTER IS BELIEVED TO HAVE PROVIDED FUNDS FOR THE HOSTAGE-TAKING AT THE JAPANESE AMBASSADOR'S RESIDENCE, NOT THE OLDER RANSOM PAYMENTS. AT LEAST SOME OF THE MRTA HOSTAGE-TAKERS MAY HAVE INSISTED ON WINNING THE RELEASE OF MRTA LEADERS BECAUSE THEY DESPERATELY WANTED TO TAP MRTA'S WAR CHEST. ONE MRTA TERRORIST TOLD THE CAPTIVE BOLIVIAN AMBASSADOR THAT HE BELIEVED A JAILED CHILEAN MRTA MEMBER COULD ACCESS MRTA BANK ACCOUNTS CONTAINING USD 18-20 MILLION IF HE WERE FREED.

THE REVENGE FACTOR

9. (C) MRTA WORKED FOR OVER TWO YEARS ON A FAILED STRATEGY TO TAKE AND EXCHANGE VIP HOSTAGES FOR ITS OVER 400 IMPRISONED MEMBERS. MRTA FIRST TARGETED THE PERUVIAN CONGRESS, BUT BEFORE MRTA COULD LAUNCH THAT ATTACK, THE NATIONAL POLICE CAPTURED A NUMBER OF MRTA MEMBERS AT THE GROUP'S LA MOLINA STAGING HOUSE AFTER AN ALL-NIGHT GUN BATTLE ON DECEMBER 1, 1995. THE DAY BEFORE, THE NATIONAL POLICE ARRESTED AMCIT LORI BERENSON AND CERPA'S COMMON-LAW WIFE NANCY GILVONIO AND ACCUSED THEM OF COMPLICITY IN THE MRTA CONSPIRACY TO ATTACK CONGRESS. A LITTLE OVER ONE YEAR LATER, CERPA LED THE MRTA HOSTAGE-TAKING AT THE JAPANESE AMBASSADOR'S RESIDENCE IN A SECOND BID TO WIN THE RELEASE OF IMPRISONED MRTA MEMBERS. THE GOP, HOWEVER, DID NOT CONCEDE TO RELEASING CERPA'S SHORT LIST OF PRISONERS [

AND INSTEAD, LAUNCHED THE TREMENDOUSLY SUCCESSFUL APRIL 22 RESCUE OPERATION.]

10. (C) AFTER TWO FAILED ATTEMPTS, MRTA MUST HAVE FEW ILLUSIONS THAT IT CAN WIN THE RELEASE OF ITS IMPRISONED COMRADES THROUGH A HOSTAGE-TAKING. THE MRTA'S SHORT-TERM GOAL MAY HAVE SHIFTED TO SEEKING REVENGE FOR THE APRIL 22 HOSTAGE RESCUE OPERATION IN WHICH 14 OF THEIR COMRADES DIED. MRTA'S SPOKESMAN IN EUROPE TOLD THE PRESS AFTER THE RESCUE OPERATION THAT "THIS CRIME WAS COMMITTED WITH THE CONSENT OF U.S. IMPERIALISM AND THE COMPLICITY OF THE JAPANESE GOVERNMENT." WHEN PRO-GOVERNMENT CONGRESSMAN DANIEL ESPICHAN VISITED YANAMAYO PRISON IN OCTOBER, THE MRTA INMATES REFUSED TO SPEAK WITH HIM AND INSTEAD CHANTED SLOGANS AGAINST THE HOSTAGE RESCUE. MRTA HAS RESORTED TO SELECTIVE ASSASSINATIONS TO GET REVENGE IN THE PAST. MOST NOTABLY, MRTA TERRORISTS ASSASSINATED A FORMER DEFENSE MINISTER IN LIMA IN JANUARY 1990 TO AVENGE AN APRIL 1989 BATTLE IN WHICH DOZENS OF MRTA CADRES DIED.

11. (C) NEVERTHELESS, THERE IS CURRENTLY NO SPECIFIC THREAT INFORMATION TO CORROBORATE RUMORED MRTA INTENTIONS TO COMMIT A TERRORIST ATTACK TO COMMEMORATE LAST YEAR'S HOSTAGE-TAKING AT THE JAPANESE AMBASSADOR'S RESIDENCE. THE

31

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GOP AND OTHERS INVOLVED IN THE HOSTAGE NEGOTIATIONS, HOWEVER, ARE TAKING NO CHANCES. THE GOP WILL TIGHTEN SECURITY IN LIMA AROUND THE DECEMBER 17 HOSTAGE-TAKING ANNIVERSARY. FORMER HOSTAGE NEGOTIATOR ARCHBISHOP CIPRIANI STILL HAS FULL-TIME POLICE PROTECTION ASSIGNED TO HIM. THE CANADIAN AND JAPANESE EMBASSIES, WHOSE PREVIOUS AMBASSADORS SERVED ON THE GUARANTOR COMMISSION DURING HOSTAGE NEGOTIATIONS, ARE ALSO STILL TAKING EXTRA SECURITY PRECAUTIONS. NOT SURPRISINGLY, THE JAPANESE EMBASSY CHOSE NOT TO HOST A RECEPTION THIS YEAR TO CELEBRATE THE EMPEROR'S BIRTHDAY. EMBASSY LIMA MAINTAINS PRUDENT SECURITY MEASURES COMMENSURATE WITH EXISTING TERRORISM AND CRIMINAL THREAT LEVELS.

POTENTIAL TO COMMIT INDIVIDUAL ATTACKS

12. (C) WHILE CONCEDED THEY UNDERESTIMATED MRTA'S CAPABILITIES PRIOR TO THE HOSTAGE CRISIS, PERUVIAN TERRORISM WATCHERS STILL DO NOT BELIEVE MRTA IS CURRENTLY CAPABLE OF LAUNCHING SOMETHING SIMILAR AT THE PRESENT TIME. NOR DO THEY BELIEVE MRTA HAS THE CAPABILITY OF COORDINATING SUSTAINED TERRORIST ATTACKS. IF MRTA IS TO BECOME ACTIVE AGAIN IN LIMA, THEY BELIEVE THE TERRORIST ORGANIZATION IS MORE LIKELY TO RETURN TO REVENUE-GENERATING KIDNAPPINGS, BLURRING THE LINE BETWEEN ITS "POLITICAL" AND CRIMINAL ACTIVITIES. THE TERRORIST GROUP COMMITTED AT LEAST 15 KIDNAPPINGS OF WEALTHY BUSINESSMEN IN LIMA BETWEEN 1988 AND 1993. THE LOCAL PRESS SPECULATED THAT MRTA WAS BEHIND THE DECEMBER 5 KIDNAPPING OF A PERUVIAN BANKER, BUT THE MRTA CONNECTION HAS NOT BEEN CONFIRMED.

13. (C) DESPITE THE LINGERING THREATS OF MRTA AND SENDERO LUMINOSO, THE GOP IS ONCE AGAIN SLIPPING INTO A TRIUMPHANT PUBLIC POSTURE. IN PREPARATION FOR THE HOSTAGE CRISIS ANNIVERSARY, THE GOP LAUNCHED AN EXTENSIVE PUBLIC RELATIONS CAMPAIGN TO FOCUS MEDIA AND PUBLIC ATTENTION ON THE RESCUE RATHER THAN THE MRTA ATTACK. THE MILITARY SHOWED DOMESTIC AND INTERNATIONAL REPORTERS THE MRTA HOSTAGE-TAKERS' ARSENAL ON DECEMBER 9. THE NEXT DAY, PRESIDENT FUJIMORI LED THE PRESS ON A TOUR OF THE FULL-SCALE MOCK-UP OF THE JAPANESE AMBASSADOR'S RESIDENCE THAT THE MILITARY USED TO TRAIN FOR THE HOSTAGE RESCUE OPERATION. ON DECEMBER 11, COMMANDOS REENACTED "OPERATION CHAVIN DE HUANTAR" ON THE SPECIALLY BUILT FACSIMILE OF THE HOSTAGE SITE. MORE SIGNIFICANT THAN RENEWED GOP RHETORIC ABOUT THE "DEFEAT" OF TERRORISM IN PERU, SOME MILITARY UNITS PREVIOUSLY ASSIGNED TO COMBAT TERRORISM HAVE BEEN SHIFTED TO UNITS TASKED TO PATROL THE ECUADORIAN BORDER.

COMMENT

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14. (C) MRTA DEMONSTRATED IN THE HOSTAGE CRISIS THAT EVEN A SMALL GROUP OF WELL-TRAINED, WELL-ARMED TERRORISTS COULD DO SIGNIFICANT POLITICAL DAMAGE. MRTA ALSO DEMONSTRATED, IF NOTHING ELSE, ITS LINGERING ABILITY TO SURPRISE. THE DEBILITATED GROUP, HOWEVER, OVERPLAYED ITS HAND DURING THE HOSTAGE CRISIS, AND MAY NEVER RECOVER AFTER ITS MOST IMPORTANT LEADER OUTSIDE OF JAIL AND 13 OTHER MILITANTS WERE KILLED DURING THE GOP'S SUCCESSFUL HOSTAGE RESCUE. CURRENTLY, THE REMAINING MRTA MEMBERS PROBABLY HAVE MORE MOTIVATION THAN MEANS TO AVENGE THE RESCUE OPERATION, LET ALONE REGROUP AFTER A SERIES OF SETBACKS OVER THE LAST SEVERAL YEARS. ONLY EIGHT MONTHS AFTER GRABBING INTERNATIONAL HEADLINES, THE FEEBLE AND ANACHRONISTIC MRTA IS QUICKLY RECEDING BACK INTO POLITICAL IRRELEVANCE. AT THE SAME TIME, MOST PERUVIANS, NUMBED BY 17 YEARS OF POLITICAL VIOLENCE AND ANXIOUS TO FEEL SECURE, ARE INCLINED TO TREAT THE EVENTS OF LAST YEAR AS IF THEY WERE A DISTANT MEMORY.

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16. (U) THIS REPORT IS SUBMITTED IN COMPLIANCE WITH THE POST REPORTING PLAN.

HODGES

ADMIN
END OF MESSAGE

[REDACTED]

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