

El Salvador

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TELEGRAM NUMBER 351 OF 3 FEBRUARY

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MIPT

ELECTIONS IN EL SALVADOR

1. THE AMERICANS ATTACH GREAT IMPORTANCE TO A RESPECTABLE TURN OUT BY FOREIGN OBSERVERS DURING THE FORTHCOMING ELECTIONS IN EL SALVADOR.

2. I UNDERSTAND THAT MINISTERS WILL BE CONSIDERING THIS QUESTION SOON. THERE ARE ADMITTEDLY COGENT REASONS FOR ASSUMING THAT THESE ELECTIONS WILL NOT BE FULLY REPRESENTATIVE AND I FULLY APPRECIATE THE STRENGTH OF OPPOSITION IN THE UK TO THE SENDING OF A BRITISH GROUP OF OBSERVERS. BUT TO SEND SUCH A TEAM DOES NOT COMMIT IT TO DECLARING THE ELECTIONS FREE AND FAIR: QUITE APART FROM THE FACT THAT BY REFUSING TO SEND ONE WE WOULD ESSENTIALLY GIVE THE GUERRILLAS A RIGHT TO INVALIDATE THE ELECTIONS SIMPLY THROUGH NON-PARTICIPATION, WE WOULD ALSO BE SEEN AS FAILING TO SUPPORT THE AMERICANS IN A MATTER OF REAL IMPORTANCE TO THEM.

3. AS YOU KNOW, WEST EUROPEAN ATTITUDES TOWARDS AMERICAN PROBLEMS IN THE CARIBBEAN AND CENTRAL AMERICA HAVE BEEN GENERALLY SEEN IN WASHINGTON AS OSCILLATING BETWEEN NEUTRALITY AND UNHELPFULNESS: WE OURSELVES HAVE HAD TO DISAPPOINT THE AMERICANS ON A NUMBER OF MINOR ISSUES RELATING TO OUR RELATIONS WITH CUBA (E.G. RADIO MARTI, ECGD COVER ETC): IT IS AGAINST THIS BACKGROUND THAT WE HAVE TO CONSIDER THE REQUEST FOR OBSERVERS AT THE ELECTIONS IN EL SALVADOR. ONE SOLUTION MIGHT BE TO PERSUADE THE HOUSE OF COMMONS FOREIGN AFFAIRS COMMITTEE TO UNDERTAKE THE TASK: THIS

COMMONS FOREIGN AFFAIRS COMMITTEE TO UNDERTAKE THE TASK: THIS MIGHT HAVE THE ADVANTAGE OF AVOIDING ANY AWKWARDNESS WHICH COULD BE CAUSED IF AN OFFICIAL (AS OPPOSED TO A PARLIAMENTARY) GROUP FELT OBLIGED TO CRITICIZE THE CONDUCT OF THE ELECTIONS.

4. ONE FINAL POINT: WITH A GOOD DEAL OF PRESSURE, WE PERSUADED THE LAST US ADMINISTRATION TO SEND AN OFFICIAL TEAM TO OBSERVE THE ELECTIONS IN ZIMBABWE. THIS WAS NOT A WHOLLY RISK-FREE OR UNCRITICISED MOVE ON THEIR PART, BUT THEY OBLIGED IN A MATTER OF CRUCIAL IMPORTANCE TO US. IT WOULD IN MY VIEW BE APT FOR US TO REPAY THAT GESTURE NOW AT A TIME WHEN AMERICAN POLICY IN CENTRAL AMERICA FACES SO MANY PROBLEMS.

HENDERSON

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