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C O N F I D E N T I A L LIMA 2197

E O 12386 DECL: OADR
TAGS: PTER, SHUM, PINS, PE
SUBJ: (LOU) PERUVIAN SECURITY FORCES KEEPING PRESSURE ON TERRORISTS

REFS: (A) LIMA 1913/(NOTAL); (B) LIMA 1381/(NOTAL);
(C) LIMA 1329/(NOTAL)

1. (U) THE CASUALTY FIGURES. PERUVIAN MILITARY AUTHORITIES IN THE EMERGENCY ZONE ISSUED THEIR FIRST OFFICIAL COMMUNIQUE ON THE LOSSES SUFFERED BY SENDERO LUMINOSO (SL) TERRORISTS AS A RESULT OF THE GOVERNMENT'S CURRENT STEPPED-UP OPERATIONS. COMMUNIQUE NO 56 ATTRIBUTED 54 SL DEATHS TO SECURITY FORCES IN THE THREE-DAY PERIOD FEBRUARY 22-24; COMMUNIQUE NO 55 ADDED ANOTHER EIGHT, IN THE SAME PERIOD, AT THE HANDS OF LOCAL VILLAGERS.

2. (C) NEITHER SET OF FIGURES COMES CLOSE TO CASUALTY REPORTS APPEARING IN THE PRESS, WHICH SPEAK OF SL TOLLS OF 120 PER COMBAT INCIDENT AND OF SEVERAL HUNDRED OVER A PERIOD OF DAYS. SOME SECURITY SOURCES AND GOP OFFICIALS APPARENTLY ARE PUTTING OUT THE WORD THAT THE TERRORISTS
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ARE DECISIVELY DEFEATED AND ALL THAT REMAINS IS FOR THE

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SECURITY FORCES TO MOP UP. THE RURAL POPULATION OF THE EMERGENCY ZONE, PICTURED A FEW WEEKS AGO AS SYMPATHETIC TO, OR COERCED INTO COOPERATION BY, THE SL IS NOW PORTRAYED AS EXACTING VENGEANCE ON THEIR FORMER TORMENTORS.

3. (LOU) ANOTHER ELEMENT ADDING TO THE CONFUSION OVER FIGURES IS THE GOVERNMENT'S DIFFICULTY IN IDENTIFYING SL CASUALTIES. SL COMBATANTS CUSTOMARILY CARRY NO IDENTIFICATION. GAPS IN INTELLIGENCE INFORMATION AND FORENSIC TECHNIQUES COMPLICATE THE PROBLEM. ONE TRAGIC ASPECT OF THE FIGHTING INVOLVES THE RELATIVE YOUTHFULNESS OF SOME OF THE VICTIMS. SENDERO RECRUITED ACTIVELY IN SCHOOLS THROUGHOUT THE EMERGENCY ZONE. CULTURAL PATTERNS IN THE REGION CONFER THE RESPONSIBILITIES (AND CONSEQUENCES) OF ADULTHOOD ON YOUNG PEOPLE AT MUCH EARLIER AGES THAN IN US SOCIETY, BUT FINDING 13 AND 14 YEAR OLDS IN ARMED CONFLICTS IS DISQUIETING FOR PERUVIANS TOO. THE FAR LEFT TENDS TO DOWNPLAY THE SL'S RECRUITMENT PRACTICES AND INSTEAD CONCENTRATES ON THE THEME THAT "GOVERNMENT FORCES ARE KILLING CHILDREN." GOVERNMENT SENSITIVITY ON THIS POINT CAN BE GAUGED BY APPEALS, SUCH AS THAT MADE BY PRESIDENT BELAUNDE'S WIFE TO SENDERO TO STOP THIS RECRUITMENT AND TO PARENTS OF STUDENTS IN THE EMERGENCY ZONE TO BE ALERT TO RECRUITMENT EFFORTS.

4. (U) THOUGH NOT DIRECTLY RELATED TO CASUALTIES IN THE EMERGENCY ZONE, THE REPORT OF THE SPECIAL COMMISSION NAMED TO INVESTIGATE THE DEATHS OF EIGHT PERUVIAN NEWSMEN (REF C) IS TO BE MADE PUBLIC ON MARCH 4, WITH A FULL SCALE PRESS CONFERENCE ON ITS CONTENT TO FOLLOW ON THE 5TH. DISCREET LEAKS TO THE PRESS INDICATE THAT THE

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REPORT WILL EXTEND WELL BEYOND DISCLOSURE OF KNOWN FACTS ON THE TRAGEDY AND WILL, INSTEAD, FOCUS ON THE SOCIOLOGICAL-CULTURAL BACKGROUND TO THE REGION, THE TERRORIST PHENOMENON, AND THE EFFECTIVENESS OF GOVERNMENT POLICY AND OPERATIONS IN THE ZONE.

5. (C) COMMENT: PREHAUTURE PUBLIC EXPECTATIONS OF VICTORY MAY BOOMERANG AGAINST THE GOVERNMENT IF INDEED AN UNCAPTURED AND UNREPENTANT SL TOP LEADERSHIP SURVIVES, DIGS IN, AND LIVES TO REVENGE THE FIGHT; ANOTHER MAY BE

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DO NOT BELIEVE THE GOP OR MILITARY LEADERSHIP IS
ITSELF CAUGHT UP IN THE SPIRIT OF EUPHORIA. ARMY
LEADERSHIP TELLS THE DAO THAT THEY THINK SL ENCLAVES
ARE ON THE DEFENSE BUT ARE LIKELY TO REMAIN A THREAT.
PUBLIC COMMENTS ASIDE, PRIME MINISTER SCHWALB'S
POLICY CONTINUES AS STATED IN HIS ADDRESS TO CONGRESS:
REASSERTING GOVERNMENT AUTHORITY IN THE EMERGENCY ZONE
WHILE, SIMULTANEOUSLY, ATTACKING THE REGION'S ECONOMIC
AND SOCIAL BACKWARDNESS WITH CONCERTED DEVELOPMENT
EFFORTS. END SUMMARY
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