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ACTION SS-30

RELEASE IN FULL

INFO OCT-01 ADS-00 SSO-00 /031 W
-----044955 250755Z /23

R 211429Z AUG 80
FM AMEMBASSY GEORGETOWN
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3316
INFO AMEMBASSY BRIDGETOWN

REVIEW AUTHORITY: Richard Zorn,
Senior Reviewer

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EXDIS

E.O. 12065: XDS-4 8/20/00 (ROBERTS, GEORGE B.) OR-M
TAGS: PINT, PEPR, GY
SUBJ: RODNEY DEATH -- FURTHER DEVELOPMENTS

REF: GEORGETOWN 3783

1. (S) SUMMARY: THE GUYANESE FOREIGN MINISTRY HAS YET TO PROVIDE US WITH A COPY OF THE BRITISH BOMB EXPERT'S REPORT, BUT THE DEPUTY COMMISSIONER OF POLICE HAS GIVEN US A PLAUSIBLE STORY THAT RODNEY'S DEATH COULD HAVE BEEN AN ACCIDENT. THE COMMISSIONER ADMITTED THAT RADIO FRAGMENTS HAD BEEN FOUND IN THE WRECKAGE OF RODNEY'S CAR, BUT HE SAID THEY COULD BEEN PART OF A RADIO-CONTROLLED BOMB SET OFF EITHER PURPOSELY OR PERHAPS BY A SPURIOUS SIGNAL. OTHER KNOWLEDGEABLE COMMENTATORS HAVE IMPLIED TO US THAT RODNEY'S DEATH WAS JUSTIFIABLE SELF-DEFENSE BY THE GOG SINCE HE HAD BEEN PLANNING THE VIOLENT OVERTHROW OF THE GOVERNMENT. WE BELIEVE THAT WE SHOULD CONTINUE TO PRESS FOR A COPY OF THE REPORT WHILE MAINTAINING A LOW PUBLIC PROFILE AND AVOIDING ANY SUPPORTIVE INITIATIVES TOWARD THE GOG. END SUMMARY.

2. (C) I TELEPHONED HARRY DYETT, PERMANENT SECRETARY IN THE GUYANESE MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS, AUGUST 19
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TO ASKE WHETHER HE HAD HAD ANY LUCK IN OBTAINING A COPY OF THE BRITISH BOMB EXPERT'S REPORT ON WALTER RODNEY'S DEATH FROM DEPUTY POLICE COMMISSIONER ROBERTS (REFTEL PARA. 7C). DYETT SAID THAT HE HAD SO FAR BEEN UNSUCCESSFUL.

3. (C) I THEN TOLD DYETT THAT I HAD SEEN ROBERTS MYSELF THE PREVIOUS EVENING. I HAD NOT PRESSED ROBERTS FOR THE REPORT, BUT WE HAD DISCUSSED IT. ROBERTS HAD TOLD ME THERE WERE FRAGMENTS OF AN AMERICAN RADIO IN THE WRECKAGE

OF RODNEY'S CAR. ROBERTS HAD SAID THAT IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE BOMB EXPERT'S RECOMMENDATIONS, HE WANTED TO CHECK FURTHER INTO THE OPERATING CHARACTERISTICS OF SUCH RADIOS. ROBERTS HAD TOLD ME THAT HE WOULD BE GETTING IN TOUCH WITH THE EMBASSY LATER IN THE WEEK TO ASK OUR ASSISTANCE IN OBTAINING THIS ADDITIONAL INFORMATION.

4. (C) I TOLD DYETT THAT WE UNDERSTOOD THE SUB JUDICE ASPECTS OF THE BOMB EXPERT'S REPORT SINCE DONALD RODNEY HAD BEEN CHARGED WITH A CRIME. NEVERTHELESS, I OBSERVED THAT ROBERTS SEEMED TO BE ABOUT TO TRY TO DEAL US INTO THE GAME ON HIS SIDE BUT APPEARED UNWILLING TO PROVIDE US WITH A FULL DECK. I SAID THAT IF WE WERE GIVEN THE REPORT, WE WOULD KEEP IT IN STRICT CONFIDENCE AND HANDLE IT SO THAT DONALD RODNEY'S RIGHTS WOULD BE RESPECTED.

5. (C) DYETT SAID HE WOULD SEE WHAT HE COULD DO. IN CLOSING, I MENTIONED THAT I PRESUMED THAT THE BRITISH HAD THE REPORT AND PERHAPS WE COULD GET IT FROM THEM. DYETT AGREED THAT THE BRITISH PROBABLY HAD A COPY OF THE BOMB EXPERT'S REPORT.

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6. (C) IN ADDITION TO WHAT I DISCUSSED WITH DYETT, ROBERTS COMMENTED QUITE FREELY AUGUST 18 ON THE CIRCUMSTANCES SURROUNDING RODNEY'S DEATH. HE INDICATED THAT HE WAS OF THE OPINION HAD AHD IN HIS POSSESSION A RADIO-CONTROLLED BOMB. RODNEY HAD EITHER ACCIDENTALLY OR PURPOSELY TURNED THE BOMB'S ACTIVATOR SWITCH TO THE RECEIVE POSITION. THE DEVICE HAD THEN RECEIVED EITHER A SPURIOUS OR INTENTIONAL SIGNAL SETTING IT OFF.

7. (C) ROBERTS SAID THAT HIS CRIMINAL INVESTIGATION DIVISION WAS ACTIVELY LOOKING FOR EX-SERGEANT SMITH. HE SAID THAT SMITH WAS A LONER WHOM FEW PEOPLE KNEW VERY WELL. HE HAD ALSO APPARENTLY CHANGED HIS APPEARANCE BY GROWING A BEARD AND SIDEBURNS. EVEN IF HE

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SHOULD BE APPREHENDED, IF HE COULD NOT BE POSITIVELY IDENTIFIED THE CASE AGAINST HIM WOULD EVAPORATE.

8. (C) I ASKED ROBERTS ABOUT JOAN MEVILLE/MELVIN'S HURRIED DEPARTURE FROM GUYANA FOR TORONTO VIA THE U.S. ROBERTS CLAIMED THAT HE HAD OBTAINED A LENGTHY STATEMENT FROM HER BEFORE SHE HAD LEFT. I WAS CLEAR, HOWEVER, SAID ROBERTS, THAT SHE KNEW VERY LITTLE OF SMITH AND HIS ACTIVITIES. SHE HAD, FOR EXAMPLE, CLAIMED THAT SHE WAS SMITH'S COMMON LAW WIFE OR AT LEAST FIANCEE. ROBERTS SAID THAT SHE APPARENTLY DID NOT KNOW THAT SMITH HAD HAD AT LEAST ONE OTHER FEMALE ASSOCIATE BY WHOM HE HAD HAD TWO CHILDREN.

9. (C) IN THE COURSE OF A LUNCHTIME CONVERSATION AUGUST 18 WITH GUYANESE AMBASSADOR TO WASHINGTON LAURENCE MANN, MANN INDICATED THAT RODNEY'S DEATH WAS ON BALANCE BETTER FOR GUYANA SINCE HE HAD BEEN PLANNING VIOLENT ACTION AGAINST THE GOVERNMENT. IN A DIGRESSION, MANN MAINTAINED THAT FATHER DARKE HAD BEEN KILLED A YEAR AGO AS A RESULT OF HIS OWN FOOLISHNESS (TAKING PICTURES OF THUGS ENGAGED IN STREET FIGHTING) AND THAT FORMER EDUCATION MINISTER TEEKAH AHD ACCIDENTALLY SHOT HIMSELF LAST OCTOBER WHILE ATTEMPTING TO WARD OFF AN
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ATTACK BY LOVERS LANE MUGGERS. MANN SAID THAT THE GOVERNMENT HAD HAD TO LET DR. WALTER (THE WITNESS TO TEEKAH'S DEATH) LEAVE FOR THE UNITED STATES BECAUSE SHE HAD REFUSED TO SAY ANYTHING USEFUL FOR FEAR OF DAMAGING HER REPUTATION. HE DID NOT COMMENT WHEN WE MENTIONED MELVILLE/MELVIN'S HASTY DEPARTURE.

10 (C) A LOCAL SOURCE, WHO IS WELL CONNECTED WITH BURNHAM AND HIS FAMILY, TOLD ME AUGUST 15 THAT BURNHAM WAS PREPARED TO DO PARCTICALLY ANYTHING IN ORDER TO PROTECT HIS POLITICAL POSITION. THE SOURCE SAID THAT RODNEY HAD MADE NO BONES ABOUT THE FACT THAT HE WAS

GOING TO TRY TO BRING BURNHAM DOWN.

11. (C) COMMENT: WE ARE AWARE THAT THE RODNEY INCIDENT SEEMS INSIGNIFICANT WHEN COMPARED WITH THE BLOODLETTING THAT IS GOING ON ELSEWHERE IN THE HEMISPHERE. NEVERTHELESS, IN THE GUYANESE CONTEXT, WHICH IS A PRODUCT OF THE BRITISH LEGAL AND PARLIAMENTARY TRADITION, RODNEY'S DEATH REPRESENTS A SERIOUS CHANGE FOR THE WORSE IN THE POLITICAL CLIMATE (CF. MAKEPEACE RICHMOND'S COMMENT TO ME ON MARCH 18, 1980 -- GEORGETOWN 1305, PARA. 12).

12. (S) ROBERTS' APPROACH TO THE RODNEY CASE IS PLAUSIBLE. HE IS, HOWEVER, KNOWN FOR HIS LOYALTY TO BURNHAM. DESPITE THE EMBASSY'S OPINIONS (GEORGETOWN 3783), IT MAY BE IMPOSSIBLE TO OBTAIN CONCLUSIVE PROFF THAT RODNEY'S DEATH WAS NOT AN ACCIDENT, PARTICULARLY IF SMITH CANNOT BE FOUND, OR IF ONCE FOUND HE CANNOT BE IDENTIFIED.

13. (S) ROBERTS HAS NOW FREELY TOLD US ABOUT THE PORTIONS OF THE BOMB EXPERT'S REPORT WHICH INTEREST
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US (THE PRESENCE OF RADIO FRAGMENTS IN THE WRECKAGE OF RODNEY'S CAR), AND WE HAVE NOW RECEIVED A POUCHED COPY OF THE REPORT FROM LONDON. WE ARE THUS IN A BETTER POSITION TO DRAFT A USEFUL HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT. NEVERTHELESS, WE THINK WE SHOULD CONTINUE TO PRESS THE FOREIGN MINISTRY FOR A COPY OF THE REPORT IN ORDER TO DEST WHETHER THEY THINK THEY HAVE SOMETHING TO HIDE. IN THE MEANTIME, WE BELIEVE WE SHOUD CONTINUE WITH OUR LOW PROFILE POLICY AND OUR AVOIDANCE OF NEW INITIATIVES WHICH MIGHT BE INTERPRETED AS SUPPORTIVE OF THE GOG.

14. (U) MOST OF THIS IS SIMPLY FOR THE RECORD. WE ARE REPEATING IT TO BRIDGETOWN BECAUSE WE HAVE THE IMPRESSION EASTERN CARIBBEAN MEDIA CONTINUE TO BE INTERESTED IN THE RODNEY CASE.)
ROBERTS

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