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Deborah Tyroler

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Salvadoran Rebel Offensive & Related Developments: Summary Of Events & Statements, Tuesday- wednesday, Nov. 21-22

by Deborah Tyroler

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According to AP, fighting broke out in San Salvador on the northern side, and on the slopes of the nearby volcano. Early Tuesday morning, fighting took place in the western sector of the city. Somewhat later, blasts resounded throughout the city. Foreign reporters said the blasts appeared to come from the direction of the Merliot suburb of from the slopes of the San Salvador volcano to the northwest. Briton Paul Iredale, 38, chief regional correspondent for British news agency Reuters, was hit in a shoulder by three pieces of shrapnel during the fighting in Escalon. Doctors said his life was not in danger. In Washington, the Organization of American States called an emergency session of its permanent council to discuss the volatile situation in El Salvador later Tuesday. In San Francisco, California, demonstrators demanding a halt to US military aid to El Salvador surrounded a federal government building. Police said they had arrested 131 protesters. Salvadoran officials cited by AP said the rebels had blown up seven of the country's 16 main power lines along with about 40 towers and other equipment. Of the 16 lay workers arrested at an Episcopal church on Monday, 13 remained under arrest on Tuesday. Rebels initiated a surprise move in San Salvador's wealthiest neighborhood, Escalon, taking over a portion of the luxury Sheraton Hotel. According to Radio Venceremos, fighting also took place in San Benito, adjacent to Escalon, among other areas in the capital, and in the town of El Manguito, Usulután department. According to AFP, on Monday it appeared that the FMLN rebels were retreating from the capital to strongholds in the interior, and thousands of residents returned to work. Before dawn Tuesday, the rebels came down from the slopes of the volcano to launch an attack on Escalon. Many embassies are located in Escalon, as well as the homes of government and military officials, including the president. AFP said military helicopters pounded guerrilla positions in Escalon with heavy machineguns and thick columns of smoke billowed up as the army attacked with artillery. Witnesses said a number of houses were blazing as the fighting went on around some 30 blocks and the army used tanks and armored vehicles to plow through barricades the guerrillas threw up across access roads. Six helicopters flew over the luxurious homes and tennis club around the hotel, and hundreds of soldiers advanced slowly from corner to corner. They were frequently pinned down by guerrilla fire. The army moved several tanks into the neighborhood. Sheraton Hotel takeover The rebels held a part of the Sheraton Hotel complex known as the VIP Tower. Hotel executives and others, including Organization of American States Secretary General Joao Baena Soares, were holed up in an administrative office in the main building. Baena Soares was not in the VIP Tower, nor was he ever held hostage by the rebels. Napoleon Diaz, the Sheraton's marketing manager, told AFP that 80 persons occupying the hotel's main tower, including Baena Soares, had been evacuated by the army at around noon. He said armed US citizens had participated in shooting in the VIP Tower. * Four US military advisers, and one from Colombia and another from Guatemala, were reported captured by the FMLN. In Mexico City, FMLN spokesperson Antonio Hernandez said, "They are considered prisoners, but we will respect their lives and they will not be harmed." Hernandez said that earlier the rebels had asked the government to permit a Red Cross team to come to the hotel and evacuate guests, aside

from the military advisers. In a broadcast on Radio Venceremos, the rebels guaranteed the physical safety of all foreigners, including the captured US advisers who they said had put up a fight and three Guatemalans and a Chilean, also captured during the attack on the hotel. * AP reported that 29 other people, mostly foreigners, were held by the guerrillas. * White House spokesperson Marlin Fitzwater said no options, including military ones, were being ruled out "to protect American lives" at the hotel. State Department spokesperson Margaret Tutwiler said the rebels are "terrorists, pure and simple" and ruled out negotiations with them. She said about a dozen of the rebels had entered the Sheraton shortly before dawn. They were later reinforced by up to 150 guerrillas, some of them as snipers in the area. Tutwiler said the Salvadoran army had surrounded the hotel, and described the situation as "very fluid and dangerous." The State Department issued a travel advisory, and suggested that all US citizens in El Salvador should leave the country. * Later Tuesday, AP reported that dozens of foreigners had been trapped in the hotel at some point during the day, including eight US Green Berets. Both NBC and CBS television reported Tuesday night that all US citizens, including military personnel, were evacuated unharmed. The reports were attributed to the US Embassy but the reports were refuted late Tuesday by the Red Cross and sources at the scene. Red Cross spokesperson Marie Aude Lude said 17 people had been evacuated safely in the early evening but that it appeared no US military personnel or guerrillas were among those evacuated. AP cited "knowledgeable diplomatic sources" who requested anonymity as saying that the eight Green Berets from Fort Bragg, NC, would spend the night inside in the hotel. State Department sources said Tuesday night that many of the guests trapped in the Sheraton Hotel, including US citizens, had been allowed to leave the building in the custody of the Red Cross. * The AP reached the occupied sector of the tower and were told the heavily armed US soldiers were barricaded in one or two rooms and controlled the fourth floor hallway. They told reporters they had fired no shots and would not fire unless fired upon. One of US soldiers said that he and his companions were not hostages, but could not safely leave. AP said there were six men in civilian dress, who did not identify themselves as US military advisers but carried M-16 rifles, and spoke of having been in Vietnam and of the rules of engagement for US military advisers. They were barricaded behind mattresses and furniture at one end of the fourth floor hall of the VIP Tower. * AP reported that more than 200 soldiers occupied the streets of Escalon. Private guards at many of the luxurious mansions nearby added additional risk to those foolish enough to walk the streets. A plane armed with rockets and machine guns made several passes over the hotel and fired at least six rockets. The rockets landed about 200 yards from the Sheraton in a ravine alongside the hotel. Dozens of poor people fled the community of shacks along the ravine. * On Tuesday night, an unidentified source told AP that it was unclear whether the guerrillas had slipped out of the hotel, or were still inside. He added that the rebels may have left behind mines or booby-traps. The hotel manager told the AP by telephone there was still sporadic firing around the building. AP cited a US source who said the military men trapped in the hotel were not part of the 55-member US military adviser group, but were on a two-week training mission and had been due to leave Tuesday. The source, who requested anonymity, would not say how large the group was, where it was based in the US or its specific mission. * Early Wednesday morning, AP reported that "diplomatic sources" said the eight Green Berets remained in the hotel throughout the night. Col. Carlos Aviles, a military spokesperson, had said Salvadoran troops would fight their way in if necessary to rescue the soldiers, but that the guerrillas would probably be gone by daylight. According to AP, it was not clear if the rebels had intended to seize the annex, since their numbers were inadequate to take control of the sprawling hotel complex. The eight Green Berets were the only foreigners remaining in the hotel annex early Wednesday. AP said the soldiers were apparently waiting for the rebels to

slip away under cover of darkness. The 15 to 20 rebels, said the Green Berets, had apparently slipped out of the hotel before dawn, managing to pass through a cordon of Salvadoran soldiers. Reporters who went through the third and fifth floors of the hotel where the rebels were on Tuesday found none Wednesday. The US soldiers told the reporters who tried to approach them: "Get out, leave."

* Later on Wednesday, an unidentified senior Bush administration official was cited by AP as saying that the 12 US military personnel were safe and had left the building. An AP correspondent in San Salvador said she saw nine soldiers run in a crouched position, carrying M-16 rifles with grenades on their belts, from the main hotel building to waiting police pickup trucks that sped off with them. * President Bush said Wednesday that a unit of the US Army's elite Delta Force commandos was sent to El Salvador and "liberated" the hotel from rebels without a shot. According to AP, "it appeared the rebels had left the hotel before the US special operations force arrived." According to AP, three bodies were lying in one street, dozens of telephone poles were toppled and thousands of bullet holes were in the hotel. (Basic data from several reports by AP, 11/21/89, 11/22/89; AFP, Notimex, Radio Venceremos, 11/21/89)

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