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FM AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1273
SECDEF WASHDC IMMEDIATE
INFO AMEMBASSY ASUNCION
AMEMBASSY BRASILIA
AMEMBASSY LA PAZ
AMEMBASSY MONTEVIDEO
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USCINCSO QUARRY HEIGHTS PN
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BUENOS AIRES 00983

CINCSO AND CINCLANT ALSO FOR INTAFF

E.O. 12356 DECL: OADR
TAGS: PGOV, PREL, MARR, NU, AR
SUBJECT: LA TABLADA: SOME REFLECTIONS

1. CONFIDENTIAL - ENTIRE TEXT.
 2. THE EVENTS OF JANUARY 23 AT LA TABLADA TOOK ARGENTINA BY ABSOLUTE SURPRISE. THAT IS NOT TO SAY THAT INTELLIGENCE SERVICES AND OTHERS HAD NO NOTION THAT GROUPS WITH PROPENSITY FOR VIOLENCE EXISTED ON EXTREME LEFT. BUT NO ONE ANTICIPATED A STRIKE OF THIS NATURE AT THIS
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TIME. ONLY FEW WEEKS AGO, MTP LEADERS BANOS AND PROVENCANO GAVE A PRESS CONFERENCE CLAIMING THAT PERONIST PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE MENEM HAD MET ON CLANDESTINE BASIS WITH SEINELDIN AND

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LABOR LEADER LORENZO MIGUEL. CLEAR IMPLICATION WAS THAT MENEM WAS SOMEHOW CONSPIRING WITH SEINELDIN. WHETHER UCR LEADERS HAD ANYTHING TO DO WITH PROMOTING ACCUSATION OR NOT THEY CERTAINLY PROMOTED DISSEMINATION OF MTP'S ALLEGATION. PERMITTING THE MTP A FORUM OF THIS NATURE LENT SOME CREDIBILITY TO GROUP AS A PLAYER, ALBEIT AN INSIGNIFICANT ONE, IN THE DEMOCRATIC PROCESS.

3. THE MTP WAS FOUNDED IN 1985 WITH A FAR LEFT BUT DEMOCRATIC ORIENTATION. ACCORDING TO WHAT WE HAVE LEARNED, IT UNDERWENT A TRANSFORMATION OF SORTS IN 1987 WHEN A DECISION WAS MADE TO TAKE ON LEGAL DEFENSE/REPRESENTATION OF FORMER ERP LEADER GORRIARAN MERLO. MERLO, A CONFIRMED AND UNREPENTENT REVOLUTIONARY, BECAME LEADER OF THE GROUP. A NUMBER OF MTP MEMBERS RESIGNED FROM THE GROUP BECAUSE OF ITS NEW ORIENTATION AND OVER PAST SEVERAL DAYS ISSUED STRONG DENUNCIATIONS OF THE ATTACK AT LA TABLADA.

4. MAJOR ELEMENTS OF UNCERTAINTY REMAIN THE MOTIVES FOR AND OBJECTIVES OF THE LA TABLADA ATTACK. WITH INITIAL ARRAIGNMENTS AND JUDICIAL INTERROGATIONS NOW COMPLETE, GOA MAY KNOW MORE TODAY THAN IT DID LAST FRIDAY, BUT OUR CONTACTS CONTINUE TO REFLECT PERPLEXITY. NO EXPLANATION SEEMS TO MAKE ADEQUATE SENSE. THE
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HIT-AND-RUN SCENARIO, WHICH MANY CONTINUED TO CONSIDER MOST LOGICAL AS OF LATE LAST WEEK, IS FULL OF ILLOGICAL ELEMENTS. ATTEMPTING TO BLAME SEINELDIN OR RICO GROUPS WAS A SUBTERFUGE WHICH COULD NOT HAVE WITHSTOOD TWO HOURS OF TELEPHONE CALLS AND ANALYSIS. NO ONE IN ARMY WOULD HAVE BELIEVED EITHER RICO OR SEINELDIN GROUPS CAPABLE OF USING WOMEN OR SHOOTING CONSCRIPTS ON THEIR WAY INTO BASE. TERRORISTS CLEARLY WERE NOT INTENDING TO STEAL A GREAT DEAL OF ARMS FROM LA TABLADA. THEY DID NOT HAVE EXTRA VEHICLES WITH THEM TO CARRY AWAY ANYTHING IMPORTANT. SIMILARLY, THE IDEA THAT THIS RELATIVELY SMALL GROUP COULD HOLD THEIR POSITION OR SUCCESSFULLY ENGAGE IN FIXED COMBAT WITH SECURITY FORCES WHILE POPULAR RESISTANCE AND SUPPORT DEVELOPED IS PREPOSTEROUS. THE FAR LEFT

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SIMPLY DOES NOT HAVE THAT KIND OF SUPPORT IN ARGENTINA. INSTEAD OF DIVIDING SOCIETY, OR EVEN THE ARMY, IT BROUGHT EVERYONE TOGETHER, AT LEAST ON JANUARY 23.

5. ANOTHER HIGHLY SIGNIFICANT UNANSWERED QUESTION INVOLVES THE EXTENT OF SUBVERSIVE GROUPS OF EXTREME LEFT AND THEIR INFRASTRUCTURE IN ARGENTINA. MILITARY AND CONSERVATIVE SECTORS ARE PUTTING OUT THE WORD THAT LA TABLADA WAS TIP OF AN ICEBERG. THEY CITE NEED FOR AN AMPLE SUPPORT BASE FOR LA TABLADA TYPE OPERATION, THE FACT THAT GORRIARAN MERLO HAS NOT BEEN APPREHENDED AND THAT A SUBSTANTIAL NUMBER OF TERRORIST COMBATANTS EVIDENTLY ESCAPED DURING NIGHT OF JANUARY 23/24. IT SUITS MILITARY'S PURPOSES TO DRAMATIZE THE THREAT, PARTLY TO VINDICATE

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 02 OF 03 BUENOS AIRES 00983

CINCSO AND CINCLANT ALSO FOR INTAFF

E.O. 12356 DECL: OADR
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FEARS OF LURKING LEFT WING SUBVERSION
THEY HAVE ALLUDED TO ALL ALONG, AND PARTLY TO
BUTRESS DEMANDS FOR AN INTERNAL SECURITY LAW,
OR A MODIFICATION IN DEFENSE LAW, WHICH WOULD
GIVE MILITARY SOME STRUCTURED ROLE IN DEALING
WITH DOMESTIC SUBVERSIVE MENACE. CERTAIN
SECTORS OF GOVERNMENT, SUCH AS MINISTER OF
INTERIOR NOSIGLIA, FOR EXAMPLE, APPEAR TO HAVE
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AN INTEREST IN PROJECTING IMAGE THAT LA TABLADA
WAS ESSENTIALLY A ONE SHOT PHENOMENON. THE
GOVERNMENT DOES NOT WISH TO AUGMENT ALREADY
EXISTING NOTION THAT IT WAS INCOMPETENT IN
NOT DETECTING LA TABLADA BEFORE IT HAPPENED,
BY GIVING IMPRESSION THAT EXTREMIST LEFT HAS
BUILT A MAJOR NETWORK HERE UNDETECTED BY
AUTHORITIES. FURTHERMORE, GOA DOES NOT WISH
TO BECOME FURTHER VULNERABLE TO MILITARY
PRESSURES. SOME OF TRUTH MAY EMERGE FROM
INVESTIGATIVE/INTERROGATION PROCESS.

6. LA TABLADA HAS PROBABLY HAD A POSITIVE EFFECT ON
CIVILIAN-MILITARY RELATIONS, AT LEAST INITIALLY. ONCE
IT WAS KNOWN THAT THE PERPETRATORS WERE FAR LEFT, THE
ARMY UNITED IN CONDUCTING THE REPRESSIVE ACTION.
INDIVIDUALS WITH WAR PAINT (CARAPINTADAS), CHARACTERISTIC
OF RICO AND SEINELDIN REBELLIONS, PARTICIPATED.
THE NEED TO FOCUS ON THE EXTREMIST THREAT HAS, AT LEAST

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TO SOME EXTENT, DIVERTED ATTENTION FROM INTERNECINE CONFLICTS IN ARMY AND PLACED DISPUTES BETWEEN THE INSTITUTION AND GOVERNMENT ON SEMI-BACK BURNER. THE GOA TOOK ADVANTAGE OF SITUATION TO PUT OUT REPORTS OF A PLANNED USDOL FOUR BILLION FORCE MODERNIZATION PROGRAM OVER NEXT FIVE YEARS (SEPTEL). WHILE FAR FROM FRUITION, PLAN SENDS MESSAGE TO MILITARY THAT ITS DEMANDS ARE BEING HEARD. IN IMMEDIATE AFTERMATH OF AN IMPORTANT EXTREMIST EPISODE, VOICES OF CRITICS OF SUCH A REALLOCATION OF RESOURCES ARE MUTED. BY MOVING SWIFTLY TO CREATE A NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL, ALFONSIN WAS ABLE TO GIVE A STRUCTURED ROLE TO THE MILITARY IN FIGHT AGAINST SUBVERSION DESPITE PROVISION OF DEFENSE LAW. THIS WILL NOT SATISFY THOSE WHO HAVE ALWAYS MAINTAINED CONFIDENTIAL

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THAT ALFONSIN ADMINISTRATION CONSCIOUSLY AND WILLFULLY IGNORED THREAT FROM EXTREMIST LEFT, WHILE EMASCULATING MILITARY. AT LEAST IT WILL BE SEEN AS A STEP IN RIGHT DIRECTION. SECRETARY OF NEW NSC, RECENTLY RETIRED ADMIRAL BARRY HUSSEY, IS HIGHLY REGARDED AS A PROFESSIONAL THROUGHOUT ARMED FORCES.

7. THE CRISIS TOOK ON AN UNEXPECTED AND SERIOUS POLITICAL DIMENSION WHEN MENEM VIRTUALLY ACCUSED GOVERNMENT OF COMPLICITY IN THE LA TABLADA ATTACK. CHARACTERISTICALLY, HE SUBSEQUENTLY CLARIFIED AND, IN SO DOING, ALTERED HIS ORIGINAL CHARGES. GOVERNMENT, NONETHELESS, RESPONDED WITH ANOTHER STREAM OF INSULTS. MENEM WAS IN ESSENCE SMARTING FROM WHAT HE STILL BELIEVES WAS UCR MANIPULATION OF AN MTP ALLEGATION THAT HE HAD MET WITH SEINELDIN AND MIGUEL SECRETLY, PRESUMABLY TO CONSPIRE. IN LEVYING HIS OWN CHARGE, MENEM WAS OBVIOUSLY TRYING TO STICK ONE IN THE GOVERNMENT'S EAR TO RETALIATE. THERE IS, IN FACT, AN OUTSTANDING QUESTION ABOUT POSSIBLE ROLE OF AN ADVISOR TO PRESIDENCY SECRETARY GENERAL BECERRA, WHO IS BELIEVED TO HAVE MTP CONNECTIONS. WE UNDERSTAND, HOWEVER, THAT THIS INDIVIDUAL WAS ASSOCIATED WITH MTP PRIOR TO 1987 SCHISM. THE DECIBEL LEVEL OF THE MUTUAL ACCUSATIONS WAS SO HIGH BY END OF LAST WEEK THAT FEELERS ARE NOW OUT TO TRY AND TONE IT DOWN. ONE OF MENEM'S ADVISORS TOLD US BY PHONE JANUARY 30 THAT MENEM IS WILLING AS LONG AS UCR GOES ALONG. AS OF NOW, NEITHER PARTY HAS EXTRACTED CLEAR POLITICAL ADVANTAGE FROM LA TABLADA.

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8. THE ARGENTINE FAR LEFT HAS COME OUT OF THIS POORLY. THE "UNITED LEFT" PRESIDENTIAL SLATE

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SUBJECT: LA TABLADA: SOME REFLECTIONS

WILL HAVE A HARD TIME RECRUITING SUPPORTERS. MOST LEFTIST ACTIVISTS WILL BE DIVING FOR COVER IN WEEKS AHEAD. THE LEFT WING HUMAN RIGHTS GROUP HAVE ALSO BEEN ADVERSELY AFFECTED. BANOS' CONNECTIONS TO THEM AND STATEMENTS BY MOTHERS OF PLAZA DE MAYO HAVE BEEN EXTREMELY POORLY RECEIVED BY GENERAL PUBLIC (SEPTEL).

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9. THE ADMINISTRATION IS BEING SOMEWHAT CIRCUMSPECT ABOUT THE NICARAGUAN CONNECTION. ONE EXPLANATION, WE BELIEVE, IS THAT IT IS STILL MARSHALLING FACTS. GORRIAMRAN MERLO'S CONNECTIONS TO TOMAS BORGE ARE DEFINITELY KNOWN, BUT SOME MEDIA REPORTS SUGGEST THESE TIES MIGHT HAVE BEEN BY AND LARGE BROKEN OFF SOME TIME AGO. OTHERS TAKE POSITION THAT TIES ARE CURRENT. SIMILARLY, ALTHOUGH NOSTIGLIA IDENTIFIED TO US SPECIFIC INDIVIDUALS WHO HAD SERVED IN SANDINISTA ARMY, HE DID NOT SAY WHEN. IT WILL NOT BE EASY FOR GOA TO TAKE STEPS REGARDING NICARAGUA WHICH APPEAR TO BE IN ORDER. CAPUTO WILL NEED TO ADMIT THAT HIS VIRTUAL APPEASEMENT POLICY FAILED. DESPITE EFFORT TO CULTIVATE CUBA AND SANDINISTAS, INTERNATIONAL COMMUNIST SUBVERSIVES ATTACKED ARGENTINA ANYWAY. WE PRESUME THAT DEBATE OVER HOW TO PROCEED IS TAKING PLACE AT TOP LEVELS OF ADMINISTRATION. WHEN HE RETURNS, PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE ANGELOZ WILL ALMOST CERTAINLY WEIGH IN FAVORING A HARD LINE.

10. UNTIL JANUARY 23, ARGENTINES WERE INTERNATIONALLY PERCEIVED AS A COUNTRY WITH SIGNIFICANT ECONOMIC PROBLEMS, AN UNCERTAIN POLITICAL/ELECTORAL FUTURE AND A LOOMING MILITARY THREAT. UNLIKE MANY SOUTH AMERICAN COUNTRIES, IT WAS NOT CONSIDERED A COUNTRY ENDANGERED BY SIGNIFICANT TERRORIST VIOLENCE. LA TABLADA CHANGED THAT. GIVEN UNCERTAINTIES WHICH REMAIN, THE SPECTER OF TERRORISM IS STILL ANOTHER NEGATIVE FACTOR DOMESTIC AND FOREIGN INVESTORS WILL HENCEFORTH BE TAKING INTO ACCOUNT.

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