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ACTION SS-25

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FM AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8776

089237 (A) PROJECT (S200000044)
U.S. DEPT. OF STATE, A/RPS/IPS
Margaret P. Grafeld, Director
 Release Excise Deny
Exemption(s): _____
Declassify: In Part In Full
 Classify as ___ Extend as ___ Downgrade to ___
Date _____ Declassify on _____ Reason _____

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DECAPTIONED

E.O. 11652: XGDS-2
TAGS: PFOR, PINT, AR
SUBJECT: ADMIRAL MASSERA AGAIN TALKS OF DIVISIONS WITHIN ARMED FORCES

1. ON EVENING JANUARY 25, ACCOMPANIED BY POLITICAL COUNSELOR, I CALLED ON ADMIRAL MASSERA AT HIS REQUEST AT NAVAL HEADQUARTERS. MASSERA OPENED CONVERSATION BY ASKING HOW I SAW U. S.-ARGENTINE RELATIONS DEVELOPING. I ANSWERED FRANKLY THAT HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUE REMAINED A SERIOUS PROBLEM AND THAT UNLESS GOA TOOK MORE ENERGETIC ACTION TO IMPROVE SITUATION I COULD SEE DETERIORATING RELATIONS WITH USG IN THE FUTURE. I POINTED TO RECENT STATEMENTS IN CONGRESS AND TO POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS IL TRANSFER OF F-86'S TO URUGUAY AS TELLTALE SIGNS OF TROUBLES IN OUR RELATIONSHIP.

2. ADMIRAL MASSERA SAID HE BELIEVED THE HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION HAD IMPROVED SOMEWHAT AND THAT, IN ANY EVENT, THE MAGNITUDE OF THE PROBLEM WAS MUCH EXAGGERATED. HE ADMITTED, HOWEVER, THAT THERE DEFINITELY IS A PROBLEM. HE THEN RETURNED TO A FAVORITE THEME BY SAYING HE DID NOT BELIEVE THE PROBLEM COULD BE EFFEC-TIVELY ADDRESSED UNTIL THERE IS UNITY WITHIN AND A STRONG COMMAND OVER THE ARMY. INDEED, HE SAID, MOST OF THE PROBLEMS THAT THE CURRENT GOVERNMENT IS EXPERIENCING STEM FROM VIDELA'S LACK OF LEADERSHIP AND THE RESULTANT DISUNITY AND FRAGMENTATION WITHIN THE ARMY. IMPORTANT DECISIONS ARE POSTPONED OR FORGOT-

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TEN BECAUSE THE ARMY DOES NOT KNOW WHAT IT WANTS TO DO AND VIDELA DOES NOT HAVE THE STRENGTH OF LEADERSHIP TO POINT THE WAY. BY WAY OF ILLUSTRATION, MASSERA NOTED THAT EX-GOVERNOR ROMERO IS STILL HELD PRISONER IN CORRIENTES ALTHOUGH THERE ARE NO SERIOUS ACCUSATIONS AGAINST HIM. MASSERA CLAIMED VIDELA HAD CALLED GENERAL GALTIERI (COMMANDING II CORPS) TO ORDER ROMERO'S RELEASE, BUT, ACCORDING TO MASSERA, GALTIERI HAD REPLIED HE UNABLE TO EFFECT RELEASE OF ROMERO BECAUSE LATTER BEING HELD BY COLONEL IN CHARGE OF SECURITY IN CORRIENTES PROVINCE, AND HE COULD NOT INTERFERE. INTERESTINGLY, (MASSERA ALSO ILLUSTRATED POINT BY SAYING GOA HAD KNOWN PERFECTLY WELL WHO WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR MASSACRE AT PILAR. HE HAD, HE ASSERTED, SUGGESTED TO VIDELA THAT THOSE RESPONSIBLE SHOULD BE TRIED AND SHOT AS AN OBJECT LESSON, BUT CIDELA, RUNNING INTO OPPOSITION FROM SOME OF HIS GENERALS, HAD REFUSED AND HAD BEEN BACKED BY AGOSTI IN DECISION TO DO NOTHING.

3. MASSERA COMPLAINED THAT INTERNATIONAL PRESS DEPICTS NAVY AS HARD-LINE. THIS, HE SAID, SIMPLY IS NOT TRUE. BOTH NAVY AND ITS COMMANDER FAVOR MORE ENERGETIC EFFORTS TO ASSURE RESPECT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS. THE PROBLEM IS WITH THE ARMY, NOT THE NAVY. MASSERA ACKNOWLEDGED THAT VIDELA HIMSELF IS A MODERATE. BUT SINCE HE CANNOT CONTROL THE FEW EXTREME HARDLINERS IN HIS OWN SERVICE, RESULT IS TO GIVE THEM FREE HAND IN COMMITTING EXCESSES IN NAME OF THE ARMY.

4. MASSERA WENT ON TO SAY SENIOR GENERAL WERE FED UP WITH ARMY CHIEF OF STAFF VIOLA AND THAT HE EXPECTED MOVE WITHIN THE ARMY TO OUST VIOLA WITHIN THE NEXT 60 DAYS. THRUST WOULD BE AGAINST VIOLA, BUT IF VIDELA TRIED TO SAVE HIS CHIEF OF STAFF, HE, TOO, WOULD BE SWEEP ASIDE. MASSERA SAID THAT IN LATTER INSTANCE ANOTHER ARMY GENERAL WOULD PROBABLY HAVE TO REPLACE VIDELA, AND HE MENTIONED GENERALS SUAREZ MASON AND DIAZ BESSONE AS POSSIBILITIES. GENERAL GALTIERI ALSO HAS SAME FOLLOWING. MASSERA SPOKE DISPARANGINGLY OF GENERAL RIVEROS AS SOMEONE WHO IS ALL TALK ("BLA-BLA," SAID MASSERA, WAGGLING HIS HAND IN

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FRONT OF HIS MOUTH). SURPRISINGLY (SINCE IT IS DIFFICULT TO SEE THAT EITHER SUAREZ MASON OR DIAZ BESSONE WOULD BE ANY MORE INTERESTED THAN VIDELA IN STRENGTHENING THE JUNTA AT THE EXPENSE OF THE PRESIDENCY), MASSERA MENTIONED POSSIBLE RESTRUC-TURING OF THE GOVERNMENT IN THE WAKE OF ANY SUCH CHANGE. THERE

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WAS NOW DISCUSSION, HE SAID, OF HAVING JUNTA REMAIN AS SUPREME EXECUTIVE AUTHORITY BUT TO HAVE RETIRED MILITARY FIGURE APPOINTED AS PRESIDENT OR PRIME MINISTER TO SERVE UNDER THE JUNTA. THIS "FOURTH FIGURE" WOULD NOT BE MEMBER OF THE JUNTA AND WOULD CARRY OUR LATTER'S DECISIONS.

5. MASSERA ASKED HOW USG WOULD VIEW CHANGE OF GOVERNMENT IN ARGENTINA. I REPLIED THAT OUR VIEW WAS NOT REALLY GERMANE SINCE THIS WAS STRICTLY AN INTERNAL MATTER FOR ARGENTINES TEMSELVES TO DECIDE. I NOTED, HOWEVER, THAT I HAD ALREADY INDICATED THE POSSIBILITY OF GROWING PROBLEMS BETWEEN THE TWO GOVERNMENTS OVER THE ISSUE OF HUMAN RIGHTS; HENCE, LOGIC SUGGESTED THAT A GOVERNMENT WHICH TOOK A HARDER LINE THAN THE PRESENT ONE WAS EVEN MORE LIKELY TO HAVE PROBLEMS WITH USG.

6. MASSERA REPLIED QUICKLY THAT NEW GOVERNMENT WOULD NOT BE HARDER LINE. ON CONTRARY, HE SAID, EFFECT WOULD BE TO BRING GREATER CONTROL TO THE ARMY AND THUS TO ALLEVIATE RATHER THAN COMPLICATE HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION.

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7. SHIFTING FOCUS OF CONVERSTION SOMEWHAT, I ASKED IF MASSERA FORESAW PROBLEMS WITH LABOR DURING NEXT FEW MONTHS. HE REPLIED THAT HE DID. ECONOMY MINISTER MARTINEZ DE HOZ, HE SAID, WAS A FINE MAN BUT DID NOT UNDERSTAND SALARY PROBLEMS OR NEEDS OF THE WORKING MAN. AND, HE ADDED, NEITHER VIDELA NOR VIOLA KNOWS HOW TO POINT HIM IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION. UNLESS THERE ARE CHANGES IN THE GOVERNMENT'S ATTITUDES TOWARD LABOR AND SUGGESTED SALARY LEVELS, HE PREDICTED SERIOUS TROUBLE BY MAY OR JUNE. "WE

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CAN EXPECT THE ANTI-GOVERNMENT CHANTS AT THE FUTBOL MATCHES TO BECOME STREADILY WORSE," HE CONCLUDED. HE ADDED THAT HE HIMSELF HAS BEEN VERY CONCERNED OVER SOCIAL CONSEQUENCES OF MARTINEZ DE HOZ PROGRAM, A FACT WHICH HAS BEEN NOTED BY BUENOS AIRES PRESS.

8. COMMENT: RUMORS OF MOVES AGAINST GENERAL VIOLA HAVE BEEN CIRCULATING IN BUENOS AIRES FOR SEVERAL WEEKS. IT IS NOT IMPLAUSIBLE THAT SOME MOVE WILL BE MADE IN WEEKS OR MONTHS AHEAD, BUT I WOULD NOT CONCLUDE THAT WILL BE THE CASE ON THE BASIS OF MASSERA'S SAY-SO. MASSERA IS PLAYING A WELL-WORN RECORD--SAME ONE, ESSENTIALLY, HE PLAYED TO DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY BRAY IN DECEMBER. MASSERA HAS AN EXE TO GRIND AGAINST VILLA--AND AGAINST VIDELA--AND HIS SUGGESTION THAT THE TWO MAY BE THROWN OUT IN THE NEAR TERM BY THERIE OWN FELLOW GENERALS MAY TO A LARGE EXTENT REPRESENT WISFUL THINKING ON HIS PART. MASSERA'S DESCRIPTION OF DISUNITY WITHIN THE ARMY, HOWEVER, IS COGENT AND IT IS, AS HE SAYS, DIFFICULT TO SEE HOW

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REAL COHERENCE CAN BE BROUGHT TO GOVERNMENT WITHOUT STRONGER LEADERSHIP. ON THE OTHER HAND, CERTAIN OF THE "STRONGER" LEADERS WHO MIGHT REPLACE VIDELA WOULD PROBABLY BE DISASTROUS FOR ARGENTINA AND MOST ESPECIALLY FOR ITS RELATIONS WITH U. S. AND WESTERN EUROPEAN COUNTRIES.

9. MASSERA'S CONTENTION THAT HE AND NAVY ARE ACROSS BOARD MORE MODERATE THAN ARMYO ON HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUE IS SIMPLY NOT BORNE OUT BY FACTS. NAVY ITSELF HAS UPON OCCASION (AND IN AREAS WHERE IT HAS CONTROL) GONE FURTHER THAN ARMY. AT SAME TIME, HOWEVER, IT WOULD BE MISTAKE TO SEE MASSERA AS NATURAL LEADER OF HARD-LINE ELEMENTS IN MILITARY. HE IS AMBITIOUS AND IS WILLING TO USE THEM, BUT HIS OWN PROCLIVITIES WOULD SEEM TO BE TOWARD MODERATION.

10. FINALLY, WHILE MASSERA DISCLAIMS ANY PRESIDENTIAL AMBITIONS AT THIS POINT (AND WHILE HE IS REALISTIC ENOUGH TO KNOW JOB MUCH MORE LIKELY TO GO TO ARMY GENERAL), HE CLEARLY HOPES ANY CHANGES WILL LEAVE HIM IN STRENGTHENED POSITION--AND POSSIBLY IN THE PRESIDENCY. HE MAY WELL HOPE GENERAL, UNABLE TO AGREE AMONG THEMSELVES, WOULD TURN TO HIM IN DESPERATION AS COMPROMISE CANDIATE. ONE COULD WELL IMAGINE THAT SHOULD MASSERA END UP AS THE "FOURTH MAN," HE WOULD NOT LONG ACCEPT SUPREMACY OF JUNTA (AS HE NOW EXPECTS VIDELA TO DO).

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