

DEPARTMENT OF STATE TELEGRAM

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FROM Amembassy BUENOS AIRES CLASSIFICATION ~~SECRET~~

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PINT, PFOR, AR, VT
Mrs. Peron Versus the Military

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1. Accompanied by Pol Couns, I called on Papal Nuncio yesterday morning (Jan 13) for tour de horizon. Nuncio had spent three hours with Mrs. Peron on evening Jan 9. On basis of what she had confided in him at that time, he elaborated on previous account of her Jan 5 confrontation with three CinCs (see reftel). According to Mrs. Peron, she had invited CinCs to Olivos for quite another purpose, but on arrival three immediately led into demand that she resign for good of country. They assured her that they supported institutionalization process and did not wish to violate constitution. However, they were under tremendous pressure from officers below them who were no longer willing to accept Mrs. Peron as Pres or put up with corruption of her govt.

Hence, to avoid golpe and save process, best thing would be for

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her to step aside, allowing power to pass to constitutional successor. If not, they said, they could not be responsible for consequences.

2. Mrs. Peron told Nuncio she had flatly refused and had insisted that no Peronist other than herself had sufficient backing to hold situation together. If she stepped aside in favor of Luder, within two months there would be total disintegration of govt's political base, with result that military themselves would have to assume direct control. And this, she insisted, could be disaster for country, as it would play into hands of terrorists and move whole Peronist Movement to the Left. She told them matter of keeping order and discipline within their own institution was their problem, not hers, and they should not use it as argument for her resignation.

3. Military commanders had taken quite opposite view--i.e. that disintegration more likely to be avoided by her absence rather than her presence. Mrs. Peron told Nuncio that Admiral Massera especially had used very harsh language. She reported him as saying military were not afraid of a fight if that were one of consequences. Mrs. Peron said she then told CinCs they would have to drag her out of Casa Rosada by physical force. She admitted to then becoming highly emotional and giving way to tears (which one can imagine must have been most unsettling to the very disciplined

and unemotional Videla).

4. Despite her emotionalism, however, Nuncio said she gave impression of being totally determined to stick it out, whatever the consequences for her. Nuncio said she looked better and seemed to be thinking more rationally than she had for many months. According to Nuncio (which confirms information recently provided by Peronist source close to Raul Lastiri), Pedro Eladio Vazquez had kept Mrs. Peron on such high level of drugs over so long a period of time that she was disintegrating mentally. She finally realized this herself, severed relations with Vazquez and went into clinic on 11/3 in order to dry out. Since then, her health and mental state have improved considerably--though she still has her ups and downs. Nuncio said he found her in very good frame of mind and with very flexible, sensible approach on Jan 9. She said she was aware of failings of her govt and wished to correct them. She told Nuncio she had emphasized to three CinCs that she was willing to make sweeping rectifications, including cabinet changes, but would not step down as Pres.

5. Nuncio said Mrs. Peron had talked freely about some of the figures around her, beginning with Lopez Rega, whom she described as a "well-meaning man who had made some mistakes but who had done much good for the country." She told Nuncio she would not abandon her friendship with Lopez Rega

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[but that she would not allow that to interfere with
her duties as Pres. On others:

A. Robledo. From a point at which she was not on speaking terms with him, her view of Robledo has improved.

Nuncio said she spoke of latter as "an intelligent man playing generally constructive role." She may be more inclined to follow his advice than in the past.

B. Lorenzo Miguel. At same time, however, Nuncio said Mrs. Peron did not speak as if Lorenzo Miguel, Robledo's primary adversary at the moment, had lost favor with her. On contrary, she referred to him warmly as "good father" (a point which Nuncio described as an obsession with her) and trusted advisor.

C. Julio Gonzalez. Nuncio said it clear that Julio Gonzalez continues to enjoy very favored position. Mrs. Peron relies heavily on him. This, said Nuncio, was too bad, for while Gonzalez meant well and was very religious, he was not particularly intelligent and had tendency to go to extremes. He was, Nuncio agreed, "a right-wing Catholic nationalist."

D. Raul Lastiri. Nuncio said he had advised Mrs. Peron that she should not appoint Raul Lastiri as Min of Interior as some rumors had her doing. He said she had replied that she "would not make such a glaring mistake," that she understood fully that Lastiri had been repudiated

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by the Chamber of Deputies, was a man of low morals, etc.

E. Casildo Herreras. The same applied to Casildo Herreras, whom she described as a "drunk, and a womanizer." She told Nuncio she had had to speak to Herreras several times about his "excesses."

6. On another subject, Nuncio said FonMin had asked for audience with Pope before departing for Europe and had asked Nuncio to help arrange it. Nuncio had asked for Minister's travel plans and reasons for audience-- i.e. what Min wished to discuss. Min had not given him either, but he had nonetheless asked that audience be given and it was. Reason was now clear. Upon return from Rome, FonMin had used audience to suggest that Pope supports Mrs. Peron. This, however, was not the case, Nuncio said. Church supports idea of institutionalization in Argentina but not any specific person for Pres.

7. Nuncio said that from several of Mrs. Peron's remarks it was obvious that she was very concerned over threat to her position posed by BA Gov Victorio Calabro and that it equally obvious she undecided as to how to handle it. Nuncio remarked that in his own opinion, Mrs. Peron and her supporters could not think of going into an election campaign until they have first solved problem of rebellious gov. Yet, to intervene the province would be equally

[dangerous since that might provoke military response.]

8. I asked Nuncio if Mrs. Peron expressed any attitude towards US. He responded that to the extent that she did, it was favorable, but that she knew little of foreign affairs and was generally oriented towards Spain. Nuncio, however, congratulated US on its low profile in Argentina which, he commented, was exactly the policy we should be following here. "Observers know you support institutions, but are in no way involved and are leaving it to the Argentines to work out for themselves. That is the best position to be in at moment," he concluded.

9. Comment: Nuncio's account (or Mrs. Peron's account as given to Nuncio) of Mrs. Peron's interview with three CinCs on Jan 5 has been generally substantiated by several well-placed sources, though not in such detail. I believe Nuncio is accurately relating what Mrs. Peron told him on this and other points. However, in several comments, such as her remarks concerning Lastiri (who still appears to be close to her despite his "low morals") and her insistence that she is willing to be flexible and make rectifications, she may have been speaking more for effect than from conviction, knowing that remarks would get back to some of her critics. Nuncio himself was obviously impressed, for he was more optimistic concerning Mrs. Peron's chances of lasting

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out her term than he has been in some time. He was obviously to some extent flattered--and thus swayed--by fact that she has again turned to him as a confidant. This is not to say, however, that Nuncio was making gilded predictions. He recognized that golpe could be touched off at almost any time, and that situation remained extremely precarious.

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