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ACTION ARA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SS-15 SP-02 PRS-01 HA-05 H-01
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E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: OVIP (VANCE, CYRUS)
SUBJECT: ARGENTINE GOVERNMENT (MFA-ARLIA) IS A RAGE
OVER PRESS ACCOUNTS OF A "LIST OF 7,500"

REF: STATE 282605

SUMMARY: THE MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS HAS EXPRESSED SHARP DISPLEASURE TO THE EMBASSY OVER PRESS STORIES COMING AT THE TIME OF THE SECRETARY'S VISIT TO THE EFFECT THAT MR. VANCE HAS PRESENTED TO THE ARGENTINE GOVERNMENT A LIST OF SOME 7,500 PERSONS WHO HAVE EITHER DISAPPEARED OR BEEN DETAINED WITHOUT DUE PROCESS. THE MINISTRY ISSUED TELEGRAPHIC INSTRUCTIONS ON NOVEMBER 24 TO ALL ARGENTINE DIPLOMATIC MISSIONS AND REPRESENTATIONS AT INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS TO DENY THE LIST'S PRESENTATION -- EVEN IF IT BECOMES NECESSARY FOR MISSIONS TO BUY NEWSPAPER SPACE TO MAKE THIS ANNOUNCEMENT. OUR REPLY THAT SECRETARY VANCE HAD TOLD FOREIGN MINISTER MONTES THAT A LIST OF MORE OR LESS THIS DESCRIPTION WOULD SHORTLY BE PRESENTED IN USUAL DIPLOMATIC CHANNELS MADE NO IMPRESSION, MAKING APPARENT THAT WHAT HAS RILED MFA IS IN FACT PRESS COMMENT ON A SOMBER THEME WHICH DIMINISHES AN IMAGE OF THE SECRETARY'S VISIT THE ARGENTINES SEEK TO CREATE. END SUMMARY.

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1. POLCOUNSELOR AND PRESS OFFICER WERE CALLED TO MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS AFTERNOON ON NOVEMBER 25 TO MEETING ON PRESS HANDLING OF SECRETARY VANCE'S VISIT IN GENERAL AND ON HANDLING THE "LIST OF 7,500" SUBJECT IN PARTICULAR. ARGENTINE PARTICIPANTS JUAN CARLOS ARLIA (FOREIGN OFFICE WORKING GROUP ON HUMAN RIGHTS) AND CAPTAIN ROBERTO PEREZ FROIO (OF MFA'S PRESS SECTION) DELIVERED BLISTERING SERMONS ON WHAT THEY PROFESSED TO BELIEVE WERE DELIBERATE ATTEMPTS BY JOURNALISTS TO UNDERMINE THE SUCCESS OF THE SECRETARY'S VISIT. NORTH AMERICAN AFFAIRS DIRECTOR ESPECHE GIL ALSO ATTENDED THE HOUR LONG SESSION.

2. THE STAGE HAD BEEN SET FOR THE MEETING BY PEREZ FROIO'S FULMINATIONS WITH PRESS OFFICER O'BRIEN (BUENOS AIRES 8893), AND BY TELEPHONE CALL MADE DURING THE MORNING OF NOVEMBER 25 BY ARLIA TO DCM. PEREZ FROIO DISCLAIMED ANY OFFICIAL CONTENT IN HIS EARLIER ATTACK AGAINST THE WASHINGTON POST'S

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DE YOUNG AND THE NY TIMES DE ONIS, EXPLAINING AT CONSIDERABLE LENGTH THAT NEVERTHELESS HE STOOD BY HIS EARLIER EXPRESSIONS (PERSONAL EXPRESSIONS, THAT IS) OF DISMAY AT THOSE REPORTERS' APPARENT GOAL OF WRECKING BILATERAL RELATIONS. ARLIA DESCRIBED AN OPPOSITE SITUATION: HIS HARD WORDS FOR THE POST AND TIMES STORIES, AND OF OTHER COVERAGE AS WELL, WAS AN OFFICIAL ACT OF HIS MINISTRY CLEARED WELL IN ADVANCE. NEITHER ARLIA NOR PEREZ FROIO WAS AWARE OF THE OTHER'S REMARKS TO US.

3. THE ISSUE THAT HAD REALLY RILED ARLIA, HOWEVER, WAS THE OF THE "LIST OF 7,500" PERSONS WHICH PRESS REPORTS DESCRIBED AS HAVING BEEN DELIVERED TO THE ARGENTINE GOVERNMENT PRESUMABLY DURING THE SECRETARY'S STAY HERE. NO SUCH LIST HAD BEEN DELIVERED, ARLIA SAID, NOR WOULD ANY LIST BE ACCEPTABLE WERE IT TO CALL UPON GOA FOR A SPECIFIC ACTION OR IMPLY A SPECIFIC

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PROMISE.

4. WE REPLIED THAT THE SECRETARY HAD DISCUSSED A LIST OF PERSONS MISSING OR IMPRISONED, PREPARED BY PRIVATE GROUPS IN THE U.S. AND HAVING NO OFFICIAL CHARACTER, WITH FOREIGN MINISTER MONTES. THE SECRETARY HAD SAID TO MONTES, AND MONTES DID NOT DEMUR, THAT THE LISTS WOULD BE SUBMITTED "THROUGH USUAL DIPLOMATIC CHANNELS." COURTESY COPIES OF THE SIZEABLE LIST HAD BEEN XEROXED, WE SAID, AND HAD BEEN DELIVERED EARLIER THE SAME DAY (NOVEMBER 25) UNDER COVER OF AN AIDE-MEMOIRE. (AS EVENTS ACTUALLY WOULD HAVE IT THE PACKET WAS RETURNED BY MFA FOR DELIVERY ON MONDAY NOVEMBER 28 FOR THE PEDESTRIAL BUT TRUTHFUL REASON THAT MFA DOES NOT RECEIVE DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENCE IN THE AFTERNOON.)

5. THIS EXPLANATION MADE NO IMPACT ON ARLIA. AS HIS

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FULMINATIONS CONTINUED IT BECAME CLEAR THAT WHAT IN FACT HAD SET OFF ARLIA AND APPARENTLY A NUMBER OF HIS MFA COLLEAGUES IS THE

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FACT OF SUCH AN "UNFORTUNATE" DOCUMENT'S HAVING BEEN GIVEN CELEBRITY EVEN BEFORE THE SECRETARY'S VISIT, AS WELL AS AGAIN DURING IT, BY THE U.S. PESS. THE MINISTRY HAS, WE LEARNED, SENT A CIRCULAR TELEGRAM TO ALL ARGENTINE DIPLOMATIC POSTS AND MISSIONS BEFORE INTERNATIONAL BODIES INSTRUCTING THEM TO CHARACTERIZE AS A LIE ANY PRESS REPORTS OF A LIST PRESENTED OF DISAPPEARED OR ELIMINATED PERSONS. THE INSTRUCTION ALSO REQUIRES POSTS TO DISCLAIM NOTICES OF AN ARGENTINE BLACKLIST OF ARTISTS, WHICH HARKS TO AN ARTICLE PUBLISHED IN THE WASHINGTONPOST BY KAREN DE YOUNG ON NOVEMBER 20. BUENOS AIRES PAPERS CARRIED THE GOVERNMENT'S DISCLAIMER ON NOVEMBER 26 -- WITH ONLY THE "HERALD" STORY GIVING A FINAL PARAGRAPH STATING FULL CIRCUMSTANCES OF THE LIST'S PRESENTATION.

6. TO OUR SUGGESTIONS THAT TOGETHER WE SEARCH U.S. PUBLIC RECORDS (WE HAD IN MIND THE TRATTNER NOVEMBER 21 PRESS BRIEFING SESSION) TO DISCOVER HOW ANY MIS-REPRESENTATION OF THE LIST COULD HAVE COME ABOUT ARLIA SAID THAT AS AN ARTICLE OF FAITH IT WAS UNIMAGINABLE TO HIM THAT A RESPONSIBLE U.S. OFFICIAL COULD HAVE CONTRIBUTED TO THIS MISUNDERSTANDING -- BUT THAT IF BY CHANCE SUCH A THING HAD TAKEN PLACE IT WAS AS WELL HE NOT LEARN OF IT, FOR HE WOULD BE FORCED TO SOMBER CONCLUSIONS. "HOW WAS IT POSSIBLE," HE ASKED, "FOR MISCHIEVOUS PERSONS TO UNDO THE FINE WORK MRS. DERIAN AND I DID TOGETHER IN PHRASING THE

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HUMAN RIGHTS PORTION OF THE JOINT STATEMENT?" PEREZ FROIO AT THIS POINT ROSE TO STATE HIS BELIEF THAT SOME KIND OF PLOT EXISTS TO WRECK BILATERAL RELATIONS.

7. FINAL POINT MADE BY THE ARGENTINES WAS THE GOA FEELS OBLIGATED ALWAYS TO CORRECT ANY JOURNALIST'S STORY WHEN A GOVERNMENT OFFICIAL IS QUOTED AND A REPORT IS INCORRECT. ARLIA AT FIRST ASKED FOR SUCH GALLANTRY FROM OURSELVES, BUT THEN WITHDREW HIS REQUEST. AT ANOTHER POINT HE REFERRED TO THE NEED OF TAKING STEPS TO COUNTER PRESS ONSLAUGHTS AGAINST GOOD BILATERAL RELATIONS BETWEEN ANY COUNTRIES.

8. WE STOOD PAT WITH OUR EXPLANATION OF THE LIST'S ORIGINS AND PRESENTATION, AND STATED THAT IF ASKED REGARDING THE LIST WE EXPECTED TO QUOTE FROM OUR AIDE-MEMOIRE, WHICH CAREFULLY SETS OUT THE OPINION WE HAVE OF THE REPORT AND OUR INTENTIONS IN PRESENTING IT. (AIDE-MEMOIRE TEXT, WHICH FOLLOWS CIRCUMSTANCES DESCRIBED REFTEL, BEING SENT SEPARATELY.)
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