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ACTION SS-30

INFO OCT-01 ADS-00 SSO-00 /031 W
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O 082207Z AUG 80
FM AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 6327

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E.O. 12065: RDS-4 8/8/00 (RUSER, CLAUS W.) OR-M
TAGS: PINS PDIP AR BL
SUBJECT: (S) ARGENTINE INVOLVEMENT IN BOLIVIA

REF: (A) BUENOS AIRES 6013; (B) BUENOS AIRES 6016;
(C) BUENOS AIRES 6062; (D) BUENOS AIRES 6063

1. ~~S/NOFORN~~ - ENTIRE TEXT.

2. EMBASSY ASSESSMENT OF EVENTS LEADING TO GOA RECOGNITION FULLY COVERED IN REFTELS. FURTHER DETAILS CONTAINED IN IR 0142 AND IR 0146. CONCLUSIONS FROM THESE DATA ARE THAT THERE WAS SOME DIFFERENCE OF OPINION ABOUT THE TIMING OF GOA RECOGNITION, RELATED TO THE IMPENDING BOWDLER VISIT. THERE ARE NO INDICATIONS THAT THE RECOGNITION PER SE WAS AT ISSUE OR THAT THESE DIFFERENCES WERE MAJOR. AS PER IR 0146 THERE IS EVIDENCE TO SUPPORT BELIEF THAT ARMY STAFF DID TRY TO DELAY RECOGNITION BOTH FOR ITS IMPACT ON VISIT AND THE WORRY THAT EARLY RECOGNITION WOULD GIVE CREDENCE TO VIEW ABROAD THAT GOA HAD SUPPORTED COUP. REF C CLEARLY INDICATES THAT VIDELA'S VIEW WAS THAT DELAY WOULD BE THE MOST PREJUDICIAL TO BOWDLER VISIT. OTHER SOURCES ARGUE THAN FONMIN PASTOR OPPOSED IMMEDIATE RECOGNITION PRIOR TO

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BOWDLER VISIT BUT THAT "ARMY INFLUENCE" CONVINCED VIDELA AND GALTIERI TO TAKE THE STEP PRIOR TO THE ARRIVAL OF ASST. SEC. BOWDLER.

Department of State, A/GIS/IPS/SRP
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 Release () Excise () Deny () Declassify Exemptions b () () E.O. 13526 25x () ()
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3. IR 0151 PROVIDES RECENT EVIDENCE THAT ARGENTINE ARMY SOURCES HAVE INFORMATION CASTING DOUBT ON THE PRESENT BOLIVIAN LEADERSHIP. THE USE OF THE LOCALLY VERY DEROGATORY TERM "DEMAGOGUE" TO DESCRIBE GARCIA MEZA IS NOTEWORTHY. EMBASSY ALSO HAS INFORMATION THAT GENERAL CARLOS ALBERTO MARTINEZ OF SIDE HAS SOME RESERVATIONS ABOUT SOME KEY MILITARY LEADERS OF THE COUP. FURTHER REPORTS ARE THAT THE ARGENTINE AMBASSADOR IN LA PAZ IS REPORTING THAT GARCIA MEZA HAS NOT CONSOLIDATED HIS POSITION AND THAT APPROXIMATELY 40 PERCENT OF BOLIVIAN OFFICERS DO NOT REPEAT NOT SUPPORT HIM. THERE IS ALSO SOME SECOND GUESSING AT VARIOUS LEVELS IN MILITARY AND FONMIN PARTICULARLY ABOUT EXTENT OF PUBLIC COMMITMENT MADE BY VIDELA ON AUGUST 6 IN CORDOBA. THERE IS UNANIMITY HERE THAT SILES ZUAZO GOVERNMENT WOULD HAVE BEEN SERIOUSLY PREJUDICIAL TO VITAL NATIONAL INTERESTS OF GOA. IR 0151 SOURCE CLAIMS PROOF OF "MONTONERO" INVOLVEMENT. EMBASSY SEEKING TO ATTAIN THIS DATA. THERE IS SOME DOUBT OF WISDOM OF POINT OF EXAMINING GOA COURSE BUT NOT YET REACHED ALTERNATIVES.

4. COMMENT: DURING MY INITIAL ROUND OF TALKS I FOUND SOME DIFFERENCES OF OPINION BUT NO EVIDENCE OF MAJOR DIFFERENCES IN THE REGIME. ALL MY INTERLOCUTORS MADE TWO POINTS: (A) ARGENTINA HAD LEGITIMATE CONCERNS OVER THE POSSIBILITY OF ANOTHER CUBA (ONE SAID "NICARAGUA") ON ITS DOOR STEPS; AND (B) EVEN THOUGH THE US AND ARGENTINA MIGHT DIFFER IN THEIR PERCEPTIONS ON BOLIVIA, IT IS IMPORTANT THAT THE TWO GOVERNMENTS MAINTAIN THEIR

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DIALOGUE. COL. PINO, IN A SECOND MEETING YESTERDAY, STATED THAT THERE HAD INDEED BEEN A CONSIDERABLE DIFFERENCE OF OPINION ON WHETHER TO PROCEED WITH RECOGNITION BEFORE THE BOWDLER VISIT. AT THE STAFF LEVEL, THE MAJORITY VIEW HAD FAVORED DEFERRAL; HOWEVER, THE VIEWS OF THE MAJORITY AT THE SENIOR DECISION LEVEL HAD FAVORED IMMEDIATE RECOGNITION. THE ISSUE HAD BEEN ONE OF TIMING; THERE HAD BEEN NO QUESTION THAT ARGENTINA SHOULD SUPPORT THE COUP BY RECOGNIZING THE GARCIA MEZA REGIME. (ALL OF THIS MAY, OF COURSE, HAVE BEEN SAID FOR MY BENEFIT.) DURING MY INITIAL CALL CAVANDOLI WENT TO CONSIDERABLE LENGTH EXPRESSING HIS PERSONAL REGRET OVER THE COURSE OF EVENTS JUST PRIOR TO THE PLANNED BOWDLER VISIT, DISTANCING HIMSELF PERSONALLY FROM THE DECISION.

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5. ABOUT GARCIA MEZA'S PROSPECTS, VIEWS DIFFERED. AMBASSADOR ROS RUMINATED THAT BOLIVIA WAS "QUICKSAND," AS MANY BEGINNING AT LEAST WITH CHE GUEVARA HAD FOUND OUT; ARGENTINA AND THE US NOW WERE WORKING AT CROSS PURPOSES. DID WE PROPOSE TO LET BOLIVIA DRIFT INTO CHAOS? EVEN IF SILES SUAZO WAS NOT A CONVINCED COMMUNIST, THOSE AROUND HIM WAITING IN THE WINGS WERE. OVER DINNER LAST NIGHT, AIR CHIEF OF STAFF TEMPORINI STRESSED THAT DEVELOPMENTS IN BOLIVIA WERE UNCERTAIN, UNPREDICTABLE AND DIFFICULT; HE SPECULATED WHETHER THE SITUATION IN LA PAZ WAS GOING WELL SINCE THE ARGENTINE AMBASSADOR'S WIFE WAS RETURNING FROM LA PAZ. COL. PINO, ON THE OTHER HAND, EVER PROFESSIONALLY OPTIMISTIC, SAID HE HAD CHECKED ON MY EARLIER DOUBTS WHETHER GARCIA MEZA WOULD CONSOLIDATE HIS HOLD. THEY HAD NO INFORMATION, HE CLAIMED, THAT THERE WERE SERIOUS FISSURES IN THE BOLIVIAN ARMED FORCES, ENDANGERING GARCIA MEZA'S POSITION AT THIS TIME; THERE WAS A SMALL GROUP OF FOUR SENIOR OFFICERS (IN THIS CONTEXT, HE MENTIONED LOPEZ LEYTON) BUT THEY DID NOT REPRESENT A THREAT. GARCIA MEZA NOW SEEMED TO BE DOING BETTER THAN HE DID INITIALLY. NONE OF MY INTER-

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LOCUTORS GAVE ANY HINT THAT OFFICIALS AT THE POLICY LEVEL HAD IN MIND SPECIFIC ALTERNATIVES TO GARCIA MEZA AT THIS POINT.

6. IN SUM, THE ARGENTINA GOVERNMENT WILL NOT EASILY BE MOVED TO WITHDRAW ITS SUPPORT FROM A RIGHTIST MILITARY GOVERNMENT. ARGENTINE MILITARY GOVERNMENTS HAVE HISTORICALLY DEFINED BOLIVIA AS AN AREA OF VITAL (NOT IMPORTANT BUT VITAL) NATIONAL INTEREST, AND THE PRESENT REGIME IS HAUNTED BY THE POSSIBILITY THAT A BOLIVIA GOVERNED BY A LEFTIST GOVERNMENT MIGHT BECOME A SAFEHAVEN FOR MONTONERO GUERILLAS.

WE THINK THERE ARE DOUBTS AT HIGH GOA LEVELS THAT GARCIA MEZA WILL BE ABLE TO RETAIN A UNIFIED MILITARY BEHIND HIS REGIME -- THIS MAY HAVE BEEN ONE REASON FOR THE RAPID MOVE TO RECOGNITION -- BUT IT IS NOT CLEAR WHETHER THE GOA HAS ARTICULATED ITS THOUGHTS ABOUT AN ALTERNATIVE AT THIS POINT.

7. ONE POSSIBLE APPROACH WE MIGHT TAKE IS TO ENCOURAGE THE GOA TO TAKE AS LOW A PROFILE AS POSSIBLE IN THEIR SUPPORT OF THE GARCIA MEZA GOVERNMENT. OUR OBJECTIVE WOULD BE TO MAKE IT AS EASY AS POSSIBLE FOR THE GOA TO SWITCH FROM GARCIA MEZA TO ANOTHER GOVERNMENT MORE ACCEPTABLE TO THE US WHILE ALSO ACCEPTABLE TO THE PRESENT MILITARY GOVERNMENTS IN THE SOUTHERN CONE. SHOULD OUR POLICY PERMIT THIS (AND GARCIA MEZA'S POSITION DETERIORATE) THERE IS A POSSIBILITY THE GOA WOULD ACCEPT -- AND POSSIBLE ACT ON INDICATIONS FROM THE USG THAT ALL INTERESTS (INCLUDING THOSE OF BOLIVIA) WOULD BEST BE SERVED BY SEEKING AND ACCEPTING AN ALTERNATIVE TO GARCIA MEZA.
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