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ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 /026 W

065165

P 251156Z MAY 76
FM AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 5774

ARGENTINA 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 _____

[REDACTED] SECTION 1 OF 2 BUENOS AIRES

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E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, PGOV, AR

SUBJECT: CONVERSATION WITH UNDERSECRETARY OF THE PRESIDENCY

1. ON MAY 21 AMBASSADOR HILL, THE MINISTER, AND THE POLITICAL COUNSELOR, HAD LUNCH WITH DR. RICARDO YOFRE, THE UNDERSECRETARY GENERAL OF THE OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENCY. GIVEN BELOW ARE THE HIGHLIGHTS OF THE CONVERSATION.

2. AMBASSADOR HILL OPENED THE CONVERSATION BY SAYING THE US WAS VERY CONCERNED OVER THE HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUE, ESPECIALLY IN THE WAKE OF THE MICHELINI AND GUTIERREZ RUIZ KIDNAPPINGS. ACCORDING TO YOFRE, VIDELA AND HIS STAFF WERE SHOCKED BY THE KIDNAPPINGS, AND ARE TRYING TO GET TO THE BOTTOM OF THE QUESTION. YOFRE ALSO SAID VIDELA HAD PLANNED TO HOLD A PRESS CONFERENCE ON WEDNESDAY, MAY 26, BUT THAT THIS MIGHT NOW BE POSTPONED IN ORDER TO HAVE BETTER HOLD ON THE SITUATION AND TO BE ABLE TO MAKE A MORE DEFINITIVE STATEMENT REGARDING THE SITUATION OF THOSE WHO HAVE BEEN DETAINED SINCE MARCH 24. BY NEXT WEEK, YOFRE SAID, IT IS PLANNED: (A) TO RELEASE MANY OF THOSE CURRENTLY DETAINED; (B) TO BE READY TO PUBLISH A COMPLETE LIST OF THOSE DETAINED (YOFRE NOTED THAT ALTHOUGH THE NAVY HAD DRUG ITS FEET IT HAS NOW GIVEN VIDELA A ROSTER OF THE PRISONERS BEING HELD ABOARD THE SHIPS IN THE HARBOR); (C) TO BE READY TO ANNOUNCE SPEEDY TRIALS FOR THOSE WHOSE INVESTIGATIONS ARE COMPLETED; (D) TO ANNOUNCE SEVERAL NEW MEASURES OF "REVOLUTIONARY JUSTICE" UNDER WHICH THOSE WHO ARE KNOWN TO BE GUILTY OF CRIMES AGAINST THE STATE BUT AGAINST WHOM THERE IS INSUFFICIENT

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EVIDENCE WILL BE PUNISHED BY SUCH MEASURES AS HAVING THEIR POLITICAL RIGHTS SUSPENDED FOR A NUMBER OF YEARS.

3. DR. YOFRE CALLED ATTENTION TO VIDELA'S RECENT "OPENING TO THE OTHER SECTORS" UNDER WHICH HE HAS LUNCHEDED WITH A NUMBER OF SCIENTISTS, WRITERS AND WITH EX-FOREIGN MINISTERS SUCH AS HIPOLITO PAZ (A PERONIST), MIGUEL ANGEL ZAVALA ORTIZ (ILLIA'S FOREIGN MINISTER), PABLO PARDO AND OTHERS. ALSO AS PART OF THIS "OPENING", VIDELA HAS APPOINTED OSCAR CAMILION (MID) AMBASSADOR TO BRAZIL, AMERICO GHIOLDI (PSD) AMBASSADOR TO SWEDEN, HECTOR HIDALGO SOLA (UCR) AMBASSADOR TO VENEZUELA AND LEOPOLDO BRAVO (BLOQUISTA) TO THE SOVIET UNION. (YOFRE SAID THE NEW AMBASSADOR TO WASHINGTON HAD NOT YET BEEN CONFIRMED, BUT THAT A DECISION WOULD PROBABLY BE MADE WITHIN THE NEXT FEW DAYS. HE CONFIRMED THAT ARNOLDO MUSITCH HAS THE INSIDE TRACK.) YOFRE ASKED IF VIDELA'S OPENING HAS BEEN NOTED IN THE UNITED STATES AND BY US NEWSMEN HERE, AND IF SO WHETHER OR NOT IT HAS REASSURED THEM REGARDING THE GOVERNMENT'S MODERATE POLICIES.

4. THE POLITICAL COUNSELOR ANSWERED THAT THE OPENING HAS BEEN NOTED BOTH BY THE EMBASSY AND BY US NEWSMEN. HOWEVER, HE SAID HE DOUBTED NEWSMEN WERE REASSURED AND HE RELATED A CONVERSATION WITH A KEY US JOURNALIST IN WHICH THE LATTER HAD CONCLUDED THAT VIDELA'S LUNCHEDES WITH REPS OF OTHER SECTORS AND HIS APPOINTMENT OF POLITICAL PARTY FIGURES TO AMBASSADORSHIPS SIMPLY UNDERLINED VIDELA'S OWN MODERATION; IN THE EYES OF THE CORRESPONDENT, THEY DID NOT INDICATE THAT VIDELA COULD CONTROL THE HARDLINERS. THIS, THE POLITICAL COUNSELOR SAID, SEEMS TO BE THE QUESTION FOREMOST IN THE MINDS OF MANY OBSERVERS. EVERYONE RECOGNIZES THAT VIDELA HIMSELF IS A SINCERE, DECENT AND MODERATE MAN. BUT THERE ARE MANY IN THE ARMED FORCES WHO WANT MORE DRASTIC SOLUTIONS, AND WHO OBVIOUSLY ARE NOT ENTHUSIASTIC OVER VIDELA'S MODERATE APPROACH. CAN HE CONTROL SUCH HARDLINERS?

5. YOFRE ADMITTED THAT VIDELA IS HAVING TROUBLE WITH THE HARDLINERS BUT STATED CATERORICALLY THAT VIDELA CAN AND WILL CONTROL THEM. YOFRE NOTED THAT VIDELA'S STYLE IS NOT ONE OF FRONTAL CONFRONTATIONS; HENCE, HE IS MANEUVERING BEHIND THE SCENE AND IS WAITING FOR AN APPROPRIATE MOMENT TO ASSERT HIMSELF. HE WANTS TO CONTROL THE HARDLINERS, BUT HE WISHES TO DO SO IN SUCH A WAY A WAY AS NOT TO SPLIT THE ARMED FORCES WIDE OPEN.

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6. DR. YOFRE NOTED THAT THERE ARE TWO DISTINCT COMPLICATIONS IN CHECKING THE HARDLINERS AND IN BRINGING THE HUMAN RIGHTS PROBLEM UNDER CONTROL: (A) THE FIRST IS THAT THE COUNTRY IS IN AN ALL-OUT WAR AGAINST SUBVERSION. IN THE HEAT OF BATTLE THERE WILL INEVITABLY BE SOME VIOLATIONS OF HUMAN RIGHTS. AND YOFRE WANTED THAT THE GOVERNMENT PLANS TO DRASTICALLY STEP UP ITS CAMPAIGN AGAINST THE TERRORISTS VERY SHORTLY. (B) SECONDLY, HE SAID, THERE ARE A NUMBER OF GROUPS WHO ARE OPERATING ON THEIR OWN. VIDELA AND HIS STAFF HAVE NOT YET BEEN ABLE TO DETERMINE WHETHER THESE ROUPS ARE OPERATING FROM WITHIN THE GOVERNMENT OR FROM OUTSIDE. WHATEVER THE CASE, IT IIS CLEAR THAT THESE GROUPS ARE OPERATING IN VIOLATION OF THE GOVERNMENT'S POLICIES AND MAY HAVE AS ONE OF THEIR OBJECTIVES TO UNDERMINE THE IMAGE AND POSITION OF THE PRESENT GOVERNMENT (THE SUGGESTION, THEN, IS THAT THEY ARE HARDLINERS WHO WOULD LIKE NOTHING BETTER THAN TO EMBARRASS THE PRESENT GOVERNMENT.) IT WAS DOUBTLESS SUCH A GROUP THAT WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE MICHELINI KIDNAPPING AND MURDER, YOFRE SAID. HE CONCLUDED THAT THE GOVERNMENT MUST GET TO THE BOTTOM OF THE QUESTION AND BRING SUCH GROUPS UNDER CONTROL.

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7. INTERESTINGLY, DR. YOFRE ADMITTED THAT THERE ARE SERIOUS

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PROBLEMS BETWEEN THE ARMY AND THE NAVY. HE NOTED, FOR EXAMPLE, THAT THE NAVY HAS ARRESTED A NUMBER OF PEOPLE WITHOUT INFORMING THE ARMY. HE SPECIFICALLY REFERRED TO PROBLEMS BETWEEN THE FOREIGN MINISTRY, WHICH IS UNDER THE CONTROL OF THE NAVY, AND THE OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENCY, WHICH VIDELA CONTROLS HIMSELF. YOFRE VOICED THE OPINION THAT THE NAVY WAS MAKING A MESS OF THINGS IN THE FOREIGN MINISTRY AND THAT NAVAL OFFICERS UNDER ADMIRAL GUZZETTI (THE FOREIGN MINISTER) ARE SHOWING SIGNS OF PETTY JEALOUSY AND VINDICTIVENESS TOWARDS MEMBERS OF THE OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENCY. BY WAY OF ILLUSTRATION, YOFRE CLAIMED THAT THE NAVAL OFFICERS WHO ARE REORGANIZING THE MINISTRY ARE TRYING TO GET RID OF HIS LAW PARTNER, ARNOLDO LISTRE, CURRENTLY ARGENTINE MINISTER-COUNSELOR TO THE OAS. ACCORDING TO YOFRE, HE NAVY IS TAKING THE POSITION THAT LISTRE IS A DANGEROUS LEFTIST. IN FACT, HOWEVER, YOFRE NOTED LISTRE'S REAL SIN IS THAT HE IS A CLOSE FRIEND OF YOFRE'S AND THUS HAS AN "IN" WITH THE OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENCY. THIS MAKES THE NAVY NERVOUS. (NOTE: LISTRE IS WELL KNOWN TO EMBOFFS. HE IS A RESPECTED AND MODERATE MEMBER OF THE UCR. WE WOULD THEREFORE AGREE WITH YOFRE'S ANALYSIS.)

8. AMBASSADOR HILL INDICATED THAT RELATIONS BETWEEN OUR TWO GOVERNMENTS ARE EXCELLENT, BUT THAT WE ARE HAVING SOME PROBLEMS OF COMMUNICATION. HE SUGGESTED, THEREFORE, THAT YOFRE MIGHT SERVE A VERY USEFUL PURPOSE IF HE WERE WILLING TO ACT AS A CONDUIT BETWEEN THE EMBASSY AND PRESIDENT VIDELA. WE FREQUENTLY HAVE VIEWS AND INFORMATION WHICH MIGHT BE OF INTEREST TO THE PRESIDENT, AMBASSADOR HILL NOTED, BUT WE OF COURSE DID NOT

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WISH TO BOTHER THE PRESIDENT HIMSELF. IF WE COULD PASS SUCH INFORMATION THROUGH YOFRE, AND YOFRE IN TURN COULD PASS TO US ANY VIEWS OR IMPRESSIONS WHICH THE PRESIDENT WOULD LIKE TO CALL TO OUR ATTENTION, IT COULD BE MOST HELPFUL.

9. YOFRE AGREED THAT THIS WAS AN EXCELLENT IDEA AND SAID HE WOULD SUGGEST IT TO PRESIDENT VIDELA IMMEDIATELY. HE NOTED THAT PERHAPS AS THE FIRST PIECE OF INFORMATION TO PASS THROUGH THE PIPELINE, THE PRESIDENT WOULD BE INTERESTED IN KNOWING WHETHER OR NOT GENERAL MOTORS AND CHRYSLER PLAN TO CLOSE DOWN THEIR PLANTS FOR A PERIOD OF TIME. AMBASSADOR HILL SAID HE WOULD CHECK AND WOULD HAVE THE POLITICAL COUNSELOR CALL THAT AFTERNOON. (THIS WAS DONE--NEITHER GENERAL MOTORS NOR CHRYSLER DO PLAN TO CLOSE THEIR PLANTS, ALTHOUGH THEY MAY HAVE TO LAY OFF SOME WORKMEN).

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10. COMMENT: YOFRE IS OBVIOUSLY CONVINCED OF VIDELA'S GOOD INTENTIONS AND BELIEVES THE LATTER, IN HIS QUIET AND UNASSUMING WAY, WILL BE ABLE TO CONTROL THE HAWKS AND GUARANTEE THE SURVIVAL OF THE MODERATE LINE. PERHAPS. HOWEVER, UNLESS VIDELA IS ABLE VERY QUICKLY TO STOP THE SORT OF DEATH-SQUAD ACTIVITIES SUCH AS THE MICHELINI KIDNAPPING AND MURDER, MOST OBSERVERS WILL CONCLUDE THAT HE HAS LOST CONTROL OF THE SITUATION, AND HIS IMAGE WILL SUFFER AN IRRETRIEVABLE LOSS. IT MAY WELL BE THAT HIS HARDLINE ENEMIES MURDERED MICHELINI WITH THE PRIMARY PURPOSE OF EMBARRASSING PRESIDENT VIDELA. BUT THAT IS ALL THE MORE REASON FOR VIDELA TO WISH TO BRING THEM IN LINE. INDEED, HE MUST BRING THEM UNDER CONTROL OR THEY WILL VERY LIKELY DO IN HIS GOVT. HILL

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