



REVIEW AUTHORITY: Paul Hilburn, Senior
Reviewer

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Department of State

TELEGRAM

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S E C R E T BUENOS AIRES 1751

ROGER CHANNEL
E.O. 11652: XGDS-2
TAGS: PINT,PFOR, AR, US
SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR'S CONVERSATION WITH ADMIRAL MASSERA

SPECIAL HANDLING

FOR ASST SEC ROGERS FROM AMB HILL

1. ACCOMPANIED BY POL COUNS I HAD COFFEE TODAY WITH ALEXANDRO SHAW, PRES OF BANCO SHAW. ADMIRAL MASSERA, COMMANDER IN CHIEF OF THE NAVY, WAS ALSO THERE. MASSERA SOUGHT OPPORTUNITY TO SPEAK PRIVATELY WITH ME AND POL COUNS. HE SAID THAT IT WAS NO SECRET THAT MILITARY MIGHT HAVE TO STEP INTO POLITICAL VACUUM VERY SOON. THEY DID NOT WANT TO DO SO BUT AT THIS POINT CHOICES SEEM TO BE BETWEEN MILITARY INTERVENTION AND TOTAL CHAOS LEADING TO DESTRUCTION OF THE ARGENTINE STATE. MASSERA SAID HE DID NOT WANT TO DISCUSS POSSIBLE INTERVENTION AS HE WAS SURE I WOULD REGARD IT AS DIPLOMATICALLY INCORRECT. HOWEVER, HE SAID, HE DID WISH TO APPROACH ME AS A FRIEND TO SAY THAT MILITARY WERE TERRIBLY CONCERNED ABOUT THEIR PUBLIC RELATIONS IN THE US SHOULD THEY HAVE TO INTERVENE. HE ADMITTED THAT MILITARY WERE INEXPERIENCED IN TERMS OF PUBLIC RELATIONS PROBLEMS IN ARGENTINA, MUCH LESS IN THE US, AND HE ASKED IF I COULD INDICATE TO HIM ONE OR TWO REPUTABLE PUBLIC RELATIONS FIRMS IN THE US WHICH MIGHT HANDLE THE PROBLEM FOR AFUTURE MILITARY GOVT.
2. I EMPHASIZED THAT USG COULD NOT IN ANY WAY BECOME INVOLVED IN ARGENTINE INTERNAL AFFAIRS. I SAID THAT WHILE I COULD NOT GIVE ANY SUCH ADVICE AS HE HAD REQUESTED, I COULD QUITE PROPERLY MAKE AVAILABLE TO HIM THE LIST OF PUBLIC RELATIONS FIRMS AVAILABLE

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IN THE EMBASSY'S COMMERCIAL LIBRARY. MASSERA INDICATED THAT WOULD BE FINE AND THAT HE WOULD APPRECIATE RECEIVING SUCH A LIST "WITHIN NEXT FEW DAYS".

3. MASSERA SAID MILITARY WERE FULLY AWARE OF THE NEED TO AVOID HUMAN RIGHTS PROBLEMS SHOULD THEY HAVE TO TAKE POWER. HE SAID ARGENTINE MILITARY INTERVENTION IF IT COMES WILL NOT FOLLOW THE LINES OF THE PINOCHET TAKEOVER IN CHILE. RATHER, HE SAID, THEY WILL TRY TO PROCEED WITHIN THE LAW AND WITH FULL RESPECT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS. THIS DID NOT MEAN, HE SAID, THULJY# WOT OT I#

LLY RFESS THE WAR AGAINST THE TERRORISTS; ON THE CONTRARY, THEY INTENDED TO STEP UP THE FIGHT AGAINST TERRORISM AND SUBVERSION, BUT THEY WOULD DO SO WITHIN THE LAW. THEY HAD NO INTENTION OF RESORTING TO VIGILANTE-TYPE ACTIVITIES, TAKING EXTRA-LEGAL REPRISALS OR OF TAKING ACTION AGAINST UNINVOLVED CIVILIANS. #DTSSYNGYWUPKUDEE CINCS HAVE TO MOVE, HE SAID, THEIR INTENTION IS TO DO SO IN THE MOST "DEMOCRATIC" AND MODERATE MANNER POSSIBLE. HE NOTED THAT THEY ARE HAVING SOME DIFFICULTIES RESTRAINING HOT HEADS, BUT EXPRESSED CONFIDENCE THAT THEY WOULD BE ABLE TO DO SO.

4. MASSERA SAID HE HESITATED TO RAISE SUBJECT WITH ME BUT THAT AT SAME TIME HE WISHED TO ASSURE ME AND REPS OF OTHER GOVTS THAT IF MILITARY FEEL CALLED UPON TO MOVE THEY WILL NOT HARM MRS. PERON. HE SAID THIS WAS A KNOTTY PROBLEM BUT THAT THE THINKING OF THE THREE CINCS AT THE MOMENT WAS THAT PROBABLY BEST THING WOULD BE THAT MRS. PERON SIMPLY LEAVE THE COUNTRY. ON THE OTHER HAND, THERE WERE MANY WITHIN THE MILITARY WHO WISHED TO TAKE STRONGER ACTION AGAINST HER. A POSSIBLE COMPROMISE SOLUTION WOULD BE TO DETAIN HER IN ARGENTINA ON MARTIN GARCIA ISLAND OR IN SOME MILITARY RESORT AREA SUCH AS ASCOCHINGA UNTIL SUCH TIME AS FINAL DETERMINATION AS TO HER FUTURE COULD BE MADE.

6. COMMENT: ADMIRAL MASSERA WAS VERY CORRECT THROUGHOUT THE CONVERSATION. HE SCRUPULOUSLY PLACED ALL HIS COMMENTS IN THE CONDITIONAL TENSE, AND SEVERAL TIMES EMPHASIZED THAT HE WAS ONLY SPEAKING OF HYPOTHETICAL POSSIBILITIES. NONETHELESS, POI. COUNS AND I HAD DISTINCT IMPRESSION THAT MASSERA WAS TALKING ABOUT A COUP WHICH WILL PROBABLY COME WITHIN THE

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NEXT FEW DAYS, POSSIBLY EVEN BEFORE THE WEEKEND.

7. MY PLANS: I HAVE PLANNED AND HAVE RESERVATIONS TO DEPART ARGENTINA THE EVENING OF MAR 17. SHOULD I CANCEL THESE PLANS NOW AND COUP SHOULD TAKE PLACE ON, SAY MAR 18, THAT MIGHT BE TAKEN BY MANY AS PROOF THAT WE HAD PRIOR KNOWLEDGE OF MILITARY ACTION. FURTHER, IT MIGHT BE ALLEGED THAT I HAD CANCELLED PLANS AND STAYED HERE TO HELP DIRECT THE COUP. I THEREFORE BELIEVE THAT IT IS IN THE BEST INTEREST OF THE USG THAT I PROCEED WITH MY PLANS AS THOUGH WE HAD NO FOREWARNING. TO BE SURE, EVERY NEWSPAPER AND MAGAZINE IS NOW SPECULATING THAT THE GOLPE MAY COME SHORTLY, BUT THAT IS ONLY HEARSAY. THE FACT THAT I WOULD BE OUT OF THE COUNTRY WHEN THE BLOW ACTUALLY FALLS WOULD BE, I BELIEVE, A FACT IN OUR FAVOR INDICATING NONINVOLVEMENT OF EMBASSY AND USG. HENCE, I INTEND TO DEPART ON SCHEDULE. I AM, HOWEVER, CHANGING MY PLANS AND WILL FLY FROM MIAMI TO WASHINGTON. I SHOULD ARRIVE THERE BY NOON MAR 19, AND WILL BE AVAILABLE FOR CONSULTATIONS THAT AFTERNOON AND THE MORNING OF THE 20TH IF YOU SO DESIRE AND LONGER IF NECESSARY.
HILL

NOTE BY OC/T: BUENOS AIRES 1751 #PARA 3, AS RECEIVED, CORRECTION TO FOLLOW.

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