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ACTION ARA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-07
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E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, PINS, MILI, AR
SUBJECT: TROUBLES IN THE JUNTA

ARGENTINA PROJECT (S200000044)
U.S. DEPT. OF STATE, A/RPS/TPS
Margaret P. Grafeld, Director
() Release (X) Exclude () Deny
Exemption(s): B1
Declassify: (X) In Part () In Full
(X) Classify as S () Extend as () Downgrade to
Date 4/24/01 Declassify on Reason R5X/

1. SUMMARY - IN THE PAST FEW DAYS THE EMBASSY HAS HEARD SEVERAL ACCOUNTS OF INCREASING TENSION BETWEEN PRESIDENT VIDELA AND HIS JUNTA PARTNER ADMIRAL MASSERA. WE DO NOT BELIEVE THINGS HAVE REACHED SUCH A SERIOUS STATE THAT THERE COULD BE AN OPEN FALLING OUT BETWEEN THE TWO MEN LEADING TO THE KIND OF INTER-SERVICE ARMED CONFLICT THAT HAS OCCASIONALLY TROUBLED ARGENTINE POLITICS. WHAT WE DO FORESEE IS INCREASING PUBLICITY FOR THE FALLING OUT, AND POSSIBLY AN ESCALATION OF MEASURES TAKEN BY ONE MAN AGAINST THE OTHER WHICH COULD LEAD TO LESS EFFECTIVE GOVERNMENT. END SUMMARY.

2. THE RIVALRY BETWEEN VIDELA AND MASSERA IS INCREASING AND MAY BE BREAKING INTO THE OPEN. ALREADY THE QUARREL HAS TROUBLED POLICY MAKING. IT WAS AN OPEN SECRET THAT MEMBERS OF THE NAVY OPPOSED VIDELA'S TRIP TO WASHINGTON. NOTABLE AMONG OPPONENTS WAS DEPUTY FOREIGN MINISTER (NAVY) CAPTAIN ALLARA, ALTHOUGH HIS BOSS ADMIRAL MONTES IS REPORTED TO HAVE PLAYED A MODERATING ROLE. WHAT HAS SET RUMORS BUZZING TODAY IS THAT A SMALL PUBLICATION CALLED "CONVICCION,"

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WHICH IS BELIEVED BY MANY TO BE DIRECTLY LINKED TO THE NAVY, HAS COME FORTH WITH A BLISTERING ATTACK UPON THE VIDELA JOURNEY LIKENING THOSE WHO ATTENDED THE PANAMA TREATIES SIGNING TO LACKEYS JUMPING TO THE SIGNAL OF THE "OAS MANAGER" WHO TOLD THEM THAT THE "BOSS" WANTED TO SEE THEM IN WASHINGTON. THE PAPER'S EDITOR, HUGO EZEQUIEL LEZAMA, A FANATIC YOUNG RIGHT WINGER THOUGHT TO BE RABIDLY ANTI-US, PRINTED THE OPINION THAT IT WOULD HAVE BEEN BETTER FOR THE ARGENTINE PRESIDENT TO FOLLOW THE DIGNIFIED LEAD OF THE PRESIDENTS OF BRAZIL AND MEXICO.

3. TODAY SEPT 22 AN EXECUTIVE ORDER BANNED "CONVICCION" FOR THREE MONTHS, A FACT LIKELY TO BE WIDELY REPORTED AND, SO IT APPEARS, DIRECTLY ATTRIBUTED TO VIDELA'S HAVING ACTED TO CURB THE ACTIVITIES OF HIS NAVY RIVAL.

4. EARLIER [REDACTED] THERE HAD BEEN A REPORT OF THE VIDELA-MASSERA ARGUEMNT'S BEING EXPRESSED IN SUCH MINOR DISCOURTESIES AS ADMIRAL MASSERA'S HAVING CALLED A MEETING OF HIS ADMIRALS, AND HAVING INSISTED THEY ATTEND, AT PRECISELY A TIME WHEN VIDELA HAD SUMMONED HIS CABINET. TWO ADMIRALS ARE MEMBERS OF THE CABINET BODY. (NEWSPAPERS EARLIER THIS WEEK DID INDEED REFER TO A "PREVIOUSLY UNSCHEDULED" ADMIRALS' MEETING.)

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5. ODDLY, IT SEEMS THAT MASSERA'S CAMPAIGN AGAINST HIS ARMY COLLEAGUE DID NOT EXPRESS ITSELF IN DIRECT ATTACKS ON THE RESULTS OF THE VIDELA WASHINGTON VISIT. FOREIGN MINISTRY OFFICIALS WITH WHOM WE TALKED HAD TOLD US EARLIER THAT EVEN THOSE WHO OPPOSED THE TRIP HAD GONE QUIET IN THE FACE OF THE JOURNEY'S APPARENT SUCCESS. [REDACTED] HOWEVER, THAT MASSERA HAD BEEN PIQUED ON HEARING THAT VIDELA HAD SPOKEN FOR TWO HOURS IN WASHINGTON WITH MASSERA'S CLOSEST

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NAVY RIVAL, ADMIRAL MENDIA, SERVING NOW AS ARGENTINA'S REPRESENTATIVE ON THE INTER-AMERICAN DEFENSE BOARD.

6. IN THIS MURKY POLITICAL ATMOSPHERE IT IS DIFFICULT TO KNOW AT ALL WHETHER THE NOTORIOUS ALFREDO BRAVO CASE FIGURES IN THE VIDELA-MASSERA RIVALRY. FACTS ARE, HOWEVER, THAT BRAVO DID INDEED DISAPPEAR WHILE THE PRESIDENT WAS IN THE US AND THE DISAPPEARANCE WAS INTERPRETED AS AN ATTEMPT

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TO DISCREDIT THE PRESIDENT. BRAVO'S REAPPEARANCE IN LA PLATA CAUSED SPECULATION THAT IT WAS THE NAVY HAD HAD ENGINEERED THE DISAPPEARANCE, AND THAT ENORMOUS EFFORT HAD BEEN EXPENDED TO SMOKE OUT BRAVO'S WHEREABOUTS. (THIS ENORMOUS EFFORT WAS CLEARLY EXERTED UPON SOMEONE, ALMOST CERTAINLY AT VIDELA'S BEHEST, THOUGH IT COULD WELL HAVE BEEN AGAINST SOME OTHER ARM OF THE SECURITY APPARATUS.)

7. INTERNATIONAL IMPLICATIONS? WHETHER BY DESIGN OR BY ACCIDENT THE ARGENTINE NAVY HAS IN RECENT DAYS TAKEN ON AN IMMEDIATE AND CREDIBLE ROLE AS THE NATION'S FIRST DEFENDER WHICH COMES AS HEAVEN-SENT OPPORTUNITY FOR ADMIRAL MASSERA -- WHETHER IN PURSUING HIS QUARREL WITH PRESIDENT VIDELA OR MAKING HIMSELF INTO A NATIONAL HERO. NEWS BROKE THIS PAST WEEKEND OF A MYSTERIOUS FISHING FLEET STEAMING WITHOUT FLAGS OR MARKINGS OFF THE ARGENTINE COAST. TODAY THE NAVY ANNOUNCED THAT THREE OF ITS DESROYERS HAD TAKEN INTO CUSTODY THE SOVIET SHIPS "BUSSOL," "APATIT," "TEODOR LETTE," AND "MAGEIT" FOR ILLEGAL ENTRY INTO TERRITORIAL WATERS AND WAS BRINGING THE SHIPS TO AN ARGENTINE PORT. THE NOTICE CONTINUES THAT OTHER UNITS OF THE FLOTILLA HAD "ABANDONED THE 200 MILE AREA AHEAD OF IMMINENT CAPTURE." THIS EVENT TAKES PLACE ON THE HEELS OF A STIFF ARGENTINE PROTEST TO CHILE OVER TERRITORIAL WATERS VIOLATIONS AND UNAUTHORIZED OVERFLIGHTS. THESE WILL BE TOUGH ACTS FOR THE ARGENTINE ARMY TO FOLLOW.

8. PROGNOSIS. WHAT CONCERNS US NOW IS THAT THE MASSERA-

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VIDELA QUARREL HAS BROKEN INTO THE OPEN WITH "CONVICCION" AFFAIR (THE BRAVO AFFAIR IS MORE A MATTER OF POLITICAL SPECULATION), AND THAT MASSERA'S NEXT ACT WILL ALMOST CERTAINLY BE TO PRESERVE FACE BY ESCALATING THE ARGUMENT.

9. WE DO NOT KNOW WHETHER VIDELA IN HIS OWN MIND BLAMES THE NAVY FOR SUCH EXTRAORDINARY ACTS AS THE BRAVO DISAPPEARANCE, BUT FOR WHOMEVER ENGINEERS SUCH EVENTS THERE IS TROUBLE COMING: VIDELA TOLD A GROUP OF US AND ARGENTINE CORRESPONDENTS ON SEPTEMBER 21 THAT HEADS WOULD ROLL BECAUSE HE PERSONALLY WOULD TAKE ACTION AGAINST THESE PERPETRATORS. HE WENT ON TO RELATE THAT HE HAD HAD TO FACE UP TO RESPONSIBILITY FOR SUCH ACTS TOO LONG, AND THAT

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DURING HIS VISIT TO THE US THIS HAD AMOUNTED TO A HUMILIATION GREATER THAN HE INTENDS TO CONTINUE TO BEAR.

10. THIS ALL LOOKS SERIOUS, BUT IT BEARS REMBERING TOO THAT THE JUNTA HAS SHOWN A REMARKABLE ABILITY TO WALK RIGHT UP TO CONFRONTATION AND THEN TURN BACK.
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