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R 281213Z MAR 78
FM AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 0000
INFO AMEMBASSY ASUNCION
AMEMBASSY BRASILIA
AMEMBASSY MONTEVIDEO
AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO
USMISSION GENEVA
USUN 757

ARGENTINA PROJECT (\$200000044)

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 ______

SECTION 1 OF 3 BUENOS AIRES 2234

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: SHUM, PINS, AR

SUBJECT: THE PROBLEM OF THOSE WHO DISAPPEARED

1. SUMMARY:

WITH THE PUBLICATION OF THE FINAL LISTS OF PRISONERS
HELD BY THE EXECUTIVE UNDER THE STATE OF SEIGE
POWER, MANY IN ARGENTINA AND ABROAD WILL HAVE TO
FACE THE LIKELIHOOD THAT MISSSING FRIENDS AND
RELATIVES MUST BE PRESUMED DEAD. THIS WILL CREATE
SOME POLITICAL PRESSURES WITHIN ARGENTINA, BUT
LIKELY WILL NOT HAVE A MAJOR DOMESTIC POLITICAL
IMPACT. IT WILL ALSO GENERATE PRESSURES AND
CAMPAIGNS SEEKING TO FORCE THE GOA TO RENDER AN ACCOUNTING FOR
THE MISSING. THIS SITUATION RAISES THE QUESTION
FOR THE USG OF HOW TO REACT. THE EMBASSY RECOMMENDS
THAT THE USG SHOULD CONCENTRATE ITS EFFORTS ON THE
OPPORTUNITIES CREATED FOR CONTINUED PROGRESS TOWARD
RETURN TO THE RULE OF LAW. WHILE NOT CONDONING OR

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PARDONING THE GOA FOR ITS PART IN THE DISAPPEARANCES, WE SHOULD AVOID ENDORSING DEMANDS FOR AN ACCOUNTING.

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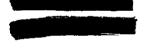
END SUMMARY

2. CIVIL VIOLENCE, TERRORISM AND COUNTERTERRORISM IN ARGENTINA OVER THE PAST HALF-DOZEN YEARS HAVE PROBABLY TAKEN THOUSANDS OF LIVES. A GREAT MANY OF THOSE HAVE BEEN SHOT OR VICTIMS OF BOMB ATTACKS. THERE IS A LARGE CATEGORY, HOWEVER, GENERALLY DESCRIBED AS "THE DISAPPEARED". THE CONVENTIONAL GOVERNMENT EXPLANATION FOR THESE PERSONS WHO HAVE VANISHED WITHOUT A TRACE IS THAT THEY:

- (1) HAVE GONE UNDERGROUND.
- (2) WERE TERRORISTS WHO WERE KILLED BY THEIR COMPANIONS.
- (3) HAVE FLED THE COUNTRY.
- (4) HAD BEEN KILLED IN BATTLE AND BODIES WERE UNRECOGNIZABLE, OR
- (5) WERE THE VICTIMS OF COUNTER-SUBVERSIVE EXCESSES.

WHILE WE KNOW THAT THERE ARE SIGNIFICANT NUMBERS IN THE FIRST FOUR CATEGORIES, WE ARE CONVINCED THAT THE MAJORITY FALL IN THE FIFTH. THESE INDIVIDUALS HAVE BEEN SEIZED BY ELEMENTS OF THE SECURITY FORCES AND HAVE BEEN SUMMARILY EXECUTED WHEN IT IS FOUND OR STRONGLY SUSPECTED THAT THEY HAVE SERIOUS INVOLVEMENT WITH TERRORISM.

3. THE MAGNITUDE OF THE PROBLEM:
AN ACCURATE NUMBER CAN NEVER BE ARRIVED AT. ORGANIZATIONS WHICH REGISTER REPORTS OF DISAPPEARANCES
HAVE COLLECTED WIDELY VARYING NUMBER OF CASES.
IT IS OUR ESTIMATE THAT AT LEAST SEVERAL THOUSAND
WERE KILLED, AND WE DOUBT THAT IT WILL EVER BE



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POSSIBLE TO CONSTRUCT A MORE SPECIFIC FIGURE.

4. THE ISSUE MUST BE FACED. UNTIL NOW, THE ARGENTINE GOVERNMENT HAS SIMPLY ACKNOWLEDGED THAT INDIVIDUALS HAVE DISAPPEARED AND CITED THE FIVE REASONS GIVEN ABOVE, DISMISSING THE MATTER. THE ISSUE OF DISAPPEARANCES WILL SHORTLY BECOME MORE ACUTE, WHEN FRIENDS AND NEXT-OF-KIN OF THE MISSING MUST FACE UP TO THE FACT THAT THEY ARE NOT BEING HELD BY THE GOVERNMENT. IN DECEMBER 1977 THE GOA BEGAN TO PUBLISH LISTS OF ALL THOSE BEING HELD UNDER THE EXECUTIVE'S STATE OF SEIGE DETENTION

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POWER ON GROUNDS OF SUBVERSIVE ACTIVITY OR SUSPECTED ACTIVITY. AT THIS POINT, ALL BUT ABOUT 800 OF THE 3,700 PRISONERS IN THIS CATEGORY HAVE BEEN IDENTIFIED BY THE GOA. WHEN THE NAMES OF THE REMAINING 800 HAS BEEN PUBLISHED, ALL THOSE MISSING WHOSE NAMES HAVE NOT TURNED UP ON THE LISTS (AS SOME 70 HAVE) WILL HAVE TO BE PRESUMED DEAD. THEIR FRIENDS CAN NO LONGER CLING TO THE HOPE THAT THEY WERE UNDER SECRET GOVERNMENT DETENTION.

5. COMPLETENESS OF THE GOVERNMENT'S LISTS:
IT IS INEVITABLE THAT SOME WILL CONTINUE TO CONTEND
THAT THOUSANDS OF PRISONERS ARE BEING HELD IN SECRET
PRISON CAMPS OR THAT FOR SPECIAL REASONS THE GOVERNMENT HAS DECLINED TO IDENTIFY SOME INDIVIDUALS
IT IS HOLDING. THE EMBASSY DOUBTS THAT THIS COULD
ACCOUNT FOR A SIGNIFICANT NUMBER. WE KNOW THAT
THERE IS A SMALL NUMBER OF CAPTURED TERRORISTS
WHO ARE COOPERATING WITH THE AUTHORITIES AGAINST
THEIR FORMER COMRADES AND WHOSE NAMES ARE WITHHELD
FOR THEIR PROTECTION. THERE MAY BE SMALL
NUMBERS OF OTHER PRISONERS SECRETLY RETAINED FOR
SPECIAL REASONS, BUT THERE IS NO INCENTIVE OR

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RATIONALE FOR THE GOVERNMENT TO IMPRISON SECRETLY SIGNIFICANT NUMBERS OF TERRORIST SUSPECTS.

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6. THE PROBLEM FOR THE GOA: THOSE WHO HAVE BEEN MAINTAINING THE HOPE THAT DISAPPEARED RELATIVES MAY TURN UP WILL FEEL THEIR SENSE OF LOSS . ACUTELY. THE ONE-ISSUE GROUPS, SUCH AS THE MOTHERS OF THE PLAZA DE MAYO, WILL CLAMOR FOR THE GOVERNMENT TO MAKE AN ACCOUNTING FOR THE MISSING. THE ISSUE WILL BE INCREASINGLY AND DRAMATICALLY REPORTED INTERNATIONALLY. HOWEVER, WE DOUBT THAT IT WILL ASSUME SIGNIFICANT DOMESTIC POLITICAL PROPORTIONS; HE GOVERNMENT RETAINS SUBSTANTIAL PUBLIC SUPPORT AND THERE IS NO SIGNIFICANT ORGANIZED OPPOSITION. THERE IS NO GENERAL PERVASIVE SENSE OF OUTRAGE ABOUT THOSE WHO HAVE DISAPPEARED, AND, INDEED, AMONG THOSE WHO HAVE NOT LOST RELATIVES -- AND EVEN AMONG SOME WHO HAVE -- A FREQUENT REACTION IS "GOOD RIDDANCE". THE ISSUE HAS SHOWN POLITICAL POTENTIAL, HOWEVER, IN THAT ADMIRAL MASSERA HAS MADE A FEW GESTURES AT EXPLOITING IT FOR HIS PERSONAL POLITICAL ADVANTAGE AND WHEN GREATER

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POLITICAL FREEDOM PERMITS, THE POLITICAL PARTIES WILL USE THE ISSUE AS A STICK WITH WHICH TO BEAT THE MILITARY REGIME.

7. THE GOA REACTION:

THE GOA HAS LONG SINCE DECIDED HOW TO DEAL WITH THE PROBLEM OF DISAPPEARANCES. IT HAS ESTABLISHED A FRAMEWORK TO EXPLAIN THE DISAPPEARANCES AND HAS NOT DENIED THAT WHEN THE LAST OF THE LISTS OF DETAINEES UNDER THE EXECUTIVE AUTHORITY IS PUBLISHED, THOSE NOT LISTED CAN BE ASSUMED LOST INTO ONE OF THE FIVE CATEGORIES OF THE DISAPPEARED. THE GOA'S LEADERS HAVE DECIDED TO RIDE OUT THIS ISSUE. WE THINK THEY HAVE CONCLUDED THAT IT CAN BE DONE WITHOUT SIGNIFICANT DOMESTIC POLITICAL RISK. WE

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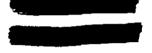
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CAN EXPECT THE GOA SPOKESMEN IN THE UN AND OTHER INTERNATIONAL FORA TO DEAL WITH THE DISAPPEARANCE PROBLEM BY CITING THE FIVE REASONS FOR DISAPPEARANCES WHENEVER THE SUBJECT IS RAISED. THE PUBLICATIONS OF THE LISTS OF DETAINEES, HOWEVER, TOGETHER WITH THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE RIGHT OF OPTION (VOLUNTARY EXILE) PROGRAM HAVE SET THE STAGE FOR FURTHER MODIFICATIONS OF THE GOA COUNTER-TERRORIST PRACTICES. THESE MOVES, MINIMAL THOUGH THEY BE, CREAT SOME MOMENTUM IN THE DIRECTION OF A RETURN TO DUE PROCESS AND NORMALITY. WE ALREADY SEE-AS IN THE CHURCH'S LETTER TO THE GOVERNMENT -- GROWING PRESSURES TO CHARGE OR FREE THOSE HELD UNDER THE EXECUTIVE AUTHORITY AND TO CEASE THE IRREGULAR DETENTION PRACTICES (ABDUCTION) REGULARLY USED BY THE SECURITY FORCES.

8. THE PROBLEM FOR THE UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT:



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WHEN EVENTS REQUIRE THAT THERE BE PUBLIC ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF MANY THOUSANDS OF PRESUMED DEAD IN ARGENTINA, THE USG WILL HAVE TO COMMENT ON THE SIUTATION IN DEALING WITH CONGRESS AND INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS, HUMAN RIGHTS GROUPS, AND PARTICULARLY FRIENDS AND RELATIVES OF THE MISSING. THE EMBASSY RECOMMENDS THAT THE US AVOID SUPPORTING DEMANDS THAT THE GOA ACCOUNT FOR THE MISSING. WE BELIEVE THIS WOULD BE FRUITLESS AND MIGHT DIVERT US FROM THE OPPORTUNITY THAT LIES IN THE CURRENT SITUATION. THE EFFORT WOULD BE FRUITLESS BECAUSE WE BELIEVE THAT THE GOA FEELS ITS CURRENT POSITION IS LESS RISKY THAN FUTURE PUBLICATION OF NECESSARILY INCOMPLETE LISTS OF THOSE EXECUTED BY THE SECURITY FORCES. EVEN IF IT SHOULD CHOOSE TO PUBLISH LISTS, THEIR OMISSIONS WOULD GENERATE FURTHER CONTROVERSY. THE GOA COUNTER-TERRORIST OPERATIONS WERE DELIVERATELY ORGANIZED WITH A HIGH DEGREE OF INDEPENDENCE OF INDIVIDUAL UNITS, PARTICULARLY IN THE FIRST YEAR FOLLOWING THE REVOLUTION. THIS WAS DONE PARTLY TO COMPARTMENTALIZE THE OPERATIONS AND PROTECT THEM FROM TERRORIST PENETRATION, BUT IT WAS ALSO DONE SO THAT THE GOA MIGHT MAKE A PLAUSIBLE DENIAL OF ANY PARTICULAR OPERATION. WE SUSPECT THAT, EVEN IF THE GOVERNMENT HAS TRIED TO MAINTAIN SOME RECORDS OF EXECUTIONS, THE METHOD

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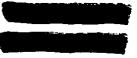
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BY WHICH IT ORGANIZED ITS TROOPS ALMOST GUARANTEES
THAT REPORTS WOULD BE UNRELIABLE. IT IS ALSO
IMPORTANT TO BEAR IN MIND THAT THE GOA HAS ACCEPTED
RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE DEATHS OF SOME OF THE
PERSONS DISAPPEARED AND, CONSEQUENTLY, ADMITS A
BURDEN OF GUILT, ALBEIT VASTLY UNDERSTATED. THE
EMBASSY RECOMMENDS THAT IN CORRESPONDENCE AND PUBLIC
STATEMENTS ABOUT THE PROBLEM OF THOSE MISSING IN
ARGENTINA, THE USG AVOID LANGUAGE THAT WOULD
STIGMATIZE THIS GOVERNMENT AND INSTEAD FOCUS ATTENTION ON
THE PROSPECTS FOR IMPROVED OBSERVANCE OF HUMAN



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RIGHTS IN ARGENTINA.

9. THE OPPORTUNITY FOR THE U.S.:
THE PUBLICATION OF THE LISTS OF POLITICAL PRISONERS
IS IN A SENSE A WATERSHED EVENT. THE GOVERNMENT
HAS DROPPED THE VEIL OF SECRECY FROM ONE IMPORTANT ASPECT
OF ITS SECURITY PROGRAM. WITH THE WAR AGAINST SUBVERSION
ACKNOWLEDGED AS WON BY ALL BUT A FEW HARDLINERS,
IT SHOULD BECOME INCREASINGLY DIFFICULT TO JUSTIFY
THOSE ABDUCTION PRACTICES STILL USED BY THE SECURITY
FORCES IN THEIR OPERATIONS. THE US RESPONSE SHOULD
BE TO REINFORCE THE MOMENTUM TOWARD NORMALIZATION
AND DUE PROCESS. IN THIS CONTEXT, PRESSING FOR



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AN ACCOUNTING OF THE MISSING WOULD BE A DIVERSION.

10. THE EMBASSY RECOMMENDS THAT ON AN EARLY CONVENIENT OCCASION A RANKING DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL COMMENT ON THE PUBLICATION OF THE DETENTION LISTS, THE RIGHT OF OPTION PROGRAM (AND, POSSIBLY THE DEUTSCH AND TIMERMAN RELEASES), STRESSING OUR HOPE THAT THEY ARE BUT EARLY STEPS TOWARD THE RULE OF LAW. THE PUBLIC STATEMENT SHOLD BE COMPLEMENTED BY HIGH-LEVEL PRIVATE DEMARCHES IN BOTH WASHINGTON AND BUENOS AIRES. THESE WOULD NOT THE PUBLIC STATEMENT BUT HEAVILY QUALIFY IT, AND OBSERVE THAT US PUBLIC OPINION, FOR ONE, WILL NOT TOLERATE MOVES FOR AN IMPROVEMENT IN BILATERAL RELATIONS WHILE THE IRREGULAR ARREST PROCEDURES AND DETENTIONS WITHOUT CHARGE CONTINUE. AT THIS TIME IT SHOULD ALSO BE STRESSED THAT THE ISSUE OF THE DISAPPEARED WILL NEVER GO AWAY SO LONG AS THE GOA CONTINUES THOSE PRACTICES WHICH

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ARE DIRECTLY ASSOCIATED WITH MANY DISAPPEARANCES.
THE DEMARCHE COULD USEFULLY SET FORTH COME
SPECIFIC REFORMS WHICH WOULD PERMIT THE USG TO
ABSTAIN ON FURTHER IFI VOTES ON ARGENTINE LOANS.
WE SHOULD CONCENTRATE ON THE ARREST PROCEDURES AT
THIS STAGE, FOR THEY ARE THE MECHANISM FOR THE
WORST ABUSES. WE SHOULD AVOID PRESSING FOR
INDIVIDUAL RELEASES.—A TACTIC WHICH THE GOA HAS
SUCCESSFULLY USED TO BLUNT THE FORCE OF THE
USG PRESSURES.—AND SHOULD AVOID DEMANDING
ACCOUNTABILITY FOR THE DISAPPEARED, SINCE
THAT DOES NOTHING DIRECTLY TO ELIMINATE FURTHER ABUSES.

11. THE DEPARTMENT'S COMMENTS WOULD BE APPRECIATED. CASTRO

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