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FM AMEMBASSY PORT AU PRINCE
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S E C R E T PORT AU PRINCE 3997

REVIEW AUTHORITY: Oscar Olson, Senior Reviewer

E.O. 12356: DECL: OADR
TAGS: HA, IT, MASS, MARR
SUBJECT: HAITI PURCHASES JET FIGHTERS

REF: PORT AU PRINCE 3774 (NOTAL)

1. (C) SUMMARY: HAITIAN DEFENSE MINISTER DR. ROGER LAFONTANT VISITED ITALY DURING THE WEEK OF JULY 8 AND SIGNED CONTRACTS WITH ITALIAN ARMAMENT FIRMS WORTH \$12 MILLION. MAJOR ITEMS PURCHASED WERE FOUR SIAI MARCHETTI S-211 TRAINER/GROUND SUPPORT JETS WORTH \$1.5 MILLION EACH, AIRCRAFT BOMBS, ROCKETS, CANNON AMMUNITION AND SUPPORT EQUIPMENT. END SUMMARY.

2. () ITALIAN AMBASSADOR SERGIO EMINA (PLS PROTECT) BRIEFED CHARGE JULY 17 ON HAITIAN DEFENSE MINISTER LAFONTANT'S RECENT VISIT TO ITALY. HAVING PURCHASED SIX SAIA MARCHETTI SF-260 TURBOPROP TRAINER/CLOSE SUPPORT AIRCRAFT IN MARCH 1983, LAFONTANT RETURNED TO ITALY TO PURCHASE FOUR JET TRAINER/GROUND SUPPORT S-211 AIRCRAFT AND RELATED GROUND SUPPORT EQUIPMENT. SECRET

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WITH THE MUNITIONS PACKAGE (DETAILS SEPTTEL FROM DAO) AND RELATED SERVICES, LA FONTANT COMMITTED THE GOH TO REPAY \$12 MILLION, OF WHICH A CERTAIN UNSPECIFIED SUM HAS ALREADY BEEN PAID. THE MUNITIONS PACKAGE APPEARS DESIGNED FOR CLOSE AIR SUPPORT OF GROUND OPERATIONS, BUT ALSO PROVIDES AN ANTI-SHIP CAPABILITY. DELIVERY IS SCHEDULED FOR MID-1985.

3. (C) LAFONTANT RETURNED TO HAITI ON OR ABOUT JULY 15. OTHER SOURCES HAVE TOLD CHARGE THAT LAFONTANT

HAD ALSO GONE TO ISREAL WHICH HAD PREVIOUSLY SOLD HAITI MACHINE GUN PODS FOR THE SF-260'S. ISRAELI AMBASSADOR DECKEL SEEMED GENUINELY SURPRISED AT THE IDEA THAT LAFONTANT COULD HAVE VISITED ISRAEL, BUT ADDED THAT HE MIGHT NOT HACE BEEN INFORMED. ISRAEL HAS ALREADY SUPPLIED HAITI WITH THE UZI SUBMACHINE GUN, THE FALIL ASSAULT RIFLE, TWO DUAL-MOUNTED 40 MM CANNONS WHICH GUARD THE WEST LAWN OF THE PALACE, AND OTHER MILITARY EQUIPMENT.

4. (C) THE EMBASSY WILL BE FOLLOWING WITH INTEREST LAFONTANT'S SUBSEQUENT MOVES AS HE SPENDS CRITICALLY SCARCE FOREIGN EXCHANGE IN VIOLATION OF THE IMF AGREEMENT TO PURCHASE JET FIGHTERS AND ORDNANCE. IN THE ABSENCE OF ANY CREDIBLE EXTERNAL MILITARY THREAT, OUR PRELIMINARY ASSESSMENT OF LAFONTANT'S MOTIVE FOR THE PURCHASES IS PSYCHOLOGICAL, TO ENHANCE THE GOH'S INTERNAL AND REGIONAL IMAGE AND TO BOOST LAFONTANT'S POSITION IN THE CABINET. WE DO NOT YET HAVE A READING ON THE REACTION OF THE HAITIAN ARMY WHICH NEEDS BASIC INFANTRY WEAPONS TO REPLACE ANTIQUE M-1 RIFLES.

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5. (S) AMBASSADOR EMINA, WHO PRESENTED HIS CREDENTIALS ONLY ON JUNE 19, ASKED THAT THE SOURCE OF THIS INFORMATION BE CLOSELY HELD WITHIN THE USG AS HIS STANDING WITH THE GOH WOULD SUFFER SHOULD IT BECOME KNOWN THAT HE HAD REPORTED ON LAFONTANT'S ACTIVITIES SO QUICKLY.
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