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PAGE 01 BUENOS 02692 01 OF 04 182152Z  
ACTION ARA-01

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INFO	LOG-00	ACDA-15	AMAD-01	CIAE-00	SJK-01	C-01	DODE-00
	DS-00	EUR-01	HA-09	H-01	INRE-00	INR-01	L-03
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	PRS-01	P-01	SCT-03	SNP-01	SP-01	SS-01	TRSE-00
	T-01	USIE-00	/047W				

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O 182144Z MAR 92  
 FM AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES  
 TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4261  
 INFO AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV IMMEDIATE  
 AMEMBASSY ASUNCION  
 AMEMBASSY BRASILIA  
 AMEMBASSY LA PAZ  
 AMEMBASSY LIMA  
 AMEMBASSY MONTEVIDEO  
 AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO  
 AMEMBASSY BOGOTA  
 AMCONSUL SAO PAULO  
 AMCONSUL RIO DE JANEIRO  
 AMEMBASSY BUCHAREST  
 AMEMBASSY DUBLIN  
 AMEMBASSY CAIRO  
 AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS  
 FAA WASHDC  
 USCINCSO QUARRY HEIGHTS PM  
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PAGE 02 BUENOS 02692 01 OF 04 182152Z  
 C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 BUENOS AIRES 02692

CINCSO AND CINCLANT ALSO FOR INTAFF

E.O. 12356: DECL: OADR  
 TAGS: ASEC, PTER, PREL, AR, IS  
 SUBJECT: UPDATE ON ISRAELI EMBASSY BOMBING

REF: BUENOS AIRES 2649 (NOTAL)  
 SUMMARY

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1. (U) THE CASUALTY TOLL CONTINUES TO MOUNT AFTER MARCH 17 ISRAELI EMBASSY BOMBING, WITH TEN REPORTED DEATHS AND OVER TWO HUNDRED INJURED. ACCORDING TO MEDIA REPORTS, A NUMBER OF VICTIMS ARE STILL BURIED UNDER THE RUBBLE OF THE EMBASSY, WITH VERY LITTLE HOPE OF RESCUE. IN A LATE MARCH 17 PRESS CONFERENCE, PRESIDENT MENEM SAID THAT HE HAD ASKED FOR CIA AND MOSSAD ASSISTANCE, AND THAT THE ATTACK WOULD STRENGTHEN ISRAELI-ARGENTINE RELATIONS.

2. (C) ARGENTINE REACTION TO THE ATTACK HAS BEEN A VIRTUALLY UNANIMOUS COMBINATION OF SHOCK, SORROW AND OUTRAGE. THE ATTACK MAY THUS HELP STIFFEN THE RESOLVE OF A COUNTRY UNDERGOING A FOREIGN POLICY EVOLUTION TOWARDS THE FIRST WORLD. IT WILL ALMOST CERTAINLY HAVE THIS EFFECT ON MENEM. SOME RECKLESS OPPONENTS OF THIS POLICY HAVE MADE STATEMENTS, HOWEVER, THAT SUGGEST THAT THEY WILL TRY TO BLAME MENEM'S FIRST WORLD ALIGNMENT FOR THE SAINT PATRICK'S DAY TRAGEDY.

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PAGE 03 BUENOS 02692 01 OF 04 182152Z  
END SUMMARY.

DEATH TOLL MOUNTS  
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3. (U) INTERIOR MINISTER MANZANO REPORTEDLY ANNOUNCED MARCH 18 THAT THE CASUALTY TOLL WAS NOW TEN DEAD AND 252 WOUNDED. ARGENTINE POLICE SOURCES TOLD EMBASSY EARLY MARCH 18 THAT THREE FEDERAL POLICEMEN, ONE CHILD, A NUN, AND A PRIEST WERE AMONG THE DEAD. MANY CHILDREN ATTENDING A KINDERGARTEN IN FRONT OF THE EMBASSY WERE TREATED FOR CUTS AND RELEASED FROM LOCAL HOSPITALS. A NUMBER OF THE INJURED OR DEAD WERE FROM A GERIATRIC HOME AND A CHURCH DAMAGED BY THE BLAST.

4. (U) OFFICIALS BELIEVE THE DEATH TOLL IS LIKELY TO MOUNT. RESCUE WORKERS CONTINUE TO DIG THROUGH A PILE OF DEBRIS WHERE A WING OF THE EMBASSY ONCE STOOD. THE FRAGILITY OF SECTIONS OF THE EMBASSY THAT REMAIN STANDING HINDERS THIS RESCUE EFFORT. HEAVY MARCH 18 MORNING RAINS REPORTEDLY SHOWERED GLASS FROM BROKEN WINDOWS OF NEARBY TOWERS ONTO RESCUE WORKERS, FURTHER SLOWING SALVAGE WORK. POLICE SOURCES TOLD RSO EARLY MARCH 18 THAT RESCUE WORKERS HAD YET TO PROGRESS PAST

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THE FIRST FLOOR OF THE FORMER EMBASSY, WHICH HAD TWO UNDERGROUND LEVELS.

ONE BOMB, OR TWO?  
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PAGE 04 BUENOS 02692 01 OF 04 182152Z

5. (C) POLICE SOURCES TOLD RSO THAT SALVAGE EFFORTS HAD IMPEDED ANALYSIS OF THE EXPLOSIONS. THEIR PRELIMINARY ANALYSIS, HOWEVER, SUGGESTED THAT TWO BOMBS HAD EXPLODED, ONE INSIDE AND ANOTHER (APPARENTLY A CAR BOMB) OUTSIDE OF THE BUILDING. POLICE SOURCES BELIEVED THAT THE BUILDING'S COLLAPSE INDICATED AN EXPLOSION WITHIN THE BUILDING, WHILE WIDESPREAD DAMAGE TO NEIGHBORING BUILDINGS HAD TO REFLECT A LARGE-SCALE EXPLOSION FROM OUTSIDE.

6. (U) THE ISRAELI EMBASSY WAS UNDERGOING INTERNAL RENOVATION AT THE TIME OF THE ATTACK. ARGENTINE OFFICIALS QUOTED BY LOCAL PRESS SUGGESTED THAT

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PAGE 01 BUENOS 02692 02 OF 04 182153Z  
ACTION ARA-01

INFO	LOG-00	ACDA-15	AMAD-01	CIAE-00	SJK-01	C-01	DODE-00
	DS-00	EUR-01	HA-09	H-01	INRE-00	INR-01	L-03
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CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 BUENOS 02692 02 OF 04 182153Z  
C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 02 OF 04 BUENOS AIRES 02692

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E.O. 12356: DECL: OADR  
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SUBJECT: UPDATE ON ISRAELI EMBASSY BOMBING

EXPLOSIVES COULD HAVE ENTERED THE TIGHT ISRAELI  
SECURITY PERIMETER ALONG WITH BUILDING MATERIALS.  
-

OTHER NEAR VICTIMS  
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7. (U) A NUMBER OF ISRAELI OFFICIALS AND LOCAL  
JOURNALISTS BARELY MISSED BECOMING VICTIMS OF THE  
TRAGEDY. ISRAELI MFA DIRECTOR OF POLITICAL  
COORDINATION VICTOR HAREL BRIEFED JOURNALISTS EARLIER  
MARCH 17 ON ISRAELI VIEWS OF THE PEACE PROCESS. HAREL  
AND THE JOURNALISTS LEFT THE EMBASSY APPROXIMATELY

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ONE-HALF HOUR BEFORE THE BLAST. ISRAELI AMBASSADOR YITZAK SHEFFI WAS ALSO OUTSIDE OF THE EMBASSY AT THE TIME OF THE BLAST. SOME REPORTS IDENTIFIED HAREL AS THE PRINCIPAL TARGET OF THE INCIDENT.

8. (U) THE NEIGHBORING EMBASSIES OF IRELAND AND ROMANIA WERE ALSO REPORTEDLY DAMAGED. EMBOFFS AT THE SCENE ALSO SAW SHATTERED WINDOWS AT THE NEARBY BRAZILIAN AND COLOMBIAN MISSIONS, SERIOUS ENOUGH TO CLOSE THE LATTER. THE U.S. EMBASSY IS IN MID-TOWN  
CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 03 BUENOS 02692 02 OF 04 182153Z  
BUENOS AIRES, WELL AWAY FROM THE DOWNTOWN BLAST SITE.

CLAIM OF RESPONSIBILITY  
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9. (U) A BUENOS AIRES RADIO STATION REPORTED THAT A GROUP CALLED "FOR A FREE PALESTINE" HAD CLAIMED RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE ATTACK IN A 6:30 P.M. MARCH 17 TELEPHONE CALL. A LOCAL TELEVISION STATION RECEIVED A MESSAGE SAYING "TODAY IT WAS AN EMBASSY, TOMORROW IT WILL BE A MINISTRY. BEWARE OF ARGENTINA'S NAZIS." THE DIRECTOR OF BUENOS AIRES' PALESTINE INFORMATION OFFICE, FOR HIS PART, CONDEMNED THE ATTACK IN A MARCH 17 STATEMENT TO THE PRESS. REPORTS SUBSEQUENTLY REACHED BUENOS AIRES THAT ISLAMIC JIHAD HAD CLAIMED AUTHORSHIP OF THE TERRORIST ATTACK.

GENERAL REPUDIATION  
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10. (U) VIRTUALLY ALL SECTORS OF ARGENTINE SOCIETY HAVE CATEGORICALLY CONDEMNED THE ATTACK. JEWISH SCHOOLS CLOSED MARCH 18. ARGENTINA'S CONGRESS WAS TO MEET IN SPECIAL SESSION THE SAME DAY TO REPUDIATE THE ATTACK. NEWSCASTERS ON A MORNING NEWS SHOW WERE DRESSED IN MOURNING.

11. (U) PRESIDENT MENEM, FOR HIS PART, ROUNDLY CONDEMNED THE ATTACK IN STATEMENTS IMMEDIATELY AFTER THE BLAST, AND SUBSEQUENTLY IN AN EVENING PRESS CONFERENCE IN THE CASA ROSADA. IN EARLY REMARKS HE  
CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 04 BUENOS 02692 02 OF 04 182153Z  
ALLUDED TO NEO-NAZIS AND REBEL ARMY DISSIDENTS  
("CARAPINTADAS") IN THE ATTEMPT. HE WAS MORE  
CIRCUMSPECT DURING THE CASA ROSADA PRESS CONFERENCE,  
IN WHICH HE ANNOUNCED THAT HE HAD ASKED FOR CIA AND  
MOSSAD ASSISTANCE IN INVESTIGATING THE BLAST. HE  
WARNED JOURNALISTS NOT TO TWIST ASSISTANCE FROM  
FOREIGN INTELLIGENCE SERVICES INTO "INTERFERENCE IN  
ARGENTINE DOMESTIC AFFAIRS."

COUNTERATTACK  
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CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 01 BUENOS 02692 03 OF 04 182153Z  
ACTION ARA-01

INFO	LOG-00	ACDA-15	AMAD-01	CIAE-00	SJK-01	C-01	DODE-00
	DS-00	EUR-01	HA-09	H-01	INRE-00	INR-01	L-03
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AMEMBASSY BOGOTA  
AMCONSUL SAO PAULO  
AMCONSUL RIO DE JANEIRO  
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CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 BUENOS 02692 03 OF 04 182153Z  
C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 03 OF 04 BUENOS AIRES 02692

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SUBJECT: UPDATE ON ISRAELI EMBASSY BOMBING

12. (U) ALTHOUGH NO ONE ACTUALLY APPLAUDED THE ACT, SEVERAL POLITICIANS ON THE RIGHT OR LEFT TRIED TO USE IT TO ATTACK MENEM'S PRO-WESTERN FOREIGN POLICY. FORMER CARAPINTADA REBEL (AND CURRENT EXTREME RIGHT POLITICAL LEADER) ALDO RICO DENIED ANY RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE ATTACK. HE EXPLICITLY BLAMED MENEM, HOWEVER, "FOR HAVING TURNED TWO COMMUNITIES (I.E., ARGENTINA'S JEWISH AND ARAB COMMUNITIES) AGAINST EACH OTHER THROUGH A BLATENT POLITICAL MANUEVER, THE DISPATCH OF TROOPS TO THE GULF." OLGA DE BARALDINI, WIFE OF A PROMINENT CARAPINTADA, ATTRIBUTED THE ATTACK TO "THE THE MISTAKEN STRATEGIC DIRECTION OF THIS GOVERNMENT, EXACERBATED BY THE RECENT ATTITUDES OF THE AMBASSADOR OF THE UNITED STATES."

13. (U) THE LEFT-OF-CENTER DAILY "PAGINA 12," FOR ITS PART, TIED THE ATTACK TO ARGENTINA'S PARTICIPATION IN THE GULF WAR COALITION. NOTING THAT IT HAD WARNED OF TERRORIST ATTACKS AT THE TIME OF ARGENTINA'S COMMITMENT, "PAGINA 12" ARGUED THAT NOT ONLY ARGENTINE TROOPS FIGHTING IN THE GULF "RISKED THEIR LIVES IN THIS ADVENTURE. ALTHOUGH THE FOREIGN MINISTER PRETENDS NOT TO UNDERSTAND, THE POPULATION HAS ALREADY

CONFIDENTIAL

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 BUENOS 02692 03 OF 04 182153Z  
LEARNED, WITH ITS BLOOD, THE COSTS OF SEEKING THROUGH  
ARMS THE BENEVOLENCE OF THE POWERFUL."  
-

WHY HERE?  
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14. (C) HOWEVER POLITICALLY MOTIVATED, "PAGINA 12'S" ACCUSATION REFLECTS A QUESTION THAT IS ON THE MIND OF MANY ARGENTINES: WHY HERE? A NUMBER OF LOCAL COMMENTATORS HAVE NOTED THAT AN ATTACK OF THIS MAGNITUDE IS UNHEARD-OF HERE, WHILE EXPRESSING FEARS THAT THE MARCH 17 BOMBING MIGHT PRESAGE A RETURN TO THE HORRIBLE AND NOT SO DISTANT ERA OF DOMESTIC TERRORISM. ALTHOUGH THIS ATTACK WAS INTERNATIONAL RATHER THAN DOMESTIC IN SCOPE, THE MENEM GOVERNMENT, BY ABANDONING THIRD-WORLD ALLIANCES, MAY HAVE REMOVED A BRAKE ON TERRORIST ACTION ON ARGENTINE TERRITORY.

15. (C) THERE ARE SEVERAL OBVIOUS REASONS WHY AN ARAB TERRORIST MIGHT WANT TO LAUNCH AN ATTACK HERE. FIRST IS THAT ARGENTINA SEEMS A SOFT TARGET, WITHOUT A RIGID OR PARTICULARLY EFFECTIVE COUNTER-TERRORIST POLICY. THINGS HAD BEEN TOO PEACEFUL FOR TOO LONG. MOREOVER, BUENOS AIRES HAS A VERY LARGE JEWISH POPULATION, SECOND TO NEW YORK AMONG COMMUNITIES OUTSIDE OF ISRAEL. THE ARAB COMMUNITY IN ARGENTINA IS ALSO CONSIDERABLE. ALTHOUGH WE HAVE NOT NOTICED TENSIONS BETWEEN ARABS AND JEWS HERE, AND ALTHOUGH THE ARAB COMMUNITY HAS SUPPORTED MENEM'S FOREIGN POLICY, THE LARGE ARAB COMMUNITY MIGHT PROVIDE SOME SORT OF COVER

CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 04 BUENOS 02692 03 OF 04 182153Z  
TO TERRORISTS FROM ABROAD.  
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WHAT NOW?  
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16. (C) ARGENTINE-ISRAELI RELATIONS UNDER THE CURRENT ARGENTINE GOVERNMENT HAVE BEEN EXCELLENT. MENEM AND

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FOREIGN MINISTER DI TELLA HAVE BOTH VOWED THAT THE SAINT PATRICK'S DAY BOMBING WILL STRENGTHEN, RATHER THAN WEAKEN, THESE RELATIONS. WE BELIEVE THEY ARE SINCERE. WE WOULD NOTE, MOREOVER, THAT WHEN MENEM HAS BEEN CHALLENGED HARSHLY IN THE PAST -- E.G., DURING

CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 01 BUENOS 02692 04 OF 04 182154Z  
ACTION ARA-01

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PAGE 02 BUENOS 02692 04 OF 04 182154Z  
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THE CARAPINTADA REBELLION OF DECEMBER, 1990 -- HE HAS  
RESPONDED WITH DETERMINATION, EVEN RUTHLESSLY.

17. (C) ARGENTINE POLITICS HAS MORE THAN ITS SHARE OF  
IRRATIONALITY, HOWEVER, WITH POLITICIANS CASTING  
AROUND FOR WHATEVER EVIDENCE CAN BE USED TO ADVANCE A  
PREDETERMINED POSITION. WE THUS EXPECT SOME POLITICAL  
FALLOUT FROM OPPONENTS OF MENEM'S POLICY, WHO WILL  
ATTEMPT TO ARGUE THAT ARGENTINE SHOULD RETURN TO ITS  
NON-ALIGNED PAST TO SAVE ITSELF FROM THE SCOURGE OF  
INTERNATIONAL TERRORISM. IN VIEW OF THE OUTRAGE  
PRODUCED BY THE TERRORISTS, HOWEVER, SUCH EFFORTS ARE  
SURE TO FAIL.

TODMAN

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