

SECRET

RELEASED IN FULL

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ACTION ARA-15

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 NSCE-00 COME-00 SP-02 AID-05 EB-08
TRSE-00 SS-15 STR-08 OMB-01 CEA-01 INRE-00
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FM AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9997

S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 2 BUENOS AIRES 2399

E.O. 12065: XDS-1 3/27/09; (CASTRO, RAUL H.) OR-M
TAGS: SHUM AR
SUBJ: (S) AMBASSADOR DISCUSSES RAILROAD LOAN WITH PRESIDENT
VIDELA

REF: CASTRO-RUSER TELECONS, 3/26; STATE 075474; STATE 076152

1. (SECRET) ALL TEXT.

2. I RECEIVED A CALL FROM DEPARTMENT YESTERDAY (MAR 26) INFORM-
ING ME MESSAGE WOULD BE ARRIVING SHORTLY REFERENCE USG VOTE ON
GOA RAILROAD LOAN TO TAKE PLACE TODAY (MARCH 27). I WAS INSTRUCT-
ED TO SEEK APPOINTMENT WITH PRESIDENT VIDELA ASAP, ANTICIPATING
MESSAGE, I CONTACTED PRESIDENT VIDELA'S OFFICE AND WAS TOLD
PRESIDENT WOULD SHORTEN HIS MEETING AWAY FROM PRESIDENTIAL
PALACE TO MEET ME AT 20:30 HRS LAST NIGHT (MARCH 26). DUE TO
NON-ARRIVAL OF DEPT'S MESSAGE, I CONTACTED DIRECTOR, (ARA/ECA)
FOR GUIDANCE AS TO CONTENTS OF MESSAGE. CONTENTS WERE FURNISHED
ME AND SUBSEQUENTLY AN AMENDMENT WAS GIVEN JUST BEFORE LEAVING
FOR MY MEETING WITH VIDELA.

3. ON ARRIVAL, VIDELA WAS WAITING FOR ME. HE APPEARED IN GOOD
SPIRITS AND INVITED ME TO HIS WORKING OFFICE. I HAD ALWAYS MET
WITH HIM IN HIS MAIN OFFICE. TO MY DISMAY, HIS WORKING

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OFFICE APPEARS TO BE AN ADJUNCT TO SOME BISILICA AS THE
DECOR IS HEAVILY RELIGIOUS. AFTER MY MAKING FULL INQUIRY
INTO THE HEALTH AND WELFARE OF HIS FAMILY AND THE PRESIDENT
OF MINE, I GAVE MY OPENING STATEMENT. I TRANSLATED IN FULL

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DETAIL CONTENTS OF MESSAGE GIVEN ME. I MUST ADMIT IT WAS NOT PLEASANT TO READ TO THE PRESIDENT AN INDICTMENT OF CHARGES THAT HIS COUNTRY WAS A HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATOR AND FOR THAT REASON USG, AS REQUIRED BY LAW, IT WAS REQUIRED TO VOTE "NO" ON LOANS FROM MULTILATERAL DEVELOPMENT BANKS. I THEN EXPLAINED TO VIDELA THAT IN 1978 THE USG CHANGED ITS POSITION FROM VOTING "NO" TO ABSTAINING ON THESE LOANS BECAUSE THERE WERE SEVERAL INDICATIONS WHICH INDICATED IMPROVEMENTS WOULD BE FORTHCOMING. I TOLD HIM WE CONSIDERED THE IAHR VISIT AS A VERY POSITIVE FACTOR.

4. I THEN EXPLAINED TO VIDELA THE YEAR 1978 WAS EXTREMELY DISCOURAGING. I THEN WENT DOWN THE LINE ON CHARGES AND TOLD VIDELA SUBSTANTIAL IMPROVEMENTS HAD NOT OCCURRED IN 1978. BY THIS TIME PRESIDENT VIDELA APPEARED VERY MUCH LIKE THE ACCUSED AND I AS THE SUPERIOR COURT JUDGE. I TOLD THE PRESIDENT ARBITRARY ARRESTS, DISAPPEARANCE OF PERSONS DUE TO EFFORTS OF SECURITY FORCES HAD BLATANTLY CONTINUED IN 1978. I EXPLAINED THERE WAS AN AVERAGE OF OVER 50 PERSONS DISAPPEARED PER MONTH LAST YEAR. I EXPLAINED OF USG TOTAL CONTEMPT FOR TORTURING AND MIS-TREATMENT OF PRISONERS DURING INTERROGATIONS AND THAT FURTHERMORE THE NUMBER OF POLITICAL PRISONERS REMAINED VERY HIGH. DURING ALL THIS TIME I SPOKE FIRMLY, SUCCINCTLY AND AT A RAPID PACE SO AS TO AVOID THE PRESIDENT INTERRUPTING MY TRAIN OF THOUGHT. I WANTED TO BE SURE HE HEARD IT ALL. AS I WATCHED THE PRESIDENT, IT BECAME CLEAR HE WAS IN PAIN OVER MY STATEMENTS. (COMMENT: I WAS HAPPY I WASN'T TALKING TO MININT. HARGUINDEGUY, WHO WEIGHS ABOUT 240 POUNDS AND DOESN'T SPEAK BUT INSTEAD ROARS.)

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5. I CONTINUED TELLING THE PRESIDENT USG HAD BEEN MONITORING GOA'S HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION HOPING TO FIND POSITIVE INDICATIONS SO AS TO AVOID VOTING "NO" ON LOANS. I MENTIONED THE PRESIDENT'S STATEMENT OVER THE RECENT SUPREME COURT DECISION AND ALSO THE POSSIBILITY OF THE TIMERMAN RELEASE. I THEN EXPLAINED THERE WAS LACK OF CONVINCING EVIDENCE TO INDICATE TORTURE AND DISAPPEARANCES HAD COMPLETELY CEASED. IN VIEW OF THESE FACTORS, VIDELA WAS TOLD USG WAS READY TO VOTE "NO" ON TUESDAY, MARCH 27.

6. VIDELA WA THEN TOLD THAT BASED ON STATEMENTS MADE BY THEIR AMBASSADOR AJA ESPIL ON MARCH 22, USG WAS WILLING TO TAKE ANOTHER LOOK ON SITUATION. I INFORMED VIDELA THAT AJA ESPIL HAD STATED DISAPPEARANCES HAD STOPPED, THAT GOA WOULD

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INVESTIGATE NEW DISAPPEARANCES AND ACTION WOULD BE TAKEN AGAINST ANY SECURITY FORCE RESPONSIBLE FOR DISAPPEARANCES. VIDELA WAS THEN TOLD AJA ESPIL HAD SUBMITTED TO HIS GOVERNMENT NAME OF PERSON SUPPOSEDLY DISAPPEARED ON FEBRUARY 9, 1979 AS PER RECORDS OF AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL. VIDELA DISCLAIMED KNOWING ANY SUCH DISAPPEARANCE ON FEB. 9. (COMMENT: EMBASSY RECORDS FAIL TO INDICATE ANY DISAPPEARANCE ON FEB. 9. I ASKED AJA ESPIL, WHO WAS IN TOWN FOR ONE DAY, TO SUBMIT NAMES OF MISSING PERSON, SO CASE CAN BE SUBSTANTIATED. END COMMENT:)

7. I TOLD VIDELA BASED ON HIS AMBASSADOR'S AND OTHER REPRESENTATIONS ON HUMAN RIGHTS IMPROVEMENTS, THE USG WOULD CONTINUE ITS POLICY OF ABSTENTION ON MARCH 27. AS I MADE THIS STATEMENT, VIDELA GAVE A LONG SIGH OF RELIEF, SMILED REACHED OVER, AND SHOOK MY HAND AND THANKED ME. (COMMENT: THIS ACTION WAS MOST PERPLEXING FOR ME AS I FELT AS THOUGH I HAD FAILED IN MY MISSION. I ANTICIPATED LITERALLY BEING TOSSED OUT DURING MY INITIAL PHASE OF THE INTERVIEW, BUT HAVING THE PRESIDENT OF ARGENTINA THANK ME FOR AN "ABSTENTION" WAS TOTALLY UNEXPECTED. VIDELA WAS THOROUGHLY PLEASED WITH

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THE "ABSTENTION", EVEN THOUGH MY CHARGES OF HIS COUNTRY WERE HARD, FACTUAL AND NOT EASY TO ACCEPT. END COMMENT:)

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8. I THEN SHIFTED OVER BY TELLING VIDELA USG HOPED GOA WOULD SOON START WORKING ON LISTS OF DISAPPEARED SUBMITTED BY US AND INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS. I AGAIN STRESSED NEED TO RELEASE POLITICAL PRISONERS ASAP AND IMMEDIATELY HALT TO TORTURE AND MISTREATMENT OF PRISONERS. I COMPLIMENTED VIDELA FOR VIRTUAL CESSATION OF DISAPPEARANCES SINCE JANUARY AND WILLINGNESS OF GOA TO INVESTIGATE AND TAKE ACTION AGAINST SECURITY FORCES WHICH ACTED ILLEGALLY. IT WAS MADE CLEAR TO VIDELA GOA'S ACTIONS WOULD BE MONITORED NOW AND IN THE FUTURE.

9. TIMERMAN CASE: I TOLD VIDELA I HAD HEARD HE AND THE JUNTA HAD DISCUSSED THE FATE OF JACOBO TIMERMAN. HE SMILED AND SAID IT WAS TRUE. VIDELA MADE A GESTURE AS THOUGH PUTTING ON A PAIR OF GLOVES AND STATED THE TIMERMAN CASE COULD NOT BE HANDLED WITH BARE KNUCKLES BUT ONLY WITH KID GLOVES. I SUGGESTED THE PUTTING ON OF THE KID GLOVES SHOULD NOT PROVE TO BE A DILATORY TECHNIQUE. VIDELA THEN TOLD ME HE KNEW I HAD PERSISTENTLY DISCUSSED THE TIMERMAN CASE WITH GENERAL VIOLA AND VIOLA HAD IN TURN DISCUSSED THE CASE WITH HIM AND OTHER MEMBERS OF THE JUNTA. I THEN SAGGESTED PERHAPS IT MIGHT PROVE GOOD P.R. WORK IF TIMERMAN WOULD BE RELEASED ASAP SO AS TO AVOID GIVING APPEARANCE OF ACT BEING ONE OF PRESSURE BEFORE ARRIVAL OF IAHRG. HE AGREED. I THEN TOLD

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VIDELA I HOPED TIMERMAN CASE WOULD NOT TURN OUT TO BE ANOTHER TLATELOLCO RATIFICATION - JUST PROMISES AND MORE PROMISES. WITH A SHEEPISH GESTURE, HE TOLD ME STRONG EFFORTS WERE BEING MADE TO DECIDE TIMERMAN AND TLATELOLCO CASE BY MIDDLE OR END OF APRIL. IN A MOMENT OF LEVITY ON MY PART, I TOLD PRESIDENT I HOPED TIMERMAN AND TLATELOLCO WOULD BE RESOLVED BY APRIL 14, AS I WOULD BE VISITING THE DEPARTMENT ON THAT DATE. I ALSO TOLD VIDELA I WANTED TO GET CREDIT FOR TIMERMAN AND TLATELOLCO BEFORE I LEFT AS I DIDN'T WANT THE DCM, MAX CHAPLIN, TO GET THE GLORY. VIDELA LAUGHED HEARTILY AND SAID HE WOULD MAKE HIS BEST TO ACCOMMODATE ME. I SUGGESTED TO VIDELA THAT IF TLATELOLCO WAS RATIFIED AND TIMERMAN RELEASED, THAT HE SHOULD PHONE PRESIDENT CARTER DIRECTLY, SO THE AMERICAN PRESIDENT WOULD BE THE FIRST TO KNOW THE FATE OF TWO MATTERS OF HIS HIGH INTEREST. PRESIDENT VIDELA REPLIED THIS WAS WHAT HE HAD IN MIND OF DOING.

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10. RIGHT OF OPTION: I TOLD VIDELA USG WOULD BE VERY APPRECIATIVE IF HE PUT IN A GOOD WORD WITH GENERAL HARGUINDEGUY, MIN OF INT, SO AS TO ACCELERATE RIGHT OF OPTION PROGRAM. VIDELA PROMISED HE WOULD BUT THEN CLARIFIED ISSUE BY STATING A NEW COMMITTEE HAD BEEN FORMED FOR RIGHT OF OPTION CASES. HE IMPLIED HARGUINDEGUY'S ROLE HAD BEEN DIMINISHED.

11. FUTURE HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIONS: THE PRESIDENT GAVE ME ASSURANCES DISAPPEARANCES HAD STOPPED AND WOULD NO LONGER BE A FACTOR. HE EXPLAINED THERE WILL BE INSTANCES OF CRIMINAL DISAPPEARANCES FOR RANSOM AND PERHAPS AN OCCASIONAL SECURITY OFFICER WHO MIGHT GO OFF HALF-COCKED. HE DID AGREE TO INVESTIGATE ALL DISAPPEARANCES AND THAT CULPRITS WOULD BE TRIED IN A COURT OF LAW.

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12. DISAPPEARANCES: VIDELA STATED HE FORESAW AN IMPASSE DURING THE IAHRG VISIT. HE SAID GOA IN ALL SINCERITY LACKED INFORMATION ON DISAPPEARANCES AND WOULD IN ALL PROBABILITY NOT BE ABLE TO RESPOND TO COMMISSION REQUIREMENTS. HE STATED DISAPPEARANCES WAS ONE PHASE OF IAHRG INVESTIGATION GOA WAS UNABLE TO COME UP WITH ANY ANSWERS. VIDELA EXPRESSED GREAT CONFIDENCE IN THEIR ABILITY NOW AND IN THE FUTURE TO ABIDE BY THE RULE OF LAW. HE TOLD ME A SINCERE EFFORT WAS BEING MADE TO CLEAN HOUSE BEFORE THE ARRIVAL OF IAHRG.

13. I THANKED VIDELA FOR RECEIVING ME FAST AS SOON AS HE DID. HE REPLIED BY STATING HE WAS GLAD HE COULD ACCOMMODATE ME AS MIN ECON MARTINEZ DE HOZ TOLD HIM LAST WEEK USG WOULD VOTE "NO" ON RAILROAD LOAN. HE SAID HE LOOKED UPON ME AS A BEARER OF GOOD TIDINGS.
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