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From: U.S. Embassy Buenos Aires – Hugh McL. Woodward

To: Secretary of State Washington D.C.

Subject/Title: Terrorist Toll Continues High

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Search Key(s):

Synopsis:

Comments:
UNCLASSIFIED

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ACTION ARA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 OMB-01

AIO-05 SCCT-01 SY-05 1069 W

P 2221262 MAR 76 CCY FOR MRN
FM AMENBASSY BUENOS AIRES
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4942

CONFIDENTIAL BUENOS AIRES 2015

CORRECTED

E.O. 11652: G05
TAGS: PIN, PINT, ELAB, AR
SUBJECT: TERRORIST TOLL CONTINUES HIGH
REF: BUENOS AIRES 1791

1. SUMMARY: WITH LOCAL PRESS OPENLY REPORTING THAT COUP MAY TAKE
PLACE "WITHIN HOURS", DEATH TOLL FROM TERRORIST ACTS NEARING
ALL-TIME HIGH. PRIVATELY, POLITICAL CONTACTS VOICING CONCERN
THAT MANY OF THE DEAD ARE "PRE-COUP VICTIMS" OF PROVINCIAL
MILITARY AND POLICE VENGEANCE. END SUMMARY.

2. LONG-TIME OBSERVERS OF ARGENTINE POLITICAL SCENE STATE
THAT PUBLIC REPORTING OF IMMINENT COUP IS WITHOUT PRECEDENT
IN MODERN ARGENTINE HISTORY, GIVEN WIDESPREAD PUBLIC ACCEPTANCE
OF IDEA THAT COUP IMMINENT, CHIEF CONCERN OF MOST EMBASSY
CONTACTS IS THAT THE PROVINCIAL LEVEL POLICE AND MILITARY
AUTHORITIES DESPITE REPEAT DESPITE ORDERS FROM HIGHER
COMMAND ARE MOVING TO SETTLE SCORES WITH LOCAL LEFTISTS,
LABOR STUDENTS AND OTHER ANTAGONISTS. FROM MAR 1 TO 20
OF THIS YEAR FORTY-SIX PERSONS HAVE DIED AS A RESULT OF
TERRORIST ACTS OF BOTH RIGHT AND LEFT, ANOTHER TWELVE
TO FIFTEEN DIED OVER LAST WEEKEND. FROM BEGINNING OF
YEAR TO DATE, OVER 165 PERSONS HAVE BEEN KILLED AS

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RESULT OF POLITICAL VIOLENCE.

3. While political violence per se is not new feature of Argentine scene, there is increasing concern among civilians, politicians, and newsmen, including those who look on a coup favorably, that latest acts may fore-shadow inability of army command and police authority to control their subordinates when the coup comes. One leftist politician told emboff over weekend that he has become fervent supporter of Videla-Viola coup saying that "If they don't do it soon some hard-line general in the provinces will push them aside and plunge the country into bloodbath in misguided effort to purify the body politic." While somewhat overdrawn, the fear is shared among responsible civilians.

4. The fact that many of latest acts have taken place in remote areas far from federal capital or principal cities and that victims in these areas are more often than not "leftists" adds credence to these fears. While all killings may not be work of military and police, it is highly probable that many are. The killing of Santillan, leftist secgen of Tucuman sugar workers federation (FOTIA), was almost certainly the work of the military or police. He was assassinated in his union headquarters midday today, Mar 22. Santillan had long history of collaboration with Trotskyite leaders Tosco and Salamanca, but reportedly had reached live and let live accord with national Peronist labor leadership approximately six months ago. He is most prominent labor leader killed within recent months.

5. Comment: Latest turn in terrorist acts attributed to military add substance to comments emboffs have received from sources in recent days stating "nature of coup presently planned to be moderate and legalistic will not be determined until there is evidence that Videla-Viola-Masera et al will in event be able to impose this policy on their subordinates."

WOODWARD