CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01

BUENOS 06457 011614Z

47

ACTION ARA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 ARAE-00 SSQ-00 INRE-00 NSCE-00 USIE-00

CIAB-00 DODA-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05

PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 DHA-02 MCT-01 IO-13 /067 W

128392

O 011440Z OCT 76

FM AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 7370

BUENOS AIRES 6457

E.O. 11652: XGDS-2

TAGS: PINT SHUM PFOR PINS AR

SUBJECT: ADMIRAL MASSERA MEETS FOREIGN CORRESPONDENTS

1. JUNTA MEMBER AND CINC NAVY ADMIRAL EMILIO MASSERA MET EVENING
OF SEPT 29 AT AMERICAN CLUB WITH ABOUT 50 MEMBERS OF FOREIGN
PRESS, IN OFF-THE-RECORD SESSION WHICH WAS ONE OF SERIES
BEING SPONSORED BY RESIDENT FOREIGN CORRESPONDENTS WITH MEMBERS
OF GOA AND OTHER DISTINGUISHED LOCAL FIGURES. PRESS OFFICER HAS
RECEIVED BRIEFING FROM RELIABLE CORRESPONDENT WHO WAS PRESENT.
COMMENTS BY MASSERA WERE MADE UNDER UNDERSTANDING ON BOTH
SIDES THAT DISCUSSION OFF RECORD, WITH NO DIRECT USE OF MATERIAL.
PLEASE PROTECT.

2. HUMAN RIGHTS: PRINCIPAL FOCUS OF SESSION WAS ON HUMAN RIGHTS.
CORRESPONDENTS PRESSURED HARD AND OPENLY ON SUBJECT, AND MASSERA
RESPONDED WITH APPARENT OPENNESS AND LACK OF RESENTMENT. HE
REPORTEDLY SAID THAT HEARINGS ON ARGENTINA AND THREATENED
ASSISTANCE CUTOFFS IN U.S. CONGRESS WERE "ELECTORAL GAME"
ONLY, RELATED TO U.S. PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGNING. HE EXPECTED NO
REPERCUSSIONS ON U.S. ARGENTINE RELATIONS, WHICH ARE "PERMANENT".
"THEY NEED US, WE NEED THEM".

3. WHEN ASKED WHY GOA CULD NOT SEEM TO CATCH RIGHT-WING
TERRORISTS, WHILE IT HAS CONSIDERABLE SUCCESS AGAINST LEFTIST
TERRORISTS, MASSERA REPORTEDLY REPLIED THAT RIGHT-WING TERRORISTS
CONFIDENTIAL

UNCLASSIFIED
DO EXIST, IN SMALL AND ISOLATED GROUPS. HE STATED FLATLY AND FIRMLY THAT "NEITHER POLICE NOR MILITARY HAS ANYTHING TO DO WITH SUCH TERRORISM, AS FAR AS I OFFICIALLY KNOW." IN COLORFUL WORDS WHICH BROUGHT DELIGHTED REACTION FROM CORRESPONDENTS, MASSERA SAID THAT "NEITHER VIDELA NOR I IS AL CAPONE, AND THIS GOVERNMENT IS NOT A MAFIA". HE SAID THAT IT HAS BEEN EASIER TO CATCH LEFTIST TERRORISTS BECAUSE THERE ARE MANY MORE OF THEM AND THEY ARE WELL ORGANIZED (I.E. STRUCTURES CAN BE BROKEN BY LEADS FROM ONE PART TO ANOTHER), WHILE RIGHTISTS ARE FAR FEWER AND ACT IN ISOLATED GROUPS MUCH MORE DIFFICULT TO IDENTIFY.

4. WHEN ASKED ABOUT THE CASE OF THE AMERICAN CITIZEN PATRICIA ERBE, WHO HAD JUST APPEARED (ALIVE) AFTER A TWO-WEEK "DISAPPEARANCE", MASSERA RAISED EYEBROWS BY LOOKING SOMEWHAT UNCERTAIN AND SAYING, "I THOUGHT SHE HAD TURNED UP AT SOME POLICE STATION--HASN'T THE BODY BEEN IDENTIFIED?"

5. GOA PLANS: MASSERA SAID IN RESPONSE TO QUESTION ABOUT HOW LONG MILITARY WOULD RETAIN POWER THAT "PROCESS IS LONG ONE" AND THAT THERE HAS BEEN NO DECISION ON ELECTIONS.

6. U.S. ELECTION: MASSERA SAID GOA HAS "NO PREFERENCE" ON U.S. PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES.

7. "SOUTH ATLANTIC TREATY ORGANIZATION": ATTENTION GIVEN THIS SUBJECT IS ALL PRESS SPECULATION, MASSERA SAID, AND THERE IS "NO PROJECT" TO SET UP SUCH AN ARRANGEMENT.

8. MRS. PERON: MASSERA SAID FORMER PRESIDENT MARIA ESTELA (ISABEL) PERON "WOULD NOT BE TRANSFERRED", EVIDENTLY MEANING SHE WILL NOT BE ALLOWED TO SIMPLY LEAVE THE COUNTRY IN EXILE.

9. LOPEZ REGA: THE FORMER PERONIST STRONGMAN IS NOW CONSIDERED "A SMALL FISH"BY THE GOA. IT WOULD LIKE TO CATCH HIM TO ANSWER FOR SOME FINANCIAL SCANDALS, BUT IT IS NOW VITAL.

10. LABOR UNIONS: MASSERA SAID JUNTA FAVORS "STRONG UNIONS" BUT NOT "STRONG POLITICAL UNIONS". WORKERS MIGHT IN RELATIVELY NEAR FUTURE EVEN BE GIVEN RIGHT TO STRIKE OVER "INEQUITIES". IMPLICATION WAS CLEAR THAT PROBLEM IS NOT ORGANIZED LABOR.
BUT LABOR ORGANIZED FOR POLITICAL PURPOSES RATHER THAN STRICTLY
LABOR WELFARE AND IMPROVEMENT PURPOSES.

11. MASSERA AND HIS ATTENDANT STAFF WERE ALL IN CIVILIAN
CLOTHES, AND ATMOSPHERE WAS ONE OF FRIENDLINESS, OPENNESS
AND ENERGETIC EXCHANGE WITHOUT EXCESSIVE RESTRAINT ON EITHER
SIDE. HE SPOKE ALWAYS OF THE "JUNTA", RATHER THAN OF THE
PRESIDENT OR THE GOVERNMENT.

12. COMMENT: IF WE HAVE ACCURATE REPORT, AND WE HAVE NO
REASON TO THINK WE DO NOT, IT IS CLEAR THAT WE HAVE NOT
GOTTEN THROUGH TO MASSERA ON DEPTH OF OUR CONCERN OVER HUMAN
RIGHTS. IF MASSERA MEANS WHAT HE SAID TO CORRESPONDENTS, THEN
HE OBVIOUSLY STILL FEELS THAT CRITICISM AND EFFORTS TO PRESSURE
GOA ON HUMAN RIGHTS, AT LEAST FROM U.S., ARE MERELY MANIFESTATIONS
OF U.S. INTERNAL POLITICS WHICH WILL FADE FROM IMPORTANCE AFTER
OUR ELECTIONS, AND NEED NOT BE TAKEN TOO SERIOUSLY. THE AMBASSADOR
WILL SEEK AN EARLY OPPORTUNITY TO ONCE AGAIN POINT OUT TO ADMIRAL
MASSERA THE FACTS OF LIFE.

HILL

NNN

*** Current Handling Restrictions *** n/a
*** Current Classification ***