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TO IMMEDIATE FCO

TELNO 717 OF 2 NOVEMBER 1984

AND TO IMMEDIATE WASHINGTON, UKMIS NEW YORK, EC POSTS

COUP RUMOURS

1. I WAS YESTERDAY VISITED BY JUAN SEBASTIAN SOLER, AN ARGENTINE LAWYERJS D BUSINESS ACQUAINTANCE, WELL-CONNECTED WITH MILITARY AND RIGHT-WING CIRCLES HERE, WHO HAS IN THE PAST TAKEN AN ACTIVE INTEREST IN ENCOURAGING THE NORMALISATION OF ARGENTINE REPATIONS WITH THE UK.

2. SOLER ANNOUNCED THAT A COUP WAS BEING CONTEMPLATED BY MIDDLE-RANKING OFFICERS AT ABOUT THE LEVEL OF LIEUTENANT COLONEL. THE CURRENT BATCH OF SERVING GENERALS WOULD BE EXCLUDED FROM THE OPERATION WHICH WOULD PROBABLY BE ORGANISED AROUND THE FIGURE OF RETIRED GENERAL LUCIANO BENJAMIN MENENDEZ, THE HARD-LINE RIGHT-WINGER WHO WAS FORMERLY COMMANDER OF THE ARMY'S CORDOZA-BASED III CORPS AND WHO HAS RECDNTLY BEEN AN OUT-SPOKEN APOLOGIST FOR THE MILITARY'S PERFORMANCE DURING THE DIRTY WAR.

3. SOLER SAID THE COUP WOULD HAVE THREE PRINCIPAL OBJECTIVES:
 A. THE REINTEGRATIMN OF ARGEYTINA INTO THE "FIRST WORLD" WHEREBY THE LEFT WING MARXIST IDEOLOGY THAT CHARACTERISED THE PRESENT ADMINISTRATION WOULD BE SWEPT AWAY AND THIRD-WORDERLY WOULD BE SHUNNED.
 B. THE REDUCTION OF THE GOVERNMENT APPARATUS TO A FEW ESSENTIAL

ADMINISTRATION WOULD BE SWEEPED AWAY AND THIRD-WORDERLY WOULD BE SHUNNED.

B. THE REDUCTION OF THE GOVERNMENT APPARATUS TO A FEW ESSENTIAL MINISTRIES SUCH AS DEFENCE AND INTERIOR, ETC.,

C. THE ELIMINATION OF MANY OF THE NOTORIOUSLY INEFFICIENT STATE ENTERPRISES.

4. SOLER CLAIMED THAT HE HAD BEEN DEPUTED TO SOUND OUT CERTAIN FOREIGN GOVERNMENTS ABOUT SCHEME BY APPROACHING THEIR REPRESENTATIVES IN BUENOS AIRES. THE BELGIAN AND US EMBASSIES WERE ON THIS LIST AND HE EXPECTED A POSITIVE REACTION FROM THE AMERICANS UNDER REAGAN'S LEADERSHIP (SIC). HE DID NOT KNOW EXACTLY WHEN THE COUP WOULD TAKE PLACE OR HOW IT WOULD BE LAUNCHED, BUT BELIEVED IT MIGHT BELZIN WITH A SERIES OF INCIDENTS STAGED BY SMALL GROUPS. IN ANSWER TO MY QUESTION, HE ASSERTED THAT THERE WAS NOBODY IN THE ARMED FORCES, WHO WOULD BE PREPARED TO DEFEND PRESIDENT ALFONSIN. THE NAVY WERE APPARENTLY IN FAVOUR OF THE PLAN, AS WAS THE AIR FORCE WHOSE MEMBERS WERE HOWEVER TOO FASCIST FOR COMFORT (SIC).

COMMENT

5. I HAVE SO FAR DISCUSSED THIS NEWS WITH THE DANISH AMBASSADOR WHO WAS PROFOUNDLY SCEPTICAL OF THE ARMY'S INCLINATION TO MOUNT A COUP, AND WITH THE US DCM, JOHN BUSHNELL, WHO WAS ALSO DISMISSIVE EXPLAINING THAT HIS EMBASSY WAS CONSTANTLY RECEIVING THIS KIND OF REPORT.

6. OUR OWN UNDERSTANDING IS THAT A DIVIDE IS OPENING UP BETWEEN THE ARMY'S GENERALS WHO ARE, ALBEIT SOMETIMES GRUDGINGLY, RECONCILED TO DEMOCRACY, AND THE REMAINING RANKS WHERE DISCONTENT IS FUELLED BY POOR PAY AND THE THREAT OF HUMAN RIGHTS INVESTIGATIONS. THERE IS SOME INCREASING EVIDENCE OF INSUBORDINATION, BUT WHILE ALFONSIN'S GOVERNMENT HAS FAILED TO ESTABLISH FIRM CONTROL OVER ALL SECTORS OF THE MILITARY, WE DOUBT THE FEASIBILITY OF A COUP IN THE FORESEEABLE FUTURE. IN TOPPLING DEMOCRATIC ADMINISTRATIONS THE ARMED FORCES HAVE TRADITIONALLY RESPONDED TO STRONG POPULAR DEMAND AND AT THE MOMENT THERE IS NO INDICATION THAT THEY ARE WIDELY REGARDED AS A VIABLE OR DESIRABLE ALTERNATIVE. THIS DOES NOT OF COURSE EXCLUDE THE POSSIBILITY OF RIGHT-WING TERRORIST ACTIVITY WHICH WOULD PROBABLY BE RECIPROCATED BY THE LEFT AND COULD IN A LONGER TERM HAVE A SERIOUS DESTABILISING EFFECT.

JOY

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POWELL-JONES

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