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TO IMMEDIATE FCO

TELNO 162 OF 8 MARCH 1985

AND TO IMMEDIATE MODUK (SEC (O) (C)), CBFFI
INFO PRIORITY MONTEVIDEO, SANTIAGO, WASHINGTON, UKMIS NEW YORK,
PORT STANLEY.

ARMED FORCES RESHUFFLE

1. PRESIDENT LAFONSIN WILL TODAY INVEST AIR FORCE BRIGADIER
TEODORO WALDNER AS HEAD OF THE ARGENTINE JOINT GENERAL STAFF IN
SUCCESSION TO GEN JULIO FERNANDEZ TORRES WHO RETIRED EARLIER
THIS WEEK. WALDNER'S APPOINTMENT ENDS A WEEK OF SWEEPING CHANGES IN
THE SENIOR RANKS OF THE ARMED FORCES, PARTICULARLY THE ARMY.

2. FERNANDEZ TORRES IS BELIEVED TO HAVE INCURRED GOVERNMENT
DISPLEASURE BECAUSE HE PUBLICLY VOICED CONCERN ABOUT THE
POSSIBILITY OF A RESURGENCE IN LEFT-WING TERRORISM AND ABOUT
CUTS IN THE MILITARY BUDGET. HE HAD ALSO BEEN LINKED WITH
GENERALS WHO SOUGHT TO UNDERMINE THE POSITION OF ARMY CHIEF
OF STAFF GEN RICARDO PIANTA ON THE GROUNDS THAT THE LATTER
HAD FAILED TO DEFEND ADEQUATELY THE INTERESTS OF HIS SERVICE.
MOST OF THOSE GENERALS HAVE NOW BEEN RETIRED.

3. PIANTA, WHO WAS TORRES' NATURAL SUCCESSOR, REFUSED HIS JOB
AND OPTED FOR RETIREMENT. ALLEGEDLY THIS WAS BECAUSE HE THOUGHT
THAT HE COULD NOT COUNT UPON THE BACKING OF HIS OWN OFFICER CORPS.
PIANTA'S JOB WAS TAKEN BY GEN HECTOR RIOS ERENU WHO HAD
PREVIOUSLY COMMANDED THE ARMY'S III CORPS. HIS PROMOTION CAUSED
THE AUTOMATIC RETIREMENT OF SEVEN OF HIS MORE SENIOR COLLEAGUES.
THE GOVERNMENT HAS ALSO REMOVED FOUR ADMIRALS AND TWO AIR FORCE
BRIGADIERS. ALFONSIN THEN PERSUADED WALDNER TO HEAD THE NEW
JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF. ERNESTO CRESPO WILL REPLACE WALDNER AS
AIR FORCE CHIEF OF STAFF. CRESPO WAS IN CHARGE OF AIR FORCE
OPERATIONS DURING THE FALKLANDS WAR, HE IS A WELL-RESPECTED, IF
NATIONALISTIC, PROFESSIONAL.

4. THE PROMOTION OF WALDNER, AN AIR FORCE OFFICER, TO THE SENIOR
POST IN THE ARMED FORCES (ALFONSIN IS COMMANDER IN CHIEF) COULD
PROVE CONTROVERSIAL. IT IS POLITICALLY SHREWD AS AIR FORCE
PERSONNEL WERE LESS COMPROMISED IN THE EXCESSES OF THE DIRTY WAR
AGAINST TERRORISM AND HAVE BEEN OVERALL LESS CRITICAL OF
GOVERNMENT POLICIES THAN THE ARMY OR THE NAVY. THEIR MOST
FREQUENT COMPLAINT CONCERNS THE DISTRIBUTION OF BUDGET FUNDS
WHICH, THEY FELT, DISCRIMINATED AGAINST THEM TO THE BENEFITS OF
THE ARMY. HOWEVER ATTEMPTS BY WALDNER TO REDRESS THE BALANCE
COULD CAUSE TROUBLE.

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5. THE GOVERNMENT HAS REJECTED ALLEGATIONS THAT THIS RESHUFFLE REFLECTS A CRISIS IN ITS RELATIONS WITH THE ARMED FORCES. PIANTA IS NOT THE FIRST ARMY CHIEF OF STAFF TO BE REPLACED SINCE THE RADICALS TOOK OFFICE IN DECEMBER 1983. JORGE ARGUINDEGUEY SUFFERED THE SAME FATE LAST YEAR BECAUSE THE ADMINISTRATION WAS DISSATISFIED WITH HIS CONTROL OF THE ARMY. FORTY-THREE OTHER GENERALS HAVE ALREADY BEEN RETIRED DURING THE ALFONSIN GOVERNMENT. HOWEVER, THE GOVERNMENT APPEARS TO HAVE DECIDED UPON FIRM ACTION NOW TO ASSERT ITS AUTHORITY OVER THE MILITARY, WHERE THERE HAVE BEEN PERSISTENT SIGNS OF DISCONTENT.

6. THIS DISCONTENT HAS BEEN FUELLED ALSO BY THE CONTINUING DEPRESSED LEVEL OF ARMED FORCES PAY AND THE HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUE. THE ARMED FORCES SUPREME COUNCIL HAS ALREADY CHALLENGED THE GOVERNMENT POLICY BY ITS DECISION TO RELEASE THE NOTORIOUS CAPTAIN ALFREDO ASTIZ WHO WAS ACCUSED OF INVOLVEMENT IN THE DISAPPEARANCE OF A SWEDISH-ARGENTINE GIRL. AS THE ECONOMIC CRISIS CONTINUES, THE RADICALS MUST BE SENSITIVE THAT THE ARMED FORCES SHOULD NOT BE SEEN IN SOME QUARTERS AS A POSSIBLE ALTERNATIVE TO PRESIDENT ALFONSIN ADMINISTRATION.

7. WE DO NOT CONSIDER A COUP TO BE LIKELY IN THE FORSEEABLE FUTURE, BUT THIS RESOLUTE ACTION BY THE GOVERNMENT WAS OPPORTUNE. IT HAS BEEN WELCOMED GENERALLY BY POLITICIANS OF ALL PARTIES.

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