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FOIA Exemptions b1, b5 TS authority to
PA Exemptions CLASSIFY as () S or () C Sec.
DOWNGRADE TS to () S or () C

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EXCISE

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ACTION SCT-00

INFO	LOG-00	ACDA-10	ACDE-00	AID-00	ARA-01	A-00	CA-02
	CCO-00	CG-00	CIAE-00	COME-00	CTME-00	OASY-00	DODE-00
	DOEE-00	DOTE-00	SRPP-00	DS-00	EAP-01	EB-00	FAAE-00
	FBIE-00	H-01	IMMC-01	TEDE-00	INR-00	INSE-00	L-01
	MCO-01	ADS-00	MMP-00	M-00	NRCE-00	NSAE-00	NSCE-00
	OCS-03	OIS-01	OMB-01	PA-00	PM-00	PRS-00	P-00
	CIO-00	SP-00	SSO-00	SS-00	TRSE-00	USIE-00	USSS-00
	ASDS-01	PMB-00	DSCC-00	DRL-09	G-00	/033W	

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P 311844Z DEC 96
FM AMEMBASSY MONTEVIDEO
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9912
INFO AMEMBASSY LIMA PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY TOKYO
AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES
AMEMBASSY LA PAZ
AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO

SECTION 01 OF 02 MONTEVIDEO 003724

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/30/01
TAGS: PTER, PREL, UY, PE
SUBJECT: GOU SCRAMBLES FOR EFFECTIVE RESPONSE AS OUTCRY
INCREASES OVER RELEASE OF MRTA SUSPECTS

REF: (A) MONTEVIDEO 3683 (B) TOKYO 11769

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Page 1

1. CLASSIFIED BY NANCY M. MASON, DCM. REASON: 1.5(D).

2. SUMMARY. THE GOU IS SCRAMBLING TO ANSWER CRITICISM FROM ABROAD AND MOUNTING DISGUST AT HOME OVER ITS HANDLING OF THE RELEASE OF THE MRTA SUSPECTS. FOREIGN MINISTER RAMOS AND INTERIOR MINISTER OPERTTI APPEARED IN PARLIAMENT ON MONDAY FOR QUESTIONING OVER THE AFFAIR. PRESS COVERAGE HAS TURNED INCREASINGLY NEGATIVE AMID SNIPING FROM VARIOUS POLITICAL FACTIONS. AN OPINION POLL SHOWS PUBLIC DISBELIEF IN THE GOU'S ACCOUNT AND DISAPPROVAL OF ITS ACTIONS.

THE FINAL DESTINATION OF THE MRTA SUSPECTS REMAINS UNCERTAIN. SEE PARAGRAPH NINE FOR ACTION REQUEST. END SUMMARY.

DAMAGE CONTROL

3. THE GOU CONTINUES TO PRESS ITS HIGH-DECIBEL CAMPAIGN TO "CORRECT THE RECORD" ON ITS HANDLING OF THE TWO MRTA SUSPECTS AND THE RELEASE OF AMBASSADOR BOCALANDRO. THEBVR(ING ITS STORY UPON ANYONE WHO WILL LISTEN: THE PRESS, THE DIPLOMATIC COMMUNITY, PARLIAMENT, THE MAN IN THE STREET.

BUT WILL IT SELL?

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

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4. POLITICIANS: ALL FOUR POLITICAL PARTIES INITIALLY LINED UP IN SUPPORT OF THE GOU'S EXPLANATION THAT THERE WERE NO NEGOTIATIONS AND THE TIMING OF THE TWO RELEASES WAS COINCIDENTAL (THE SOLE EXCEPTION WAS FROM THE FORMER TUPAMARO GUERRILLAS (MLN-T), WHO APPLAUDED THE PRESUMED DEAL BETWEEN THE GOU AND MRTA). THIS POLITICAL CONSENSUS BEGAN TO FRAY OVER THE WEEKEND, HOWEVER, AS

MEMBERS OF THE LEFT-WING FRENTE AMPLIO BEGAN TO QUESTION PRESIDENT SANGUINETTI'S MEETING (REF A) WITH MEMBERS OF THE SUPREME COURT. MEMBERS OF FORMER-PRESIDENT LACALLE'S FACTION OF THE BLANCO PARTY ALSO RAISED QUESTIONS ABOUT THE GOU'S ACTIONS AND CALLED FOR FOREIGN MINISTER RAMOS (HIMSELF A BLANCO, BUT OF ANOTHER FACTION) TO ANSWER TO PARLIAMENT. DURING HIS APPEARANCE IN PARLIAMENT ON MONDAY, THE FOREIGN MINISTER DENIED ANY NEGOTIATIONS WITH THE MRTA BUT ACKNOWLEDGED THAT PRESIDENT SANGUINETTI HAD SPOKEN TO MEMBERS OF THE SUPREME COURT ABOUT THE PENDING APPEALS COURT DECISION. INTERIOR MINISTER OPERTTI, WHO APPEARED ALONG WITH RAMOS, UNDERSCORED THE NEED TO UPDATE URUGUAY'S 1930S-ERA LEGISLATION ON POLITICAL ASYLUM AND RENEGOTIATE OUT-OF-DATE EXTRADITION TREATIES TO SPECIFICALLY ADDRESS TERRORISM. THE RESPONSE TO THE TWO FROM MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT GENERALLY WAS FAVORABLE.

5. PRESS: THE PRINTED PRESS HAS TURNED MORE CRITICAL AS THE STORY UNFOLDS. EL PAIS, THE (BLANCO) NEWSPAPER OF RECORD HERE, DEPARTED FROM ITS SLAVISH COVERAGE OF THE GOU'S VERSION OF EVENTS WITH A STINGING EDITORIAL ON DECEMBER 30 CRITICIZING THE PRESIDENT'S INTERVENTION TO

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SPEED THE APPELLATE COURT'S DECISION. EVEN LEFT-WING LA REPUBLICA HAS BEGUN TO ASK WHY THE PRESIDENT WOULD HAVE ATTEMPTED TO SPEED A DECISION ON THE APPEAL. EL OBSERVADOR, THE MOST CONSERVATIVE OF THE DAILIES, HAS CONTRIBUTED A STRING OF CRITICAL EDITORIALS AND COLUMNS.

6. DIPLOMATIC COMMUNITY: FOREIGN MINISTER RAMOS CALLED IN ALL AMBASSADORS ON DECEMBER 27 TO JUSTIFY THE GOU'S ACTIONS AND REJECT "UNINFORMED" CRITICISMS FROM ABROAD.

[REDACTED] PUBLIC REACTION FROM THIRD COUNTRIES, HOWEVER, HAS BEEN MUTED. PRESIDENT MENEM, VISITING ON FRIDAY, RETRACTED HIS EARLIER COMMENTS ("MUY MALA, URUGUAY") AND VOICED CONFIDENCE IN PRESIDENT SANGUINETTI. FOLLOWING THE FOREIGN MINISTER'S BRIEFING ON FRIDAY, THE JAPANESE

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AMBASSADOR TOLD THE PRESS HE HAD NO REASON TO DOUBT THE
GOU'S STORY. L

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7. PUBLIC REACTION: A WIDE VARIETY OF EMBASSY CONTACTS EXPRESS DISGUST AND EMBARRASSMENT AT THE GOU'S ACTIONS, AND CONCERN ABOUT THE POTENTIAL HARM TO URUGUAY'S IMAGE AS A COUNTRY WHICH IS SERIOUS ABOUT FIGHTING TERRORISM. MANY URUGUAYANS REMEMBER ONLY TOO WELL THEIR OWN EXPERIENCES WITH TERRORISM IN THE 1970S. SUCH VIEWS WERE REFLECTED IN A DECEMBER 27 POLL RELEASED ON MONDAY, WHICH REGISTERED WIDESPREAD DISBELIEF IN THE GOU'S STORY. 95 PERCENT OF THOSE POLLED INDICATED THEY WERE FAMILIAR WITH THE CONTROVERSY. 40 PERCENT SAID THE GOU HAD NEGOTIATED WITH THE MRTA; ONLY 29 PERCENT BELIEVED THE GOU. 64 PERCENT SAID THE GOU SHOULD NOT HAVE NEGOTIATED; 18 PERCENT FAVORED SUCH BARGAINING. BY 56-32 PERCENT, RESPONDENTS SAID THE CONTROVERSY HURTS URUGUAY'S INTERNATIONAL IMAGE.

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