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C O N F I D E N T I A L BUENOS AIRES 08321

E.O. 12356 DECL: OADR

TEXT

TAGS: PHUM, PGOV, AR
SUBJ: B'NAI B'RITH ON ARGENTINE ELECTIONS
- AND EXTRADITIONS

1. (C - ENTIRE TEXT).

2. SUMMARY. LOCAL B'NAI B'RITH LEADERS FOUND PROSPECT OF MENEM PRESIDENCY TO BE A NET LOSS FOR ARGENTINE JEWISH COMMUNITY, BUT NOT TOTAL DISASTER. JEWISH COMMUNITY DOES NOT FEAR MENEM'S TIES TO THE ARAB COMMUNITY AS MUCH AS HIS PERCEIVED TIES TO ANTI-DEMOCRATIC EXTREMISTS. B'NAI B'RITH IS FRUSTRATED WITH PACE OF EXTRADITION PROCEEDINGS AGAINST ACCUSED NAZI WAR CRIMINAL SCHWAMMBERGER AND HOPES TO EXPEDITE THROUGH POLITICAL PRESSURE.
END SUMMARY

3. DURING LUNCH WITH POLOFF JULY 29, ARGENTINE B'NAI B'RITH VICE PRESIDENT (KAPLAN) AND EXECUTIVE

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DIRECTOR (BURKMAN) DISCUSSED JEWISH CONCERNS REGARDING PERONIST PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE CARLOS MENEM AND EXTRADITION CASE AGAINST ACCUSED NAZI WAR CRIMINAL JOSEPH SCHWAMMBERGER.

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MENEM AND THE JEWISH COMMUNITY

4. THE B'NAI B'RITH LEADERS BELIEVED A MENEM VICTORY PROBABLE AND SUGGESTED IT WOULD REPRESENT A NET LOSS FOR THE ARGENTINE JEWISH COMMUNITY. MENEM WOULD NOT BE A DISASTER. HE HAD ALREADY MADE OVERTURES TO B'NAI B'RITH AND OTHER JEWISH ORGANIZATIONS, ASSURING THEM HE WAS NEITHER ANTI-SEMITIC NOR PRO-ARAB. HE HAD ATTRACTED SOME JEWISH LEADERS TO HIS CAMPAIGN CIRCLE. HE WAS, BY B'NAI B'RITH'S ASSESSMENT, FUNDAMENTALLY A NATIONALIST; HE WOULD PURSUE HIS PERCEPTION OF ARGENTINA'S INTERESTS DOMESTICALLY AND EXTERNALLY. THAT SAID, BURKMAN BELIEVES MENEM RECEIVED CONSIDERABLE FINANCIAL SUPPORT FROM SEVERAL ARAB GOVERNMENTS, FOREMOST AMONG THEM BEING LIBYA. MENEM HAD MADE IT CLEAR THAT HE WOULD GRANT THE PLO A PERMANENT PRESENCE IN ARGENTINA SHOULD HE BE ELECTED.

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5. KAPLAN SUGGESTED THAT THE GREATEST THREAT TO ARGENTINE JEWS FROM MENEM WAS THE CANDIDATE'S CLOSE ASSOCIATION WITH ANTI-DEMOCRATIC SUPPORTERS. HE ASSERTED MENEM HAD TIES TO PERONIST FRINGE GROUPS SUCH AS "ALERTA NACIONAL," THE REVOLUTIONARY PERONIST YOUTH, THE MONTONEROS, AND OTHER EXTREMIST GROUPS FROM BOTH RIGHT AND LEFT. ARGENTINA'S JEWISH COMMUNITY BELIEVED THAT ITS INTERESTS WERE BEST PROTECTED BY DEMOCRATIC GOVERNMENTS. IN HIS CONVERSATIONS WITH THEM, MENEM REPORTEDLY CLAIMED HE COULD CONTROL THE FRINGE ELEMENTS ASSOCIATED WITH HIS CAMPAIGN. KAPLAN WAS NOT SO SURE.

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6. MENEM AND THE ARAB-ARGENTINE COMMUNITY

POLOFF INQUIRED ABOUT RECENT PRESS STORIES THAT MENEM'S PRIMARY VICTORY REPRESENTED THE POLITICAL COMING OF AGE FOR ARGENTINA'S LARGE (ESTIMATED 10 PERCENT) ETHNIC ARAB POPULATION AND ITS POSSIBLE EFFECT ON FOREIGN POLICY IN THE MIDDLE EAST. THE B'NAI B'RITH LEADERS ACKNOWLEDGED THE PREVALENCE OF ARAB-ARGENTINES IN THE MENEM CAMP. MANY HAD STRONG FAMILY TIES TO LEBANON AND SYRIA. B'NAI B'RITH EXPECTED SOME TILTING TOWARDS THE ARAB STATES IN A FUTURE MENEM ADMINISTRATION. HOWEVER, MENEM'S ARAB-ARGENTINE ADVISERS, LIKE THE CANDIDATE HIMSELF, WERE MORE NATIONALIST THAN ARABIST. THEY

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WOULD HAVE NO DIFFICULTY DEALING WITH ISRAEL IF THEY SAW IT IN THEIR INTEREST. KAPLAN AND BURKMAN SAW THE GREATEST DANGER IN THE ARAB-ARGENTINE RISE TO POWER TO BE THE TRADITIONAL PROBLEM OF A GROUP OF "HAVE-NOTS" COMING TO POWER FOR THE FIRST TIME -- LACKING IN EXPERIENCE OF GOVERNMENT AND FILLED WITH DESIRES TO REDRESS PAST WRONGS.
C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 02 OF 02 BUENOS AIRES 08321

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7. SCHWAMMBERGER EXTRADITION

KAPLAN CLOSED BY EXPRESSING B'NAI B'RITH CONCERNS ABOUT THE EXTRADITION OF ACCUSED NAZI WAR CRIMINAL FRANZ JOSEF LEO SCHWAMMBERGER FROM ARGENTINA TO THE FRG. HE NOTED THAT THE GOA HAS DIVIDED THE CASE INTO TWO SEPARATE PROCEEDINGS -- ONE TO DETERMINE HIS CLAIM TO ARGENTINE CITIZENSHIP AND ANOTHER TO RULE ON THE GERMAN EXTRADITION REQUEST. THE CITIZENSHIP PROCEEDING IS EXPECTED TO TAKE AT LEAST A YEAR TO RESOLVE. B'NAI B'RITH LEARNED THE ARGENTINE FEDERAL PROSECUTOR HAS RECEIVED INSTRUCTIONS NOT TO PROCEED FURTHER WITH THE EXTRADITION CASE UNTIL CITIZENSHIP IS FINALLY RESOLVED. KAPLAN WAS CONCERNED SCHWAMMBERGER MIGHT DIE OF NATURAL CAUSES (HE IS 76) BEFORE GOING TO TRIAL, THEREBY PREVENTING HIS TRIAL FROM SERVING AS AN EXAMPLE TO VIOLATORS OF HUMAN RIGHTS. KAPLAN FELT THE CASE NOW REQUIRED A POLITICAL PUSH FROM THE GOA. B'NAI B'RITH IN ARGENTINA AND AROUND THE WORLD WOULD SOON GEAR UP TO PRESS FOR SUCH A POLITICAL PUSH FROM PRESIDENT ALFONSIN.

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8. COMMENT. THE B'NAI B'RITH LEADERS WERE TRYING TO PUT THE BEST FACE POSSIBLE ON A MENEM PRESIDENCY, BUT WERE CLEARLY CONCERNED. THEY SEE IN MENEM A MAN WITH NATURAL TIES TO A REGION IN CONSTANT CONFLICT WITH ISRAEL AND POLITICAL TIES TO GROUPS WITH ANTI-SEMITIC AND ANTI-DEMOCRATIC BACKGROUNDS. FOR THEM, MENEM REPRESENTS A THROWBACK TO THE CLASSIC PERONIST CAUDILLO AND ARGENTINA'S JEWISH COMMUNITY WAS NEVER COMFORTABLE WITH PAST PERONIST ADMINISTRATIONS.

GILDRED

ADMIN
END OF MESSAGE

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