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TEXT  
TAGS: PGOV, AU  
SUBJECT: THE WALDHEIM CASE: ALLEGATIONS REGARDING  
- A NAZI PAST

REF: VIENNA 3242

1. CONFIDENTIAL - ENTIRE TEXT.

2. AS DEPARTMENT IS AWARE FROM PRESS COVERAGE IN THE U.S., ALLEGATIONS THAT **KURT WALDHEIM** -- CURRENT CANDIDATE FOR THE AUSTRIAN PRESIDENCY (SUPPORTED BY THE OVP), FORMER AUSTRIAN FOREIGN MINISTER AND UN SECRETARY GENERAL -- HAD A NAZI PAST HAVE BECOME A PUBLIC ISSUE IN AUSTRIA, AND BEYOND. THE GENESIS OF THE ALLEGATIONS WAS A LENGTHY ARTICLE IN THE MARCH 3 ISSUE OF "PROFIL," ONE OF AUSTRIA'S LARGEST WEEKLIES. THAT ARTICLE ASSERTS WALDHEIM WAS A MEMBER OF THE NAZI SA (BROWNSHIRTS) AND THE NAZI STUDENT YOUTH BEFORE THE WAR. AS DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE, "PROFIL" OFFERS A REPRODUCTION OF A SUPPOSED "MILITARY PERSONNEL-DATA

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CARD" IN WALDHEIM'S NAME INDICATING PREVIOUS SA AND NAZI STUDENT AFFILIATION. IN FURTHER BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION COVERING HIS WAR SERVICE, "PROFIL" WRITES THAT WALDHEIM SERVED IN THESSALONIKI, GREECE, AS A TRANSLATOR AT THE HEADQUARTERS OF ARMY GROUP E (A FACT WALDHEIM DOES NOT DISPUTE). THIS MILITARY GROUP HAD ANTI-PARTISAN RESPONSIBILITIES IN YUGOSLAVIA AND GREECE, "PROFIL" NOTES. WALDHEIM HAS STOUTLY DENIED THE ALLEGATIONS AS FALSE AND A POLITICAL SMEAR. EQUALLY, THE PRESS, INCLUDING "THE NEW YORK TIMES," WE UNDERSTAND, IS STANDING BY THE ACCURACY OF ITS REPORTS. THUS, THE SITUATION HAS EVOLVED INTO A STAND-OFF.

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3. POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS OF THIS "REVELATION" CAN BE SIGNIFICANT. IF THE ALLEGATIONS CANNOT BE DEMOLISHED, IT WOULD BOTH SERIOUSLY DAMAGE WALDHEIM'S CREDIBILITY -- SINCE HE HAS DENIED THEIR VALIDITY -- AND RAISE AS A POLITICAL ISSUE HIS NAZI PAST. ALTHOUGH SA AFFILIATION IN ITSELF MIGHT NOT BE DAMAGING AMONG THE AUSTRIAN ELECTORATE, IT IS POSSIBLE WALDHEIM'S CANDIDACY UNDER THESE CIRCUMSTANCES WOULD BE ENDANGERED. (IN THE EARLY 1980S, FPO PARLIAMENTARY FLOOR LEADER FRIEDRICH PETER GAVE UP HIS BID FOR THE THIRD PRESIDENCY OF THE PARLIAMENT WHEN HIS MEMBERSHIP IN AN SS EXTERMINATION UNIT IN THE SOVIET UNION BECAME A POLITICALLY DIVISIVE ISSUE. THEN CHANCELLOR KREISKY SUPPORTED PETER, MAINTAINING THE LATTER'S PERSONAL CULPABILITY HAD NOT BEEN PROVEN, AND CRITICIZED SIMON WIESENTHAL, PETER'S PRINCIPAL CRITIC, AS LIKELY HAVING BEEN A NAZI ACCOMPLICE.)

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4. IF, ON THE OTHER HAND, WALDHEIM'S CLAIMS OF INNOCENCE PREVAIL, THIS INCIDENT MAY BOOST HIS CANDIDACY, SINCE THERE IS A SENSE THAT THE RESPONSIBILITY FOR WHAT, IN THIS CASE, WOULD BE A VERY VICIOUS SMEAR LIES WITH THE SOCIALIST PARTY.

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5. IT IS STILL PREMATURE TO PREDICT THE UNFOLDING OF THIS EPISODE. HOWEVER THE INCIDENT EVOLVES, IT WILL REMAIN A BRUISING PARTISAN ISSUE HEIGHTENING TENSION BETWEEN THE TWO MAJOR PARTIES. STRANGELY, SOME PEOPLE'S PARTY OFFICIALS WELCOME THE ALLEGATIONS, BELIEVING THEY WILL BREATHE LIFE INTO A MORIBUND PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN AND -- IF THE ALLEGATIONS ARE FALSE -- REDOUND TO WALDHEIM'S ADVANTAGE, AND, ULTIMATELY, TO THEIR OWN. OVP CHAIRMAN MOCK, FOR HIS PART, HAS GONE ON RECORD THAT HE CONTINUES TO SUPPORT WALDHEIM WITHOUT QUALIFICATION. BLOCH

END OF MESSAGE

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