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FROM THE AMBASSADOR FOR THE SECRETARY AND ASEC RIDGWAY

E.O. 12356: DECL:OADR

TEXT

TAGS: PGOV, AU  
SUBJECT: HANDLING THE WALDHEIM AFFAIR

1. CONFIDENTIAL - ENTIRE TEXT.

2. SINCE MY ARRIVAL IN VIENNA LAST WEEK, I HAVE SPENT CONSIDERABLE TIME EXAMINING THE IMPLICATIONS OF WALDHEIM'S CANDIDACY (AND POSSIBLE PRESIDENCY) FOR U.S. NATIONAL INTERESTS IN AUSTRIA. LAST SATURDAY, **KURT WALDHEIM** CALLED ME PERSONALLY TO TELL ME IN GREAT DETAIL HIS SIDE OF THE STORY. HE WAS WORRIED OVER A POTENTIAL USG DECISION AND ITS EFFECT ON HIS REPUTATION AND THE RUN-OFF CAMPAIGN. I LISTENED BUT DID NOT OFFER ANY RESPONSE.

3. IT IS CLEAR TO ME THAT THE WALDHEIM CASE GOES BEYOND WALDHEIM HIMSELF. FOR MOST AUSTRIANS IT HAS COME TO INVOLVE THE QUESTION OF THE AUSTRIAN IMAGE AND THE IMPORTANT ISSUE OF FOREIGN INTERFERENCE IN THE AUSTRIAN POLITICAL PROCESS. WHILE THESE ARE

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LARGELY NON-PARTISAN CONCERNS, PARADOXICALLY, IT IS MOST KEENLY FELT BY OUR MOST SUPPORTIVE AUSTRIAN FRIENDS HERE -- MEMBERS OF THE CONSERVATIVE PEOPLE'S PARTY. FURTHERMORE, GIVEN THE MAY 4 ELECTION RESULTS, WE BELIEVE THAT WALDHEIM STANDS THE BEST CHANCE OF WINNING THE JUNE 8 ELECTION, AND OF BECOMING AUSTRIA'S NEXT PRESIDENT. ALL AUSTRIANS ARE WATCHING HOW THE U.S. WILL BEHAVE AT THIS MOMENT. IT TAKES NO FURTHER ELUCIDATION TO CONVEY HOW MUCH OUR INTERESTS AND THE FUTURE OF U.S.-AUSTRIAN RELATIONS ARE INVOLVED IN HOW THE USG HANDLES THE WALDHEIM AFFAIR.

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4. MY CONCERN IS THAT OUR DECISION ON WALDHEIM'S WARTIME BEHAVIOR BE BEYOND REPROACH. IN EFFECT, I BELIEVE THAT WE MUST BE SCRUPULOUS IN OUR JUDGMENTS. IF ALL THE EVIDENCE ON WALDHEIM, TAKEN TOGETHER, IS PERSUASIVE AS TO HIS CULPABILITY FOR CRIMINAL ACTIONS -- LEGALLY SUSTAINABLE -- WE SHOULD SO STATE AND ACT. WE MUST NOT ARRIVE AT A NEGATIVE FINDING AGAINST WALDHEIM BASED ON INCONCLUSIVE, CONFLICTING OR CIRCUMSTANTIAL EVIDENCE. IF THAT IS ALL WE HAVE, THE WALDHEIM MATTER SHOULD BE HELD IN ABEYANCE UNTIL FURTHER RESEARCH OR ADDITIONAL EVIDENCE GIVES US A BETTER SENSE OF DIRECTION.

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5. AUSTRIA HAS BEEN A FRIEND, ESPECIALLY THE PEOPLE'S PARTY. UNLESS WE HANDLE THE WALDHEIM CASE CORRECTLY WE WILL HAVE ANTAGONIZED FRIENDS AT A TIME WHEN WE NEED THE SUPPORT OF ALL THE FRIENDS WE HAVE AND THE BILATERAL RELATIONSHIP WILL HAVE SUSTAINED A GRIEVOUS BLOW. I BELIEVE THAT WE CAN BEST PROTECT OUR INTERESTS IN HANDLING THE WALDHEIM CASE BY DEMONSTRABLY LIVING UP TO OUR HIGH STANDARDS OF JUSTICE AND EQUITY.

LAUDER

END OF MESSAGE

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