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CONTROLS

C O N F I D E N T I A L VIENNA 01514

USVIENNA FOR UNVIE

E.O. 12356: DECL:OADR

TEXT

TAGS: PREL, AU  
SUBJECT: WALDHEIM: AUSTRIA'S POLITICAL DILEMMA--  
RECOMMENDATION FOR U.S. ACTION

REF: VIENNA 1446 (NOTAL)

1. CONFIDENTIAL-ENTIRE TEXT.

2. SUMMARY: A FRACTIOUS INTERNAL DEBATE WITHIN THE GOVERNMENT OVER THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE HISTORIANS' COMMLSSION'S REPORT ON WALDHEIM HAS ALREADY BEGUN. THIS IS A DEBATE WHICH COULD AFFECT THE COHESION OF THE COALITION. IT IS A DEBATE WHICH COULD INVOLVE IMPLICITLY THE U.S. AND THE WATCH LIST DECISION. MOCK AND THE PEOPLE'S PARTY (OVP) OBVIOUSLY INTEND TO PICK THE RAISINS FROM THE REPORT'S CAKE TO REINFORCE THEIR

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IPS/CR/IR by SD Date: 8/30/01

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POSITION AND MAY ONCE AGAIN EXPLOIT THE WATCH LIST DECISION TO DRUM UP POPULAR SUPPORT. OUR CONDUCT AND RESPONSE TO THIS BEHAVIOR CAN HAVE AN IMPACT ON THE INTERNAL DEBATE. THUS, FOR THE MOMENT, WE JUDGE DISCRETION IS INDICATED. WE RECOMMEND THAT WE SAY NOTHING BEYOND THE GUIDANCE PROPOSED REFTEL AND REVIEW DEVELOPMENTS OVER THE NEXT FEW DAYS TO SEE IF A FURTHER U.S. RESPONSE MAY BE APPROPRIATE OR REQUIRED. END SUMMARY.

3. THE HISTORIANS' COMMISSION REPORT ON WALDHEIM PRESENTED LAST NIGHT (FEB. 8) TO THE AUSTRIAN GOVERNMENT HAS ALREADY BEGUN TO CREATE POLITICAL STRAINS. IT CONTAINS THREE PRINCIPAL POINTS WHICH ARE PROVIDING GRIST FOR PUBLIC DEBATE AND FOR DIVISIONS WITHIN THE GOVERNMENT:

--THAT WALDHEIM'S PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY FOR WAR CRIMES HAS NOT BEEN ESTABLISHED,

--BUT THAT HE PLAYED A SUPPORTING ROLE IN ACTS OF "REPRISALS." THIS OPAQUE FORMULATION WAS FURTHER EXPLAINED BY THE COMMISSION'S FINDING THAT WALDHEIM HAD "REPEATEDLY PARTICIPATED IN CONNECTION WITH ILLEGAL ACTS AND THEREBY FACILITATED THEIR IMPLEMENTATION."

--FURTHERMORE, WALDHEIM'S ACCOUNT OF HIS MILITARY PAST, CONCLUDED THE COMMISSION, IN MANY CASES DID NOT AGREE WITH THE EVIDENCE. THE HEAD OF THE COMMISSION OBSERVED THAT WALDHEIM'S FORGETFULNESS WAS FUNDAMENTAL.

4. MOCK'S PUBLIC DECLARATIONS AND MFA SECRETARY GENERAL KLESTIL'S BEHAVIOR WITH THE COMMISSION SUGGEST THAT THEY AND THE PEOPLE'S PARTY ARE GEARING UP FOR A FULL-SCALE COUNTERATTACK IN SUPPORT OF WALDHEIM. THEY WILL BASE THEIR ARGUMENT ON THE COMMISSION'S FINDING-- THAT WALDHEIM'S PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY FOR WAR CRIMES COULD NOT BE ESTABLISHED--WHICH THEY INTERPRET PUBLICLY AS PROVING THAT WALDHEIM HAD NO PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY FOR WAR CRIMES. IT IS POSSIBLE THAT MOCK AND THE PEOPLE'S PARTY MAY ATTACK THE WATCH LIST DECISION, CONTRASTING THE DECISION WITH THE POSITIVE ELEMENTS IN THE COMMISSION'S REPORT. BOTH MOCK AND A LARGE SEGMENT OF THE MEDIA AND PUBLIC WILL EXPECT THE SOCIALIST-LED COALITION TO LINE UP IN SUPPORT OF WALDHEIM. MOCK HAS ALREADY MADE STRONG DEMANDS ON THE CHANCELLOR TO DISTANCE THE GOVERNMENT FROM THE COMMISSION AND THE REPORT.

5. PREDICTABLY, THE SOCIALISTS ARE HAVING PROBLEMS. ALTHOUGH THE COMMISSION'S REPORT IS STILL TOO NEW TO HAVE BEEN FULLY DIGESTED, WHAT IS KNOWN IS ALREADY INDUCING IN THE SOCIALIST PARTY A FRACTIOUS SOUL-SEARCHING ON THE QUESTION OF SUPPORT FOR WALDHEIM. VRANITZKY HIMSELF, IN PUBLIC STATEMENTS, HAS APPEARED NOTABLY COOL IN HIS ATTITUDE TOWARD WALDHEIM. HE IS

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CAUGHT BETWEEN A ROCK AND A HARD PLACE IN ATTEMPTING TO RECONCILE HIS OWN CONVICTIONS AND THE ANTI-WALDHEIM SENTIMENTS WITHIN HIS PARTY, WITH THE DEMANDS OF MAINTAINING A GOVERNING COALITION. THE DEBATE IN THE DAYS AHEAD WILL BE OVER THIS RECONCILIATION. AND WHILE IT IS LIKELY THAT THE DECISION WILL BE TO SUPPORT THE WALDHEIM PRESIDENCY, IT WILL BE TAKEN CONDITIONALLY, C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 02 OF 02 VIENNA 01514

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AND WITH REGRET.

6. IN THIS ENVIRONMENT, ANY U.S. COMMENT ON THE REPORT ITSELF, LET ALONE AN ATTACK ON THE REPORT--OR CONVERSELY A COUNTERATTACK ON THE OVP LINE--COULD MAKE US AN ISSUE IN AN INTERNAL ARGUMENT WHICH THE AUSTRIANS MUST SETTLE FOR THEMSELVES. INDEED, THE COMMISSION'S REPORT CLEARLY SUSTAINS THE U.S. WATCH LIST DECISION. THE COMMISSION ESTABLISHED A FORM OF PARTICIPATORY CULPABILITY ON THE PART OF WALDHEIM--ACTUAL AS WELL AS ETHICAL. ITS HEAD, GERMAN HISTORIAN MESSERSCHMIDT, SPEAKING FOR HIMSELF, WAS QUOTED AS SAYING THAT THE COMMISSION'S FINDINGS VINDICATE THE U.S. WATCH LIST DECISION. THESE CONSIDERATIONS HAVE LED TO OUR STRONG RECOMMENDATION THAT THE U.S. GOVERNMENT CONFINE ITS COMMENTS ON THE COMMISSION'S REPORT TO THOSE PROVIDED REFTEL. AT THE SAME TIME, WE DO NOT FORECLOSE THAT AN ASSAULT ON THE WATCH LIST DECISION AND A DISTORTION OF ITS MEANING MAY REQUIRE A MORE EXACT RESPONSE. BUT ANY PREEMPTIVE BEHAVIOR ON OUR PART WOULD ONLY IMPEDE A POSITIVE RESOLUTION OF THE NATIONAL DEBATE WHICH THE COMMISSION'S REPORT IS ENGENDERING.

7. POSTSCRIPT: IN ALL OF THIS BROUHAHA, WALDHEIM'S BEHAVIOR HAS DIMINISHED HIS STANDING AND CREDIBILITY EVEN FURTHER. HE HAS REACTED POORLY TO THE COMMISSION AND RUN FOR COVER BEHIND THE SKIRTS OF A GENERAL DISCLAIMER THAT HE WAS PART OF A WARTIME GENERATION. "MANY KNEW, HE SAID, "I KNEW--THERE IS NO GUILT IN KNOWING."

8. IT IS HARD FOR US TO SEE HERE, WHATEVER THE OUTCOME OF AUSTRIA'S INTERNAL DEBATE, HOW ITS ALREADY UNACCEPTABLE PRESIDENT CAN NOW AVOID BECOMING EVEN MORE OF AN INTERNATIONAL PARIAH. MANY AUSTRIANS ARE PAINFULLY AWARE OF THE BURDEN OF **KURT WALDHEIM**. THEY ARE ALSO EQUALLY AWARE THAT IT WILL BE EXCRUCIATINGLY DIFFICULT TO GET RID OF HIM. NOWHERE IS THIS MORE TRUE THAN WITHIN THE CONFINES OF THE GOVERNMENT ITSELF, WHICH WILL HAVE REACHED A GRUDGING CONSENSUS FOR

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WALDHEIM'S RETENTION. GRUNWALD

ADMIN  
END OF MESSAGE

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