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GRS 800
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FROM ROME 041645Z MAY 83
TO PRIORITY FCO
TELNO 217 OF 4 MAY 83
INFO ROUTINE UKMIS GENEVA, UKMIS NEW YORK, WASHINGTON

INFO SAVING EC POSTS, BERNE, MODUK

MY TELNOS 198 AND 207/8 (NOT TO ALL): ITALY/ARGENTINA
DESAPARECIDOS

1. THE ARGENTINE JUNTA'S ANNOUNCEMENT ABOUT DESAPARECIDOS LAST WEEK PROVOKED A STRONG REACTION IN ITALY. PRESIDENT PERTINI SENT A MESSAGE IN HIS NAME AND THAT OF THE ITALIAN PEOPLE DENOUNCING THE 'APPALLING CYNICISM' OF THE COMMUNIQUE WHICH PLACED THOSE RESPONSIBLE 'OUTSIDE CIVILISED HUMAN SOCIETY'. THE MFA TERMED THE POSITION OF THE ARGENTINE JUNTA UNACCEPTABLE, ADDING THAT IT COULD NOT BE CONSIDERED A RESPONSE TO REPEATED ITALIAN REQUESTS FOR INFORMATION ON THE DISAPPEARANCE OF ITALIANS SINCE 1976. THE MFA NOTE ALSO ASKED HOW THE COMMUNIQUE COULD BE RECONCILED WITH ARGENTINE UNDERTAKINGS TO THE COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS TO SOLVE THE DESAPARECIDOS PROBLEM. THE ITALIAN AMBASSADOR IN BUENOS AIRES WAS INSTRUCTED TO PROTEST ON THESE LINES, AND ALSO TO CALL FOR A MEETING OF EC AMBASSADORS THERE TO COORDINATE REACTIONS. COLOMBO HIMSELF, INTERVIEWED IN BAGHDAD DURING HIS MIDDLE EAST TOUR, EXPRESSED HIS ANGER AND AMAZEMENT AND CALLED ON THE ARGENTINE GOVERNMENT TO EXPLAIN ITSELF BETTER ON THE SPECIFIC CASES RAISED BY ITALY.

2. THE ITALIAN PRESS REPORTED ALL THIS AT LENGTH, WITH BACKGROUND FEATURE ARTICLES. ALL THE MAJOR PARTIES PRODUCED STATEMENTS CONDEMNING THE ARGENTINE COMMUNIQUE.

3. TODAY'S ITALIAN NEWSPAPERS REPORT THAT THE ARGENTINE AMBASSADOR IN ROME HAS, ON INSTRUCTIONS, MADE A FORMAL PROTEST TO THE MFA ABOUT PERTINI'S MESSAGE TO THE JUNTA AND 'REJECTED IT COMPLETELY', ON THE GROUNDS THAT IT REPRESENTS A HARMFUL INTERFERENCE IN ARGENTINA'S INTERNAL AFFAIRS. IN REPLY PERTINI HAS SENT A FURTHER MESSAGE TO PRESIDENT BIGNONE ARGUING THAT (A) HE HAD A RIGHT TO PROTEST BECAUSE THERE WERE ITALIANS AMONG THE VICTIMS, (B) ARGENTINA AS A MEMBER OF THE UN, AND ITS RULERS HAD TO ANSWER TO THE WORLD FOR EVERY VIOLATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS, (C) THE FACT THAT OTHER HEADS OF STATE HAD NOT PROTESTED AS HE HAD WAS THEIR BUSINESS, (D) IT WAS HARD TO UNDERSTAND WHY BIGNONE, AS AN HONEST MAN AND UPRIGHT OFFICER, SHOULD WISH TO DEFEND OFFICERS WHO HAD DISHONoured THEIR UNIFORM. THIS FIRM STAND IS LIKELY TO WIN PERTINI CONSIDERABLE CREDIT IN THE EYES OF THE ITALIAN PUBLIC.

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4. THIS EXCHANGE MUST HAVE DONE SOME DAMAGE TO RELATIONS BETWEEN ITALY AND ARGENTINA, ALTHOUGH SO FAR THE HARSHTEST WORDS HAVE COME FROM THE PRESIDENT RATHER THAN THE ITALIAN GOVERNMENT. NO PARTY, LEAST OF ALL IN AN ELECTION CAMPAIGN, WILL WISH TO SUGGEST IN PUBLIC THAT ITALY SHOULD TAKE A SOFTER LINE. WE MAY THEREFORE EXPECT ITALY TO REMAIN IN THE FOREFRONT OF THOSE COUNTRIES PROTESTING AT THE ARGENTINE ANNOUNCEMENT, AND PERHAPS TO PURSUE FURTHER COLOMBO'S IDEA OF CONSULTING EUROPEAN COUNTRIES, INCLUDING NON-EC ONES THAT ALSO HAVE MISSING NATIONALS. THERE IS MUCH SPECULATION THAT THE ITALIAN AMBASSADOR IN BUENOS AIRES MAY BE RECALLED, OR THAT THE ARGENTINES MAY SEEK HIS RECALL. THE MFA HAVE DECLINED TO BE DRAWN.

FALKLANDS

5. THE ITALIAN PRESS PICKED UP RUMOURS FROM BUENOS AIRES THAT THE ITALIAN AMBASSADORS IN LONDON AND BUENOS AIRES HAVE RECENTLY URGED A PEACEFUL SOLUTION TO THE FALKLANDS DISPUTE. THE MFA HAVE THEREFORE CONFIRMED THIS BUT WITHOUT GIVING DETAILS, STRESSING THAT IT WAS WRONG TO INTERPRET THIS MOVE AS AN OFFER OF ITALIAN MEDIATION. WE HAVE AGREED WITH THE DEPARTMENT THAT IN RESPONSE TO ANY PRESS ENQUIRIES HERE WE SHALL SAY ONLY THAT THE FALKLANDS HAVE BEEN DISCUSSED IN THE COURSE OF NORMAL CONTACTS BETWEEN OUR TWO GOVERNMENTS ON MATTERS OF COMMON INTEREST.

6. IN TALKING TO THE MFA, WE SHALL STICK TO THE LINE TAKEN BY MR ONSLOW AND BY GIFFARD ON 14, AND 28 APRIL RESPECTIVELY. COLOMBO'S SCOPE FOR PROMOTING COMPROMISE SOLUTIONS MAY BE REDUCED BY THE FRESH PUBLICITY OVER THE DESAPARECIDOS ISSUE AND BY THE PROBABLE IMMINENCE OF THE GENERAL ELECTION HERE. WE KNOW HOWEVER THAT MFA OFFICIALS ARE STILL WORKING ON POSSIBLE WAYS TO BRING ABOUT NEGOTIATIONS BETWEEN BRITAIN AND WHATEVER CIVILIAN GOVERNMENT EMERGES IN ARGENTINA, AND OUR RESPONSE TO CAGIATI'S DEMARCHE WILL THEREFORE NEED TO EXPLAIN CAREFULLY WHY IT IS NOT FOR HMG TO MAKE THE FIRST MOVE. A DETAILED NOTE OF THE EFFORTS WE HAVE ALREADY MADE TO NORMALISE RELATIONS WOULD HELP, TOGETHER WITH ALL THE AVAILABLE EVIDENCE OF ARGENTINE INTRANSIGENCE (ESPECIALLY THAT WHICH RELATES TO THE POLITICAL PARTIES RATHER THAN THE JUNTA).

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/ DESTEFANIS

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DESTEFANIS

7. THE ITALIAN PRESS HAVE REPORTED WITH LITTLE COMMENT THE JUNTA'S WITHDRAWAL OF SUPPORT FOR DESTEFANIS AND HIS OWN CHANGE OF PLAN.

8. FCO PLEASE PASS TO SAVING ADDRESSEES

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