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AM-FALKLANDS-USREACT 3RDLD-PICKUP12THGRAF 4-6

URGENT

(ARGENTINE FOREIGN MINISTER CONFIDENT PROBLEM WITH BRITAIN CAN BE SOLVED= ELIMINATING 15THGRAF)

WASHINGTON (UPI) -- THE UNITED STATES OFFERED ITS SERVICES AS MEDIATOR TUESDAY IN THE DISPUTE BETWEEN BRITAIN AND ARGENTINA AND THE ARGENTINE FOREIGN MINISTER SAID AT THE END OF A MEETING WITH SECRETARY OF STATE ALEXANDER HAIG, +I AM CONFIDENT WE CAN SOLVE OUR PROBLEM WITH BRITAIN.+

FOREIGN MINISTER NICANDOR COSTAS MENDEZ MET HAIG TUESDAY EVENING. EARLIER IN THE DAY HAIG MET SEPARATELY WITH THE BRITISH AMBASSADOR TO WASHINGTON, SIR NICHOLAS HENDERSON, AND ARGENTINE AMBASSADOR ESTEBAN TAKACS.

COSTAS MENDEZ SAID, +THE UNITED STATES HAS OFFERED US ASSISTANCE TO SEE IF WE CAN SOLVE OUR PROBLEM WITH BRITAIN.+

HE SAID HE IS GOING TO TRANSMIT THE OFFER TO HIS GOVERNMENT BUT HE ADDED, +AS A DIPLOMAT, I AM CONFIDENT WE WILL REACH THROUGH NEGOTIATIONS -- EVEN IF THEY ARE LONG -- AN HONORABLE AND JUST PEACE.+

DURING THE DAY, HAIG EMERGED AS THE POINT MAN IN THE U.S. OPERATION TO HEAD OFF A MILITARY CLASH. WHITE HOUSE OFFICIALS SAID THAT THE SERVICES OF VICE PRESIDENT GEORGE BUSH -- OR SOMEBODY LIKE HIM -- WERE OFFERED EARLIER TO THE ARGENTINES AND THE BRITISH BUT THE OFFER HAD BEEN REFUSED AT THAT TIME BY THE ARGENTINE PRESIDENT LEOPOLDO GALTIERI.

BUSH WILL REMAIN IN WASHINGTON WHILE REAGAN AND HAIG MAKE THEIR PREVIOUSLY SCHEDULED VISIT TO THE CARIBBEAN, LEAVING WEDNESDAY.

COSTAS MENDEZ SAID THAT HE WOULD NOT DESCRIBE THE UNITED STATES AS A +MEDIATOR -- JUST OFFERING ASSISTANCE SO TWO GOOD FRIENDS CAN FIND AN AMICABLE SOLUTION.+

COSTAS MENDEZ TOOK SHARP EXCEPTION TO A STATEMENT BY HENDERSON EARLIER TUESDAY. HENDERSON HAD SAID THE UNITED STATES HAD ONLY 52 HOSTAGES IN IRAN BUT +WE HAVE 2,000 (HOSTAGES IN THE FALKLANDS.)+

COSTAS MENDEZ HAD HIS SECRETARY READ TO REPORTERS THE DICTIONARY DEFINITION OF HOSTAGE -- +A PERSON WHO IS HELD AS SECURITY TO FULFILL CERTAIN TERMS+ AND HE SAID, +THERE IS NO ONE WHO IS HELD.+

HE SAID, +EVERY ISLANDER IS FREE TO STAY THERE ...OR IF HE WANTS TO GO, HE CAN GO TONIGHT, HE CAN GO TOMORROW.+

HE SAID ANY ISLANDER WHO LEAVES WOULD BE COMPENSATED FOR ANY DAMAGES -- +WE WILL EVEN BUY THEIR PROPERTY.+

PICKUP 12THGRAF: HENDERSON REFUSED

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