ARGENTINE ARMY CHIEF OF STAFF PLACES ARMY RESTRUCTURING IN PERSPECTIVE

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- DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE

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SOURCE: (U) DAILY NEWSPAPER, "LA PRENSA," BUENOS AIRES, ARGENTINA, 941028 (U), IN SPANISH. INDEPENDENT-CONSERVATIVE NEWSPAPER WHICH USUALLY SUPPORTS THE US AND HAS AN INTERNATIONAL REPUTATION FOR INTEGRITY. INFLUENTIAL WITH POLITICIANS AND THE MILITARY.

SUMMARY: (U) ARGENTINE ARMY CHIEF OF STAFF, GENERAL MARTIN ANTONIO ((BALZA)), DESCRIBES THE PRIMARY ROLE OF THE ARMY AS AN INSTRUMENT OF DISSUASION OF AGGRESSION AND EXPRESSES SATISFACTION WITH ITS RECENT UTILIZATION IN INTERNATIONAL PEACE KEEPING.

TEXT: 1. (U) IN A NEWSPAPER INTERVIEW, ARGENTINE ARMY (ARGARM) CHIEF OF STAFF, GENERAL MARTIN ANTONIO ((BALZA)), DESCRIBED THE PRIMARY ROLE OF THE ARMY AS THAT OF AN INSTRUMENT OF THE NATIONAL AUTHORITY TO DISSUADE AGGRESSION AND ENFORCE ITS FOREIGN POLICIES. GENERAL BALZA SEES THE ARGARM'S RECENT EMPLOYMENT IN

2. (U) GENERAL BALZA RELATED THAT THE ARGARM CURRENTLY HAS 1300 PERSONNEL DEPLOYED IN PEACE KEEPING MISSIONS OVERSEAS, INCLUDING 900 IN CROATIA, 270 IN CYPRUS, 55 IN KUWAIT, AND UNSPECIFIED NUMBERS IN OTHER LOCATIONS IN THE MIDDLE EAST, MOZAMBIQUE, ANGOLA, AND WESTERN SAHARA. HE ADDED THAT THE ARGENTINE NAVY HAS 103 PERSONNEL AND THE AIR FORCE HAS TWO IN CYPRUS, AS WELL. WHILE HE DOES NOT FEEL THAT THIS EMPLOYMENT OF THE ARGARM WAS EVER IMAGINED A FEW YEARS AGO, THE RESTRUCTURING OF THE ARGENTINE ARMED FORCES IN RECENT YEARS HAS COMPLEMENTED AND FACILITATED ITS REORIENTATION AS A MAJOR PLAYER IN INTERNATIONAL PEACE KEEPING.


4. (U) GENERAL BALZA DISMISSES THE SUGGESTION THAT HE BE NICKNAMED THE "DEMOCRACY GENERAL," STATING THAT (NOT WITHSTANDING SOME LAMENTABLE ERRORS OF THE PAST) THE ARGARM HAS ALWAYS BEEN INVESTED WITH THE PRINCIPLES OF DEMOCRACY. CONCERNING THOSE UNSPECIFIED ERRORS, BALZA

5. (U) WHEN ASKED IF ARGENTINE MILITARY INTELLIGENCE, LIMITED AS IT IS TO OPERATIONS AGAINST FOREIGN THREATS, IS CAPABLE OF DEALING WITH INTERNATIONAL TERRORISM, BALZA REPLIED THAT MILITARY INTELLIGENCE IS PREPARED TO CARRY OUT ITS MISSION WITHIN THE LIMITS IMPOSED ON IT BY THE LAW. HE ADDED THAT THIS REQUIRES DISCRETION, AND HE COMMENTED THAT ONLY IN ARGENTINA IS SO MUCH MENTION MADE OF SENSITIVE INTELLIGENCE OPERATIONS IN THE PUBLIC MEDIA.

6. (U) GENERAL BALZA DECLINED COMMENT ON THE RECENT CONTROVERSY IN THE ARGENTINE NAVY REGARDING THE ADMISSION BY MIDDLE-LEVEL OFFICERS OF PARTICIPATION IN ACTS OF HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSE DURING THE SO CALLED "DIRTY WAR" (CITE: IIR 6 804 0012 95). HE INDICATED THAT IT WOULD BE INAPPROPRIATE FOR HIM TO COMMENT ON SUCH MATTERS INTERNAL TO A SISTER SERVICE. WHEN ASKED HOW HE WOULD HANDLE A SIMILAR SITUATION IF IT WERE TO OCCUR IN THE ARMY, BALZA REMARKED THAT HE WOULD "CROSS THAT BRIDGE WHEN HE CAME TO IT." SIMILARLY, WHEN ASKED HIS OPINION OF A REQUEST BY MODIN POLITICIAN ARTURO (FRONDIZI) FOR AMNESTY FOR JAILED "CARAPINTADA" COLONEL MOHAMED ALI (SEINELDIN) AND HIS FOLLOWERS, GENERAL BALZA INDICATED THE MATTER IS A POLITICAL ONE IN WHICH THE MILITARY HAS NO ROLE.

GENERAL BALZA CONTINUES TO REPRESENT THE IMAGE OF A MATURER, PROFESSIONAL ARGARMA, DEDICATED TO ITS ROLE AS A SUBORDINATE ARM OF THE DEMOCRATICALLY ELECTED CIVILIAN AUTHORITIES.
HIS PREEMINENT ROLE AS SENIOR OFFICER OF THE ARGENTINE ARMED FORCES HAS PROVIDED A STRONG INFLUENCE OF REASON AND PROFESSIONALISM WITHIN THE OFFICER CORPS DURING THE DIFFICULT, SOMETIMES PAINFUL, PROCESS OF RESTRUCTURING THE ARMED FORCES. IT IS NOT HARD TO IMAGINE A MUCH MORE TURBULENT ARGENTINA DURING THIS PROCESS WERE IT NOT FOR HIS INFLUENCE.

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