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ACTION SS 70

INFO /070 W

R 241321Z MAR 68

FM AMEMBASSY SANTO DOMINGO

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4887

INFO AMCONSUL SAGO DE LOS CABALLEROS 740

S E I C R E T SANTO DOMINGO 2085

LIMDIS

SUBJ: AMBASSADOR DISCUSSES ELECTORAL SITUATION WITH PRESIDENT

REF: SD-2081

*Pol 18-1 DR
Pol 12 DR*

SUMMARY: OUR CONCERN OVER DECLINING PROSPECTS MULTI-PARTY PARTICIPATION IN MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS (REFTEL) AND RESULTING SITUATIONS IMPLICATIONS FOR GENERAL POLITICAL ATMOSPHERE PROMPTED ME SEE PRES MARCH 21 TO DISCUSS WAYS IN WHICH (A) FIELD MIGHT BE BROADENED, AT VERY LEAST TO EXTENT OF KEEPING PRSC IN RACE, AND (B) MOST FAVORABLE ELECTORAL CLIMATE POSSIBLE MIGHT BE ACHIEVED AND MAINTAINED. NET RESULT OF APPROACH WAS FAVORABLE.

I. TOLD PRES MY PREOCCUPATION RE ELECTIONS SHARED BY

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WASHINGTON AND THAT, WHILE I FULLY AWARE DOMESTIC IMPLICATIONS NARROWING ELECTORAL PANORAMA, I WISHED PUT MAJOR EMPHASIS ON INTERNATIONAL ASPECTS SITUATION. STATED FRANK OPINION THAT ESSENTIALLY ONE-PARTY ELECTION COULD CREATE VERY BAD IMPRESSION ABROAD WITH CONSEQUENT DAMAGE GOVT'S IMAGE. POINTED OUT ELECTION CAMPAIGN ALSO BEGINNING IN US, AND THAT I CONSIDERED IT VERY POSSIBLE PRES JOHNSON'S OPPONENTS WOULD BE LOOKING CLOSELY AT DR BECAUSE OF ADMINISTRATION'S POLICY FULL SUPPORT BALAGUER'S GOVT. ADDED CONDUCT AND TONE DOM ELECTIONS WOULD, THEREFORE, RECEIVE MUCH ATTENTION FROM ALL SIDES IN US AND, PROBABLY, IN

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OTHER COUNTRIES AS WELL. ALSO REFERRED BRIEFLY OUR RELIEF "SINGLE-PARTY" ELECTIONS COULD LEAVE GOVT IN WEAKENED RATHER THAN HOPED FOR STRENGTHENED POSITION.

2. CONCLUDED BY SUGGESTING NUMBER MEASURES GODR MIGHT TAKE TO (A) ESTABLISH CLEARLY ITS BONA FIDES RE ELECTIONS AND ELECTORAL CLIMATE; (B) ENCOURAGE CONTINUED PRSC PARTICIPATION, MORE INDEPENDENT CANDIDACIES AND LARGEST POSSIBLE VOTER TURNOUT; AND (C) NEUTRALIZE OPPOSITION CHARGES GOVT ACTIVELY OR TACITLY

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ENCOURAGING "ONE-PARTY" CONTROL OF NATION. SUGGESTIONS CONCERNED BEHAVIOR SECURITY FORCES, ESTABLISHMENT COMPLAINT REVIEW BOARDS, ELECTORAL POLICE, AND PUBLIC RELATIONS GENERALLY. I STRESSED ALL THESE IN NATURE IDEAS WE HAD DEVELOPED AND THAT I NOT IN POSITION JUDGE APPROPRIATENESS ALL THEM IN CONTEXT LOCAL SITUATION, BUT THAT I WISHED PRES HAVE BENEFIT OUR THINKING IN ANY EVENT.

3. A. PRES LISTENED ATTENTIVELY BUT WITH SOME ANNOYANCE AT BEGINNING PRESENTATION. WHEN I MENTIONED RECENT CASE INVOLVING POLICE AND DR. OLIVARES BENCOSME IN MOCA (SEPTOL) AS EXAMPLE INCIDENT PREJUDICING PRSC "ELECTIONISTS", PRES REACTED VERY STRONGLY TO WHAT HE TERMED CONSTANT OPPOSITION EXPLOITATION ALLEGED POLICE ABUSES WITHOUT ONCE HE SAID, HAVING PRESENTED PROOF THEIR CHARGES TO HIM. HIS INFORMATION INDICATED BENCOSME HAD BEEN DRUNK, THAT HE PUSHED POLICEMAN WHO APPROACHED HIM, AND THAT POLICEMAN PUSHED HIM BACK. ONLY ONE, NOT VARIOUS, POLICEMAN WAS INVOLVED, HE SAID, ANGRILY GESTICULATING WITH ONE FINGER. IN ANY EVENT, HE WAS ORDERING FULL INVESTIGATION THIS INCIDENT (INTERIOR SECRETARY GOICO MORALES REPORT

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ON BENCOSME INVESTIGATION, PUBLISHED MARCH 23, DIFFERED IN SOME DETAIL FROM PRESIDENT'S ACCOUNT--SEE SEPTOL). STATING I FULLY AWARE OPPOSITION EXPLOITATION AND EXAGGERATION INCIDENTS, I INQUIRED ABOUT CASE INVOLVING DETENTION

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EIGHT ALLEGED SOCIAL CHRISTIANS IN MOCA.
SAYING EIGHT HAD BEEN RELEASED ALMOST IMMEDIATELY, HE
REPLIED HE HAD JUST DIRECTED CHIEF POLICE MAKE FULL
INVESTIGATION AND REPORT. (BRAULIO ALVAREZ HAD JUST LEFT
PRES WHEN I ENTERING AND APPEARED BE IN IRASCIBLE MOOD.)
B. THERE WAS BRIEF DISCUSSION PRESIDENT'S ENJOINER I
MUST UNDERSTAND THAT "THESE PARTIES" WERE HEAVILY
INFILTRATED WITH COMMUNISTS AND AGITATORS, THAT
POLICE WERE AT BEST POOR SPECIMENS LACKING ABILITY DISCRIMI-
NATE OR WITHSTAND PROVOCATIONS, AND THAT ALMOST EVERYONE IN
OPPOSITION SEEKING CONSTANTLY EMBARRASS HIS GOVT FOR
PARTISAN POLITICAL ENDS. I ACKNOWLEDGED VALIDITY HIS
OBSERVATIONS BUT EMPHASIZED NEED FOR HIS GOVT JUST AS
CONSTANTLY TRY KEEP SUCH INCIDENTS TO MINIMUM IN ORDER
PREVENT FURTHER BREAKDOWN ITS RELATIONSHIP WITH OPPOSITION
AND PROTECT ITS IMAGE HERE AND ABROAD.

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4. PRES THEN SIMMERED DOWN AND LISTENED TO REMAINDER MY
PRESENTATION. HE SAID HE AGREED WITH ALL MY SUGGESTED MEASURES
EXCEPT ELECTORAL POLICE, STATING HE HAD IN FACT HAD MANY OF THEM
IN MIND AND WAS ALREADY TAKING SOME OF THOSE CONCERNING SECURITY
FORCES BEHAVIOR AND REVIEW COMMISSION. HE HAD PROMISED AND
WOULD TAKE WHATEVER MEASURES NECESSARY PROVIDE MOST PROPITIOUS
POSSIBLE ELECTORAL CLIMATE FOR ALL PARTICIPANTS, HE DECLARED.
SUCH MEASURES WOULD NEITHER HURT HIS GOVT NOR REFORMISTA CHANCES
IN ELECTIONS, WHICH NOT NATIONAL IN CHARACTER AND THUS POSE NO
CHALLENGE TO HIS ADMINISTRATION, AND HE WOULD REMAIN OPEN TO
FURTHER
SUGGESTIONS FROM ME OR ANYONE ELSE. (PRESS MARCH 23 REPORTED
IMPLEMENTATION NUMBER MEASURES DISCUSSED AT THIS MEETING--
SEE SEPTEL).

5. PRES EXPRESSED OPINION MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS OF LITTLE
IMPORTANCE AND WOULD NOT GENERATE MUCH PUBLIC INTEREST. SAID
ELECTIONS ESSENTIALLY INVOLVE RATHER SORDID SCRAMBLING FOR OFFICE
AND CONTROL MUNICIPAL FINANCES BY ELEMENTS WHO SEEKING MAINLY
SATISFY PERSONAL AMBITIONS. HE HAS HAD NOTHING TO DO WITH THEM.

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HE SAID (WITH ONLY MODEST OVERSTATEMENT), AND HE HAS MAINTAINED HANDS OFF POLICY CONCERNING REFORMISTAS, INDICATING HE DOES NOT PLAN FUTURE INVOLVEMENT IN CAMPAIGN. I OBSERVED HE MIGHT WELL BE RIGHT ABOUT REAL IMPORTANCE ELECTIONS, BUT IT WAS EVIDENT OPPOSITION'S TACTICS GIVING THEM POLITICAL IMPORTANCE.

6. TO ILLUSTRATE ALLEGED GENERAL LACK INTEREST IN ELECTIONS, PRES STATED IN STRICT CONFIDENCE HE HAD FEW DAYS BEFORE BEEN APPROACHED BY PRD WITH SUGGESTION PRD AND REFORMISTA LEGISLATORS PRESENT JOINT RESOLUTION TO CONGRESS PROPOSING AMENDMENT TO CONSTITUTION "ANNULLING" COMING ELECTIONS. HE PROFESSED NOT KNOW WHY PRD WANTED THIS, ADDING, "THEY DON'T TELL ME THEIR MOTIVES", BUT HE SUSPECTED ONE REASON WAS PRD WISH HOLD ON TO MUNICIPALITIES IT NOW CONTROLS, ESPECIALLY IN CAPITAL WHERE, WITH UASD, OPPOSITION HAS SIGNIFICANT POWER AND FINANCIAL BASE. IN ANY EVENT, HE SAID, PROVISION FOR 1968 MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS WAS INCLUDED IN CONSTITUTION ONLY AS CARRYOVER FROM INSTITUTIONAL ACT. AFTER 1968 THEY ARE TO BE HELD EVERY FOUR YEARS TO COINCIDE WITH GENERAL ELECTIONS, HE NOTED. PRES DID NOT INDICATE WHO IN PRD HAD APPROACHED HIM (ALTHOUGH HE GAVE ME IMPRESSION IT WAS AUTHORIZED MEMBER LEADERSHIP) NOR WHETHER HE BELIEVED SUGGESTION WOULD PROSPER.
GP-2 CRIMMINS

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