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DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE

NATIONAL MILITARY COMMAND CENTER  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L 896 FM ARMA SEP

1. (C) RELEABLE MILITARY SOURCE WHO SPENT TWO HOURS ON 2 SEPT WITH MAJ GEN AFFONSO DE ALBUQUERQUE LIMA, ARMY CHIEF OF ORDNANCE AND FORMER INTERIOR MINISTER, AVOWS THAT AFFONSO IS MANEUVERING FRANTICALLY TO GAIN PERSONAL POLITICAL ADVANTAGE FROM CURRENT SITUATION, ACCORDING TO SOURCE - WHO PLAYS TENNIS WITH AFFONSO AND AT WHOSE HOUSE I HAVE MET WITH AFFONSO - LATTER IS PUSHING FOR DEVELOPMENT OF FOLLOWING SCENARIO:

A. KEEP COSTA E SILVA FROM RETURNING TO PRESIDENCY, AFFONSO HOPES TO ACHIEVE THIS LARGELY THROUGH RUMOR THAT PRESIDENT IS MENTALLY UNFIT TO RESUME OFFICE.

B. ONCE PRESIDENT'S PERMANENT INCAPACITY IS ESTABLISHED, PKESSURE THE THREE SERVICE MINISTERS INTO NAMING A SINGLE ACTING PRESIDENT, AFFONSO DOES NOT HAVE ANYONE SPECIFIC IN MIND (AND DOESN'T WANT IT HIMSELF), BUT YE ENVISIONS THAT THE ACTING PRESIDENT WOULD BE DIRECTED TO RE-CALL THE CONGRESS WHICH WOULD ELECT COSTA E SILVA'S SUCCESSOR WITHIN 60 DAYS.

C. AFFONSO IS CONFIDENT THAT HE COULD THEN AIM AT THE CONGRESS DECISIVE MILITARY "PERSUASION" IN HIS FAVOR.

2. (C) IN ADDITION TO MEETING WITH HIS REGULAR ENTOURAGE, GEN AFFONSO HAS BEEN OBSERVED IN HUDDLES WITH SUCH PREVIOUSLY INFLUENTIAL INDIVIDUALS AS AIR MARSHAL EDUARDO GOMES AND MARSHAL CORDEIRO DE FARIS. THESE CONTACTS ADD A CERTAIN RESPECTABILITY TO GEN AFFONSO, BUT THEY ARE NOT OF EARTHSHAKING IMPORTANCE BECAUSE NEITHER ELDER SOLDIER-STATESMAN IS LIKELY TO BE SYMPATHETIC TO AN ARBITRARY SETTING ASIDE OF COSTA E SILVA, MOREOVER, EDUARDO GOMES' MAIN CONCERN IS THAT AIR MINISTER MARCIO - WHOM

ACTION DIA-15 AMPS/FILE-1 (16) EEW/GHJ

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HE DESPISES - IS NOW THE ACTING CO-PRESIDENT, MARSHAL CORDEIRO, ON THE OTHER HAND, PROBABLY WENT TO AFFONSO TO EXPRESS HIS DISPLEASURE OVER THE VICE PRESIDENT BEING BY-PASSED.

3. (C) A RETIRED ARMY MAJOR GENERAL WHO WAS A CLASSMATE OF TEN PORTELLJQN CHIEF OF THE PRESIDENT'S MILITARY HOUSEHOLD, AND WHO MAINTAINS CLOSE LIAISON WITH HIM, SAID YESTERDAY THAT PORTELLA WAS QUITE CAPABLE OF SIDING WITH AFFONSO. SOURCE DESCRIBED PORTELLA AS BEING THIRSTY FOR SURVIVAL AND AS A SHREWD JUDGE OF POWER TRENDS. IN MY VIEW, A PORTELLA-AFFONSO MARRIAGE IS UNLIKELY BECAUSE OF THE PROBLEMS AFFONSO HAS CAUSED FOR THE PRESIDENT, WHO REMAINS THE OBJECT OF PORTELLA'S PROFOUND LOYALTY. ADDITIONALLY, PORTELLA APPEARS FULLY IN STEP WITH ARMY MINISTER LYRA TAVARES, WHO HARBORS A TOWERING CONTEMPT FOR GEN AFFONSO.

COMMENT: (C) GEN AFFONSO CANNOT BE DISMISSED AS A POSSIBLE FUTURE ALTERNATIVE AT THE PRESIDENT LEVEL, BUT HE FACES A TRYING UPHILL STRUGGLE. I SPENT 72-HOURS IN CLOSE CONTACT WITH HIM DURING VISITS TO ARMY FACTORIES IN SAO PAULO AND MINAS GERAIS LAST WEEK, AND HE CAME THROUGH AS SINGULARLY UNIMPRESSIVE IN POLITICAL TERMS. HE IS NOT ATTRACTIVE IN A PHYSICAL SENSE; HE IS A POOR SPEAKER WHO GIVES THE IMPRESSION OF BEING ILL AT EAST IN ANY LARGE GROUP, AND HIS CONVERSATION CENTERS LARGELY ON PLATITUDES CONNECTED WITH NATIONALISM AND DEVELOPMENT OF NORTHERN AND NORTHEASTERN BRAZIL. MOREOVER, HE THRIVES ON FLATTERY AND INVITES IT THROUGH SELF-PRAISE. IN TERMS OF THE CURRENT SITUATION, HE HAS THE FOLLOWING HANDICAPS: (1) AMBITION FOR HIGH POLITICAL OFFICE WHICH DULLS HIS PROFESSIONAL CREDENTIALS. (2) ALBEIT A SENIOR ONE, HE IS STILL A MAJOR GENERAL WHO MUST CONTEND WITH ALL THE 4-STAR GENERALS WHO HAVE THEIR OWN AMBITIONS; (3) HAVING BEEN IDENTIFIED BY THE REGIME AS A REAL OR IMAGINED PLOTTER, HIS PT@3@ 43 5-OPED AND HIS MOVEMENTS WATCHED; (4) AS DIRECTOR OF ORDNANCE HE DOES NOT HAVE ANY TROOP COMMAND; AND (5) HE LACKS A CIVILIAN POLITICAL BASE OF ANY CURRENT CONSEQUENCE AND IS INTENSELY DISLIKED BY INTERIOR MINISTER COSTA CAVALCANTI, FINANCE MINISTER DELFIM NETTO, TRANSPORTATION MINISTER ANDREAZZA, AND PROBABLY OTHERS IN THE CABINET AS WELL.

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