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SUBJECT: TOWARD THE CONCLAVE PART III: THE CANDIDATES

REF: A. A) VATICAN 0367,

B. B) VATICAN 0450,

C. C) 03 VATICAN 5309

¶1. (U) When the 115 Cardinal electors enter the Sistine Chapel April 18 to elect a successor to Pope John Paul II, there will be no clear favorite. Despite intensive media speculation and a series of media bubbles for various candidates, heading into the conclave no candidate appears to have an inside track to the 77 votes (two-thirds of the electors) required for election. As we have reported in the first two parts of this series (refs a and b), the electors will likely be looking for a theologically conservative but socially engaged candidate, who can address the distinctive regional challenges facing the church, capture the public imagination, and run a tight ship in Rome while broadening the sense of collegiality among bishops in the field. This final pre-conclave cable takes a look at the leading papal candidates or "papabile," from whom the next Pope is likely to be chosen. Still, the many factors at play in the election, the secretiveness of the process, and the unpredictable group

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dynamics makes handicapping this election almost impossible, as evidenced by the fact that Pope John Paul was not among the papabili at the time of his election in 1978. End Summary.

The Race is Not to the Swift . . .

¶2. (U) On the eve of the papal election, no single candidate has emerged as a clear frontrunner. Despite a week of media speculation suggesting that German Cardinal and close John Paul II collaborator Joseph Ratzinger was moving close to a majority of votes, it appears that he lacks enough support to achieve the required two-thirds, given strong opposition from factions that see Ratzinger as too rigid and jealous of Rome's prerogatives. Some of these forces appear to be uniting around retired Archbishop of Milan, Cardinal Carlo Maria Martini, as a standard-bearer for the initial votes that will test the strength of the differing groups, though he is not expected to be a viable candidate. Based on these initial showings, the cardinals in subsequent votes are expected to shift to other candidates who reflect the Ratzinger or Martini views, but who offer better hope of garnering support from other groups. Italian Cardinals Ruini or Scola, and Argentinian Cardinal Bergolio would be suitable to the Ratzinger camp, while Milan's Archbishop Cardinal Tettamanzi or Brazilian Cardinal Hummes could pull the support of the anti-Ratzinger groups.

¶3. (U) Despite the focus on these front-runners, the list of viable candidates remains broad, and given the shape of the race at this point, any one of them - or someone not included here -- could emerge as Karol Wojtyla did in 1978. Many Italians, who form the largest national bloc, are hoping to regain the papacy. Many Latin Americans, who represent the largest group of Catholics in the world, believe that one of their number should ascend. Other Europeans are certainly in the mix, particularly those who could reach out to Catholics in developing regions. And Africans and Asians, who represent Catholicism's most rapid areas of growth, feel that a pope from their midst would send a powerful signal of the Church's universality. These regional factors, of course, are one series of many that will be in play, and there will be many alliances rooted in theology or approach to Church governance that will transcend regional allegiances. For the ease of identifying candidates, however, Post provides below biographical sketches of the leading candidates organized

by region, in alphabetical order within the region.

The Italians

¶4. Having held the papacy in an unbroken string for 455 years prior to Karol Wojtyla's election, many observers have suggested that the Italian electors will be eager to return the papacy to an Italian. The Pope is the bishop of Rome, they point out, and therefore should speak Italian and understand Italian culture. Those who want to see an Italian ascend to the papacy hope the Italian Cardinals can unite around one candidate and use their core strength to coalesce additional support. At this time, however, it does not appear that the Italians are united, and some have even publicly indicated that the Church has moved beyond Italy, and Italians should no longer regard the papacy as an Italian prerogative. Despite the divisions and differing perspectives, there are a number of strong Italian candidates, particularly Cardinal Tettamanzi of Milan and Cardinal Ruini, the Pope's Vicar of Rome, around whom a consensus could

eventually emerge. The Italian candidates include:

-- BERTONE, Tarcisio: Born December 2, 1934. Joined the Salesian order in 1950 and was ordained a priest on July 1, 1960. He became professor of moral theology at his order's university in Rome, and later taught canon law. Recognizing his competence in church law issues, the Vatican asked him to work on the final phase of the new Code of Canon law, released in 1983. Since the early 1980s, he has served as an advisor to various Vatican departments, including the all-important Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. Bertone was appointed Rector of Rome's Pontifical Salesian University in 1989. Three years later, Pope John Paul II appointed him Archbishop of Vercelli (northern Italy), and in 1995 named him Secretary (number two) at the Congregation for the Doctrine of

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the Faith, where he worked for Cardinal Ratzinger. During his

tenure at the Congregation, Bertone helped develop key documents on the nature of the papacy and the place of the Catholic Church in relation to other Christian churches and the world religions -- projects particularly dear to Pope John Paul II. After his appointment as archbishop of Genoa in 2002 and his elevation to cardinal the following year, Bertone continued his advisory role on theological and legal issues. Bertone recently made headlines for comments criticizing what he regarded as misleading and anti-Catholic aspects of Dan Brown's bestseller, *The DaVinci Code*. His ideological proximity to Pope John Paul II and closeness to Cardinal Ratzinger increases his odds if the cardinals are looking for continuity with John Paul II in an Italian candidate.

-- RUINI, Camillo: Pope John Paul II's Vicar (delegate) for the Diocese of Rome, President of the powerful Italian Bishops Conference (CEI), and board member of the Vatican office for Bishops. Cardinal Ruini was born February 19, 1931 in Sassuolo, Italy. Ordained a priest in 1954, he completed a Doctorate in Theology from the Pontifical Gregorian University. He was ordained a bishop in 1983 and appointed Auxiliary Bishop of Reggio Emilia. In 1986 Ruini was appointed Secretary of the Italian Bishops Conference, becoming a member of the General Secretariat (governing body) in 1990. Pope John Paul II

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promoted him to Archbishop, Vicar General of the Diocese of Rome and President of the Italian Bishops Conference in 1991, and he was created a cardinal the same year. John Paul II re-appointed Ruini to the presidency of the Bishops Conference for a further five-year term ending in 2006. A conservative, Ruini has a high profile in Italy where he is close to the Italian political establishment, and has recently been involved in an intense and complicated political battle over Italian laws on artificial insemination. He has a well-developed understanding of international affairs, and has made clear to U.S. officials his strong support for a close transatlantic partnership with the U.S., where he has spent time to enhance his English. Ruini could emerge as a candidate of the pro-Ratzinger group, who could attract a wider following than the non-charismatic German.

-- SCOLA, Angelo: Patriarch of Venice, born November 7, 1941 in Malgrate, Italy. After obtaining a degree in philosophy from the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart in Milan, he earned a doctoral degree in theology from the University of Fribourg in Switzerland. Academically brilliant, Scola was ordained a priest on July 18, 1970. His priestly career included university professorships in Switzerland and Italy, culminating with his appointment in 1995 as rector of the Pontifical Lateran University in Rome. He, too, has served as an advisor to Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger at the Vatican office for doctrinal orthodoxy. Scola is cosmopolitan, affable, intelligent, and has a warm personality. He speaks German, French and English, as well as his native Italian. Scola is a staunch defender of Catholic doctrine, but without the handicap of being a demagogue -- preferring to engage others by reason and dialogue. Some Vatican watchers have described Scola as intellectually arrogant, citing his practice of turning simple pastoral events like parish visits into magisterial lectures on sophisticated theological and philosophical themes. With the support of conservative ecclesial movements such as Opus Dei and Communion and Liberation, Scola has opened a theological school in Venice. He has also begun publication of a magazine promoting Christian-Muslim dialogue. Fiercely loyal to Pope John Paul II, Scola was a favorite of the late Pontiff and has reportedly been groomed during that period in preparation for "greater things."

-- TETTAMANZI, Dionigi: Cardinal Archbishop of Milan, Italy, board member of four important Vatican offices, formally a senior official of the Italian Bishops Conference. Tettamanzi is an astute theologian specializing in ethics and family

issues. Born March 14, 1934 in Renate, near Milan. Ordained a priest on June 28, 1957, he completed his doctorate in theology at the Pontifical Gregorian University, and taught theology for 25 years. Former Secretary General of the Italian Bishops Conference, Pope John Paul II nominated him Metropolitan Archbishop of Genoa in 1995 and created him a Cardinal on February 21, 1998. In 2002 he was appointed to the prestigious See of Milan -- an appointment seen by many as a reward for his loyalty to John Paul II. The Cardinal's notable publications

deal with moral issues associated with the elderly, women, the family, bio-ethics and virginity. He is thought to be close to Opus Dei. Tettamanzi is a moderate who may be able gain the support of and mediate between conservatives and liberals. An intellectual with a pastoral flair, he enjoys a reputation for being discerning and clear-sighted. He speaks limited English. After a high-visibility start in Milan that earned him the reproach of Vatican insiders who believed he was promoting his papal credentials too vigorously, Tettamanzi has more recently kept a lower profile. In Milan, Tettamanzi has impressed people with his pastoral sensitivity, openness to the city's young people, and ability to grapple with complicated moral and social issues, placing them within a comprehensible modern context. While probably Italy's best candidate, his lack of language skills may work against him at the conclave.

Other Europeans

¶5. (U) Despite the continued decline of the observant Catholic population in Europe and increasing secularization in most traditionally Catholic countries, Europe remains the traditional core of the Catholic Church and home to half of the Cardinal electors. Having broken the Italian stranglehold on the Papacy with a Polish Pope, many believe the door is now open to other European non-Italian candidates. Advocates of a European pope stress the importance of rebuilding the church in Europe, and maintain that a non-European pope would make it seem the church had written off Europe. Cardinal Ratzinger is the leading non-Italian European, though Portuguese Archbishop of Lisbon Policarpo has recently surfaced as a European who could reach out to Latin America.

-- da CRUZ POLICARPO, JOSE: Patriarch of Lisbon, Portugal. Born February 26, 1936, in Alvorinha, Portugal, he was ordained in August 1961 and holds a doctorate in theology from Rome's Gregorian University. After heading seminaries in Penafirme and Olivais, he became dean of the Theological Faculty of the Portuguese Catholic University. He later served two terms as rector of the same university (1988-96).

In May 1978 he was appointed auxiliary bishop of Lisbon, receiving episcopal ordination that June 29. In March 1997 he was appointed coadjutor archbishop of Lisbon and became patriarch in March 1998. He is also grand chancellor of the Portuguese Catholic University and president of the Portuguese bishops' conference. Proclaimed a cardinal in February 2001, he is seen as a moderate European who could appeal to Latin American electors.

-- DANNEELS, Godfried: Cardinal Archbishop of Mechlin-Brussels in Belgium, advisor to the Vatican's Foreign Office, and board member of several Vatican offices. Danneels was born in Kanegem, Belgium June 4, 1933. Ordained a priest in 1957, he studied at the Catholic University of Leuven, Belgium and at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome. Danneels holds a doctorate of Theology, later taught theology in Leuven, and has authored several books. Danneels was ordained Bishop of Antwerp in 1977 and promoted to the Archdiocese of Mechlin-Brussels two years later. He is President of the Belgian Bishops Conference as well as Bishop for the country's military. Created a cardinal in 1983, Danneels has traveled widely and has taken a prominent and highly visible place on the executive of a number of Synod of Bishops meetings held in Rome over the years. He speaks several languages and is computer literate. Danneels is an astute theologian, often presenting sound Catholic doctrine with a veneer of linguistic liberalism. He represents the best of an eclectic European Catholicism, and would make a good compromise candidate for the papacy. His extensive travels have made him well known among the cardinal electors. An eminently practical leader and administrator, he has been forthright yet discreet in speaking about the late Pope's health and related issues.

-- RATZINGER, Joseph: Dean of the College of Cardinals and Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. Born 16 April 1927 in Marktl am Inn, Germany, he was called into the

auxiliary anti-aircraft service in the last months of World War II. From 1946 to 1951, the year in which he was ordained a priest and began to teach, he studied philosophy and theology at the University of Munich and at the higher school in Freising.

In 1953 he obtained a doctorate in theology, and subsequently taught dogma and fundamental theology in Freising, Bonn, Munster, Tübingen, and Regensburg, where he became Vice President of the university. In 1962, at the age of 35, he became a consultant at the second Vatican Council in Rome. In March 1977, Paul VI appointed him Archbishop of Munich and Freising, and on 28 May 1977 he was ordained a bishop, the first diocesan priest in 80 years to take over the pastoral ministry of this large Bavarian diocese. Pope Paul VI created Ratzinger a cardinal in the consistory of 27 June 1977. On 25 November 1981, he was nominated by John Paul II as Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, President of the Biblical Commission, and of the Pontifical International Theological Commission. Elected November 30, 2002 as Dean of the College of Cardinals, Ratzinger serves on many curial bodies: the Secretariat of State (foreign affairs section), Eastern-rite Churches, Worship and Sacraments, Bishops, Evangelization of Peoples, Catholic Education, Christian Unity, Culture, and the Commission for Latin America. Ratzinger generated headlines in 2004 by asserting that Turkey should not be considered a European country and should not be allowed in the EU -- a view derived from his conception of Europe as rooted in Christianity. He led the unsuccessful Vatican drive to secure a mention of Europe's Christian roots in the EU constitution. He earned praise for his homily at John Paul II's funeral mass, and will certainly garner the most votes in the early ballots, but is unlikely to secure wide enough support to be elected.

-- SCHONBORN, Christoph: Cardinal Archbishop of Vienna, Austria, and member of the Vatican's doctrinal watchdog office. Born January 22, 1945 in Skalsko in the former Czechoslovakia, his family moved to Austria later that year. Schonborn joined the Dominican Order in 1963, and studied theology at prestigious Catholic and state-run universities in Germany and France, including Paris' Institut Catholique and the "Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes" at the Sorbonne. He holds a Doctorate in Theology. Ordained a priest in 1970, Schonborn continued his studies, later joining the faculty at the University of Freiburg in Switzerland. He was a member of the Vatican's select International Theological Commission from 1980-1991.

From 1987 to 1992 he was Secretary of the editorial commission for the Vatican's definitive doctrinal compendium: The Catechism of the Catholic Church. Schonborn was appointed Auxiliary Bishop of Vienna in 1991, eventually assuming responsibility for the jurisdiction in 1995. He was created a cardinal in 1998 and has been President of the Austrian Bishops Conference since then. Schonborn is the intellectual's choice for pope but unfortunately he has been tainted by the sexual abuse scandals in his national church. The fact he is the pastor of a large diocese is one plus for him. However, Austria's Catholics are divided between conservative traditionalists and radical liberals, and Schonborn's inability to control the open rebellion of many Austrian Catholics against the present papacy and Catholic conservatism in general has tarnished his image for many cardinal electors. His relative youth will also work against him as few electors are looking for another 25-year reign.

Latin American Candidates

¶6. (U) Latin America is home to 42 percent of the world's Catholics, and is the second home of the Church after Europe. With the continued decline in the vitality of the Church in Europe, many Latin Americans believe the time has come for a Pope from the developed world, where the church is growing and active, but nevertheless facing competition from evangelical groups and working to address daunting social and economic challenges. Latin American Cardinals have told us they feel this conclave could produce the first Latin American Pope, though they have been cautious about making this case too strongly for fear of alienating non-Latin colleagues. Clearly if the decision for a Pope were based solely on regional considerations, a Latin American pope would be a logical choice for the electors for the powerful message it would send to this bastion of Catholicism and to the broader church in the developing world. The conclave will have a number of viable Latin American candidates to consider when they sit down April 18, but these candidates will have to overcome the region's under-representation in the College of Cardinals, where they

account for less than 20 percent of the votes.

-- BERGOGLIO, Jorge Mario: Born December 17, 1936 in Buenos Aires, and ordained December 13, 1969 during his theological studies at the Theological Faculty of San Miguel. Bergoglio served as Jesuit Provincial (elected leader of the order) for Argentina (1973-79) and rector of the Philosophical and Theological Faculty of San Miguel (1980-86). After completing his doctoral dissertation in Germany, Bergoglio served as a confessor and spiritual director in Cordoba. In 1992, the Pope appointed him Assistant Bishop of Buenos Aires; then in 1997, he was appointed Coadjutor Archbishop (deputy archbishop with right of succession) of Buenos Aires; ultimately becoming Archbishop on February 28, 1998. Bergoglio is the vice-President of the Argentine Bishops Conference and serves on the Vatican's committee for the worldwide synod of bishops (a grouping of all bishops conferences). He speaks Spanish, Italian and German. Bergoglio exemplifies the virtues of the wise pastor that many electors value. Observers have praised his humility: he has been reluctant to accept honors or hold high office and commutes to work on a bus. What could count against him is his membership in the Jesuit order. Some senior prelates, especially conservatives, are suspicious of a liberal streak in the order, perhaps most pronounced in the U.S., but also present elsewhere. Bergoglio is said to prefer life in the local Church as opposed to a bureaucratic existence in Rome's ecclesiastical structures, but at the same time he has been willing to serve on the Vatican's various supervisory committees. This could indicate an ability to bridge the curia/local church divide that splits the College of Cardinal Electors, making him a good compromise candidate.

-- CASTRILLON HOYOS, Dario: Prefect of the Congregation for Clergy, and board member of several Vatican offices. Born July 4, 1929 in Medellin, Colombia, he was ordained a priest in 1952. He holds a doctorate in Canon Law from Rome's Pontifical Gregorian University and post-graduate diplomas in religious sociology, political economics and ethical economics. Castrillon Hoyos worked in a variety of pastoral fields and was Secretary General of the Colombian Bishops Conference from 1954

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until 1971 when we was appointed coadjutor bishop of Pereira, Colombia, assuming leadership of the diocese five years later. He played a prominent role in the Latin American Episcopal Council, first as General Secretary (1983-1987) and later as President (1987-1991). After a two-year appointment at the helm of the Archdiocese of Bucaramanga, Colombia, the Pope called him to Rome to head the Congregation for Clergy, which oversees the Vatican's outreach to and guidelines for clergy worldwide. He was created a cardinal in 1998 and has served as a Papal Legate on various occasions, most notably in 1998 at the signing of the Treaty to end the border dispute between Peru and Ecuador. As a curia official and a son of Latin America he is another of those "bridging" cardinals who may appeal to electors searching for a candidate who reflects the Catholic Church of the twenty-first century. At 74 years old, he is also just the right age.

Castrillon Hoyos is a realist and a good friend of the United States, who has expressed strong support for U.S. efforts to combat terrorism. Combining firm and traditional theology with modern communication methods, he has used his position at the Congregation for Clergy to involve tens of thousands of priest worldwide in Internet videoconferences on themes ranging from bioethics to Church/State relations. Castrillon Hoyos may be the perfect candidate for those hoping for a Hispanic pope who knows his way around the Roman Curia.

-- HUMMES, Claudio: Cardinal Archbishop of Sao Paulo, Brazil.

A Franciscan monk and very much a pastor, Hummes was born the son of German immigrants in Montenegro, Brazil in 1934. He has been a bishop since 1975, and was created a cardinal in 2001. Hummes is a board member of several Vatican departments, including the Commission for Latin America. As a young bishop, Hummes had a reputation as a staunch defender of the underdog, and he assumed mythical status in his battles with the generals of the Brazilian dictatorship. He has actively defended the Movimento sem Terra (landless peasants), arguing that people should be encouraged to organize themselves to defend their rights. In later years, he adopted a more traditional theological stance and distanced himself from political action, though he still reminds government leaders that the Church

defends private property, but with "social responsibility."

Hummes may have the right mix of doctrinal caution and social engagement electors are seeking. Hummes was invited to preach the Lenten Spiritual Exercises to Pope John Paul and senior Curia officials in February 2002 -- a traditional sign of Papal favor. Gentle and soft-spoken, the Franciscan Archbishop of Sao Paolo can also be stubbornly opinionated. His election would

be a powerful affirmative signal to Catholics in the developing world that they have a central place in the Church.

-- RIVERA CARRERA, Norberto: Cardinal Archbishop of Mexico City.

Born June 6, 1942 in Tepehuanes. After ordination as a priest in 1966, he studied at Rome's Gregorian University and later taught at the Pontifical Mexican University in Mexico City. The sixty-two year-old Rivera Carrera is the quintessential Latin American churchman who advocates social justice within a conservative theological framework. He has criticized globalization and political corruption; but also closed a seminary in his first diocese as a bishop, charging it with teaching Marxist theology. The cardinal has acted as the Vatican's agent for inspections of other seminaries in Mexico. Rivera Carrera is reputed to be close to the Legionaries of Christ, a powerful conservative movement that sprang up after the Second Vatican Council. He is also active in promoting traditional family rights and values, a central theme in the John Paul II papacy. The cardinal is a board member of several Vatican offices, including the Council of the Second Section of the Secretariat of State (Foreign Ministry).

-- RODRIGUEZ MARADIAGA, Oscar: Cardinal Archbishop of Tegucigalpa, Honduras. Born December 29 1942 in Tegucigalpa, he joined the Salesian Order in 1961 and obtained three doctoral degrees: philosophy (in El Salvador), theology, and moral theology (at papal universities in Rome). A versatile priest, he holds a Diploma in Clinical Psychology and Psychotherapy from the University of Innsbruck, Austria. He studied piano, harmony and musical composition in El Salvador, Guatemala and the United States. Ordained a priest in 1970 in Guatemala, he taught in schools and universities administered by the Salesian priests. In 1978 he was appointed as Auxiliary Bishop of Tegucigalpa, and

subsequently became Archbishop of Tegucigalpa in 1993. The cardinal has served on the executive of the powerful Episcopal Council of Latin America as Secretary (1987-1991, and as President (1995-1999), and is currently President of the Honduran Bishops Conference. Elevated to Cardinal in 2001, he played a prominent role in the Cologne G-7 Conference on World Debt and has been deeply involved in Transparency International (movement for open and accountable government). He was sharply critical of the United States' media's coverage of the clergy sexual abuse scandal, charging that the media was anti-Catholic, motivated by hatred of the Church, and that it used tactics that reminded the cardinal of Stalin and Hitler. His comments could endear Rodriguez Maradiaga to conservatives within the Vatican and help his prospects as a compromise candidate for the papacy. The fact that he comes from Latin America but is Roman trained is a plus. Given the College of Cardinals' presumed hesitancy to elect an African, Rodriguez Maradiaga may be an acceptable, more "European" developing country alternative. His relative youth could count against him though. Rodriguez Maradiaga, while a darling of the media, has fallen somewhat out of favor after frequent media ranting on issues that run from U.S. "imperialism," to the "Jewish conspiracy" controlling the media, to his own personal "suitability" to become pope -- the latter statement the mortal sin within the College of Cardinals.

AFRICA'S CANDIDATES

¶7. (U) Africa is the fastest growing region in the world for the Church, now accounting for 11 percent of the world's Catholics. While the election of an Africa Pope would send a powerful signal throughout the continent, many European cardinals have made clear that they are not yet ready to elect a pope from a region where Catholicism's roots are still shallow. Still, two candidates have been listed among the top papal contenders.

-- ARINZE, Francis: Born Nov. 1, 1932, in Eziowelle, in the Archdiocese of Onitsha, Nigeria. Ordained to the priesthood in 1958, he became professor of liturgy and taught logic and basic philosophy at Bigard Memorial Seminary at Enugu and was later

appointed regional secretary for Catholic education for eastern Nigeria. After studies in London, he was named coadjutor to the archbishop of Onitsha in 1965 and ordained a bishop. Two years later he was named archbishop. In 1979 his brother bishops elected him president of the episcopal conference of Nigeria, a post he filled until 1984, when John Paul II asked him to head the Secretariat for Non-Christians (now the Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue). Arinze served as president of the Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue from May 1985 to October 2002, when he was named prefect of the Congregation of Divine Worship and the Sacraments. Arinze has faltered somewhat as Prefect of the Vatican's office for Worship

and Sacraments, slowly turning more reactionary in his pronouncements and insistence of liturgical correctness. He generated headlines in the U.S. with a sharply worded speech at Georgetown's graduation ceremony in 2003.

-- NAPIER, Wilfrid Fox: Born March 8, 1941, in Swartberg, South Africa, he was ordained for the Franciscans on July 25, 1970, following philosophical and theological studies at the Catholic University of Louvain, Belgium. After learning Xhosa, he worked in the parish of Lusikisiki and performed pastoral work in Tabankulu. In 1978 he was named administrator of Kokstad and appointed bishop of the same diocese on Nov. 29, 1980, receiving episcopal ordination the following Feb. 28. During the turbulent changes that marked the South African political scene, he was deeply involved in mediation and negotiation work along with other national and provincial Church leaders. He served as president of the Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference from 1987 to 1994. In May 1992 he was promoted to archbishop of Durban and, in August 1994, was named apostolic administrator of Umzimkulu. Since November 1999, he has been president of the Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference. He was elevated to cardinal in February 2001. He is a member of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, the Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, and the Special Council for Africa of the Synod of Bishops.

THE ASIAN HOPE

¶8. (U) Outside of the Philippines, whose most famous cardinal, Cardinal Sin, is old and in poor health, the Church in Asia is still young and has yet to generate many senior churchmen considered papabile. The one exception appears to be India's Ivan Dias, a veteran of the Vatican's diplomatic service.

DIAS, Ivan: Born April 14, 1936, in Bombay, India, Dias was ordained a priest in December 1958 and holds a doctorate in canon law from Rome's Lateran University. He entered the Holy See's diplomatic service in 1964 and was posted to the Nordic countries, Indonesia, Madagascar, Reunion, the Comoros, and Mauritius, and he also served at the Vatican's Foreign Ministry equivalent in the Secretariat of State. In May 1982 he was appointed Nuncio in Ghana, Togo and Benin, and received Episcopal ordination that year. He later served as Nuncio in Korea (1987-91) and Albania (1991-97). In November 1996 he was appointed archbishop of Bombay and was elevated to cardinal in February 2001. Cardinal Dias serves on the following curial bodies: Doctrine of the Faith, Divine Worship and the Sacraments, Catholic Education, Culture, Laity, Cultural Heritage of the Church, Economic Affairs of the Holy See, and the Council of Cardinals for the Study of Organizational and Economic Affairs of the Holy See. Dias is well respected within the College of Cardinals, and personifies the desirable amalgam of pastoral guidance of a local diocese and solid experience in the Roman Curia.

COMMENT

¶9. (U) Predicting who will emerge from the central balcony of St. Peter's Basilica in the hour after the white smoke appears from the Sistine Chapel roof is impossible to predict, given the absence of a clear consensus candidate, the divergent regional priorities of the cardinal electors, and differing views on church leadership and pastoral style. The electors will have to decide whether they believe the next pope should continue John Paul II's theological directions, or pursue new approaches;

whether he should have a worldwide vision and travel the globe like his predecessor, or be an administrator who focuses on the nuts and bolts of running the institutional church; whether, after an aged Pope, the Church needs a younger leader, capable of reinvigorating the optics of the leadership of the Holy See or a transitional figure to bridge the papacies of John Paul II and a future pontiff. In the face of these unanswered questions, it is possible that the candidate who emerges -- as happened 27 years ago -- will not be on anyone's list of papabile.

¶10. (U) Beyond all of these considerations and questions, however, the central criterion that cardinal electors will be seeking to satisfy, and perhaps the most intangible for outside observers is, as New York's Cardinal Egan observed, "a man of holiness," or, as Cardinal George of Chicago put it: "a man of deep faith, a man striving to be holy, a man faithful to Christ

and his teaching, and a man who will bring them into our times."

All the other factors -- age, national origins, experience, media and language abilities -- will be important, but any candidate who emerges from St. Peter's in the coming days will first need to clear this hurdle of holiness among his peers. That is why the Cardinals will enter the Sistine Chapel singing "Come Holy Spirit," and, as they face Michelangelo's Last Judgment, will pray that the spirit guides them through this maze of challenges and candidates to the right judgment for the Church's future in turbulent times.

HARDT

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BUENOS AIRES 002451

2006 November 2, 11:33 (Thursday)

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/02/2016

TAGS: PGOV [Internal Governmental Affairs], PREL [External Political Relations], AR [Argentina]

SUBJECT: ARGENTINA: COALITION LED BY CATHOLIC CHURCH
DEFEATS KIRCHNERISTA IN MISIONES

Classified By: CDA Michael Matera for Reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

¶1. (U) SUMMARY: Misiones Province governor and Kirchner ally Carlos Rovira's attempt to amend the provincial constitution to allow indefinite re-election was soundly rejected in an October 29 election for delegates to a constituent assembly. President Nestor Kirchner had publicly supported the effort and Rovira's defeat in the polls is being portrayed by the media and the opposition as a serious political setback for Kirchner. The margin of the opposition victory, in the face of a concerted government effort to secure votes, surprised nearly everyone. While all facets of the opposition were able to unite in Misiones against Rovira, it is doubtful whether this unity can be transferred to a national level. The opposition to Rovira in Misiones was led by the former Catholic bishop of the province Joaquin Pina, leading some journalists and political analysts to speculate that the Church may be the only institution strong enough to pose a real challenge to Kirchner. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) Misiones Province governor and Kirchner ally Carlos Rovira's attempt to amend the provincial constitution to

allow indefinite re-election was soundly rejected in an October 29 election for delegates to a constituent assembly. Political analysts have postulated that President Kirchner has suffered a significant defeat via the outcome in Misiones. President Kirchner's personal and public support for Governor Rovira's proposed constitutional reform leaves him with no way to shift blame for the defeat in Misiones. In a meeting with Emboffs on October 31, a respected political analyst and pollster shared information that President Kirchner was angry with his wife for encouraging him to support Governor Rovira so publicly when he felt he should have stayed out of the issue. (COMMENT: Although the defeat may be a disappointment or embarrassment for President Kirchner, it is unlikely to cause him any significant political damage. His behavior so far has been typical of his reactions to prior situations that are beyond his control: damage control by staying out of the public and remaining silent. END COMMENT.)

¶3. (U) The opposition to Rovira in Misiones was led by the former Catholic bishop of the province Joaquin Pina, leading some journalists and political analysts to speculate that the Church may be the only institution strong enough to pose a real challenge to Kirchner. While all facets of the opposition were able to unite in Misiones against Rovira, it is doubtful whether this unity can be transferred to a national level. The opposition's candidate list for the elections was filled with mostly religious leaders, including Catholic and Protestant ministers, who were widely viewed as moral leaders free of any political baggage. These same candidates were able to work together on a single issue, which many analysts have said would be much more difficult on the national level where myriad issues are at play. Pina has, moreover, announced that he is done with politics and has no plans to continue as a candidate on the local or national level. Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio, head of the Catholic Archdioceses of Buenos Aires, lent his personal support to Pina's efforts, but has also discouraged any official Church involvement in politics.

¶4. (U) The margin of the opposition victory, in the face of

a concerted government effort to secure votes, surprised nearly everyone. The final results show that Rovira was defeated by more than 13 points, an outcome that no pollster publicly predicted. Commentators have speculated that voters were reluctant to speak honestly about how they planned to vote, possibly out of fear of retribution from the government. The pollsters who projected a comfortable Rovira victory have been accused in the press of either being very bad at their jobs, or of having compromised their information to meet the needs of their customers--in this case Governor Rovira. The opposition group, United Front for Dignity led by ex-bishop Joaquin Pina, had publicly denounced Rovira's "fraudulent" campaign tactics and had feared the vote was unchangeably fixed in favor of Rovira.

¶5. (C) COMMENT: The defeat in Misiones not only puts a halt to the recent trend of changing provincial constitutions to allow indefinite reelections, but also indicates that President Kirchner's support is no longer all that is needed to please the Argentine electorate. The lesson from Misiones is that a motivated and impassioned opposition is capable of rallying the necessary support to successfully challenge President Kirchner and his political machine. Perhaps the national opposition parties, such as Mauricio Macri's PRO or the non-Kirchnerista Peronists, will be motivated to solidify their loose coalitions to present a strong and viable alternative to President Kirchner in October 2007. However, it would be nearly impossible to recreate the specific conditions that led to victory in Misiones on a national

BUENOS AIR 00002451 002 OF 002

level, and we suspect that the outcome in Misiones will be little more than a psychological defeat for President Kirchner, whose national approval ratings remain well above 50 percent. END COMMENT.

MATERA

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2007 October 11, 16:53 (Thursday)

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E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: PHUM [Human Rights], PGOV [Internal Governmental Affairs], PREL [External Political Relations], KJUS [Administration of Justice], AR [Argentina]
SUBJECT: ARGENTINA CONVICTS PRIEST FOR HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS FROM THE 1970S DIRTY WAR

Summary

¶1. (U) Christian Von Wernich, a Roman Catholic priest and

ex-chaplain of the Buenos Aires Police during Argentina's 1976-1983 Dirty War, was convicted October 9 of being an accomplice in several cases of murder, torture and illegal imprisonment. Von Wernich is the third ex-military official from the Dirty War period and first ecclesiastical figure to be tried and convicted of such crimes since the 2005 Argentina Supreme Court decision voiding immunity for ex-military personnel. The local leadership of the Catholic Church issued a press statement calling on Von Wernich to repent and seek public forgiveness, and noted the church's past requests for forgiveness and societal reconciliation. End Summary.

Von Wernich Guilty As Charged

¶2. (U) Christian Von Wernich, ex-chaplain of the Buenos Aires police force during Argentina's 1976-1983 Dirty War (when the police were under the supervision of the military), was convicted October 9 for the role he played in seven murders, 31 cases of torture and 42 kidnappings. La Plata's First Federal Tribunal determined Von Wernich played a pivotal role in the system of illegal repression that operated in Buenos Aires province, abusing the confession procedure to elicit information from detainees held in secret cells before turning them over to face torture, murder or "disappearance." The three-member tribunal condemned Von Wernich's actions as part of the "genocide" committed in Argentina during the Dirty War years. The tribunal sentenced Von Wernich to life in prison.

¶3. (U) Von Wernich is the third ex-military official from the period of Argentina's Dirty War, and the first ecclesiastical authority, to be prosecuted and convicted since the 2005 Argentine Supreme Court decision that declared unconstitutional immunity protections for Dirty War ex-military officials. He was sentenced to life in prison. Relatives of the alleged tortured or "disappeared," human rights activists and others outside the Mar del Plata courthouse cheered the verdict, some citing decades of work

that finally culminated in Von Wernich's conviction. President Kirchner and other GOA officials praised the court decision.

The Catholic Church Weighs In

¶4. (U) Following the verdict, the Buenos Aires Archdiocese of the Roman Catholic Church issued a press statement calling on Von Wernich to repent and publicly seek forgiveness. The Archdiocese said the Argentine Catholic Church was disturbed by the pain caused by one of its priests' participation in such serious crimes. The statement added that the prosecution of the crimes should be a step toward Argentine reconciliation and serve as a wake up call for citizens to put elements of impunity, hate and spite behind them. The bishops also touched on a self-critical diocese statement issued in 1997, reminding that church leadership and laypersons alike involved in these or similar crimes acted on their own responsibility. October 11 press reports indicate that the Church will initiate its own internal proceedings, possibly to defrock Von Wernich.

Comment

¶5. (SBU) Von Wernich's conviction and sentencing are a significant milestone in Argentina's ongoing efforts to seek justice in the cases of major human rights violations from the 1970s. They also draw attention to the support given by

Roman Catholic clergy to both sides in the Dirty War. Many on the political left allege the Church was complicit with atrocities committed by the state and believe the Church has failed to account or atone for its actions. As noted above, the Church has not yet disciplined nor defrocked Von Wernich but has sought to distance itself from the unauthorized, maverick operations of rogue priests. Nonetheless, at a time when some observers consider Roman Catholic primate Cardinal

Bergoglio to be a leader of the opposition to the Kirchner administration because of his comments about social issues, the Von Wernich case could also have the effect, some believe, of undermining the Church's (and, by extension, Cardinal Bergoglio's) moral authority or capacity to comment on political, social or economic questions.

WAYNE

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2008 May 20, 13:57 (Tuesday)

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C O N F I D E N T I A L BUENOS AIRES 000681

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/15/2018

TAGS: PGOV [Internal Governmental Affairs], EAGR [Agriculture and Forestry], AR [Argentina]

SUBJECT: ARGENTINA: AGRICULTURE SECTOR STRIKES TAKE
POLITICAL TOLL ON THE GOVERNMENT

REF: A. BUENOS AIRES 587 AND PREVIOUS

B. BUENOS AIRES 665

C. BUENOS AIRES 651

D. BUENOS AIRES 610

E. BUENOS AIRES 652

Classified By: Ambassador E. Anthony Wayne for reasons 1.4 (b) & (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: The agricultural crisis that has dominated headlines for the past two months has knocked the administration of Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner (CFK) back on its heels. Faced with plummeting poll numbers that indicate a lack of confidence in CFK's government and society-wide concern over inflation, the Kirchners may be reconsidering their "take-no-prisoners" governing style, at least tactically. As it becomes more clear that the Kirchners' hard-line approach was making too many enemies at once, the government has apparently offered a "truce" to the Clarin media group to encourage a more conciliatory image in its TV and press coverage as well as indicating its openness to dialogue with farmers (ref E).

¶2. (C) The Justicialist (Peronist) party (PJ) has held together to support the government despite some dissident voices. The conflict, however, places many Kirchner-allied elected representatives in a tough spot, forcing them to choose between Kirchner-controlled pursestrings and their constituents. Having opened battlefronts with farmers (the most widely admired sector in Argentina) and the media (particularly the powerful "Clarín" group), the Kirchners

also seemed to be at odds with the church, as well as powerful industrial and banking groups. In the face of this political turbulence, some analysts see an opportunity for the anti-Kirchner opposition to unite, but the opposition is still too weak and inept to be a major player. In order to restore public confidence, CFK will need to show that she can solve problems now on the table -- not only in the conflict with the farmers but also in the long-standing effort to control inflation. Septel will report decision by farm groups to lift the strike and return to talks. End summary.

Falling in the Polls

¶3. (SBU) The president's approval ratings have been drastically declining, and the government's strategies on the farmer's strike, the media, and inflation do not appear to be working. CFK's approval ratings now hover around 38%, according to reliable polling firms Ipsos and Poliarquia. Both polling firms tracked similar 26-30 point drops in CFK's approval ratings since taking office in December 2007. Even more worrisome is that both polls note that confidence in the government is at only 27-28%, and this number coincides with those who approve of the government's economic management. Finally, the decision to take on media-mogul Clarin was poorly timed. 50% of Argentines say that the media was balanced in their coverage of the agricultural strikes, and 74% say that freedom of the press is a fundamental right that should not be altered.

¶4. (C) CFK was elected with 45% of the vote in October, and enjoyed a post-inaugural honeymoon with ratings that peaked (according to Poliarquia) around 64% at the beginning of 2008. Since then, accelerating inflation and the government's confrontation with the crucial agricultural sector have fed growing anxiety about the economy. Her husband NK's image has also fallen in the polls, but not as far as CFK's. His image approval (according to Poliarquia) is at 49%, similar to when he left office, although his negatives are climbing. One contact told the Ambassador that a precipitous fall in CFK's approval ratings to around 25%

would be the only thing that would force her to change policy direction, primarily to avert a disaster reminiscent of President Fernando De La Rúa, who fled the country at the end of 2001 in the face of growing popular unrest. Ipsos polls also indicate the Kirchners' strategy of blaming the farmers for inflation and trying to discredit them has not worked. Ipsos reported in May that 69% of people think that CFK was weakened by how she managed the crisis, and 51% believe the farmers were strengthened. Ipsos reports that the farmers have enjoyed high marks in the polls since the late 1990s, and are considered by Argentines the group that has contributed the most to society. CFK's drop in the polls has not yet translated into any significant gains for opposition leaders, not even for last year's presidential runner-up, Elisa Carrio of the Civic Coalition.

Let's Make a Deal...

¶15. (C) The government's falling public image probably prompted the Kirchners to turn down the volume on the very

public conflict with media-behemoth Clarin (ref A) as well as to signal its openness to dialogue with striking farm groups. National daily "Critica" reported on May 19 that the government brokered a deal with Clarin on May 14. Cabinet Chief Alberto Fernandez reportedly received a promise from Jorge Rendo, Clarin's Director of Institutional Affairs, that the paper would stop its criticisms of the government. In exchange, Fernandez assured Rendo that the government would disactivate its slander campaign against Clarin. The top-circulation daily's headlines have since been less confrontational and emphasized the conciliatory nature the Kirchners are trying to project. (A well-placed source confirmed to the Ambassador the "truce" was worked out over dinner about 10 days ago, but adds that it is just a truce and the battle will likely be renewed by the government in the future.)

PJ Disciplined, Despite Differences

¶6. (SBU) Socialist governor of Santa Fe Hermes Binner has, from the December 2007 outset of his administration, laid claim to being a moderate leader of the opposition by visibly advocating for the farmers (a key constituency in Santa Fe). Some few PJ governors and legislators -- particularly elected representatives who hail from agricultural areas -- distanced themselves from the government early in the conflict. Of the PJ governors, only Cordoba governor Juan Schiaretti has distinguished himself as a visible supporter of the agricultural sector. Schiaretti, whose province is one of the top agricultural producers, chose early on to support the rural sector and has not attended a government or PJ rally since the crisis began. He is the only PJ governor who has agreed to meet with the rural sector representatives to encourage the government to dialogue. La Pampa governor Oscar Jorge called his province's farmers to a meeting May 13, but then stood them up, sending his Production Minister to meet with them instead. Other PJ governors like Chubut's Mario Das Neves were vocal in criticizing the Casa Rosada's management at the beginning, but have since kept quiet. The government still controls most purse strings for the provinces through the co-participation of federal revenues, which provides a strong incentive not to break with the official line.

¶7. (SBU) The Kirchners' official bloc in the lower house of Congress has been less reluctant to express differences with how the government had handled the conflict with the farmers, and some threatened to break with the bloc. Deputy and PJ vice president Beatriz Rojkes (wife of Tucuman governor Jose Alperovich) tried to calm the situation by explaining that "for the deputies from the interior of the country, this situation (with the farmers) is unsustainable. We have to face the rural producers every day." Rojkes highlights an essential element of the crisis -- the conflict is putting governors, legislators, and mayors in a difficult spot: between their constituents and the Kirchner government.

¶8. (C) The PJ's hard-core electoral base has traditionally been estimated at about 30-35% of the electorate. The

opposition parties have not been able chip away at this base, making it probable that any leader to succeed the Kirchners will come from the PJ. Former vice president and current Governor of Buenos Aires province Daniel Scioli has approval ratings of over 50% with negligible negatives, and has been mentioned as an up-and-coming leader in the PJ, where Kirchner named him first vice president. Scioli has maintained a low profile during the agricultural crisis. He originally offered to mediate between agricultural groups and government, but has since avoided making public comments. Scioli still depends heavily on the Kirchners for political support and money; his debt-ridden provincial government requires the GOA's financial assistance. He has therefore pragmatically refrained from challenging the official line.

Who Let the Piqueteros Out?

¶19. (SBU) In the face of the rural sector's decision to demonstrate their dissatisfaction in the streets, the government has responded in kind with government-aligned social activist "piquetero" groups. Piquetero Luis D'Elia and CGT "teamsters" leader Hugo Moyano have been visibly active in the conflict with the campo. Kirchner-affiliated piqueteros descended on shopping centers and grocery stores May 7 to intimidate stores to lower prices, in clear support of the policies of Commerce Secretary and price czar Guillermo Moreno. D'Elia reportedly wants to sign an accord with Moreno to formally list him and his cronies as "informants" for the Secretariat of Commerce. Publicly, the government has denied formal ties to the groups, but the public and most Argentines see the piqueteros as an extension

of the Kirchners. Just an hour after the agriculture sector announced a march in Rosario on May 25 (ref B), D'Elia (who still holds a GOA office, and has been seated for all to see near CFK during some recent pro-government rallies) announced the piqueteros would hold a counter-march in support of the government. (Unknown assailants are apparently also damaging large containers with harvested crops in the fields in what looks like an effort to force farmers to market the crops or

lose them.)

Opposition: Learning to Crawl Before They Walk

¶10. (C) Opposition parties, largely absent from media coverage of the farmer's strike, rallied in Congress on May 13 to express their support for the rural sector. After three hours of discussions, deputies and senators from the Civic Coalition, Radical Civic Union (UCR), center-right Pro, the Socialist Party, and a number of smaller parties agreed to propose a law that would repeal the export tax increases announced on March 11. Given the Kirchners' significant majority in Congress, the bill is unlikely to pass, but still marks a watershed for the opposition. UCR deputy Oscar Aguad said "getting all of the opposition together was as difficult for us as it was for (the agricultural sector) to unite." The opposition has a long way to go -- they have not been a major political force in years and are still learning to get along with one another. As conservative Lopez-Murphy highlighted in his meeting with the Ambassador (ref C), the key problem the opposition faces is the lack of unity and leadership. A win in the 2009 legislative elections would provide the opposition political credibility from which it could more easily launch a national campaign in 2011.

¶11. (SBU) The government's response to the agricultural strikes inadvertently gave the opposition a hand. Although CFK swept rural areas in the 2007 presidential election, her heavy-handed response to the crisis may have lost her the rural vote for the 2009 mid-term legislative elections. Indeed, CFK has also alienated consumers who had been placated by pre-election increases in the real value of their salaries. The opposition has not yet demonstrated the ability to capture these votes, but its May 13 meeting with agricultural leaders suggests that it is finally starting to try to capitalize on discontent in the Argentine farm belt.

Comment

¶12. (C) The agricultural crisis has shifted the political map. CFK won the election six months ago when inflation was not the number one public concern, when rural voters were solidly behind her, and when retirees and consumers had been placated by pre-election increases in pensions and salaries. The prolonged agricultural crisis fuels public anxieties about the government's management of the economy and the sustainability of the dramatic recovery from the 2001-02 crisis. The precipitous drop in the polls has encouraged the Kirchners to change their style and adopt a conciliatory approach, at least tactically. Tellingly, the government reportedly has put on the back burner its plans to "re-launch" CFK's administration with the announcement of cabinet changes and negotiations to reach a broad social pact (ref D). Business and banking groups had resisted government pressure to sign a pact without a solution to the farm crisis. The Catholic Church too showed it felt offended by the government's decision to move the May 25 celebration to Salta from Buenos Aires, so that Cardinal Bergoglio would not be the one giving the traditional May 25 church sermon (likely to be critical of the government). The real test, however, is if the government can bring about and get credit for a solution to the crisis, and then convince the public that the government is really addressing a chronic Argentine worry: inflation. Septel will look at agriculture sector's decision to return to negotiations.

WAYNE

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2008 April 8, 19:08 (Tuesday)

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 05 BUENOS AIRES 000439

SIPDIS

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/08/2018

TAGS: PGOV [Internal Governmental Affairs], EAGR [Agriculture and Forestry], ECON [Economic Conditions], PREL [External Political Relations], AR [Argentina]

SUBJECT: ARGENTINA'S PRESIDENT CFK OFF TO A ROUGH START

¶1. (C) Summary: President Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner (CFK) had a rough first four months in office. Her administration has produced few new policy initiatives or concrete policy successes. CFK's term has been marked by two serious crises, one foreign and one domestic. Both were exacerbated by the Kirchners' preference to limit decision-making to a small cadre of advisors and the tendency to respond harshly to perceived challenges. The Kirchners' exclusive decision-making style -- evident in CFK's early response to the agriculture strikes -- is not yielding positive results for the President. She has large swaths of the population angry, her poll numbers are down, and her advisors are reportedly very divided. CFK and husband Nestor Kirchner (NK) are political partners. He is her closest advisor and plays a major behind-the-scenes decision-making role, especially on domestic issues. A recurring subtext of media coverage of her administration has been the extent of her husband's power and control, forcing her to assert that she is in charge and him to pull back a bit of his public profile. CFK campaigned on themes of continuity and change, but her administration is viewed as more of the former than the latter. CFK has largely retained her husband's personnel and policies, which make policy shifts more difficult. But such changes seem increasingly necessary as public concerns over inflation, public security, energy, and other issues continue growing.

¶2. (C) CFK is eager for Argentina to take a leadership role in the region and more broadly. Her early crisis with the U.S., poorly planned involvement in a Colombian hostage release effort, and an ill advised visit by Equatorial Guinea's president added up to a poor start. She gets mixed reviews for her role in walking Chavez back from his efforts to escalate the recent Colombian-Ecuadorian dispute. She has also sought to ease tensions with Uruguay over their long-running pulp mill dispute, tried to work more closely with Brazil, and begun to show interest in easing tensions in Bolivia. She has also restarted a dialogue with the Catholic Church, which was intermittently antagonized or ignored during NK's administration. But, with recent poll numbers

dropping to around 40% approval, the new President has her work cut out for her. End Summary.

Strike One: Miami

¶3. (C) In December, just two days after CFK was inaugurated, the GOA misinterpreted and over-reacted to news reports concerning a federal case in Miami against some Venezuelans and an Uruguayan who were arrested on charges of operating and conspiring to operate in the United States as agents of the Venezuelan government without notifying the Attorney General as required by law. During the proceedings in Miami, allegations surfaced that undeclared cash brought into Buenos Aires in August 2007 from Venezuela had been destined for a presidential campaign. The statements were not made by the USG, but rather by one of those arrested. However, the initial press reports did not clarify that and the charges were misinterpreted here as reflecting the USG's views.

¶4. (SBU) CFK reacted angrily to the implication that she had been the intended recipient of the cash that was intercepted by GOA officials. Feeding off deeply ingrained anti-American sentiment, CFK resorted to the Kirchners' tendency to lash out at opponents before retreating and seeking reconciliation. She publicly interpreted the Miami arrests as directed against her government and characterized the case as a "garbage operation." To demonstrate her anger, the Ambassador's contacts with the GOA were restricted to the MFA. However, the rhetoric gradually subsided and the relationship normalized with a great deal of behind-the-scenes work during January. A new beginning occurred on January 31, when the Ambassador met with CFK, and they agreed to put the case aside and to work to strengthen bilateral cooperation.

¶5. (C) The crisis made clear that CFK relied on an exclusive inner circle of advisors that included just her husband Nestor (NK), her cabinet chief Alberto Fernandez, and, depending on the issue, Legal and Technical Secretary Carlos Zannini. Secretary General of the Presidency Oscar Parrilli

and Planning Minister Julio de Vido are key in the next restricted circle of advisors. Private sector contacts (not anyone in government) opened a back channel enabling Alberto

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Fernandez and Ambassador Wayne to meet confidentially and re-open dialogue.

¶6. (SBU) The GOA has since launched a concerted effort to act with more restraint in public on U.S.-Argentine relations, and has given prominent and constructive public play to events involving visits by CODEL Engel and the Principal Deputy Director of National Intelligence Donald Kerr. In addition, Cabinet Chief Alberto Fernandez has several times defended publicly the bilateral relationship, characterizing it as "proper and mature," in response to press speculation that the U.S.-Argentine relationship was still frozen (BA 337). Local press reported (correctly), nevertheless, that CFK was bothered by the Secretary's bypassing of Argentina on her recent trip to Brazil and Chile. As one commentator pointed out: this is positive as she cares, unlike her husband who would not have paid any attention if Secretary Rice stopped or not.

Strike Two: Export Taxes

¶7. (C) The GOA's continued affinity for enforcing price controls and for taxing its most productive sectors reached its limits in the agricultural sector, creating CFK's second crisis. Argentina's powerful agricultural sector went on strike March 13 in protest over the GOA's new tax increase on commodity exports (BA 368). This was the first massive strike of the entire agricultural sector against the CFK administration, and it surpassed in size all previous strikes by the sector within the last thirty years. The road blocks by the protesters caused food shortages in urban centers and tested CFK's ability to govern (BA 376). Her March 26 speech sharply criticized the strikes, claiming the sector earned

record profits at the cost of ordinary Argentines. Farmers and those supporting their protest immediately filled the streets throughout the country in protest. Buenos Aires residents took to banging pots and pans in a rejection of her tough stand. A more reasonable March 31 speech announcing some compensatory measures was followed by a vitriolic April 1 pep rally of up to 100,000 supporters where she again accused the farmers of coup plotting while asking them to stop the strike and talk. CFK ultimately employed back channel discussions with the ag sector (again led by Cabinet Chief Alberto Fernandez) to negotiate a truce, but many sector observers predict that, in the absence of GOA concessions, the farmers will resume their strike once their harvest concludes in May.

¶8. (C) CFK emerged from the unrest phase of the strike much criticized in the media, down in the polls, more reliant on her hard core of supporters, including extremist piqueteros, and with her base divided with a number of governors distancing themselves from government actions. In addition, her closest advisors are reportedly further split at present, with Alberto Fernandez being widely criticized, Julio De Vido trying to weaken him further, and Carlos Zannini criticizing both of them.

Argentina's Role in the Region

¶9. (C) CFK's early efforts to show herself as a leader in the region have had limited success. The U.S. crisis was a serious blow to her international ambitions. In late December, the GOA was criticized in the local press and by the opposition for NK's role in the Chavez-orchestrated "bungle in the jungle" that failed to secure the release of a number of FARC hostages (BA 013). An ill advised visit by President Obiang of Equatorial Guinea led to more criticisms. In the immediate aftermath of Colombia's March 1 attack on the FARC camp in Ecuador, the GOA swiftly condemned the action expressing concern about a "violation of Ecuadorian territorial sovereignty." However, after Brazil's public announcement on March 3 that it would coordinate an OAS

effort to mediate the conflict and Ambassador,s discussions with Foreign Minister Taiana and Cabinet Chief Fernandez (BA 274), Argentina toned down its rhetoric. CFK appears to have played a helpful role in reducing regional tensions ahead of the Rio Group summit when she visited Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez on March 6 and apparently in private urged him to move away from previous bellicose rhetoric. The local press later reported that Argentina had coordinated its OAS position on the matter with Brazil, Chile, and Mexico to show some distance from Chavez.

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¶10. (C) On Brazil, CFK set out early to establish a framework for regular bilateral consultations which could produce concrete results. CFK met with President Lula in February and signed agreements to expand nuclear power and defense cooperation. However, her efforts to secure additional natural gas supplies for Argentina in a March tripartite meeting with Lula and Bolivia's Evo Morales failed (BA 230). Local analysts interpreted Brazil,s public rejection of CFK,s request as a sign that she was poorly staffed and ill-advised on regional diplomatic engagement.

¶11. (SBU) On Bolivia, in recent days CFK dispatched Foreign Minister Taiana to La Paz to work with Brazil's Foreign Minister to ease domestic tensions, which may signal a willingness to be more active there.

¶12. (C) On Uruguay, CFK has made an effort to lower the temperature on the two-year old pulp mill dispute, after she publicly defended Argentina,s position in front of Uruguay,s President Vazquez in her initial swearing-in speech. She has publicly stated that Argentina will respect the International Court of Justice,s (ICJ) ruling on the issue. Nevertheless, two of the three Argentina-Uruguay border crossings remained blocked over the peak tourism Easter weekend; the third crossing was open only to pedestrian travelers.

¶13. (C) The GoA likes to portray CFK (with some merit) as an international defender of human rights, and she has played this up in recent public speeches. In February 2007, she was a speaker while still Senator at the Paris signing of the UN Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Forced Disappearance. She appears intent on strengthening her credentials in this area, especially as Argentina once again seeks a seat on the UN Human Rights Council. In February 2008, CFK took a chance to publicly, albeit generically, chastise the human rights record of Equatorial Guinea's President Teodoro Obiang during his state visit to Argentina in February. (Note: The Obiang visit described in BA 320 was a foreign policy embarrassment for CFK. The fact that CFK agreed to host a leader such as Obiang indicates that her desire to be more of an international player is not matched by her experience.) On March 17, CFK met with former FARC hostage Clara Rojas, who said that "Cristina can do much for the humanitarian cause" in securing the release of additional hostages. CFK had earlier committed the GOA to help secure the release of Ingrid Betancourt during her inaugural address in December 2007. CFK's April 6-7 trip to Paris had as a focus support for Betancourt's release as well as other human rights themes.

Venezuela

¶14. (C) CFK has maintained her husband's policy of close relations with Venezuela. Although CFK has publicly referred to Chavez as Argentina's "friend," the relationship is largely pragmatic rather than reflecting any particular GOA affinity with Chavez's extremist positions. Argentina relies on Venezuelan financing, and now on Venezuelan oil as it faces looming energy shortages, while Argentina facilitates Chavez's entry into MERCOSUR and provides him some cachet in the region. The close relationship with Venezuela could make Argentina an effective interlocutor with Chavez in trying to leaven some of his more extremist behavior -- if CFK is willing. As mentioned in para 3, she appears to have weighed in with Chavez to try and walk him

back from his decision to escalate the Colombian-Ecuadorian dispute. Our sources say that privately she is regularly quite critical of Chavez's antics.

GOA-Church Relations

¶15. (SBU) One of CFK's campaign promises was to engage all sectors in dialogue (including those that had been alienated by her husband). While the rural sector crisis belies that pledge, she did meet with Catholic Cardinal Bergoglio in December 2007, restarting a dialogue with the Catholic Church's senior cleric in Argentina that had been suspended for over three years by NK. She soon encountered another setback, however, with the stalled and poorly staffed nomination of former Justice Minister Alberto Iribarne as Argentina's Ambassador to the Holy See. After his nomination, media leaked that the Vatican would not accept Iribarne because he was a divorced Catholic living with a new

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partner. Iribarne eventually removed his name from consideration in order to defuse the situation (BA 320). At present, church leaders are apparently weighing whether to take a swipe at the government and others over "politics of confrontation," and over GOA proposals to decriminalize possession of drugs.

Public Approval Still High, But Waning

¶16. (SBU) At home, CFK's lackluster performance in office is reflected in recent approval ratings. Her approval ratings reportedly now hover just around 40% in polls taken after the ag strike, down from over fifty percent in January. CFK seems to be facing the same phenomenon Menem encountered after winning re-election in 1995 when his popularity dropped precipitously six months after re-election. Today, the Argentine public does not distinguish CFK's administration

from her husband's and sees more "continuity" in style and policy rather than change to meet new challenges. Her recent drop in the polls is attributed to her handling of new taxes on agricultural exports and the subsequent rural sector strikes. The public seems to have rejected both the imposition of the tax without any discussion and her heavy-handed and vitriolic response to the protesters. Local analysts also attribute the decrease to the public's lack of confidence in her ability to manage Argentina's inflation, energy, and public security woes. Local polling firm Ipsos reports that CFK is positively evaluated on her respect for human rights, management of foreign relations, and attracting investment. On the opposite side of the spectrum, 75 to 85 percent disapprove of how she is handling public security, inflation, guaranteeing justice, and fighting corruption.

Other Looming Challenges: Energy and Inflation

¶17. (C) The February Ipsos poll found that over 50 percent of Argentines have little or no confidence in the government's ability to solve a burgeoning energy crisis that could lead to gas and electricity rationing this coming austral winter (BA 356). Rather than acknowledge that frozen utility rates have discouraged investment in the energy sector, the GoA has attempted to deflect criticism by announcing a series of energy conservation measures (including expanding daylight savings time and announcing the distribution of millions of subsidized low-watt light bulbs). The GoA has not yet developed a cohesive plan to adequately address Argentina's energy crunch, which may well show up in shortages during upcoming winter months.

¶18. (C) Local analysts agree that concerns over inflation consistently rise to the top in public opinion polls. A study by Torcuato di Tella University noted that consumer confidence fell to a five-year low in March. In her March State of the Nation speech to the opening of Parliament, CFK chose neither to mention current high levels of domestic inflation nor the raging public debates over the accuracy and reliability of data from the GoA statistics agency ("INDEC").

Opposition leaders sharply criticized this omission, with former presidential candidate Elisa Carrio arguing that CFK's presentation demonstrated "a strong dissociation with reality" that ignored Argentina's present inflationary challenge (BA 274). Continued delays in the introduction of a new CPI inflation measure, promised in January, have not helped the GOA's case (BA 284). Recent polls show very little public confidence in official statistics.

Who's Running the Show?

¶19. (C) Since CFK's inauguration, Nestor has officially dedicated himself to reorganizing and revitalizing the Peronist Party (PJ) to consolidate the party's electoral base. NK's micromanaging tendencies are probably well suited to running the party, which nearly disintegrated during his administration. The former President maintains his own offices in Puerto Madero and still is in direct contact with many provincial governors, mayors, and union leaders. He is often referred to as Argentina's de facto "Economy Minister" because of his continued influence in the administration through his cronies, Planning Minister Julio De Vido and price control czar Domestic Commerce Secretary Guillermo Moreno. Local newspapers speculate that Nestor still weighs heavily on policy decisions in Argentina, prompting former president Eduardo Duhalde to describe CFK's administration as

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one with a "double command," a term used frequently by the media. The fact that CFK kept two-thirds of her husband's ministers in place and still relies on the same narrow circle of advisors he did contributes to the perception that Nestor is still running the show. The media focus on Nestor's influential role in his wife's government has prompted him to take a backseat publicly, for example, staying at home during CFK's state of the union address on March 1 (BA 272).

NK recently backed out of a trip to New York and privately we were told the main reason was to avoid the appearance of a

"double command."

Comment

¶20. (C) Perhaps not so surprisingly, the Kirchners seem unwilling or unable to adapt the decision-making style that worked so well under Nestor and which has governed their political partnership for much longer, according to local analysts. However that model looks as present like a formula for survival, not success. The Argentine public, traumatized by the severe 2001-02 crisis, gave NK a broad mandate and was ultimately grateful to him for bringing the country back from the brink. It was tolerant, even solicitous, of a strong, autocratic decision-making style and interventionist economic policies. As the crisis recedes in the wake of five years of strong economic recovery, that tolerance seems to be waning. Big chunks of the Argentine public shows signs of chafing at government by edict. CFK shows no signs -- yet -- of changing her policies or style to accommodate changing circumstances or to engage in the kind of sectoral dialogue that she called for during her campaign.

¶21. (C) The early crises also highlight the Kirchners lack of a coherent policy development or implementation process, as they rely on a minuscule circle of advisors who are tasked with running the government. Cabinet Chief Fernandez is tasked with duties that have stretched him thin, including serving as the lead negotiator in the government's two major crises and acting as the de facto GOA spokesman on most issues. Fernandez is highly capable, but he is human, and he seems to be severely overburdened. Other Ministers and officials have also become concerned with his growing authority. Rival (Planning Minister) Julio de Vido, for example, reportedly purposely is leaving issues unresolved and pushing them to Fernandez to further burden him. This concentration of authority also reflects institutional weaknesses inherent in the GOA, evident by the exclusion of ministers like Foreign Minister Jorge Taiana from policy formulation, and is a formula for further policy missteps if it is not altered.

¶22. (C) CFK still enjoys some powerful bases of support in the blue-collar and union constituency and the political machine dependent on central government funds, which her husband built while president. Factors that contribute to her popularity include: 1) her husband, who left office with unprecedented levels of public support and remains Argentina's most popular politician; 2) Argentina's continued economic growth; 3) the lack of a coherent opposition; and 4) her emphasis on human rights (especially related to Argentina's last military dictatorship), which resonates with many Argentines.

¶23. (C) CFK's overall approval ratings have taken a considerable hit from her recent handling of the agriculture strikes. Some commentators are reporting that her support has dropped to below 40% of the population, and that it now consists of little beyond the Peronist core, which accounts for some 35% of the Argentine electorate. The government has the big challenge before it of still negotiating an accord with the rural sector during the current truce. Beyond this is the need to deal with the negative impact of inflation and energy bottlenecks and simmering concerns over crime. Left unaddressed, these problems and mishandling of events such as the rural sector strike will only further erode CFK's political standing. End Comment.

WAYNE

C O N F I D E N T I A L TEGUCIGALPA 001642

2008 July 10, 18:15 (Thursday)

SIPDIS

STATE FOR WHA/CEN, INR/B, DRL/IRF,

E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/10/2013

TAGS: PGOV [Internal Governmental Affairs], KJUS [Administration of Justice], PHUM
[Human Rights], HO [Honduras], VA [Veterans Administration]

SUBJECT: A LATIN AMERICAN POPE? CARDINAL RODRIGUEZ DEEMED
PAPABILE, SPECULATION MAY AID HIS ANTI-CORRUPTION CAMPAIGN

REF: A. TEGUCIGALPA 625

B. TEGUCIGALPA 1534

C. VATICAN 4582

Classified By: Political Section Chief, Francisco L. Palmieri; Reasons 1.5(b) and (d).

¶1. (U) Summary. Pope John Paul II's increasing frailty has prompted discussion over potential successors to the papacy, among which experts have identified Cardinal Oscar Andres Maradiaga Rodriguez of Honduras as both a popular and geographically strategic candidate. Despite the Euro-centric tradition of the papacy, some Vatican experts believe that the next pontiff may, in fact, be a Latin American. Cardinal Rodriguez, Archbishop of Tegucigalpa is viewed as a strong choice among Latin American cardinals eligible for the position, both for his insider connections and international reputation as a champion of social justice and political transparency in his home country of Honduras. In Honduras, because of this status, the media pays special attention to his public pronouncements. End Summary.

Latin America: The Church's Fastest Growing Constituency

¶2. (SBU) While European and American church membership has sharply declined in recent years, the developing world (and Latin America, in particular) has experienced the opposite trend. Today, home to more than half of the world's Catholics, Latin America has increasingly emerged as the new face of Catholicism in the 21st century. Reflecting the rapid increase in church membership, the region is now represented by a powerful 22-Cardinal voting electorate for the papacy, which is the second largest regional voting block (next to Europe).

¶3. (SBU) In addition to Cardinal Rodriguez, other strong candidates from the region identified in REFtel C and by the media include: Dario Catrillon Hoyos (74) of Colombia; Jorge Mario Bergoglio (66) of Argentina; Claudio Hummes (68) of Brazil; Norberto Rivera Carrera (61) of Mexico; and Alfonso Lopez Trujillo (67) of Colombia. While many experts believe Rodriguez to be among the top few potential candidates, some

have also indicated that the Cardinal's relative youth, at 60 years of age, may prove a potential obstacle among an older voting electorate. Additionally, the Cardinal's health is not 100 percent. He allegedly suffers from diabetes, for which he apparently spent a month in a German hospital last fall. Also, his life has been threatened repeatedly in Honduras. (See REFtel A.)

Speculation Draws Greater Attention to the Cardinal's Battles

¶4. (C) Comment. Even though the timeframe for the next papal election is indeterminable, widespread media speculation among experts and the press regarding Cardinal Rodriguez's potential candidacy has nonetheless had an impact. Voted the third most powerful public figure in Honduras (behind President Maduro and the Ambassador) earlier this year, the Cardinal has been featured even more prominently in the press recently. Should the Cardinal emerge publicly as a contender for the papacy in the coming months, his high profile campaigns will likely receive increased moral and political weight. Given the close relationship between the Ambassador and Cardinal Rodriguez, the Cardinal's popular moral authority represents an increased opportunity to rally additional Honduran support for many of our shared priorities, including fighting narco-corruption, violence and poverty. At the same time, it is important to note that the Cardinal has, at times, criticized several U.S. policies, such as the War in Iraq, CAFTA, and the level of international assistance to the developing world. End Comment.

Palmer

C O N F I D E N T I A L BUENOS AIRES 000043

2010 January 26, 20:58 (Tuesday)

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 2035/01/26

TAGS: PREL [External Political Relations], PGOV [Internal Governmental Affairs], PHUM [Human Rights], AR [Argentina]

SUBJECT: Argentina: Former Vice Mayor Michetti Talks National Politics

REF: BUENOS AIRES 21

CLASSIFIED BY: VSMartinez, Ambassador, DOS, Exec; REASON: 1.4(B), (D)

¶1. (C) Summary: The Ambassador met with newly-elected national Deputy from Argentina's center-right Republican Proposal (PRO) party Gabriela Michetti on January 8, and discussed the GOA's showdown with Central Bank Governor Martin Redrado (reftel) and the opposition's legislative plans under the new Congress. Michetti characterized the Executive branch's conflict with Redrado as "deeply troubling," noting that the situation underscores the fragility of Argentina's democratic institutions and the country's lack of clear rules. Michetti shared that despite the President's

assertion that she has the exclusive authority to convene Congress during recess, the opposition still intended to hold a special session. She expressed hope that the opposition will continue the unity it demonstrated December 3 when deputies banded together to negotiate leadership positions with the ruling Victory Front during the 2010 legislative session. One of Argentina's most popular politicians, Michetti is rumored to be eyeing the Buenos Aires City mayoral seat in 2011. End Summary

¶2. (C) Ambassador Martinez met with newly-elected national Deputy and former Vice Mayor of the City of Buenos Aires Gabriela Michetti on January 8. (Note: City of Buenos Aires Mayor Mauricio Macri picked her to head his party Republican Proposal's (PRO) slate in the June congressional midterm elections. The slate won with 31% of the votes.) Michetti, while acknowledging rumors that she is eyeing the Buenos Aires mayoral seat in 2011, told the Ambassador she is focusing on her current legislative responsibilities. "I am here because it interests me, and I see government work as a very noble profession," the Mayor explained.

Central Bank Governor's Forced Ouster

¶3. (C) Michetti characterized the recent conflict between President Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner (CFK) and Central Bank Governor Redrado as "deeply troubling" (reftel). Michetti noted that if the Central Bank cannot unilaterally use the reserves as it sees fit, neither can the President. The Ambassador asked why the government would take this action now when it was moving towards paying off the Paris Club debt. As the budget already provides for debt payments coming due in 2010 (ostensibly the same purpose of the fund that CFK had created by decree), Michetti speculated that the Kirchners were seeking to draw down the reserves in order to free up the budget to pay for additional social works to curry

favor with their political base prior to the 2011 presidential elections. (Former President and first spouse Nestor Kirchner confirmed in a television interview on January 24 that the purpose of using reserves was indeed to free up the budget for public works, though he described these as legitimate and with no reference to political supporters.)

¶4. (C) Michetti said the situation with the Central Bank underscores the fragility of Argentina's democratic institutions and the country's lack of clear rules. She expressed dismay that Argentina was still battling over democratic basics, such as private property and checks and balances. Michetti stated that although the President was asserting that she had the exclusive authority to convene a special session of Congress during recess, the opposition still planned to hold one. (Note: This decision may have been put on hold following CFK's summoning of a bicameral congressional committee, per reftel. End Note)

Kirchner Mindset

¶5. (C) Michetti described CFK's administration as having a "hegemonic and non-democratic conception of power." Nonetheless, she believes the Kirchner-allied Victory Front's (FpV) defeat in the June midterms gave the government a wake-up call. However, it remains difficult to predict former President and first spouse Nestor Kirchner's logic. Despite the June set-back, Michetti conveyed she still believes anything is possible of the first couple.

Opposition's Strategy for 2010

¶16. (C) Michetti expressed mixed feelings about Argentina's future. She remains optimistic about the opposition's ability to unite as demonstrated December 3 when opposition deputies banded together to negotiate with the ruling FpV on leadership positions. (Note: Opposition parties captured the first and third vice presidencies. As the largest party, the FpV secured the presidency and the second vice presidency. Of the 45 permanent committees, the FpV will head 20 -- including a majority of the key committees -- and opposition parties will lead 25 committees.) Michetti hopes the opposition can continue this unity in the 2010 legislative session, noting the strategy is to move forward in areas of agreement, such as reforming the Council of Magistrates, which appoints judges, and restoring credibility to Argentina's statistical agency (INDEC).

¶17. (C) While recognizing that opposition leaders are divided, Michetti said each party has leaders with a common vision. She relayed she is involved in a new group of leaders from diverse parties who are working to develop a shared domestic agenda for the medium term. This informal group, which chooses to remain confidential, includes Civic Coalition national Deputy Alfonso Prat Gay, Peronist Governor of Salta Juan Manuel Urtubey, Radical Party President Ernesto Sanz, Chief Justice Ricardo Lorenzetti, business persons, and bank representatives. She added that most of the opposition's key leaders are able to reach agreement, except for Civic Coalition leader Elisa Carrio. The Deputy invited the Ambassador to meet the group and inquired if a U.S. expert could address them on a particular topic of interest.

Parting Concerns: Security and Lack of Work Ethic

¶18. (C) Michetti relayed that she is involved in a new congressional

group of female deputies focused on security issues. She added that CFK has completely ignored the crime situation, noting that not one of her speeches addresses security, a chief concern of Argentines. Michetti's biggest concern about Argentina is the lack of work ethic that has been fostered by immense social welfare plans, leading people to expect the State to provide for them. She added that many people have lived without working for years.

Bio Notes

¶9. (SBU) Prior to assuming her current post, Michetti served as vice mayor of the City of Buenos Aires from December 2007 to April 2009. From 2003 to 2007, she was a deputy in the City legislature and President of the PRO bloc. Michetti has served as a private consultant to both the United Nations Development Program and the International Development Bank on international commercial relations. She was the chief coordinator for the Strengthening of Foreign Commercial Policy Project and director of international commercial negotiations in the Economy Ministry.

¶10. (SBU) Michetti was born in Laprida in Buenos Aires Province in 1965. She is the niece of former Radical Party President Arturo Illia. Michetti uses a wheelchair due to a car accident when she was 29 which left her paralyzed. An expert on regional and Mercosur issues, Michetti has a Masters degree in regional integration with a specialty in international commercial relations and the management of international cooperation projects. She has also studied university management in Canada and international commercial conflict resolution in Geneva. A former university professor, Michetti is a self-described humanist. She has actively worked with literacy groups. A practicing Catholic, Michetti maintains regular dialogue with Cardinal Jorge Bergoglio and Catholic groups. She is divorced and has a teenage son, who

attends the prestigious Colegio Nacional de Buenos Aires. Michetti speaks English fairly well.

¶11. (C) Comment: One of Argentina's most popular politicians, Deputy Michetti is an impressive, articulate, and energetic figure with one of the highest positive ratings in the country. Warm and friendly with U.S. officials, Michetti deserves our continued attention.

MARTINEZ