

Message Text

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SUBJ: PRESIDENT BANZER COMMENTS TO AMBASSADOR ON SOVIET
OFFERS OF MILITARY EQUIPMENT

1. DURING CALL I MADE JUNE 20 ON PRESIDENT BANZER FOR ANOTHER PURPOSE, I INDICATED THAT I HAD HEARD THAT BOLIVIAN MILITARY OFFICERS WERE EXPLORING POSSIBLE EQUIPMENT PURCHASES FROM EUROPEAN COUNTRIES AND THAT ONE OFFICER HAD RECEIVED OFFERS OF COMMUNICATIONS EQUIPMENT AND TANKS FROM THE SOVIET UNION. I INDICATED THAT I DID NOT KNOW VERY MUCH ABOUT THIS MATTER BUT HAD HEARD THAT THE BOLIVIAN ARMY WAS INTERESTED IN TANKS SINCE THEY HAD BEEN IN TOUCH WITH US RECENTLY. PRESIDENT BANZER PICKED UP MY REMARKS AND SAID THAT COL. RIVERA HAD MADE A TRIP FOR OTHER PURPOSES TO EUROPE AND HAD MADE A VISIT TO THE SOVIET UNION WHERE HE HAD RECEIVED OFFERS OF SOME MILITARY EQUIPMENT. PRESIDENT NOTED THAT SOVIET AMBASSADOR TO BOLIVIA HAD BEEN ACTIVE IN RECENT MONTHS TRYING TO PRESS MILITARY EQUIPMENT ON BOLIVIA AND ALSO HAD BEEN ACTIVE IN OFFERING SOVIET FINANCIAL AND TECHNICAL COOPERATION FOR THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE BALA DAM. PRESIDENT ALSO INFORMED ME THAT HE WAS PLANNING TO NAME A NEW AMBASSADOR TO THE SOVIET UNION AND PROBABLY WOULD SEND DR. RICHARDO ANAYA OF COCHABAMBA. IN THE LATTER CONNECTION, HE SAID THE SUBJECT HAD COME UP AS TO WHETHER OR NOT BOLIVIA SHOULD ACCEPT EXCHANGE OF PERSONS PROGRAMS, INCREASED CULTURAL PRESENTATIONS, AND HOW TO DEAL WITH MILITARY EQUIPMENT OFFERS. PRESIDENT BANZER SAID THAT THERE HAD BEEN NO FORMAL OFFER MADE TO THE GOB AND THAT THE GOVERNMENT HAD NOT MADE ANY DECISION TO ACCEPT

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SOVIET EQUIPMENT. PRESIDENT SAID, ON HIS OWN VOLITION, THAT THE

GREAT DIFFICULTY WITH SOVIET EQUIPMENT, EVEN IF IT IS A GIFT, IS THAT IT GENERALLY COMES ACCOMPANIED BY TECHNICIANS WITH OTHER INTERESTS. HE SAID HIS OWN EXPERIENCE WITH THE SOVIETS HERE IN BOLIVIA WAS THAT HE HAD TO KICK OUT SEVERAL MEMBERS OF THE SOVIET MISSION FOR INTELLIGENCE ACTIVITIES. BUT, SAID PRESIDENT BANZER, THE PROBLEM IS THAT THE MORALE OF THE BOLIVIAN ARMY IS DEPENDENT UPON YOUNGER OFFICERS HAVING RELATIVELY NEW EQUIPMENT TO WORK WITH. GOB HAS NO INTENTION OF USING MILITARY EQUIPMENT, BUT THERE IS A NEED TO BOOST MORALE IN THE TROOPS. HE SAID THE BEST WAY TO COUNTER THE SOVIET PRESSURE FOR BOLIVIA TO ACCEPT THEIR MILITARY EQUIPMENT IS FOR THE PROMPT DELIVERY BY FRIENDLY COUNTRIES OF ITEMS APPROPRIATE FOR THE BOLIVIAN MILITARY.

2. PRESIDENT BANZER SAID THAT HE KNEW QUITE A BIT ABOUT THE TANK SITUATION AS THAT WAS HIS BASIC MILITARY SPECIALTY, HAVING BEEN TRAINED IN THIS IN THE U.S. HE SAID HE KNEW THE M-48 BUT CONSIDERED IT TOO HEAVY FOR BOLIVIA. HE VOLUNTEERED THAT HE KNEW THAT THE M-41 WAS NO LONGER AVAILABLE. IN SUM, HE SAID THAT HE WAS WELL AWARE THAT THE U.S. NO LONGER PRODUCES A MEDIUM SIZE TANK APPROPRIATE FOR BOLIVIA. ACCORDINGLY HE SAID THAT IT WOULD BE AN APPROPRIATE ALTERNATIVE IF WE WERE TO PROVIDE FOR BOLIVIAN PURCHASE OF "CARROS DE ASALTO." HE SAID THAT HE HAD PERSONALLY PURCHASED SOME EQUIPMENT FROM CADILLAC-GAGE AND FELT THAT LATE MODELS OF ASSAULT CARS WOULD SATISFY THE MORALE NEEDS OF THE BOLIVIAN ARMY. I ASKED HIM DIRECTLY WHETHER HE FELT THAT US SALE OF ASSAULT VEHICLES OF THIS SORT WOULD ELIMINATE ANY INTEREST IN TANKS OFFERED BY OTHER COUNTRIES. HIS REPLY, WHILE SOMEWHAT ELLIPTICAL, WAS BASED ON THE FINANCIAL ASPECT OF OTHER COUNTRIES' OFFERS. HE NOTED IT WOULD BE MOST DIFFICULT FOR BOLIVIA TO PASS UP WHAT MIGHT AMOUNT TO A GIFT. HE SAID THAT HE WOULD HAVE DIFFICULTIES WITH YOUNGER MEMBERS OF THE ARMED FORCES WERE HE TO REFUSE TO ACCEPT EQUIPMENT FROM OTHER SUPPLIERS AT LITTLE OR NO COST, ALTHOUGH HE HIMSELF DID NOT WISH TO HAVE OTHER COUNTRIES' TECHNICIANS PHYSICALLY PRESENT IN THIS COUNTRY. THE WAY HE LEFT THE SUBJECT WAS THAT PROMPT DELIVERIES OF PROGRAMMED AND SUITABLE MILITARY EQUIPMENT FROM OTHERS WOULD REDUCE SOVIET PRESSURES TO GIVE EQUIPMENT AND ANY JUNIOR MILITARY OFFICERS DESIRES TO HAVE SUCH EQUIPMENT.

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