

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-20

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CU-04 AID-20 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07 H-03

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FM AMEMBASSY LA PAZ

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3250

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 LA PAZ 3504

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, BL

SUBJ: UNIVERSITY POLITICAL SCENE

REF: LA PAZ 3295: LA PAZ A-70

1. SUMMARY: SINCE THE REOPENING OF THE UNIVERSITIES IN 1972, PERSISTENT CRITICISM HAS BEEN VOICED OF THE LARGE BUREAURACY CREATED BY THE NEW FUNDAMENTAL LAW OF THE BOLIVIAN UNIVERSITY, THE INCREASED ROLE OF POLITICAL PARTIES IN THE UNIVERSITY AND THE FAILURE TO HOLD ELECTIONS FOR STUDENT LEADERS. THESE DIS-SATISFACTIONS, SHARED BY STUDENTS, PROFESSORS AND MANY OUTSIDE OBSERVERS OF THE UNIVERSITY SCENE, WERE CRYSTALLIZED BY THE RESIGNATION MAY 9 OF THE RECTOR OF SAN ANDRES UNIVERSITY IN LA PAZ. SUBSEQUENTLY, A CHAIN REACTION F APPOINTMENTS TO AND RESIGNATIONS FROM THE RECTORSHIP, COUPLED WITH STUDENT PROTEST MEETINGS, LED TO THE CLOSING OF THE COUNTRY'S LARGEST UNIVERSITY ON MAY 21. ALTHOUGH SAN ANDRES UNIVERSITY IS NOW SCHEDULED TO REOPEN ON JUNE 3, THE POWER STRUGGLE BETWEEN COMPETING POLITICAL FACTIONS WITHIN THE UNIVERSIT SYSTEM HAS ONLY JUST BEGUN, AND IS LIKELY TO INTENSIFY OVER THE NEXT FEW MONTHS. END SUMMARY.

2. THE SURFACE CALM IN BOLIVIA'S UNIVERSITIES OVER THE PAST

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TWO YEARS HAS HIDDEN A GROWING MEASURE OF DISCONTENT WITH

SOME OF THE CHANGES IN THE UNIVERSITY SYSTEM WHICH WERE BROUGHT ABOUT BY THE 1972 FUNDAMENTAL LAW OF THE BOLIVIAN UNIVERSITY. THIS LAW RESTRICTED UNIVERSITY AUTONOMY TO THE REALM OF ADMINISTRATIVE AND ACADEMIC AFFAIRS, WHILE CREATING A NEW NATIONAL COUNCIL OF HIGHER EDUCATION (CNES) TO OVERSEE THE OPERATION OF THE NATION'S NINE UNIVERSITIES. OTHER ASPECTS OF THE POST-1971 UNIVERSITY SCENE WHICH HAVE BRED DISSATISFACTION AMONG STUDENTS, PROFESSORS AND MANY OUTSIDE OBSERVERS INCLUDE THE INCREASED ROLE OF POLITICAL PARTIES IN THE UNIVERSITIES, A RAPID GROWTH IN THE NUMBER OF SUPERNUMERARIES OCCUPYING ADMINISTRATIVE POSTS WITHIN THE UNIVERSITY SYSTEM AND THE FAILURE TO HOLD ELECTIONS FOR STUDENT LEADERS.

3. THE RESIGNATION OF RECTOR FELIPE HARTMANN OF SAN ANDRES UNIVERSITY (UMSA) IN LA PAZ ON MAY 9, FOLLOWING A SERIES OF CLASHES BETWEEN HARTMANN AND CNES OVER THE UNIVERSITY AUTONOMY ISSUE, CRYSTALLIZED MUCH OF THE EXISTING DISCONTENT OVER THE FUNCTIONING OF THE BOLIVIAN UNIVERSITY SYSTEM. WITH HARTMANN'S REPLACEMENT BY VICE RECTOR MARIO AGUILAR, A MEMBER OF THE FALANGE PARTY, FSB MEMBERS WERE RAPIDLY NAMED TO A SERIES OF HIGH-LEVEL ADMINISTRATIVE POSTS WITHIN THE UNIVERSITY. THIS ATTEMPT TO GIVE A PARTISAN POLITICAL CAST TO THE NATION'S LARGEST UNIVERSITY PROVOKED A THREAT FROM THE MNR TO WITHDRAW ALL OF ITS ADMINISTRATIVE AND ACADEMIC PERSONNEL FROM UMSA. FOLLOWING A SERIES OF HURRIED POLITICAL CONSULTATIONS WITHIN THE GOVERNMENT, CHANGES IN THE COMPOSITION OF CNES WERE ANNOUNCED ON MAY 15-16 WHEREBY AGUILAR JOINED THAT BODY AND WAS REPLACED AS RECTOR OF UMSA BY COLONEL JOSE ZELAYA. ZELAYA, A PROFESSOR OF GEOGRAPHY AND ENGINEERING, THUS BECAME THE FIRST MILITARY OFFICER EVER TO HOLD THE POST OF RECTOR OF SAN ANDRES UNIVERSITY.

4. STUDENT REACTION TO THE APPOINTMENT OF A MILITARY OFFICER TO THIS POST WAS IMMEDIATE AND STRONGLY NEGATIVE. AT A PUBLIC MEETING CALLED BY THE STUDENT-ELECTED INTER-FACULTY COMMITTEE ON MAY 17, THE ASSEMBLED UMSA STUDENTS APPROVED RESOLUTIONS REJECTING BOTH ZELAYS AND CNES, AND DECLARED A 24-HOUR STRIKE. IN THE FACE OF STRONG OPPOSITION TO HIS NOMINATION, ZELAYA RESIGNED THE RECTORSHIP ON MAY 19, AND WAS REPLACED ON THE FOLLOWING DAY BY AGUILAR. STUDENT LEADERS NOW ATTEMPTED TO TAKE ADVANTAGE

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OF THE CONFUSED ATMOSPHERE AT UMSA BY CALLING A MEETING ON MAY 21, AT WHICH THEY PLANNED TO DENOUNCE AGUILAR'S REAPPOINTMENT, CALL FOR THE ELECTION OF RECTORS BY STUDENTS AND PROFESSORS, AND APPROVE POLITICAL RESOLUTIONS IN FAVOR OF THE REOPENING OF THE COB AND DECLARING VISITING BRAZILIAN PRESIDENT GEISEL PERSONA NON GRATA. THIS MEETING WAS ABORTED BY A SQUAD OF FALANGE YOUTH, ARMED WITH TEAR GAS AND REVOLVERS, WHO CLEARED OUT THE SITE OF THE STUDENT ASSEMBLY IN A RAPID

COMMANDO-TYPE ACTION: SUBSEQUENT ATTEMPTS BY THE STUDENTS TO REASSEMBLE WERE DISPERSED BY THE POLICE. IN THE WAKE OF THESE EVENTS, INTER-FACULTY COMMITTEE LEADERS CALLED FOR A 48-HOUR STRIKE, AND WERE SUPPORTED BY SYMPATHY STRIKES AT THE CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY AND THE UNIVERSITIES OF COCHABAMBA AND SUCRE. ON THE SAME DATE, MAY21, THE RECTOR OF UMSA RESPONDED BY ANNOUNCING THE INDEFINITE CLOSURE OF SAN ANDRES UNIVERSITY.

5. THE IMPORTANCE OF ACHIEVING A POLITICAL SETTLEMENT TO THE ONGOING UNIVERSITY CRISIS WAS IMPRESSED UPON THE GOVERNMENT BY THE INVOLVEMENT OF NEW GROUPS IN THE CRISIS IN SUCCEEDING DAYS. ON THE DAY OF THE UNIVERSITY'S CLOSURE, THE ARMED FORCES ISSUED A JOINT STATEMENT SUPPORTING COLONEL ZELAYA'S ACTIONS AND CALLING UPON ALL PARTIES TO THE DISPUTE TO REFLECT UPON THE NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES OF THEIR ACTS: IN PARTICULAR, THE DOCUMENT MADE CLEAR THE "FIRM DECISION" OF THE MILITARY INSTITUTION TO "CAUSE THE ESTABLISHED ORDER AND SUBMISSION TO THE PRINCIPLES OF AUTHORITY AND DISCIPLINE TO BE RESPECTED." STATEMENTS BY GROUPS OF PROFESSORS AND PARENTS OF UNIVERSITY STUDENTS CALLING FOR THE REOPENING OF THE UNIVERSITY WERE SUPPORTED ON MAY 27 BY A COMBINED DECLARATION OF SUCH KEY UNIONS AS THE MINERS, BREWIN

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ACTION ARA-20

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CU-04 AID-20 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07 H-03

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R 302100Z MAY 74

FM AMEMBASSY LA PAZ

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3251

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 LA PAZ 3504

FACTORY WORKERS AND BANK WORKERS, WHO REQUESTED THE

PRESIDENT TO ACCEPT THE DEMAND OF THE INTER-FACULTY COMMITTEE TO HOLD DEMOCRATIC ELECTIONS FOR UNIVERSITY STUDENT LEADERS. THE GOVERNMENT'S RESPONSE TO THESE PETITIONS WAS REVEALED ON MAY 28, WHEN CNES ORDERED THE REOPENING OF UMSA EFFECTIVE ON JUNE 3. WHILE RATIFYING AGUILAR AND MNR VICE RECTOR GONZALO SANCHEZ IN THEIR POSTS THROUGH JULY 1, 1976, CNES ALSO GRANTED "ABSOLUTE LIBERTY" TO THE STUDENTS TO ELECT THEIR OWN LEADERS AND PROMISED TO REVIEW SOME OF THE MORE SERIOUS ADMINISTRATIVE PROBLEMS AFFECTING THE UNIVERSITY.

6. DESPITE THE GOVERNMENT'S CONCESSION TO THE STUDENTS ON THE KEY ISSUE OF UNIVERSITY ELECTIONS, THE ATMOSPHERE OF POLITICAL TURBULENCE AT UMSA AND OTHERS OF THE MORE POLITICIZED BOLIVIAN UNIVERSITIES IS LIKELY TO CONTINUE AND EVEN GROW IN ITS INTENSITY OVER THE COMING MONTHS. AT THE MOMENT, THE COMPLICATED FACTIONAL STRIFE WITHIN UNIVESITY STUDENT CIRCLES HAS LARGELY POLARIZED AROUND TWO COMPETING GROUPS: THE INTER-FACULTY COMMITTEE AND THE NATIONALIST UNIVERSITY FRONT(FUN), WHICH BRINGS TOGETHER THE STUDENT REPRESENTATIVES OF THE MNR, FSB AND BARRIENTISTAS. THE NEWLY-FORMED FUN HAS BEEN WEAKENED, UNTIL RECENTLY, BY THE DEFECTION OF THE MNR'S AVANZADA UNIVERSITARIA TO THE CAUSE OF THE INTER-FACULTY COMMITTEE, IN THE HOPE OF ADVANCING THE AVANZADA'S LONG-TERM POLITICAL INTERESTS WITHIN

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THE UNIVERSITY. FOLLOWING THE CLOSURE OF THE UNIVERSITY ON MAY 21, HOWEVER, THE NATIONAL MNR LEADERSHIP REMOVED THE REBELLIOUS AVANZADA LEADERS FROM OFFICE AND INSTALLED A GROUP OF MORE COMPLIANT YOUNG PARTY MILITANTS IN THEIR PLACE. ANOTHER, AND PERHAPS MORE GRAVE, WEAKNESS OF THE FUN IS ITS IDENTIFICATIONS WITH THE GOVERNMENT-APPOINTED LEADERS OF THE LOCAL UNIVERSITY FEDERATIONS (FULS) AND THE NATIONAL BOLIVIAN UNIVRRSITY CONFEDERATION (CUB), ALL OF WHOM HAVE HELD OFFICE WITH GOB SUPPORT FOR THE PAST TWO YEARS. AS UNIVERSITY POLITICAL LIFE IN THE PAST HAS ALWAYS CENTERED ABOUT THE YEARLY ELECTIONS TO THE FULS AND THE CUB, THESE LEADERS ARE NOW UNDER INTENSIVE PRESSURE TO CARRY OUT THE LONG-DELAYED ELECTIONS WHICH WILL ALMOST INEVITABLY RESULT IN THEIR REPLACEMENT BY OTHER, MORE REPRESENTATIVE STUDENT SPOKESMEN. THE GOB'S ABILITY TO CARRY OUT ITS PLEDGE TO PERMIT THE DEMOCRATIZATION OF THESE STUDENT POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS WILL BE SEVERLY TESTED OVER THE NEXT YEAR, AND THE GOVERNMENT MAY USE FORCEFUL METHODS WITH INCREASING FREQUENCY IN ITS EFFORTS TO KEEP THE UNIVERSITIES OPEN AND FUNCTIONING. IN PARTICULAR, ANY ATTEMPT TO HOLD NATIONWIDE STUDENT ELECTIONS MAY FACE OPPOSITION FROM BOTH PRO-GOVERNMENT FORCES FEARFUL OF LOSING THEIR CURRENT POSITIONS WITHIN THE UNIVERSITY SYSTEM AND ANTI-GOVERNMENT AGITATORS SEEKING TO MAINTAIN A CLIMATE OF INSTABILITY IN BOLIVIA'S UNIVERSITIES.

BREWIN

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