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DOCUMENT\_ID: 39716712  
INQNO: DOC13D 00309976  
DOCNO: TEL 012319 89  
PRODUCER: VIENNA  
SOURCE: STATE  
DOCTYPE: IN  
DOR: 19891018  
TOR: 144000  
DOCPREC: P  
ORIGDATE: 198910181736  
MHFNO: 89 4447457  
DOCCLASS: U

HEADER

PP RUEAIIB  
ZNR UUUUU ZOC STATE ZZH  
TOU8208  
PP RUEHC  
DE RUFHVI #2319/01 2911738  
ZNR UUUUU ZZH  
P 181736Z OCT 89  
FM AMEMBASSY VIENNA  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6268  
INFO RUFHMB/USMISSION USVIENNA 2529  
RUFHLD/AMEMBASSY LONDON 2175  
BT

CONTROLS

UNCLAS VIENNA 12319

USVIENNA FOR CFE AND UNVIE

E.O. 12356: N/A

TEXT

TAGS: POL, AU  
SUBJECT: REACTION TO BRITISH MOD REPORT ON WALDHEIM

REF: LONDON 20982

1. SUMMARY: PRESIDENT **KURT WALDHEIM** IS "DEEPLY GRATIFIED" BY THE BRITISH MOD INVESTIGATION ACQUITTING HIM OF DIRECT INVOLVEMENT IN THE KILLINGS OF 6 BRITISH WWII POWS IN GREECE (REFTEL). WALDHEIM EXPRESSED THE HOPE THAT THE FINDINGS WOULD RESTORE TO HIS OFFICE MORE "INTERNATIONAL MOBILITY." JUSTICE DEPARTMENT OSI BUREAU CHIEF NEIL SHER WAS QUOTED AS SAYING THE MOD FINDINGS DID NOT REHABILITATE WALDHEIM AT ALL AND THE WATCHLIST DECISION REMAINED UNCHANGED. IN FRONT-PAGE HEADLINES OCTOBER 18, THE REPORT WAS HIGHLIGHTED AS A "BRITISH GOVERNMENT ACQUITTAL OF WALDHEIM". THE PRESS SAID THE FINDINGS WOULD NOT CHANGE WALDHEIM'S POLITICAL ISOLATION, WHILE A TV COMMENTATOR PREDICTED THAT THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT REPORT WOULD PUT AN END TO THE DIPLOMATIC FREEZE BETWEEN VIENNA AND LONDON. END SUMMARY.

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2. ACCORDING TO AN OFFICIAL REPORT BY THE BRITISH MINISTRY OF DEFENSE, PRESIDENT **KURT WALDHEIM** WAS NOT DIRECTLY RESPONSIBLE FOR THE 1944 EXECUTION OF SIX BRITISH WWII POWS IN GREECE. BASED ON THESE FINDINGS, WALDHEIM TOLD THE AUSTRIAN PUBLIC OCTOBER 17 THAT HE WAS "DEEPLY GRATIFIED" THAT "A FAIR, IMPARTIAL INVESTIGATION HAD FOUND WHAT HE HAD REPEATEDLY STATED: THAT I CANNOT BE ACCUSED OF ANY CRIMINAL ACTIVITIES." WALDHEIM SAID HE CONSIDERED THE BRITISH INVESTIGATION, "BASED ON FACTS," MUCH MORE IMPORTANT THAN THE CONCLUSIONS DRAWN BY A COMMISSION OF HISTORIANS IN FEBRUARY 1988, WHICH HAD BEEN "BASED ON ASSUMPTIONS AND HYPOTHESES." IN A TV INTERVIEW WALDHEIM EXPRESSED THE HOPE THAT THE AUTHORITATIVE REPORT WOULD GIVE HIM "MORE INTERNATIONAL MOBILITY" - INCLUDING IN WESTERN COUNTRIES - AND HELP DISMISS RESERVATIONS AGAINST HIM. AT THE SAME TIME HE REJECTED THE NOTION PUT FORWARD BY THE INTERVIEWER THAT HE WAS POLITICALLY ISOLATED, SAYING HE WAS "IN TOUCH" WITH THE MOST IMPORTANT WESTERN COUNTRIES.

3. FM MOCK, A PRIME WALDHEIM SUPPORTER, SAID THE MOD REPORT CLEARLY SHOWED THAT "THE SLANDER AND CAMPAIGN AGAINST THE HEAD OF STATE IN RECENT YEARS LACKED ANY BASIS". ACCORDING TO AN AUSTRIAN MFA STATEMENT, "IN THE CONTEXT OF THE FATE OF BRITISH SOLDIERS IN GREECE DURING WW II, THE OFFICIAL BRITISH REPORT HAD NOT FOUND ANY INDICATIONS IMPLICATING THEN LIEUTENANT WALDHEIM IN THIS AFFAIR." MFA FURTHER POINTED OUT THAT THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT "AFTER VERY CAREFUL EXAMINATION, HAD FOUND NO REASON TO IMPLICATE WALDHEIM IN WAR CRIMES."

4. THE MEDIA HERE QUOTED NEIL SHER, HEAD OF OSI IN THE JUSTICE DEPARTMENT, AS SAYING THE BRITISH DECISION HAD NO EFFECT ON WALDHEIM'S REMAINING ON THE WATCHLIST. "CONCLUDING THAT THE REPORT HAD CLEARED WALDHEIM'S NAME WOULD BE ABSURD," SHER REPORTEDLY SAID. ACCORDING TO WORLD JEWISH CONGRESS EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR ELAN STEINBERG, THE REPORT "HIGHLIGHTED WALDHEIM'S LIE THAT THE HEADQUARTERS OF HIS UNIT HAD NOT INTERROGATED BRITISH PRISONERS OF WAR".

5. THE FINDINGS OF THE REPORT WERE GIVEN PROMINENT PLAY IN ALL MAJOR NEWSPAPERS AS WELL AS ON THE STATE-RUN RADIO AND TV. NONE OF THE AUSTRIAN MEDIA EXPLICITLY CALLED FOR A RE-EVALUATION OF THE U.S. WATCHLIST DECISION AS A RESULT OF THE BRITISH MOD REPORT. HOWEVER, THE MASS DAILY "KRONEN ZEITUNG", WELL KNOWN FOR ITS STAUNCH SUPPORT OF WALDHEIM, REMARKED THAT "NOW, OF THE INTERNATIONAL MEASURES DIRECTED AGAINST WALDHEIM, ONLY THE WATCHLIST DECISION, WHICH VIOLATES INTERNATIONAL LAW, AND THE ISRAELI REFUSAL TO SEND AN AMBASSADOR TO VIENNA ARE LEFT". "DIE PRESSE" FOREIGN POLICY EDITOR ANDREAS UNTERBERGER SARCASTICALLY DISMISSED HOPES THAT "THERE WOULD SOON BE APOLOGIES BY AUSTRIAN ANTI-WALDHEIM GROUPS OR THE WORLD JEWISH CONGRESS". BY THE SAME TOKEN SEVERAL COUNTRIES WOULD NOT GIVE UP THEIR BOYCOTT, SAID UNTERBERGER, AS THEY WILL NEVER "ALLOW THEIR PREJUDICES

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BE DESTROYED BY FACTS".

6. OTHER EDITORIAL COMMENTS POINTED OUT THAT THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT COMMISSION "HAD ONLY CONFIRMED WHAT EVERY REASONABLE PERSON HAD ALWAYS BELIEVED: THAT WALDHEIM HAD NEVER BEEN DIRECTLY IMPLICATED IN WAR CRIMES." "THOSE WHO HAD ACCUSED WALDHEIM OF WAR CRIMES SHOULD TAKE IT BACK AND APOLOGIZE," EDITORIALIZED THE LIBERAL UNCLAS SECTION 02 OF 02 VIENNA 12319

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INDEPENDENT DAILY "DER STANDARD." AT THE SAME TIME COMMENTATORS RECALLED THAT WALDHEIM'S REAL PROBLEM WAS THAT OF MORAL CREDIBILITY, WHICH REMAINED. THERE IS ALSO WIDESPREAD BELIEF AMONG OBSERVERS HERE THAT WALDHEIM'S POLITICAL ISOLATION WILL NOT CHANGE AS A RESULT OF THE BRITISH REPORT. HOWEVER, THE REPORT SHOULD LEAD TO ONE CONCRETE RESULT, AN AUSTRIAN TV CORRESPONDENT IN LONDON POINTED OUT OCTOBER 17: IN VIEW OF THE DE-FACTO ACQUITTAL OF WALDHEIM BY THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT, LONDON IS EXPECTED TO END ITS ONE-SIDED FREEZE OF DIPLOMATIC EXCHANGES WITH VIENNA, WHICH HAD BEEN IN EFFECT SINCE WALDHEIM TOOK OFFICE IN 1986. GRUNWALD

ADMIN  
END OF MESSAGE

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