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Argentina: Aftermath Of Attack On Military Barracks, Summary Of Statements & Events

by John Neagle

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Jan. 26: In an interview with Radio Mitre (Buenos Aires), Interior Minister Carlos Alvarez said there was no evidence to confirm rumors that Enrique Gorriaran Merlo, leader of a faction of the defunct People's Revolutionary Army (ERP), was connected with the Jan. 23 attack on the La Tablada infantry barracks. (See LADB, 01/24/89, 01/26/89 for accounts of attack.) Alvarez said that the attackers were "well trained." He added that some had escaped, and are now "at large." On Jan. 25, the government confirmed that among the dead was Jorge Banos, an attorney and a member of the secretariat of the leftist Movement Everyone For the People (MTP). One of the wounded, Roberto Felicetti, is also a member of the MTP secretariat. Unnamed government and security sources cited by AP said the leader of the attack was Gorriaran Merlo, a "leftist extremist" linked to the assassination of Nicaraguan dictator Anastasio Somoza. Gorriaran, 47, is believed to have escaped during the siege. The ERP, active in the early and mid-1970s, was decimated in a campaign waged by military leaders who seized power in a 1976 coup. Gorriaran escaped and fled abroad. According to Gorriaran himself in published interviews, in 1980 he led a team of Argentine and Nicaraguan guerrillas who assassinated Somoza, in Asuncion, Paraguay. When President Raul Alfonsin assumed power in 1983, he issued a decree ordering the prosecution of five guerrilla leaders, including Gorriaran, and of nine former military leaders for human rights abuses. Gorriaran remained a fugitive for years and was believed to be living abroad. In late 1988, human rights lawyer Jorge Banos asked the courts to allow Gorriaran to return and face trial without being imprisoned. The death toll from the assault rose to 38 with the death of a wounded police officer. The dead included eight army soldiers, including one whose body was found in the rubble on Jan. 25; two policemen; and 28 guerrillas. Nineteen guerrillas were captured. Police acting on a court order raided several homes in Mar del Plata, 250 miles south of Buenos Aires. Authorities said three people were arrested, but gave no other details. In the Buenos Aires area on Jan. 25, police raided about 25 houses in what AP sources said was an unsuccessful attempt to capture Gorriaran. Officials said on Jan. 27 that the police had raided 50 homes in the hunt for Gorriaran Merlo. After escaping the military's decimation campaign in the late 1970s, he reportedly went to Nicaragua. Jan. 27: The Argentine government filed a suit before the judiciary requesting that Peronist presidential candidate, Carlos Menem, provide proof for public statements accusing Alfonsin supporters and certain journalists of acting as the "intellectual authors" of the La Tablada assault. According to Menem, the government had contrived in the assault as a maneuver to "discredit Peronism," and delay the May presidential elections with the objective of avoiding a victory by the opposition. Menem's accusations caused consternation among Peronist leaders, including Justicialista party president and governor of Buenos Aires province, Antonio Cafiero. He said that he would "prefer" precise information on the alleged government involvement in the assault. Meanwhile, three days after the attack, Alfonsin's administration announced that it would request from the Congress the expenditure of \$4 billion over the next five years for the purchase of new military equipment and toward refurbishing existing military hardware. According to plans elaborated by the Planning and Defense Ministries, financial resources for the military budget will derive from foreign loans the sale

of defense bonds. For 1989, a total of \$400 million was earmarked for the military budget. (Basic data from Xinhua, 01/26/89; AP, 01/26/89, 01/28/89; Notimex, 01/27/89)

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