

Current Class: UNCLASSIFIED
Current Handling: SBU

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UNCLASSIFIED PTQ0954

E23

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ACTION DS-00

INFO	LOG-00	MFA-00	NP-00	AMAD-00	ACQ-00	CIAE-00	COME-00
	DODE-00	DOTE-00	WHA-00	EB-00	FAAE-00	UTED-00	VC-00
	TEDE-00	INR-00	VCE-00	AC-01	NSAE-00	NSCE-00	PER-00
	ACE-00	IRM-00	SSO-00	SS-00	TEST-00	EPAE-00	DSCC-00
	DRL-02	NFAT-00	SAS-00	/003W			

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O 120341Z APR 02
 FM AMEMBASSY CARACAS
 TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 5455
 INFO DEPT OF TREASURY WASHDC//OASIA//
 AMEMBASSY BOGOTA
 AMEMBASSY LA PAZ
 AMEMBASSY LIMA
 AMEMBASSY QUITO
 USCINCSO MIAMI FL//POLAD//

RELEASED IN PART
B6, B1, 1.4(D)

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 CARACAS 000985

NSC FOR AMB MAISTO
STATE FOR DS/OP/WHA, S/ES-O_DS/OP/CC

SENSITIVE

E.O. 12958: N/A
 TAGS: ASEC, ECON, PGOV, PREL, VE
 SUBJECT: TALE OF TWO CITIES - THE MARCH ON MIRAFLORES PALACE

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SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED, PLEASE HANDLE ACCORDINGLY.

REF: CARACAS 000965

SUMMARY

1. (SBU) MEETING ON THE MORNING OF APRIL 11TH, THE OPPOSITION'S "COORDINATING COMMITTEE FOR DEMOCRACY AND LIBERTY" DECIDED TO GO FOR BROKE - TO SEEK THE IMMEDIATE DEPARTURE OF PRESIDENT CHAVEZ BY POPULAR ACCLAMATION. SEVERAL PARTICIPANTS VOICED UNEASE OVER THE GROWING PRESSURE TO MARCH ON THE MIRAFLORES PRESIDENTIAL PALACE. THE FOLLOWING OPPOSITION RALLY HELD IN FRONT OF PDVSA HEADQUARTERS IN CHACAO WAS AN OVERWHELMING SUCCESS. THE CTV AND FEDECAMARAS

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF STATE
 CLASSIFIED BY DEPT. OF STATE, L. R. LOHMAN, DAS, A/RPS
 REVIEW AUTHORITY: JOHN L MILLS
 CLASSIFICATION: CONFIDENTIAL REASON: 1.4(D)
 DECLASSIFY AFTER: 11 APR 2012
 DATE/CASE ID: 30 AUG 2004 200400110

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LEADERS WERE SWEEPED INTO THE SPONTANEOUS MARCH ON MIRAFLORES. WHEN THE PEACEFUL MARCHERS CAME TO WITHIN ONE BLOCK OF THE PALACE, TROOPS FROM THE PRESIDENTIAL GUARD SHOT DOZENS OF TEAR GAS CANISTERS TO KEEP THEM AT BAY. TENS OF THOUSANDS OF DEMONSTRATORS REMAINED IN THE AREA THROUGHOUT THE AFTERNOON. END SUMMARY.

OPPOSITION'S STRONG DISPLAY OF RESOLVE AND UNITY

2. (SBU) THE OPPOSITION'S "COORDINATING COMMITTEE" MET AT FEDECAMARAS FOR TWO HOURS TO DISCUSS AND REACH AGREEMENT ON STRATEGY FOR THE MORNING'S UPCOMING MARCH FROM PARQUE DEL ESTE TO PDVSA HEADQUARTERS IN CHACAO. IT WAS CLEAR THAT THERE WAS GROWING SUPPORT TO CONTINUE THE MARCH FROM PDVSA ON TO MIRAFLORES. SEVERAL ATTENDEES URGED CAUTION AND EXPRESSED THE BELIEF THE
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OPPOSITION WAS NOT YET READY FOR THAT STEP. OTHERS STRONGLY MAINTAINED THAT IT WAS TIME TO DIRECTLY CONFRONT THE EXECUTIVE AND DEMAND THAT THE PRESIDENT AND HIS MINISTERS RESIGN. BY UNANIMOUS VOICE VOTE, THE COMMITTEE DECIDED TO LET FEDECAMARAS PRESIDENT PEDRO CARMONA AND CTV PRESIDENT CARLOS ORTEGA MAKE THE DECISION REGARDING THE MARCH AT THE PDVSA RALLY -- TO ALLOW THEM TO GAUGE THE TEMPERAMENT OF THE CROWD. THE 80 PLUS PARTICIPANTS BROKE UP THE MEETING IN HIGH SPIRITS AND HEADED OUT TO CHACAO.

THE ROAR OF THE CROWD...

3. (SBU) BY 11:00AM, THE AREA SURROUNDING PDVSA HEADQUARTERS WAS A SEA OF HUMANITY -- MEN, WOMEN, CHILDREN. FROM THE PRESS GALLERY LOCATED ON A PEDESTRIAN BRIDGE OVER THE MAIN PLAZA, ECONOFFS LOOKED OUT OVER A TIGHTLY PACKED CROWD STRETCHING FOR SEVERAL BLOCKS IN ALL DIRECTIONS. WHEN THE FIRST SPEAKER WAS INTRODUCED, THE ROAR OF APPROVAL WAS REMARKABLE - AND IT BUILT FROM THERE. BY THE TIME PEDRO CARMONA SPOKE, IT HAD BECOME A FOREGONE CONCLUSION: ON TO MIRAFLORES. WITH CARMONA, ORTEGA, AND FORMER PDVSA PRESIDENT GUAICAIPURO LAMEDA IN THE VANGUARD, THE MULTITUDE SURGED ONTO THE AUTOPISTA FOR THE FOUR-MILE MARCH DOWNTOWN.

4. (SBU) [REDACTED] THE COMMITTEE WAS HURRIEDLY PUTTING THE FINAL TOUCHES ON A DOCUMENT DEMANDING THE RESIGNATION OF PRESIDENT CHAVEZ -- BY POPULAR ACCLAMATION. [REDACTED] THE DOCUMENT WOULD BE DELIVERED TO CHAVEZ BY THE COMMITTEE'S LEADERSHIP WHEN THE MARCH REACHED MIRAFLORES.

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5. (U) ALONG THE MARCH ROUTE, THE PARTICIPANTS -- NUMBERING EASILY IN THE TENS OF THOUSANDS -- WERE IN A FESTIVE AND EXPECTANT MOOD, SINGING THE NATIONAL ANTHEM AND CHANTING "NOT ONE STEP BACK!" "CHAVEZ - JUST LEAVE!" THERE WERE NO WEAPONS, ONLY MEN AND WOMEN OF ALL AGES AND SOCIAL CLASSES. THE OVERRIDING SENTIMENT EXPRESSED BY MANY PARTICIPANTS WAS ONE OF DISBELIEF - OVER THE OBJECTIVE AND THE SIZE OF THE CROWD. A PHALANX OF METROPOLITAN POLICE MOTORCYCLES RODE ALONG AT THE HEAD OF THE MARCH, CLEARING THE STREETS OF TRAFFIC.

PRESIDENTIAL GUARD OVERREACTS

5. (U) AS THE MARCHERS TURNED THE FINAL CORNER AT ROUGHLY 2:00PM AND APPROACHED THE LONG DRIVE LEADING UP TO THE PRESIDENTIAL PALACE, IT APPEARED THEY WOULD REACH THEIR OBJECTIVE AND THE NOISE FROM HORNS, WHISTLES, CLAXONS, AND SHOUTS REACHED A CRESCENDO. LESS THAN A BLOCK FROM THE PALACE GATES, APPROXIMATELY A DOZEN TEAR GAS CANISTERS WERE LAUNCHED FROM BEHIND THE PALACE WALLS AND FELL AMONG THE LEAD ELEMENTS. AMID CRIES OF SURPRISE AND SOME FEAR, THE CROWD TURNED AND FLED BACK TO THE CROSSROADS AT THE

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BOTTOM OF THE DRIVE.

6. (U) WITH THE CONTINUOUS ARRIVAL OF MORE MARCHERS, THE LEAD SECTIONS TRIED ONCE AGAIN TO APPROACH THE PALACE APPROXIMATELY 20 MINUTES LATER. THIS TIME THEY ADVANCED EVEN CLOSER, BUT BY NOW THE PRESIDENTIAL GUARD HAD FORMED UP IN SOLID RANKS JUST BELOW THE PALACE GATES. THIS TIME A BARRAGE OF ROUGHLY 20 GAS CANISTERS RAINED DOWN ON THE MARCHERS -- THE CROWD RAN AND STARTED TO PANIC. THEY REGROUPED AT THE CROSSROADS AND A NEARBY PLAZA, BUT NEVER AGAIN ATTEMPTED TO APPROACH MIRAFLORES.

7. (SBU) FOR THE NEXT TWO HOURS (3-5PM) THE CROWD MILLED AROUND A LATE-ARRIVING SOUND TRUCK AND CHEERED A PROGRESSION OF SECONDARY SPEAKERS. FEW FEDECAMARAS OR CTV LEADERS ARRIVED AND THE CROWD GREW INCREASINGLY UNCERTAIN OF WHAT WOULD NEXT TRANSPIRE. TOWARD 5:00PM, ECONOFF OBSERVED INCREASING VIOLENCE IN THE NEARBY STREETS. PARTICULARLY ON THE NEXT THOROUGHFARE, AVENIDA BARALT, A SMALL CONTINGENT OF THE MARCH BECAME THE TARGET OF STEADY ROCK AND BOTTLE THROWING BY CHAVISTAS AND REPEATED BARRAGES OF TEAR GAS CANISTERS FIRED BY THE NATIONAL GUARD. THE DISTINCT SOUNDS OF GUNFIRE ERUPTED AROUND 5:30PM IN THE SURROUNDING STREETS AND THE REMAINING CROWD QUICKLY BROKE UP AND RETREATED TOWARD EASTERN CARACAS ALONG AVENIDA BOLIVAR.

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