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FOREIGN SERVICE DESPATCH**S**

FROM : American Embassy Madrid

243

TO : THE DEPARTMENT OF STATE, **WASHINGTON**

STATE DEPT. DECLASSIFICATION REVIEW

October 14, 1958

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SUBJECT: "Proposition" that Spain Sell Ceuta and Melilla to the US for
Use as US Naval and Air Bases*Paris-1 London-1
Rabat-1*

As set forth in the enclosed memorandum, the Assistant Army Attache, Captain R. C. M. STOREY, was approached recently by a brother of a former Spanish Foreign Minister and offered a tentative "proposition" that Spain sell to the U.S. its two presidios at Ceuta and Melilla for use as U.S. naval and air bases. The proponent of the scheme was Father José Ignacio MARTIN ARTAJO, whose brother, Alberto MARTIN ARTAJO, was Minister of Foreign Affairs from July 18, 1945, to February 25, 1957, and is still very influential politically in Spain, both with the regime and in Catholic political circles (he is said to have ambitions and possibilities of becoming one of the leaders of an eventual Christian Democratic Party in Spain.) Father José Ignacio told Captain Storey that his proposal had the backing of his brother, Alberto, and that they would be amenable to meet and discuss the matter seriously with American representatives. He also said that "a number of people in high positions in the Spanish Government" felt sure that General FRANCO would be "more than willing to effect such a sale."

Despite the fact that the Father has such an illustrious and influential brother, and is himself a serious person (the Embassy has confirmed this by investigating the Father's personal background and reputation), it is difficult to take the proposition seriously. The manner in which it was presented is one reason for this. It seems almost a foregone conclusion that if there were, in important Spanish political circles, any intention of making such a proposal seriously, Alberto Martin Artajo himself, or some other leading personality, would have broached it informally to the Ambassador (which he could have done unofficially since he holds no official position at present and knows the Ambassador well). There are other effective ways also in which the proposition could have been presented instead of in the round-about manner chosen.

It therefore appears to the Embassy that what may have

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"proposition". The proposition does offer, however, some flights of the imagination, such as a notion that someone has advanced that the U.S. might settle a number of troublesome issues by (a) purchasing Ceuta and Melilla from Spain, thus solving Spain's problem of finding a graceful way of getting out of the presidios in the face of inevitable Moroccan demands; and (b) then giving the presidios to Morocco in exchange for the right to retain the bases the U.S. already has there, thus solving the base problem and at the same time bolstering U.S. prestige in Morocco by satisfying one of Morocco's burning nationalist ambitions.

For the Ambassador:


Richard H. Hawkins, Jr.
Counselor of Embassy

-  Enclosures: 1. Memo of Conversation between Captain Storey and Father Martin Artajo;
2. Military Evaluation of Ceuta and Melilla

Department please send copies to: AmEmbassy Paris
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To: Mr. William N. Fraleigh
From: Captain Robert G. M. Storey

SUBJECT: Conversation with Father MARTIN ARTAJO, Director of
Instituto Catolico de Artes e Industrias, on 26 Sep 58

Re our conversation of last week, I am sending along a very brief digest of my conversation with Father MARTIN ARTAJO.

Early in September Sr. Francisco Jaureguizar, employee of the Office of the Army Attache, reported that Father J. I. Martin Artajo with whom he had dealings in the past in the location of technical information and periodicals, had expressed a desire to meet the Assistant Army Attache to show him his facilities in the Instituto. The meeting was arranged for Friday, 26 September.

Upon arrival in the Instituto, Father Martin Artajo showed Sr. Jaureguizar and me through the classrooms, workshops, laboratories and other facilities of the Instituto. During the course of the tour, Father Martin Artajo indicated that his school was in bad straits financially. He suggested that there might be a number of American business firms having offices in Spain with obsolete or excess machinery and equipment of use to his school and that they might be willing to donate such items for use in his school. He inquired if I knew of business representatives of American firms in Spain whom it would be worth-while to contact to ask for assistance in the donation of equipment or funds to aid the school. He also was interested in receiving cash donations indicating that such donations were deductible from American Income Tax and he showed me a copy of an Internal Revenue ruling to that effect. I said that I had no contacts for him at the present time, but that in event I learned of someone who would be able to help him, I would pass the information on to him.

Our conversation drifted off into matters political and centered about the current Morocco-Ifni-Spanish Sahara situation. Father Martin Artajo became quite excited and distressed about the fact that both Spain and the United States were handling the situation in Morocco very badly. He suggested that without doubt the United States Forces would lose their bases in Morocco very shortly. He also felt that within 18 months to two years, Spain would be forced to surrender Ceuta and Melilla to the Moroccans.

At this point, he stated that he had something to tell me which he hoped I would keep confidential except for passing it to the people who could best use the information. He asked me if I thought the United States would be interested in buying directly from Spain the two Presidios at Ceuta and Melilla. I, of course,

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MILITARY EVALUATION OF CEUTA

The Spanish Presidio of Ceuta, an area of approximately 19 square kilometers, is located on the northern coast of Africa 13 nautical miles south of Gibraltar and 25 nautical miles east of Tangier. It is the best and most important port on the Moroccan Mediterranean coast due to:

- 1) Its strategic position at the eastern end of the Straits of Gibraltar;
- 2) Its fine petroleum and bunkering facilities;
- 3) Its well sheltered, non-silting deep harbor with ample quays and harbor space (the largest vessels afloat can be accommodated in this harbor); and
- 4) Its potential for further development.

Its population of 85,000 contains 14,500 Spanish military personnel (soldiers and families). Barracks for 15,000 troops are presently available with space available to construct additional barracks. Defense of the Presidio cannot properly be effected without control of the hill mass of some 800 meters which lies outside the Presidio boundaries and which dominates the port. No airfield exists at Ceuta and the construction of a modern airfield within the Presidio would require extensive work to include levelling of houses and cutting away hill masses. A small seaplane base does exist in the harbor; however, it could not accommodate "Seamaster" type aircraft. The entire Presidio must rely on water from sources outside its limits and the probability of sinking adequate wells within the Presidio are slim.

In summation, Ceuta could probably be developed into a decent, small naval base and with effort probably support a division of troops. However, its value from the standpoint of an air base is negligible.

MILITARY EVALUATION OF MELILLA

Located on the Mediterranean coast between Oran and Ceuta, the Presidio of Melilla lies in the shelter of the Cape of Tres Forcas. The port itself is naturally sheltered

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from the west and the south and somewhat from the north; however, it is directly exposed to frequent easterly storms. The sea passage into the port is deep and clear and can take (at the wharf) vessels of 800 feet in length drawing 32 feet of water. The city itself seems to exist solely to support the iron ore mines just outside the Presidio boundaries. Melilla contains about 85,500 inhabitants, about 16,000 of which are Spanish soldiers and their families. Barracks for 20,000 troops are presently available with space available to construct additional troop facilities. Defense of the Presidio would be difficult to effect due to the flat, barren terrain around its boundaries. Low hill masses a few kilometers outside of the Presidio control land approaches to it. A medium-sized seaplane base (can take 25 small seaplanes) exists in the harbor, but no airfield exists in the Presidio itself. Twelve miles south of Melilla at Nador - Tauima there is a 3600-foot airfield surfaced with pierced steel planking. Concrete runways are supposedly to be built in the near future.* Extension of these runways would entail a great deal of construction effort due to drainage problems. The Presidio of Melilla must rely on water from sources outside its limits and the probability of sinking adequate wells within its limits is negligible.

Melilla would need major construction effort to prepare it as a naval base. It may be able to sustain a division or a division and a half of combat troops. Construction of a modern military airfield within the Presidio would be an extremely difficult and time consuming project.

*New runways may be built by now as the information on this field is dated 1952.

30 September 1958

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