

October 25, 1995

**Letter, South African Department of Foreign Affairs,
'Support of the South African Bid for the Supply of
Electronic Warfare Equipment to the Argentine Air
Force'**

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Summary:

Director-General writes to the Secretary for Defence to enquire as to whether the South African tender for an electronic warfare equipment deal has been successful. He suspects that the deal has already been won by Israel.

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Private Bag X152
0001 PRETORIA

25 October 1995

The Secretary for Defence
Private Bag X910
PRETORIA
0001

FOR ATTENTION: COMMODORE E P GROENEWALD

Dear Sir

SUPPORT OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN BID FOR THE SUPPLY OF
ELECTRONIC WARFARE EQUIPMENT TO THE ARGENTINE AIR FORCE.

Your minute DS/INT/311/1/4 of 9 October 1995 refers.

Attached for your information are copies of our report to the South African Embassy in Buenos Aires, following discussions with the Argentinian Charge d'Affaires and the response of the Embassy. According to the Embassy it would appear that the Argentinian authorities have already taken a decision to purchase the Israeli system. It would be appreciated if you could confirm whether the Avitronics tender was not accepted.

Yours sincerely

THE DIRECTOR-GENERAL

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ARGENTINA : REPRESENTATIONS RE AIR FORCE PURCHASES
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At the request of the Secretary of Defence, the Department called in the Argentine Charge d'Affaires to express the Department's support for and interest in the successful conclusion of a contract to supply electronic warfare equipment to the Argentine Air Force in the face of Israeli and US competition.

The text of the Aide Memoire handed to Mr Escalona is quoted below:

"

AIDE MEMOIRE

SUPPORT FOR SOUTH AFRICAN (AVITRONICS) BID FOR THE SUPPLY OF ELECTRONIC WARFARE EQUIPMENT TO ARGENTINE AIR FORCE

The Department of Foreign Affairs has received a request from the Office of the Secretary for Defence for support on a political level, of a bid for the supply of an Electronic Warfare (EW) system, submitted to the Argentine Air Force by AVITRONICS, a South African company.

AVITRONICS has reason to believe that from a technical point of view, their product is the preferred option. This has also been stressed by the Argentine Air Force authorities throughout the tender process.

Other possible suppliers are Litton (USA) and Elisra (Israel). It is believed that American and Israeli interest groups are lobbying at a high political level to favour their respective bids.

If AVITRONICS is successful, the potential foreign exchange earnings for South Africa would be worth US\$ 32 million.

The Department does not wish to intervene in the internal processes of the Argentinian authorities as it considers such actions as improper in terms of diplomatic practice and the excellent relations which exist between South Africa and Argentina.

South Africa's trade with other states forms an integral part of its Reconstruction and Development Programme. It consequently places a high premium on the existing trend in regard to the increased development and cooperation in the area of bilateral trade with Argentina. It is the view that the potential exists to build on the basis established and seeks the assistance of the Argentinian authorities to promote this process wherever possible.

PRETORIA
19 October 1995"

The discussion took place in a very positive atmosphere.

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ARGENTINA: REPRESENTATIONS RE AIRFORCE PURCHASES

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1. Thank you for your 95vhkba0387ra of 19951024.
2. The contents of the Aide Memoire handed to the Argentine Charge d' Affaires was discussed with the Military Attache at the Mission, as we were aware of the fact that a SA company tendered for this project. He informed me of the following:

He was recently unofficially informed that the Argentine Defence Ministry has decided to enter into a contract to purchase EW equipment from the Elisra company in Israel. The MA has informed his Head Office of this information at that time, but until now he has not received any official confirmation of this. Also please note that the MA would most probably not have been informed of the outcome of the tender procedure immediately after a decision was taken, as AVITRONICS competed in this tender process in private capacity. However, during our discussion, a few interesting aspects concerning the matter come to the fore.

Some months ago a deal to purchase a number of AR Skyhawk aircraft from the US by the Argentine Air Force was concluded. However, these Skyhawks needed upgrading and Lockheed USA obtained the contract to upgrade the airplanes locally in Argentina. The EW equipment which was tendered for forms part of this upgrade. According to the MA, available information indicates that the US authorities

have brought pressure upon the Argentine defence authorities not to purchase the equipment from South Africa, although the Argentine Air Force favoured the South African system.

The reasons for this could be three-fold:

- (a) The Lockheed Company is not knowledgeable on the SA system and therefore prefers a known system;
- (b) Political pressure brought about through Lockheed could have swayed the decision in the favour of the Israeli company, presumably because the Israeli system is probably known to the US/Lockheed.
- (c) A US desire to have control over electronic warfare equipment, especially where they have some interests. As evidence of this, the MA informed me that he was informed that within NATO, all electronic warfare communications, tactics and functioning of equipment are controlled by the US. For instance during the latest NATO offensive in Bosnia, the US military personnel programmed all the electronic warfare systems and communications, and after the offensive, disarmed/dismantled these systems again. It was not allowed for individual member countries of NATO participating in the offensive, to have control over these actions individually. Therefore it could be presumed that the US Air Force and probably Lockheed also has extensive knowledge of the Israeli System.

It is also rumoured that the UK had brought pressure on the US/Lockheed to ensure that South Africa does not become the supplier of EW equipment, as our system is rather unknown to them and is recognized as very sophisticated and advanced. The UK might harbour the desire that such a system should not be controlled by Argentina - rather another system that is more familiar. Currently the UK is still maintaining an arms boycott against Argentina since the 1982 Falklands war.

3. COMMENT

The reason for US interference in the matter is probably two-fold. First of all they were not prepared to sell their own system to Argentina, as this system is seen to be too sensitive and only to be controlled by US. Secondly, the lingering Armscor court ruling in the US, which at the moment has an influence on US/SA military relations and on the marketing of SA arms internationally, might have been the reason why the US is actively countering SA initiatives in this field.

If the information as conveyed in this cable is valid, it appears that Argentina has already reached a decision to purchase the EW equipment from Israel. Perhaps the Department could consult the Ministry of Defence and AVITRONICS whether the SA tender for supplying EW equipment was not accepted.

4. Your comments would be appreciated.

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