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SUBJECT **SECDEF MEETING WITH ITALIAN MINISTER OF DEFESNE**
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SECDEF FOR USDP, ISA, ISA/EURNATO

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TAGS: PREL, MARR, MOPS, NATO, IT, AF, IR, KV
SUBJECT: SECDEF MEETING WITH ITALIAN MINISTER OF
DEFESNE
IGNACIO LA RUSSA ON **FEBRUARY 6, 2010**

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Classified By: Ambassador Alexander Vershbow for Reasons
1.4 (B) and (D
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1. (S/NF) SUMMARY: Secretary of Defense Robert Gates (SecDef) met with Italian Minister of Defense Ignacio La Russa during an official visit to Rome on February 6-7, 2010. La Russa expressed deep appreciation for SecDef's visit and for the chance to focus on bilateral defense relations rather than only NATO matters. SecDef thanked La Russa for his personal efforts to secure 1000 more Italian troops for operations in Afghanistan. Discussions on Afghanistan also touched on training for Afghan Security Forces, caveats on Italian troops, and intelligence sharing. SecDef asked La Russa for Italian government advocacy in recognizing NATO SOFA jurisdiction in the case of Colonel Joseph Romano. La Russa stated that direct U.S. intervention during the appeals process would be the best way to successfully resolve the matter. SecDef asked La Russa to assist in the resolution of thorny force posture issues at Naval Support Station (NSS) Gricignano and Mobile User Objective System (MUOS) Niscemi. SecDef and La Russa agreed that further force reductions in Kosovo must be dictated by conditions on the ground. La

Russa concurred that further pressure on Iran was needed and committed that Italy would do what was asked to apply that pressure. SecDef and La Russa also discussed the Joint Strike Fighter program. END SUMMARY.

Afghanistan

2. (S/NF) La Russa started the meeting by confirming that Italy is satisfied with General McChrystal's approach to Afghanistan. He expressed contentment with the prospective bifurcation of RC-South into a two commands. La Russa noted that of the 1000 new troops Italy has committed, some will be used for training the Afghan National Army and others will be used for police training. La Russa also thanked SecDef for his initiative to get Allies better counter-improvised explosive device (C-IED) equipment in Afghanistan and to improve intelligence sharing.

3. (S/NF) SecDef commended Italy's leading role in RC-West and La Russa's personal efforts to increase Italian contributions, noting that training Afghans to take responsibility for their own security is the best means to a successful transition. SecDef commented that Afghan security forces needed to be trained at the same level and with the same skills, noting the importance of removing caveats that restrict ISAF forces' ability to partner with Afghan forces. SecDef assured La Russa that the creation of RC-SW will have no operational impact on Italian forces and explained that the stand-up of an intelligence fusion cell in RC-W will improve intelligence sharing immensely. SecDef assured La Russa that the U.S. is providing all available intelligence to Italy, but that if Italy has unmet needs, General McChrystal will try to help. Finally, SecDef stressed that providing Allies with better C-IED equipment would be his top priority upon returning to Washington.

4. (S/NF) La Russa detailed an Italian caveat requiring a six-hour waiting period for deploying Italian troops in RC-W, explaining that it is meaningless in practical terms given that operational planning takes at least that long to conduct. While believing it was unnecessary and largely a

"psychological" issue, La Russa committed to asking the Council of Ministers to remove the caveat if the United States requested.

Haiti

5. (C) SecDef commended the rapid deployment of the Italian Aircraft Carrier CAVOUR to Haiti after the recent earthquake. La Russa stated that the ship had arrived and was beginning

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to unload goods and that the embarked engineering task force had begun debris clearing work. La Russa also said that Italy is likely to send 100-120 Carabinieri to Haiti to assist in relief efforts. SecDef replied that the Carabinieri would be a welcome addition. The United Nations Mission to Haiti (MINUSTAH) -- which suffered major losses -- would need to sustain relief efforts for a long period of time.

Abu Omar/Romano Case

6. (S/NF) SecDef thanked La Russa for his efforts to have the Italian Minister of Justice send letters to relevant judicial authorities affirming U.S. jurisdiction over Colonel Romano under the NATO SOFA in the Abu Omar case. Recalling his meeting with Prime Minister BERLUSCONI, SecDef hoped that the appeals process would offer additional opportunities for GOI advocacy. Drawing on his own legal background, La Russa advised the U.S. to be more present in the appeals process and not leave it solely to the Italian government to make the case for recognition of U.S. jurisdiction. He noted that the assertion of jurisdiction late in the trial had given prosecutors a chance to politicize the issue. SecDef reminded La Russa that the U.S. decision not to immediately assert jurisdiction was made at the advice of GOI and has not served U.S. interests well.

U.S. Force Posture in Italy

7. (S/NF) SecDef requested that La Russa take a personal interest in resolving problems with NSS Gricignano and MUOS

Niscemi. He stated that lack of recognition of NSS Gricignano as a military facility was a major problem and that the security of U.S. forces was non-negotiable. On MUOS

Niscemi, SecDef requested that La Russa assist in securing final approval for the site, noting that if construction of the antenna did not begin by March, the U.S. might have to look elsewhere in the Mediterranean.

8. (S/NF) La Russa told SecDef that he believed there was a solution for NSS Gricignano, although current law does not permit handing over security fully. La Russa proposed the area be given a special status, after which a bilateral agreement between the U.S. and Italy would allow the U.S. to assume security responsibilities. La Russa did not comment on the status of MUOS Niscemi.

Iran

9. (S/NF) La Russa began discussion on Iran by noting the significant value of NATO's nuclear deterrent for the credibility of Articles 4 and 5 of the Washington Treaty. La Russa characterized the attitude of the government in Tehran

as provocative and believed its actions have serious implications for global peace and security. La Russa cautioned that sanctions can backfire, making the targeted government stronger and hurting the population. He cited 1936 sanctions against Italy as an example. La Russa confided that Italian defense contractor Finmeccanica had quietly decided against renewing a lucrative contract in Iran, noting that industry was becoming more sensitized to the consequences of doing business with Tehran.

10. (S/NF) SecDef referred to a past CIA study that had concluded that sanctions bring the desired results if there is broad-based application among nations for required measures. He cited South Africa as a successful case study. SecDef stated his belief that if Iran is allowed to continue its nuclear program, the result will be greater nuclear proliferation in the Middle East, a war, or both. Businesses

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need to see past their short-term profit margin and grasp this reality. La Russa agreed completely and stated that Italy is ready to support the sanctions track.

Kosovo

11. (S/NF) SecDef and La Russa agreed that the Alliance must follow its "in together, out together" policy for Kosovo and that conditions on the ground should dictate when to draw down force levels. SecDef noted that he had broached this topic with other Defense Ministers whose governments had contemplated unilateral reductions of forces. La Russa added that Italy was prepared to shift to a deterrence posture at the appropriate time, but that Italy understood the value of leaving enough forces to protect troubled areas.

Joint Strike Fighter

12. (C) La Russa stated that Italy was ready to be both a partner and a customer in the Joint Strike Fighter (JSF) program. He explained the importance of modernizing the Italian Air Force through JSF. SecDef responded that the U.S. retained confidence in the program after the recent restructuring and that the U.S. was committed to purchasing 360 aircraft between FY11 and FY15. He added that the U.S. fully understands Italy's desire for greater industrial participation and voiced his support for the establishment of a final assembly facility in Italy. SecDef noted some \$350M in contracts so far for Italian industry, with the potential for substantially more in the future.

13. (U) SecDef has cleared this cable. Drafted by OSD staff.
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