

Argentina

PD



DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Washington, D.C. 20520

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January 26, 1979  
Department of State, A/GIS/IPS/SRP

TO: The Secretary  
The Deputy Secretary

FROM: HA - Patricia M. Derian

SUBJECT: Next Steps in Argentina

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Date 12-5-4~~

The increasing magnitude and brutality of Argentine human rights violations convince me that it is time for us to take additional measures to underscore our concerns and bring pressure to bear on the Junta to make improvements. Only substantial pressure across a broad front is likely to have any real effect, and there are a number of things we can and should do.

The situation is clearly deteriorating:

-- 38 bodies, many of them without heads or hands, were recently washed ashore on one of Argentina's Atlantic beaches. A Buenos Aires newspaper which had investigated the report killed the story at the direction of the Presidential Press Office.

-- Our Embassy estimates that about 55 disappearances a month take place in Argentina. The International Red Cross representative in Buenos Aires recently characterized the disappearances as "a calculated policy" of the Argentine authorities.

-- For the past three weeks, security forces have arrested and threatened to imprison mothers of the disappeared who have held weekly silent demonstrations in the capital's main square for the past two years. This heavy-handed police intimidation follows by only a few weeks the soothing promises given the mothers by a Presidential Palace spokesman at Christmas.

-- An officer of the Argentine Permanent Assembly for Human Rights told our Embassy in December that security forces simply murdered a couple in their own home without bothering to take them to a detention center. The same source said he had received other recent reports of such killings.

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- 2 -

-- We continue to receive numerous highly credible reports that torture is used routinely in the interrogation of detainees. The electric "picana," something like a supercharged cattle prod, is still apparently a favorite tool, as is the "submarine" treatment (immersion of the head in a tub of water, urine, excrement, blood, or a combination of these).

-- Prison treatment of the 3,200 acknowledged political detainees has deteriorated sharply in recent months, according to the International Red Cross representative in Argentina. Torture, beatings, and dietary neglect are common for them and for the unacknowledged detainees held in secret military facilities. Another source reported that fifty female detainees recently transferred between prisons "have not been exposed to the sun for so long that their skin color is greenish...Some have lost their eyesight. Many are mentally deranged."

These developments illustrate the reasons why I believe we should, at a minimum, take these actions:

-- Vote "No" on all IFI loans to Argentina which do not clearly meet the basic human needs criteria, and at least invite other donor countries to take similar action.

-- Switch from "Yes" to "Abstain" on IFI loans which meet the basic human needs criteria.

-- Instruct our Delegate to the UN Human Rights Commission to make a strong statement condemning Argentine human rights violations.

-- Begin to deny commercial licenses of military-related equipment destined to the Argentine Armed Forces, as we now do with equipment for the police.

-- Deny or delay Export-Import Bank financing for new projects in Argentina. If necessary, we should seek a Presidential determination under the Chaffee Amendment that denial would advance U. S. human rights objectives.

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- 3 -

-- Mount major new diplomatic effort to persuade foreign arms suppliers to stop selling military and police equipment to Argentina.

-- Give careful consideration to suspending or halting entirely the pipeline of U. S. - origin military equipment purchased by Argentina under earlier programs.

-- In connection with, and explanation of, the above measures, issue a strong public statement condemning the continuing deterioration of Argentine human rights practices.

We simply have to begin to take measures like these if we expect to see any meaningful improvements. There is no longer any doubt that Argentina has the worst human rights record in South America. We cannot wait for the Inter-American Human Rights Commission visit at the end of May. While we hope that Argentine Government preparations for the visit, and the visit itself, will result in some improvements, we should not rely exclusively on this event. A high-ranking Foreign Ministry official recently said his government plans to stonewall the Commission on the disappearance issue.

We would not be alone in taking more forceful measures. I understand that both Canada and the UK share the view that the situation is worsening. Canada, as a result, has halted transfers--not just of arms--to the Argentine military. Both countries, as well as some Scandinavian countries, are seriously considering opposing IFI loans to Argentina.

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HA Subject Files

1

Argentina - Aug 9 Testimony

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