

THE PRESIDENT'S DAILY BRIEF

March 11, 1977

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At Annex we discuss the problem of human rights in Latin America.

For The President Only

LATIN AMERICA

The actions of military governments in South America against real or perceived threats from subversive groups have led to numerous violations of human rights over the years. Largely as the result of international opinion and publicity, there has been a slight improvement in the countries that have been the chief targets of criticism. These are Chile, Argentina, Uruguay, and Paraguay. The situation has also improved in Brazil, but violations of human rights still occur there.

Argentina

Violations by both the left and right remain serious in Argentina, although the frequency and scale of abuses by security forces and rightist vigilantes have diminished somewhat since last summer. The government now issues public lists of those it detains; the completeness and accuracy of the lists, however, is open to question.

International criticism of the human rights situation in Argentina has caused considerable irritation among government officials, particularly those charged with stopping leftist guerrilla warfare. President Videla has indicated that he expects some worsening of relations with the US over human rights, but he apparently feels constrained by hard-line factions within the armed forces.

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For The President Only

The government has had some success in limiting terrorism, but much remains to be done. Should the terrorists renew their provocations, those who direct the campaign against them would probably push for a return to the roundups of leftist suspects that were relatively common a year ago.

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- B. The abortive attempt by a hardline Argentine Army General, Luciano Menendez, to oust moderate Army chief Viola over the weekend was apparently triggered by the government's release and deportation of newspaper publisher Timerman last week. Menendez and other military hardliners have also been unhappy over the government's recent invitation to an Organization of American States mission to investigate human rights violations, over President Videla's policy of seeking a negotiated settlement of the Beagle Channel dispute, and over government economic policies. Menendez' failure to rally significant support for his bloodless revolt should strengthen the hand of Videla and Viola in dealing with other hardline opponents of their policies.

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ARGENTINA: New foreign
policy directions

The Argentine Government, increasingly irritated by US criticism of Argentina's human rights practices and US advice on how to develop a nuclear program, is seeking to strengthen its ties with France and several Communist and Arab countries.

Argentina recently purchased 170 jet engines from the French, who-- despite their own disagreements with the Argentines over human rights--are apparently willing to sell arms and may provide the military training previously given

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by the US. Junta member Admiral Massera recently visited Romania and claims to have opened up new possibilities for bilateral trade. Foreign Minister Montes will travel to Romania this month and to the USSR later in the year. An Argentine economic delegation is currently visiting Libya, Algeria, and Iraq.

The USSR, a relatively minor trading partner for Argentina, imports far more from the Argentines than it exports to them and would welcome an opportunity to correct this imbalance. Moscow has expressed strong interest in providing turbines for Argentina's massive Yacyreta hydroelectric project, for which the Export-Import Bank turned down concessionary financing on human rights grounds.

The Argentines are obviously posturing to some extent about strengthening relations with Communist nations. Their conservative political bias and their fears regarding potential subversion probably preclude any close diplomatic alignment or the purchase of Soviet military equipment. Nevertheless, Argentine

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willingness to turn to the Communists on economic grounds is likely to increase if the US Congress denies supplier credits through the Export-Import Bank of approximately \$800 million for US exports to Argentina.

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At Annex we review reactions to your statements on human rights.

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HUMAN RIGHTS: FOREIGN REACTIONS

We review below what we have learned concerning reactions to your statements on human rights from governments outside the Soviet sphere of influence.

There have been no official reactions from Europe. European governments have expressed concern for some time that the US might press the issue too hard at the review conference on compliance with the Helsinki accords.

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We have seen no specific Chilean reaction, but the regime has been trying for some time to improve its human rights image. Abuses continue but are fewer in number.

Argentine President Videla has said that he regrets having problems with the US over human rights but sees no alternative to continuing the fight against subversion.

Nicaraguan President Somoza believes emphasis on human rights is proper but that it is hard to see how you or anyone else can persuade other governments to change their practices--especially if they think strong measures are required for their survival.

The Uruguayan government thinks US legislation penalizing countries that violate human rights is unfair, and that US officials have a distorted view of conditions in Uruguay. There is evidence, nonetheless, that the government is considering ways to improve its human rights image.

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