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3/17/78

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MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Argentine Ratification of Treaty of Tlatelolco and U.S. Government Policy Towards Argentine Navy

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PARTICIPANTS: Admiral Massera, Navy Commander-in-Chief
Vice-Admiral Luchetta, Office of Navy Secretary General
Captain Montemayor, Office of Navy Secretary General
F. Allen Harris, Political Officer, U.S. Embassy

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PLACE: Admiral Massera's Conference Room, Edificio Libertad, Buenos Aires, Argentina

DATE: March 17, 1978

Background

Captain Montemayor, with whom Tony Freeman and I lunched on March 16, called and asked if we would be able to meet with him late in the afternoon on March 17. Mr. Freeman was occupied. I went alone to the Navy Command and was met by Captain Montemayor and Admiral Luchetta, and ushered into an ornate conference room. After a few minutes of small talk, Admiral Massera entered much to my surprise. The following are the major points of the discussion:

Navy Initiatives

Admiral Massera, after a few initial pleasantries, launched directly into earnest conversation. He said that the Navy has done many things of interest to the United States. Navy initiatives, he said, were responsible for the Christmas amnesty lists, and a listing of P.E.N. prisoners which included the jail location of where they were being detained. The Navy was responsible for the release of Mrs. Deutsch and two of her daughters, in that of Guillermo Vogler and was now working on the Timerman case. Massera added that he was pushing for the military government to issue a list of the dead as well as those held under the P.E.N. He added that this was opposed by the other services but he would continue to push this idea. (Note: That this is under serious study within the Navy was confirmed at a subsequent lunch on March 22 with Admiral Santa Maria, head of the Argentine Coast Guard.) The Admiral pointed out that the Navy has done and is doing many things which support U.S. objectives in Argentina. These were done in an effort to show good faith.

Ratification of Tlatelolco

Massera continued that there now was another major issue of interest to the United States before the government of Argentina. President Videla

ARGENTINA PROJECT (S200000044)

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has proposed ratifying the Treaty of Tlatelolco. There is strong opposition to Argentine ratification within the Navy. Massera indicated that he has been opposed to ratification and that Videla cannot sign the Treaty of Tlatelolco without the support of the Navy. He emphasized that Argentina's signing the treaty does not depend on Videla; it depends on the Navy. Massera then stated that he had decided after all to support the Tlatelolco Treaty and that tonight he planned to call Videla and inform him of the Navy's decision and tell Videla that he can put the Tlatelolco issue on the agenda for Monday's Junta meeting. (It was unclear whether the reference was to Monday, March 20 or Monday, March 27.)

Lack of a U.S. Response

After these introductory points, Massera then posed a rhetorical question, "What has the U.S. government's reply been to the Navy?" He noted that while the Army and the Air Force have received needed major items of equipment from the U.S., the Navy requests have been rejected. He stated forcefully that "this puts me in a corner." He commented that he has been responsive to issues in which the United States is interested. By way of another example, he pointed out that just yesterday he had met with the wife and Rabbi of Jacobo Timerman to discuss a Navy initiative to have Timerman removed from jail and allowed at least to live under house arrest. Massera then pointed out forcefully that he has nothing to show for his efforts. He asked, "Why am I discriminated against? Why is it that only the Navy's requests are not met?"

I responded that the U.S. government had noted the number of improvements in the human rights area in Argentina. The recent U.S. vote on the World Bank loans was a signal from the U.S. government noting human rights progress made in Argentina. Unfortunately, the Navy requests (T-34 C trainer aircraft and executive airplanes and spare parts for the Lockheed P-2 and the Grumann S-2 airplanes) had apparently been turned down prior to the human rights improvements which had taken place since Christmas. I said I felt this was unfortunate, but that perhaps in the long run all factors could be accommodated.

Domestic Politics

Subsequently the Admiral spoke of the domestic political situation. The Admiral said he would not deny that he had many contacts within Argentine society. He was, in fact, sought out by many important sectors of the country. He emphasized that the major Navy interest is in the restoration of a civilian government. This military government can last only another 2-3 years. Army plans for 6-8 years of military rule are not based on the reality of Argentina. This country, he emphasized, is not Brazil. Our people are different, he said, and will not stand for a long-term military rule. The armed forces role is to intervene when things get out of hand but not to govern the country for long periods of time.

He stated that he felt it was important that the Navy maintain contacts with all of the important sectors in society. The Admiral mentioned that

In this conference room the previous night he had had a long and useful discussion with a number of Argentine labor leaders. Yesterday he had met with a Mr. Anchorena who represented another significant group in the country. (Note: Perhaps Manuel Anchorena, a once prominent Peronist.) He added that he was the only member of the Junta who had met with the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo.

Massera affirmed that he will retire this year and sincerely hopes that he will be able to stay at home. However, he said he would be frank, and that if the circumstances warrant it within the next two years he could be called by certain groups to participate in a political process in the country. He noted that after two years it was very difficult to know if he would have any role to play in Argentine politics. He added that neither Videla and Agosti has any special political ability or inclinations. He emphasized that he is not even certain that Videla would become the "fourth" man, as that decision must be made unanimously by all the Junta members. The decision was not when Videla should become the "fourth" man, but whether he was the person the armed forces believed had the most capacity to administer the country,

U.S. Interests and Problems

I commented during the conversation that the U.S. was very aware of the important pending political developments and watched them with great interest. I emphasized that our major concerns in Argentina focused on two major bilateral issues: human rights and non-proliferation.

I stated that any steps taken by the government to resolve the desaparecido issue would certainly be welcomed in Washington. However, I added that the real concern was with the continuation of night-time antisubversive activities outside of the framework of Argentine legal procedures.

I mentioned the Embassy's interest in having strong bilateral relations with Argentina, particularly in being able to continue to offer training to members of the Argentine armed forces. I noted that Admirals Massera and Luchetta had both been in the United States and had not only received advanced training there, but had come to understand Americans and how our society worked. I indicated that there were, however, difficult problems with respect to providing training inasmuch as all training would be stopped by law on October 1, 1978 and a number of people in Washington saw that as an expression of the will of Congress to end training now. Admiral Massera acknowledged the importance of training and the close ties which have been established between the United States and many senior officers in the Argentine Navy.

I said that I also wanted to take advantage of this unusual meeting with the Admiral to express a personal opinion regarding a decision before the Argentine government whether to accept a visit from the Interamerican Human Rights Commission. I indicated that in my own view, our human rights dialogues with Uruguay and Paraguay had broken down primarily over the issue of the visit of the Interamerican Human Rights Commission.

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The visit of the Commission was seen in terms of national sovereignty and discussions with those governments with respect to human rights issues. I became submerged in the issue of the visit. I expressed my personal hope that the Navy would give serious consideration to accepting the visit of the Interamerican Human Rights Commission to Argentina. I noted that the Embassy had received no instructions on this matter as yet from Washington, and we had actually learned about the invitation from the local press, as it was an internal OEA matter. However, I noted that the refusal of Argentina to accept a visit from the Interamerican Human Rights Commission would be regarded by many observers of Argentina in the Congress and the Administration as a basic indication of the government's human rights intentions. Admiral Massera stated that he agreed with these comments and hoped that the Interamerican Human Rights Commission would be able to visit Argentina.

Conclusion of Meeting

The meeting broke up. I then adjourned to Vice Admiral Luchetta's office where we reviewed the conversation. Admiral Luchetta emphasized that Massera was not indicating any kind of a trade with respect to favorable consideration for Navy purchases in the United States in exchange for the Treaty of Tlatelolco. He pointed out that there is a very real concern within the Navy over the lack of responsiveness of the U.S. government to the good faith efforts of the Navy to improve relations. He specifically mentioned the Navy invitation to U.S. CNO Admiral Holloway, which had been declined, and the "signal" which had been received that Admiral Massera's request to visit Washington had not been approved. Admiral Luchetta stated the Navy is the only Argentine service which has not received any positive signals.

Luchetta took credit for having convinced Admiral Massera that the Navy should support the Treaty of Tlatelolco. He stated that during the previous day's luncheon conversation, he had gained an appreciation of the significance which President Carter and Secretary Vance personally attached to the ratification of the Treaty of Tlatelolco. He stated he had reviewed his notes from the Interamerican Defense College on the Treaty and had discussed the issue with the Admiral and was able to convince him of the importance of Navy support for ratification.

Admiral Luchetta stated that Admiral Massera was not threatening the U.S. in any way, but wanted to send a very clear signal that the U.S. government was receiving support for its human rights and non-proliferation policies from the Navy. As a separate matter, Admiral Massera wished also to indicate that the Navy has not received any positive signals from the U.S. government and this was a matter of serious concern.

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