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DEPARTMENT OF STATE

BRIEFING MEMORANDUM

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Argentina

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[Redacted] (Entire Text)

TO: P - Mr. Newsom

FROM: ARA - John A. Bushnell Acting

Your Lunch with the Argentine Ambassador,
July 27, 12:30 p.m.

SETTING

Ambassador Aja Espil has invited you to lunch for a tour d'horizon of U.S.-Argentine relations. He is likely to express his concern that the U.S. has not responded to improvements that have taken place in the human rights situation in Argentina. He will note the virtual end of disappearances over the past five months, the continuing release of prisoners held under executive detention (PEN), and continuing efforts of the judiciary to reassert its independence and authority.

Aja Espil will also express concern that, while President Videla and Army Commander-in-Chief Viola have taken risks to effect significant human rights improvements, they have not been able to demonstrate within Argentina that there has been any improvement in relations with the U.S. as a result. The Ambassador will note that the annual military change of command cycle, which occurs in December, will be an important time of testing between the moderates in the Argentine Army -- such as Videla and Viola -- who seek to end human rights abuses, and the hardliners -- such as Army Chief of Staff General Suarez Mason -- who wish to continue repressive policies and oppose plans to put Argentina back on the path toward political normalization.

Aja Espil will argue that the U.S. should take steps to make clear that we recognize progress has occurred and may suggest that symbolic gestures -- such as high-level visits -- be scheduled to demonstrate support for Videla and Viola. He will return to Buenos Aires on consultations in early August.

ARGENTINA PROJECT (S200000044)
U.S. DEPT. OF STATE, A/RPS/IFS
Margaret P. Grafield, Director
(X) Release () Excise () Deny
Exemption(s):

Declassify: () In Part (X) In Full
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Date Declassify on Reason

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KEY ISSUES

1. Human Rights

ESSENTIAL FACTORS

There has been some progress in the human rights situation in Argentina. Disappearances have declined sharply. There have been 13 unaccounted-for disappearances since February 1 with the last occurring on May 13. Disappearances averaged 55 per month in 1978. The GOA has continued to release prisoners held under PEN. The level now stands at 1,723 and should be under 1,000 by the end of this year. The ICRC reports that prison conditions have improved. The judiciary is beginning to reassert itself, but there has been little concrete progress so far in key areas such as information on the fate of disappeared persons or legal efforts to force the Government to show sufficient cause for holding alleged subversives under PEN.

U.S. OBJECTIVES

We want to encourage the GOA to continue its efforts to end human rights abuses and move toward full respect for internationally recognized rights.

ARGENTINE OBJECTIVES

Aja Espil will reaffirm the GOA's commitment to end human rights abuses and particularly the commitment made to us to end disappearances. (It was on the strength of Argentine assurances on this point that we decided to maintain a position of abstention on Argentine loans in the multilateral banks.)

YOUR TALKING POINTS

-- We are pleased that Argentina has moved effectively to curb disappearances. We hope that the Argentine Government will continue its investigations of the disappearances that have taken place recently and make every effort to end this practice.

-- We are encouraged by the releases of prisoners from PEN and hope that these will continue so that all persons held without charge will either be released

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or given early opportunities to defend themselves in fair judicial proceedings, and that persons exonerated by the courts or who have served their sentence will be released promptly.

-- We continue to be concerned that the relatives of the disappeared have not been able to obtain information on their missing family members. We hope that the Argentine Government will seek methods by which they can be provided information.

2. Jacobo Timerman

ESSENTIAL FACTORS

Timerman remains under house arrest and General Viola recently told Ambassador Castro that it is not likely that he will be released in the near future. Timerman is a cause celebre for the hardliners in the Argentine military as much as he is for us and human rights groups, and Viola asserts that he cannot release Timerman for fear of provoking a serious reaction from the hardliners and risking his balance of power within the military.

U.S. OBJECTIVES

To urge the GOA to release Timerman.

ARGENTINE OBJECTIVES

Aja Espil will sympathize with our concern over Timerman's continued house arrest but will picture his case as an extremely sensitive one within Argentina.

YOUR TALKING POINTS

-- We remain deeply concerned over Jacobo Timerman's continued detention, especially in light of judicial actions in Argentina ruling his detention illegal.

-- We hope that the Argentine Government will free him without further delay.

3. Right of Option

ESSENTIAL FACTORS

The GOA has released 18 persons for travel to

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the U.S. under the right of option program. Thirteen of them have entered the U.S. under our refugee parole program out-of approximately 100 who have received certificates of acceptability. The program has been beset with delays and denials, including a few cases in which GOA approval was withdrawn. The GOA has released approximately 170 persons for travel to all countries under the right of option since September 1977.

U.S. OBJECTIVES

We want the GOA to release detainees as quickly as possible.

ARGENTINE OBJECTIVES

Aja Espil will note that the government plans to release more right of option applicants and he will say that he is urging this be done more quickly.

YOUR TALKING POINTS

-- Taking into consideration the assurances Ambassador Castro has received from General Viola, we had hoped to see greater progress in the area of right of option.

-- We hope that the Argentine Government will give high priority attention to approving applications for right of option and allow these PEN detainees to travel to the U.S. and other countries.

4. Political Evolution and U.S. Policy

ESSENTIAL FACTORS

The annual military change of command will take place in December and Army Commander Viola hopes to replace himself with another moderate, possibly Buenos Aires Corps Commander General Galtieri. Hardliners, such as Army Chief of Staff General Suarez Mason and Cordoba Corps Commander Menendez, will seek to place one of their number in this key position. Viola will want to arrange a scenario in which he can succeed Videla in the presidency in March 1981. At the moment, the moderates offer the best prospects for ending human rights abuses and for a movement toward political normalization, although no plan for this has been worked out within the military.

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U.S. OBJECTIVES

We want to encourage the political evolution of Argentina toward democratic government although we recognize that our influence in this area is limited and elections cannot be expected in the near future. We would prefer to see the moderates hold the predominant position within the military but we do not want to become involved in the internal power struggle.

ARGENTINE OBJECTIVES

Aja Espil may suggest that the U.S. could play an important role in support of President Videla and General Viola and that we should take some public action to help bolster their prestige and authority during the year-end change of command/promotion cycle.

YOUR TALKING POINTS

-- We want to support and encourage the return of Argentina to elected government but we recognize that this must be the result of efforts by the Argentines themselves.

-- As we perceive progress in the human rights area we will respond with concrete actions.

5. Beagle Channel

ESSENTIAL FACTORS

The Papal mediation of the Beagle Channel dispute is still in progress, although no early outcome is expected. There are some indications that groups within the Argentine Armed Forces will seek to heat up the dispute toward year-end, partly as a political ploy in the military change of command/promotion cycle.

U.S. OBJECTIVES

We want Argentina and Chile to continue working with the Vatican in the mediation process.

ARGENTINE OBJECTIVES

Aja Espil will probably express support for the mediation, but may express concern that delay in reaching an outcome will bring trouble.

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YOUR TALKING POINTS

-- We were very pleased last January when Argentina and Chile agreed to submit the Beagle Channel dispute to the Vatican for mediation.

-- We still believe that this process offers the best prospects for reaching an amicable and mutually acceptable settlement to the dispute.

-- We hope that both sides will continue to work with the Vatican as this understandably slow process moves forward.

6. Nuclear Affairs

ESSENTIAL FACTORS

Argentina is now considering bids from various potential suppliers (Canada, the FRG and Switzerland) for construction of a third nuclear power reactor and a heavy water plant. We have engaged in an active round of consultations on our concerns over the safeguards and other conditions of supply. We are also discussing with the GOA steps it must take to meet the additional U.S. safeguards requirements, which become effective in March 1980, to allow us to continue nuclear cooperation (e.g. supply of fuel for Argentine research reactors). We do not recommend that you raise this issue with Aja Espil since he is not a key player on this problem in the GOA and Argentina fully understands our position. If Aja Espil raises this issue, you may wish to note:

-- We want to cooperate with Argentina in the transfer of equipment and technology necessary for the development of nuclear power. Our cooperation must be consistent with the nuclear export law and policy.

-- (if asked) We have shared our concerns with other nuclear suppliers about Argentine reprocessing plans and have urged them to ask for deferral of this part of Argentina's nuclear program because of its world-wide implications for the spread of sensitive nuclear facilities.

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