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DEPARTMENT OF STATE

7905114

BRIEFING MEMORANDUM

AS 80

S/S

20 MAR 1979

[REDACTED] (ENTIRE TEXT)

To: The Deputy Secretary

Through: P - David D. Newsom *DDN*

From: ARA - Viron P. Vaky *V*

Subject: U.S. Initiatives to effect Human Rights Improvements in Argentina.

As we agreed, I met with Ambassador Aja Espil to express our deep concern over the lack of progress on human rights during 1978. I told him that in the absence of substantial improvement we will shift to negative votes on Argentine non-BHN loans in the IFIs. Aja Espil countered vigorously that the human rights situation is now at a crucial turning point and predicted that we would see dramatic improvement by the time the next Argentina loan comes up in the IFIs, which he assumed would be a couple of months.

Our recent assessment of the human rights situation in Argentina, based on data available at the end of 1978, reflected a failure of the GOA to make improvements that met our expectations. There were two key factors that led to delays in the improvements that senior GOA officials had told us were coming:

- President Videla and Army Commander General Viola still did not have full control of the decision making apparatus in anti-subversive policy.
- The Beagle Channel crisis at the end of 1978 preoccupied the Argentine leadership, put a premium on officer corps unity and made it impossible for them to grapple effectively with human rights abuses.

January was an important turning point for each of these factors. The Beagle Channel dispute was entrusted to Papal mediation. Military command changes removed hardliners on the human rights issue from key commands.

In addition to the changes in the military command

ARGENTINA PROJECT (S200000044)
 U.S. DEPT. OF STATE, A/RPS/IPS
 Margaret P. Grafeld, Director

() Release (X) Excise () Deny

Exemption(s): 1B1

Declassify: (X) In Part () In Full

(X) Classify as C () Extend as () Downgrade to

Date 3/22/01 Declassify on 3/11/11 Reason 15X6

*Additional
 the significance
 the change in
 the 1978
 command*

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structure (which retrospectively may prove to have the greatest significance of all), we have -- since January -- seen a number of other promising signs suggesting a contextual change in the Argentine situation and indicating possibly serious efforts to improve matters:

-- There are no reported disappearances so far for the month of February and March. The reported disappearances for January were well below the 50 per month average of 1978.

-- [who cited a deterioration of prison conditions last December, now has told our DCM that he believes conditions are improving overall. B 1

-- The Foreign Ministry coordinator for human rights matters alleged to be planning to stonewall the IACHR on the problem of the disappeared will have nothing to do with the visit. The GOA is appointing a career diplomat with long experience in the OAS to coordinate the Commission visit.

-- The Argentine Supreme Court has begun to confront the Government on the issue of the disappeared. It protested to President Videla that the GOA has been unresponsive to requests for information on over 1500 disappeared and ordered a lower court to press a habeas corpus writ. Videla responded to the first decision with an official statement that the Government will give greater emphasis to restoring the rule of law.

I realize we have had assurances before, and that these are still ambiguous signs. Nevertheless the combination of indicators are such that I believe we must take them seriously. The Argentines have strong incentives to put their long nightmare of terror and counter-terror behind them. The GOA expects a bad report from the IACHR, but it also wants to show a strong positive trend in the weeks preceding its on-site inspection. Videla and Viola tell us that in fact the IACHR visit is the



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precise catalyst they need to push in the direction of improvement.

It would be tragic and ironic if we were to adopt a more restrictive policy toward Argentina just at the moment the leadership had begun to move and respond to our concerns. Such a shift would wither these favorable trends, and surely weaken the position of Videla and Viola, frustrating their efforts to effect improvements.

The next vote in the IFI's is scheduled for next week. I believe that we should not toughen our position on this vote just at this time; we will be sending an action memorandum up to you in this regard. In the meantime, however, I wanted to convey to you my own concerns and to call your attention to the particular conjunction of circumstances which suggest -- in my view -- that a tougher position now may be exactly the wrong thing to do at the wrong time.

Attachments:

Tab 1 - DIA Intelligence Notice on Argentina Army Command Changes.

Tab 2 - Buenos Aires 1871, Argentine Prison Conditions.

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