



DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Washington, D.C. 20520

May 18, 1978

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MEMORANDUM

TO : P - Mr. David Newsom

FROM : HA - Mark L. Schneider M\

SUBJECT : Argentina

I thought you might be interested in a private lunch at the OAS I attended two days ago with Videla's top civilian aide, Ricardo Yofre who holds the title of Secretary to the Junta. (Note: He does not want anyone to know the meeting took place, particularly the Argentine Government.) At the invitation of Alejandro Orfila's people, I was asked to join with Yofre to discuss the current human rights situation in Argentina. I have talked with Orfila about this subject at various times at his request. Orfila, by the way, is back after a week in Argentina and you might want to chat briefly with him before you go.

Yofre expressed the view that Videla was in control, desired to put an end to the more egregious violations and would do so after August 1. August 1 is the date for Videla to assume the "fourth man" position as President (above the other three junta members). Yofre said the determination of chief of the army was important but that even Menendez (the chief rival of General Viola, Videla's choice) and a very hardline general from Cordoba, would be totally loyal to Videla. He added that Menendez would support some "political plan" which would have to be designed for the recreation of the political system. Clearly, however, it would not be soon and not be autonomous of military control. Yofre felt that discussions with some sectors of the civilian political already had begun, and would continue. The process would be slow, he emphasized.

Slowness also would characterize the resolution of the political prisoner issue. However, after August 1, he anticipates a greater willingness to let the uninvolved prisoners under executive control free, to permit others to go into exile under the right of option program and to turn

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- 2 -

the remainder over to the courts. He used the number 3,800 for prisoners which is about 500 higher than we have been counting. He said he doubted very many more were being kept by security forces; although he acknowledged the possibility of some of the disappeared still being alive. He felt torture was on the decline. His guess was that most either had been killed or fled the country.

He also raised the underlying fear of the military and security forces of a relaxation and a restoration of civilian rule. They feared, he said, a "Nuremberg trial" climate which would threaten them. In this context, I emphasized our desire was not to punish any individuals but to place an end to abuses. He said that any discussion of disappearances tends to engender this concern. (While he wants this ugly issue to go away, it remains a fundamental aspect of concern of the international media, Argentine public opinion and the church and human rights organizations.)

While I would characterize Yofre as extremely bright and able, he is not held with such high regard by the right wing of the military. His house was bombed three times and his identification with the return to democracy concept a well-known view which has resulted in some question being raised in Buenos Aires as to his official tenure.

Drafted by: HA:MLSchneider:bdr
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