

DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Memorandum of Conversation

DATE: 7 July 1976

SUBJECT: President (Lieutenant General Jorge Rafael Videla)

PARTICIPANTS: President (LTG) Jorge R. Videla
 Ambassador Robert C. Hill
 Senator Jesse Helms
 Dr. James Lucier, Assistant to Senator Helms
 Colonel Paul A. Coughlin, DATT/ARMA
 Colonel Mallea Gil, Office of the President

COPIES TO: Ambassador
 STATE, ARA/APU

1. ~~(C)~~ Ambassador Hill, Senator Helms and party entered the Presidents office at 10:10 hours, 6 July 1976. After greetings were exchanged Senator Helms initiated the discussion with a brief explanation of the purpose of his trip. He then went on to explain to the President his perception of the continuing threat posed by communism throughout the world. General Videla responded that he shared the Senator's concern over the serious threat of communism and that in Argentina the threat was perceived as a global one in the economic, political, social, and cultural fields as well as in a purely military sense. By the same token, the Argentine government is convinced that if the threat is to be defeated it must be combatted by a global program encompassing all aspects of daily life of the nation.
2. ~~(C)~~ Senator Helms then referred to the U.S. Presidential elections and briefly discussed each of the principal candidates. The President appeared to be quite interested but made no comment. Ambassador Hill commented that the President should rest assured that regardless of the outcome of the elections, Argentina could count on many friends in the U.S.
3. ~~(C)~~ Senator Helms then brought up the subject of Argentina's image in the eyes of the world, and especially in the US, and suggested that a well thought-out public relations program could pay great dividends. He went on to clarify that he was not necessarily referring to a campaign in the U.S. Press, but through various media, especially television, to reach the average citizen in the U.S. who, by his customs and traditions has values and goals very similar to Argentines. Visits by distinguished Argentines to the US and their meeting.

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with key communicators in the U.S. would be quite useful. General Videla responded saying that he was well aware of the importance of public relations and his government was now beginning such a program. In fact, the appointment of Ambassador Musich to his post in Washington is one step. Rather than base the program of words alone, however, he stressed that Argentina hopes to achieve better understanding and cooperation from foreign countries on the basis of real accomplishments at home. He also emphasized that he believed that the basic values of North Americans and Argentines were quite similar. The struggle with subversive elements in Argentina is to preserve those very values and the Christian traditions of Argentina to permit the eventual return to truly representative and democratic government.

4. (U) As the meeting drew to a close the President presented Senator Helms with a leather bound volume of the epic poem "Martin Fierro," Senator Helms expressed his gratitude for the gift and his appreciation for the opportunity to exchange views with the President. The visiting party departed at 10:45 hours.

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June 28, 1976

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: RECENT CONVERSATION WITH JORGE ANTONIO

PARTICIPANTS: JORGE ANTONIO
RAYMOND MOLINA
AMBASSADOR ROBERT C. HILL ~~X~~
LEGAL ATTACHE ROBERT W. SCHERRER

PLACE: EMBASSY RESIDENCE
BUENOS AIRES, ARGENTINA

I. BACKGROUND OF PARTICIPANTS

JORGE ANTONIO is an Argentine businessman and international financier. He was a close personal confidant of deceased Argentine President JUAN DOMINGO PERON. He accompanied PERON in exile to Madrid, Spain in 1955. He returned to Argentina on 3/20/76 from exile. ANTONIO is of Lebanese origin; is married with eleven children.

RAYMOND MOLINA is a U. S. citizen with business interests in Miami, Florida and Managua, Nicaragua. His residence is in Key Biscayne, Florida; however, he spends considerable time in Managua, where he professes to have a close friendship with President Somoza. MOLINA resided in Cuba, where his father owned a bus company in Santa Clara Province, until FIDEL CASTRO came to power, at which time he went into exile in the U. S. MOLINA's father is Cuban and his mother is American. He received his secondary education in Georgia. He took part and was captured in the Playa Giron invasion. He has been active in Florida politics and campaigned for Florida Senator EDWARD GURNEY in the 1972 elections.

II. THE ERA OF JUAN DOMINGO PERON

(a) Exile in Madrid

During Peron's exile in Madrid he was constantly

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deceived by JOSE LOPEZ REGA and MARIA ISABEL MARTINEZ DE PERON. ANTONIO constantly urged PERON to initiate contact at an appropriate level with the U. S. Embassy in Madrid; however, ANTONIO only succeeded in establishing regular contact with two U. S. Embassy officials named MURRAY and LEE TELL. LOPEZ REGA, recognizing ANTONIO's influence with PERON, constantly strived to create distrust between him and PERON.

LOPEZ REGA took the position that outward friendships with the United States during PERON's period of exile in Madrid was not in PERON's best interests. LOPEZ REGA's position prevailed until PERON visited Romania in 1971 or 1972 and had a private audience with Romanian President Ceausescu during which Ceausescu advised PERON to "make his peace" with the United States. On returning to Madrid, PERON told ANTONIO that he, PERON, had been wrong and ANTONIO correct in the latter's advice to PERON to initiate contact with the U. S. Government. LOPEZ REGA's position of opposition with regard to PERON's renewing his relationship with the United States was based on the premise that PERON was an important, though exiled, leader of the "Third World" and that any contact with the United States by PERON would discredit PERON. The latter told ANTONIO that Ceausescu had privately scoffed at LOPEZ REGA's position.

(b) Return to Argentina and Peron's Views of the Future; his Presidency

PERON fully realized that he had but a few years to live when he permanently returned to Argentina in 1973. He also clearly realized that without his personal leadership, control, orchestration and manipulation of the enormous Peronist political machine and labor sector, these components would flounder and finally fragment into special interest groups, each interested only in attaining and consolidating power. PERON also knew full well that only the military would be able to govern after his, PERON's, death. Accordingly, PERON secretly proposed to President LANUSSE during negotiations in 1972 for elections and PERON's return to Argentina, that he, PERON, run as the presidential candidate, with LANUSSE as the candidate for vice-president. This would allow for a constitutional de facto military government after PERON's death. However, because of LANUSSE's hatred for PERON and resulting prejudices, he refused to even consider PERON's proposal. The candidacy and election of

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HECTOR CAMPORA to the Argentine Presidency followed by CAMPORA's disastrous brief term in office forced PERON himself to step in to restore order. PERON's permanent return to Argentina in 1973 and his own presidency, during which he was constantly betrayed by LOPEZ REGA and company, literally killed PERON. In ANTONIO's view, CAMPORA was an "unwitting fool" who was greatly influenced by his "Marxist sons" and their friends. In his personal opinion, ANTONIO stated that the March, 1976 armed forces intervention of Mrs. PERON's government was completely justified and necessary. Without military intervention, Argentina would soon have found herself on the road to civil war.

III. CURRENT AND FUTURE U.S.-ARGENTINE RELATIONS

ANTONIO views close economic and cultural relations with the United States as a key factor in restoring Argentina to her rightful place. ANTONIO frankly noted that the United States economic assistance and technology were the only hope for Argentina's future. ANTONIO said he hoped the U. S. private economic sector would be encouraged by the U. S. Government to help Argentina and noted that any outward immediate physical assistance by the U. S. would greatly assist Argentina by demonstrating U. S. sympathy with Argentina. As an example, ANTONIO noted that Argentine crops have long suffered because of the failure to utilize effective pest control. ANTONIO hoped that as a sign of U. S. sympathy that perhaps assistance in pest control could be offered and quickly implemented.

IV. ARGENTINE RELATIONS WITH CUBA

ANTONIO stated that it is his personal view that Argentina gained nothing by having diplomatic relations with Cuba, noting that it was a well known fact that numerous Argentine terrorists had traveled to Cuba for training. ANTONIO explained that former Economy Minister JOSE GELBARD utilized Argentine-Cuban relations to make a considerable profit for the Fate Tire Company, since part of the agreement with Cuba for selling Argentine-made vehicles contains the stipulation that each vehicle will be provided with two extra tires to be supplied by the Fate Tire Company. ANTONIO noted that the Argentine Embassy in Havana is extremely restricted in its activities and the number of personnel allowed in the country.

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ANTONIO stated that he thought the most logical immediate approach to the Cuban Embassy in Buenos Aires would be to reduce it on a reciprocity basis with the amount of Argentine diplomatic personnel accredited by the government of Cuba to the Argentine mission in that country.

ANTONIO further noted that culturally and ideologically Cuba and Argentina are miles apart, having only one thing in common, that being the Spanish language. ANTONIO noted that the incumbent Cuban Ambassador to Argentina is internationally known as a morally corrupt individual and a murderer.

V. CURRENT ARGENTINE MILITARY GOVERNMENT

ANTONIO stated that the current Argentine Military Junta, in his personal opinion, are well-meaning with good motivations. ANTONIO stated, however, that he felt that the present Junta might make the common mistake of all previous Argentine military governments in attempting to force upon the Argentine people their code of military conduct. ANTONIO stated that by campaigning against long hair and beards, the military alienated even conservative Argentines, since this has absolutely nothing to do with one's ideological views or one's ability to contribute to rebuilding Argentina.

ANTONIO further noted that many young Argentines simply are misinformed about United States policies and United States historical relations with Argentina. ANTONIO said he hoped that a program could be rapidly implemented to send young Argentine intellectuals to the United States in order that they might secure factual, first-hand information on what the United States is all about. ANTONIO identified two young Argentine intellectuals who are extremely active among their peers as SAAD CHEDID, San Martin #320, Buenos Aires and PEDRO OCHOA, Don Bosco #3535, Apartment #3-C, Buenos Aires. ANTONIO commented that the latter individual was formerly assigned to the Argentine Government Press Secretariat and is an extremely well informed, intelligent and open-minded young man.

ANTONIO stated that the greatest problem facing the Military Government, even more serious than terrorism, was the disastrous state of the Argentine economy. ANTONIO stated that the military appear to have embarked upon a program calling for

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tremendous sacrifices by the working class without any immediate hope of providing them with tangible results showing progress in their economic life. ANTONIO stated the most important thing that the Argentine military can do for the working man is first to provide him with work and secondly to insure that his salary will buy the necessities for his family and in order to afford him pride and dignity corresponding to his position in life.

ANTONIO concluded by stating that obviously Argentina will need tremendous assistance, both materially and in the field of expertise, in order to reverse Argentina's economic decline.

Throughout the conversation JORGE ANTONIO made it clear he was very anti-Communist. My impression of his request to see me was to tell his friends he had been received by an official of the U. S. Government and that he was not persona non grata with the United States.

Copy sent to Jack Smith
East Coast Affairs, Dept.

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