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DEPARTMENT OF STATE
ACTION MEMORANDUM

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Argentina
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JUN 4 1980

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~ (Entire Text)

TO: The Secretary
THROUGH: P - Mr. Newsom
FROM: ARA - William G. Bowdler *WGB*
USOAS - Gale McGee *GM*
SUBJECT: Argentine Initiative to Host OASGA

ISSUE FOR DECISION

Since our memo to you of May 31, 1980, the Government of Argentina unexpectedly began taking soundings which, if favorable, will result in an offer to hold this year's OAS General Assembly in Argentina. We must decide how to react to Argentina's initiative.

We recommend that we react favorably to this initiative provided that improvements in Argentina's human rights situation continue, and provided further, that Argentina's invitation be accepted by a clear majority of OAS members, including all the larger states (Option 1 below).

ESSENTIAL FACTORS

The Argentine Ambassador to the OAS has instructions to sound out member nations on their attitude toward holding the General Assembly in Argentina, at a date not yet fixed but tentatively scheduled for November 12, 1980. He claims to have consulted with a sizeable number of his colleagues, all of whom responded favorably except the Mexican who has asked for time to consult with his Government. Like Mexico, our initial response was non-committal.

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GDS - 6/3/86

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The Argentine human rights record is expected to be the major point of controversy at this year's General Assembly. A highly critical report on this subject was issued in April by the Inter-American Human Rights Commission. Initially, the Argentine Government reacted in a hostile fashion, threatening to minimize its participation in OAS activities. This latest initiative is a sudden 180-degree turn in tactics. By serving as host, the Argentine Government clearly hopes to limit exposure on the human rights issue, and to portray the meeting as a form of international acceptance of its internal policies. OAS acceptance of the Argentine offer would be subject to criticism by private human rights organizations in the U.S. and elsewhere in the hemisphere and by certain members of Congress, who will see it as a ploy. On the positive side, however, it could serve as an additional incentive for the Argentine military establishment to make further progress on human rights and to endorse the report of the Inter-American Human Rights Commission, even if grudgingly.

Moreover, this initiative comes at a time when the President has decided to seek means to improve our bilateral relationship with Argentina. Our response to the GA initiative will likely be seen by the Argentines as an early signal of our current attitude toward the development of our bilateral relationship.

Finally, there is the question of your personal participation. Secretaries of State have always attended General Assemblies of the OAS, at least for the initial sessions. If you could not attend - either because of the time problems of the long trip to Argentina, or for political reasons relating to the sensitive human rights problems of Argentina - the prestige of the meeting would be greatly impaired and our relations with Argentina adversely affected.

THE OPTIONS

There are three options available:

-- We can agree, making it clear to the Argentines that our position and your attendance are conditioned on certain human rights requirements.

-- We can remain non-committal and let the matter resolve itself at the OAS.

-- We can try to head off the initiative, seeking to have the GA held in Washington.

1. Agreement with Conditions

This option has two important advantages: First, your participation and presence in Argentina would be a strong plus in our efforts to improve bilateral relations. Second, it would provide us an additional opportunity for seeking further improvements in the Argentine human rights situation. It would, however, encompass acceptance of the risk of the criticism referred to above, and require that you make a tentative decision to devote some time in November to the GA (we estimate about 5 days, including travel).

Under this option we could tell the GOA that we will support Argentina as host under certain assumptions, as follows:

-- That there is substantial continued progress on human rights. We assume the GOA recognizes in any event that this would be essential for a successful GA held in Buenos Aires. Such progress would include, for instance, no new disappearances (i.e., extra-legal abductions of persons suspected of association with terrorism or subversion, including persons believed to be active terrorists); and substantial further reduction of the number of political prisoners held without charges through release, trial, or exile (during his recent visit, Ambassador Smith was assured that half of these prisoners -- 1300 at the time -- would

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be released or sentenced by the end of the year). It would also be presumed in this regard that the GOA would accept an OASGA resolution which encompassed a call for further improvements by Argentina and which maintained the integrity of the OAS Commission on Human Rights, while recognizing the progress made. We also will urge, as we do on every appropriate occasion, that the GOA find ways to inform families of the fate of the disappeared, including surfacing of any unacknowledged detainees, and will press the Argentines for continued improvement in the prison conditions of those being held under Executive authority.

-- That the lack of such progress, as well as any setbacks in Argentina's currently improving human rights situation between now and November, would make your attendance very difficult, if not impossible.

-- That a clear majority of OAS members, including all the larger states, agree.

2. Remain Non-Committal

This is a stalling option. It would force the GOA to decide whether to proceed without signals from us about the possibility of your attendance. It would lessen our vulnerability to attacks from critics of Argentina's human rights record, and it would not prevent us from eventually conditioning your attendance on human rights improvements. However, it would earn us few points with the Argentines in regard to improving bilateral relations, and might not prevent Argentina from pushing ahead without us.

3. Heading off the Initiative

If we decide that Argentina is an unsuitable host, we could seek to build pressure against it with Mexico and some other countries which are strongly critical of Argentina's human rights record. We do not favor this for two reasons: First, we might not have the votes to defeat a formal invitation tendered by Argentina. Second, our attitude would be seen by Argentina as hostile and therefore would contradict

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the PRC's directive to improve our bilateral relationship which, inter alia, recognizes the improving trend in Argentina's human rights performance.

A second, and more gentle, means of opposing the initiative (although perhaps not definitively) would be to inform the Argentines that your long-range scheduling commitments make it virtually impossible for you to attend any GA held outside of Washington. However, the Argentines would suspect that this was not the real reason, and it is not certain that they would drop their bid if it gained the approval of a strong majority of member states.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That we react favorably to the Argentine initiative, conditioning our response with the points specified above in the discussion of Option 1.

Approve _____ Disapprove _____

2. Alternatively, that we remain non-committal, letting the OAS decide the issue without signals from us about the possibility of your attendance (Option 2).

Approve _____ Disapprove _____

3. Alternatively, we attempt to head off the initiative by informally advising the Argentines that the prospects are very slight of your being able to attend any GA held this year outside of Washington (Option 3).

Approve _____ Disapprove _____

Drafted by: ARA/USOAS:MYohn:dr
6/3/80 x29483

Concurrence: HA: PDerian ⁷³
S/P: SPurcell (Subs) ⁷³