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MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

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March 30, 1977

PARTICIPANTS: Jacobo Korvadlov, American Jewish Committee Representative
 in Argentina
 Patricia Derian, D/HA
 Fernando Rondon, ARA/ECA
 Anthony G. Freeman, POL, Anembassy Buenos Aires

PLACE: Embassy, 8th Floor

DISTRIBUTION: Ambassador Hill

Korvadlov acknowledged that there was an anti-semitic streak which runs through Argentine history. Its origin is in pre-Vatican Council II Catholic Church doctrine which was transmitted to Argentina via heavy Italian and Spanish immigration. Anti-semitism was particularly virulent during the Peronist period, partially because Peron himself was influenced by fascist right-wing thought and partially because Peronism was a demagogic diffuse movement which catered to the masses. The movement was very loosely controlled and permitted antisemitic strains, among others, to flourish under its broad umbrella. Lopez Rega's penchant ran particularly in this direction. (Korvadlov handed Rondon a confidential report on the history of anti-semitism in Argentina.)

Although there were many Catholic rightist military officers today who harbored fascist, anti-semitic tendencies, the current military government itself was not anti-semitic. The greater problem here was one of potential totalitarianism. Korvadlov feared that if the moderate Videla were removed by the "hardline generals," the government would move down a path towards totalitarianism and an official policy of anti-semitism, which historically had been an off-shoot of totalitarianism. He was especially concerned about General Suarez Mason, the Army's First Corps Commander, who particularly was hardline in his approach to eliminating subversion and who may have Presidential aspirations. Ms. Derian mentioned she previously had heard that Gen. Menendez, Third Corps Commander in Cordoba, was the worst offender in terms of human rights abuses and wondered why Korvadlov had singled out Suarez Mason. Korvadlov speculated that Menendez was no longer in the spotlight because the anti-insurgency campaign was essentially over in his area.

One of the hardest things for him to convey to his American colleagues, Korvadlov continued, was that it was in the best interest of Argentina and of the Argentine Jewish community to continue to be governed by a moderate military regime. Civilian governments in recent Argentine history had proven disastrous. Peronist misrule had been unbelievable. The people were too individualistic and self-serving and not prepared for democracy. The political parties had no program to speak of and in fact were opposed to holding elections now. The best bet for the foreseeable future, as far as Korvadlov was concerned, was to stick with Videla and Admiral Massera. (Massera was an old personal friend.) As anti-semitism flourished when governments were weak, he favored a strong military regime, but at the same time it was essential to keep the rulers from becoming totalitarian. He

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thought the US had an important role to play by attempting to exercise influence through an expanded cultural program of exchange visits between Argentine and US military officers. Such a program would help to inculcate a democratic spirit in the Argentine Armed Forces and eventually pave the way toward a civilian opening. He was opposed to a policy of US sanctions against Argentina on account of human rights abuses, because this would strengthen the hand of the totalitarian hardliners in the military.

Asked about the participation of Jewish youth in subversive activities, Korvadlov stated that Jewish youth attended the universities in greater proportion than the population as a whole. That may account for the number of young Argentine Jews involved in left-wing activities. However, there was not an inordinate number involved. Moreover, those Jews who did join the terrorist movement in effect had turned their backs on Judaism and Jewish traditions. The revolutionary terrorist movement was a world-wide phenomenon which was aimed in considerable part against the State of Israel and the few Jewish youths who had joined the movement were renegades against their own people.

Korvadlov did believe that the kind of people who were recruited by the security forces for the para-police counter-terror tended to be authoritarian right-wing fascist types who took special joy in going after Jewish subversives. Anti-semitic slogans had been painted on the walls of Jewish homes which had been raided by these elements. He also had received a report that Jewish prisoners were being segregated in one of the wings of the La Plata prison.

However, Korvadlov thought that in recent months the Videla government was getting a better grip on the problem of uncontrolled police repression and he expressed hope that there would be further moderation in the future. (Nevertheless, it was very difficult for Videla to exercise control over the Army Corps Commanders who were practically war lords in their own regions. In effect, there was an unwritten agreement: They would not tell him how to run his government and he could not interfere in their handling of the counter-insurgency.) He did not think that the Jews would replace the subversives as the official scapegoats of the government once the subversive movement was eliminated--so long as the totalitarian generals did not take over. It was more likely that the generals would go after the Peronist labor movement instead.

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