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THE WHITE HOUSE

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IPS by Date 12-5-76

March 21, 1979

MEMORANDUM FOR

THE SECRETARY OF STATE

SUBJECT: U.S. Policy to Argentina (S)

I understand that you are considering changing our approach to Argentina to reflect the lack of improvement there in human rights. I have read the INR report on the human rights situation in Argentina, and I agree that it is a sobering document. The human rights situation in Argentina may just be the worst in the hemisphere, but in deciding what approach the United States Government should take to Argentina, I believe we should address two questions:

(1) What is the most effective approach to Argentina to encourage them to respect human rights? (S)

(2) What approach will permit us to sustain in the U.S. our overall human rights policy? When we take actions toward Argentina, which are interpreted as punitive, we not only enrage the right-wing ideologues, we also arouse the business sector and the media in the U.S. This doesn't mean that we shouldn't necessarily take such steps if we feel that they are required, but it does suggest that we should move carefully and explain our position to a wide-ranging audience -- in the U.S. and elsewhere -- before taking any steps, least we jeopardize our overall human rights policy. (S)

Argentina is a big, proud and subtle country. We have an impact on Argentine government decisions, but it's never as direct or as much as we want. This is the case in our human rights policy. (S)

The Argentine government wants a warmer relationship with us at least in part because the U.S. under Carter has the prestige and the morality which could contribute to the idea that the Argentine military government is legitimate. Such legitimacy would undermine the civilians and the democrats in Argentina and therefore strengthen and contribute to the institutionalization of the military government. The Argentine government has pursued a two-track approach to try to get closer to the U.S.: (1) through lobbying and propaganda in the U.S., they have tried to undermine the credibility of our human rights

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policy, and (2) they have taken "small steps" in the human rights area at home. While the "disappearances" continue, still the Argentine Government has released some prisoners, they have released the names of about 3,5000 people who remain in prison, they have taken steps on high priority individual cases (e.g., Deutches, Timerman, etc.), and they have invited the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights. (S)

The last --the invitation-- may well be the most important. It not only broke the monolithic Southern Cone opposition to the Commission, but it also will provide us a more legitimate basis on which we and other countries should make decisions on human rights to Argentina. (S)

I think our policy toward Argentina should remain cool and correct until such time as the human rights situation dramatically improves and the government has begun to move toward democratization. I believe that we should continue to use every opportunity both directly and through third countries to encourage them to improve their human rights situation. They will continue to try to lure high-level visitors but we should resist that until progress is evident. (S)

I think to take steps now, which could be interpreted as punitive, would be to invite criticism from moderate and conservative sectors in the U.S. at a time when we need their support on other issues. Moreover, I don't think it would be effective vis-a-vis Argentina. (S)

Even if you would prefer to adopt a tougher approach, I would recommend that you delay implementing this approach until after the Commission has completed its report. I realize that this may mean six months to one year, but I think the wait is justified. (S)

In summary, I hope that you will reconsider your position on Argentina. I think we should continue to maintain a strong, cool, and correct posture to the military regime until progress in human rights is evident. Now is not the time for us to move to negative votes in the IFI's or to cut back Export-Import Bank credits. At the least, we should wait until the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights issues its report and then adjust our policy appropriately. (S)

Or we should have a PRC on the above.

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