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Chapin's Chaplin

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for Todman's trip

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TODMAN
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Argentina

HUMAN RIGHTS: THE KEY TO OUR RELATIONS

I. STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

The human rights situation in Argentina bedevils our relations, with the possibility that we may soon have to treat Argentina like Chile or Uruguay. The GOA refuses to acknowledge the names of thousands of political prisoners under detention; disappearances, prolonged periods of incommunication, intimidation of lawyers, instances of anti-Semitism, and the harassment of foreign refugees are undeniable. Summary executions of prisoners were reported as recently as early 1977; torture has been brutal, widespread and generally unpunished.

Earlier, the Argentines received mixed signals from us on human rights, in effect giving the GOA the impression that it had carte blanche to pursue terrorism. Repeated representations on behalf of human rights were, therefore, not taken very seriously. It is important to persuade the GOA that the USG is serious about such rights - and there must be cooperation from DOD and CIA.

II. FOREIGN GOVERNMENT POSITION

The GOA will declare that it inherited a terrible problem, and that it is dealing with terrorists who have no respect whatever for human rights. Some officials will deny flatly that serious abuses are occurring. The GOA may also point out that it is seeking to guarantee the human rights of all Argentines, that prisoner detentions and releases are now being acknowledged, that the ICRC (Red Cross) is visiting prisons, that there is cooperation with the UNHCR on refugees, and that quiet steps have been taken to correct abuses due to the loose decentralization of counterterrorism.

III. OUR POSITION

We fully accept the premise that the GOA inherited an impossible situation in March 1976. Even the Peronist Parliament and unions stood aside to permit the military to do their job. Now, fully a year later, the military have largely accomplished their security goals but are

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Margaret P. Grafeld, Director

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not moving appreciably to restore legal forms and political peace. On the contrary, they are polarizing society.

IV. SUGGESTED TALKING POINTS

- The United States recognizes that Argentina has been the victim of a brutal terrorist onslaught seeking to destroy society.

- The first major victory of the terrorists probably came when the legal system found itself unable to cope with the situation due to the intimidation of judges.

- The terrorists scored another major victory when Argentina's political institutions failed to produce leadership and the military took over to avert economic and political chaos.

- After a year in power, the Argentine government has made astonishing progress, breaking the back of terrorism and salvaging the economy.

- We fear, however, that terrorism is on the verge of two further victories:

(1) The Argentine military appear split between so-called hardliners and moderates. The terrorists seek a hardline victory so that Argentine society may be split further.

(2) Inasmuch as they are able to provoke counter-terrorist excesses, the terrorists will succeed in driving a wedge between the United States, the West and Argentina.

- We want the Argentine government to succeed because Western values are at stake and Argentina's handling of the situation will have a lasting effect on the hemisphere.

- We think it essential for the Argentine government to wage the peace or risk losing the war. The government should recognize its unquestioned strength and begin to gamble dramatically on the side of peace, with the help of the citizenry.

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- The impression must be corrected that the Argentine government is not in full control and must resort to mysterious right wing forces and unexplained disappearances to root out terrorism.

- We strongly urge the acknowledgment of all prisoners under detention, the restoration of due process, and the punishment of all excesses. Perhaps the "right of option" which allows Argentine citizens to leave the country rather than being held without charges might be restored.

- In sum, we are anxious to see the Argentine government reflect the values most Argentines and the Western world share.

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