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INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

SOUTHERN CONE PERCEPTIONS OF US POLICIES

Summary

The Southern Cone governments of Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Paraguay, and Uruguay have a somewhat cynical view of US policies toward Latin America. Their perspective is shaped by the conviction that Washington's preoccupation since the mid 1960s with other parts of the world has left the US out of touch with Latin American realities. They view US policy toward their region as inconsistent, incoherent, and unreasonably punitive. There is a strong feeling that in the broader arena the US has been outmaneuvered by the Soviets and is losing its ability to lead the West.

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Many of the differences between the US and the Southern Cone nations have historical origins. At the present time, however, each country in the area has specific grievances against the US, with the most common problem being human rights. The military leaders of the region believe that security against leftist terrorism and international Communism takes precedence over personal well-being and individual freedom. Most of these leaders are convinced that intervention by the military prevented a leftist takeover. They tend to identify economic development and a slow, incremental approach toward democratic processes as the requisite therapy for accumulated national weaknesses. For the countries that have experienced a struggle against terrorism, the fight for national survival has been very real. All of the Southern Cone countries are obsessed with the threat of subversion, and herein lies the basic conflict with US human rights policies.

The Southern Cone governments bitterly resent their poor image in the world press and in international forums, where their military leaders are commonly described as "totalitarian" and "fascist." Government spokesmen often complain that exiled Communists and terrorists are allowed to criticize openly without rebuttal. One Brazilian official lamented two years ago to US Embassy officers that the Israelis were praised for staging a raid into Uganda against terrorists, while counterterrorist activities in Brazil were denounced by the US press.

Leaders in the Southern Cone believe that investigations by unofficial and official organizations such as Amnesty International and the UN Commission on Human Rights are overzealous and misguided, and that US policymakers accept these findings uncritically. They deplore the United States' selective attention to Latin America while it ignores human rights violations in Communist countries.

This does not mean that US human rights policy has had a completely negative impact on the area. On the

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contrary, police and military officials in these countries are now sensitized to human rights considerations. Every chief of state in the area claims to have made clear to his subordinates that torture and arbitrary arrest will no longer be tolerated. All of these countries have shown general improvement during the past year in their treatment of prisoners.

From their perspective, however, these improvements go unacknowledged by Washington, and moreover, the torrent of criticism, adversary treatment, and antagonistic US legislation has continued. Their conclusion is that the US is playing a game with them—using human rights as a way to dictate the timetable and ultimate shape of the political mode the US wants them to adopt. If, indeed, return to "democratic government" is the real issue, their answer is that competitive politics is not possible in the near future. This stand will not be negotiable until the various military regimes are convinced that they have established economic progress and ensured the permanence of political changes they have brought about. Continued US pressure to speed up the process will probably only increase the bitterness and recrimination.

Public Views of US Policies

It is much more difficult to get an accurate reading of public reaction to US human rights policy. Most citizens seem to support the military governments; the rest are either unconcerned with politics or belong to a declared opposition. The Chilean Government probably enjoys the greatest backing in the Southern Cone; the plebiscite vote held there earlier this year, even though rigged to a certain extent, is a good indication of this support.

Judging from newspaper commentary and personal conversations, US human rights policy has had little impact on the general populace. Some political groups that have long opposed the various governments and other groups representing civil and human rights causes have used the policy to air their own specific grievances.

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Liberal clergy have also cited the policy as being similar to their own programs.

Argentina

The human rights issue is the major point of contention between Argentina and the US. Senior Argentine officials view human rights abuses as an unfortunate but inevitable consequence of their efforts to eradicate leftist terrorism. Under these circumstances, they resent attempts by foreign critics to portray the Argentine Government as an oppressive dictatorship. Current US policy is perceived by the Argentines as a sign that the US considers good bilateral relations to be expendable. They believe that this policy is selective and biased against Argentina, that they are marked for "punishment" regardless of their internal problems. Seeing themselves as victims of a conspiracy, they often say that if the US understood the terrorist problem, it would also understand the government's tough measures.

Now that the terrorist threat seems to be abating, the government is attempting to wind down its massive security operations and exert tighter controls over police and military units. It has ordered the release of many prisoners to the custody of their relatives during daylight hours. The Interior Minister has warned police chiefs to stop bullying the public and restore normal procedures, and the government has strengthened requirements for proper police identification. In an effort to appease its critics, the government has published several lists of those arrested or under detention and is making a concerted effort to locate missing persons. The Inter-American Human Rights Committee has been invited to visit the country, possibly between March and May 1979.

The basic problem, as far as the Argentines are concerned, is that their efforts to deal with the human rights issue have not been noted by Washington. The Argentine Government is discouraged by the reduction of

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foreign military sales, the reduction in the size of the US military mission, the nonappropriation of training funds, and the lack of authorization for Argentina to pay for military training in the US. Buenos Aires has been concerned about the recently implemented Humphrey-Kennedy amendment that prohibits foreign military purchases, export licenses, and training. The State Department's recent decision to authorize a small military training contract for noncombatants alleviated some of the tension, but Senator Kennedy's letter to President Carter protesting the decision is sure to rankle Buenos Aires.

Another problem is the Argentine plan for an "experimental" plutonium reprocessing plant, [REDACTED]. The decision runs counter to President Carter's desire to curb the spread of proliferation-prone facilities. Argentina steadfastly refuses to sign the nuclear nonproliferation treaty, contending that it discriminates against countries without nuclear weapons. Admiral Raul Castro Madero, the head of Argentina's Nuclear Commission, says that all countries will have to use reprocessing in the future and the US will have to relent in its current policy. Meanwhile, Argentina wants to have the technology so it can independently decide whether or not to reprocess.

The Argentines are also concerned about Cuban-Soviet expansion in Africa and cite US inactivity as "Western weakness." They have recently discussed taking a more active role in the nonaligned movement to counter Cuban activities. The hardline attitude is taken by Army General Agosti, who commented earlier this year that Argentina's "armed forces wiped out a Marxist bridgehead without anybody's help or advice" and that something should be done about Africa.

There recently was an emotional outpouring in Buenos Aires against the US over the Export-Import Bank decision not to finance equipment exports for the Yacreta Dam project. The Export-Import Bank's change of mind on this issue has lessened the hue and cry, but many military men

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think that the financing turnaround is somehow linked to the visit by the Inter-American Human Rights Commission. Linking the Export-Import Bank financing with other problems with the US, many Argentine leaders seem determined to begin redirecting their country's foreign policy. Foreign Minister Montes, for example, played up Argentina's potential as a nuclear supplier during his recent trip to Eastern Europe. Military officers, meanwhile, have hinted that they are thinking of abrogating the Rio defense pact and expelling the US military group.

Brazil

Brazil's foreign policy reflects its very real great power aspirations. It wants to develop new markets and to expand existing ones for Brazilian exports, and it is working to achieve and demonstrate independence of the US in foreign affairs. These are not new attitudes, but resentment of US human rights and nuclear proliferation policies has heightened Brazilian sensitivities and evoked dramatic reactions such as Brasilia's severance last year of military ties with Washington.

Brazil is particularly concerned over the US position on human rights, which it attacks as an unwarranted intrusion into Brazil's domestic affairs. This truculence masks a very real fear that the US, deliberately or not, will encourage civilian dissent and increase domestic demands for basic changes. While President Geisel and President-elect Figueiredo seem to favor gradual liberalization, they do not want the pace to be pushed by social forces. Nevertheless, the government has now formally ended press censorship and committed itself to restoring habeas corpus in many political and national security cases and shelving the decree law that gives the regime sweeping dictatorial powers.

Brazilian officials are also acutely concerned that the country's economic well-being is still fragile and

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vulnerable to outside forces. Thus, the Brazilians tend to view certain US trade positions--such as countervailing duties--as harmful to their development drive, fueled as it is by ever-expanding exports. This is especially true this year because poor agricultural performance has forced the government to concentrate on alleviating the balance of payments problem by promoting more exports of manufactured goods to developed nations. One observer has noted that the intense focus on rapid modernization tends to lead Brazilian policymakers to perceive almost all foreign policy conflicts as potentially threatening to basic Brazilian interests.

The Brazilians view US nuclear nonproliferation concerns in a similar context, often saying that US opposition to the Brazil-West German nuclear accord is merely a veiled attempt to constrain Brazilian growth. They point out the critical importance to them of non-fossil fuel as a source of energy because of the high cost of imported oil. Argentina's decision to develop reprocessing technology will almost certainly prompt Brazil to follow suit.

Added to these specific problems with the US is the growing opinion in Brazil that the US has lost or is losing its resolve and even some of its capacity as a world power. The sizable conservative sector in Brazil sees the US limited in its capacity for action abroad by an excess of permissiveness, an aura of decadence, and the aftermath of its experience in Vietnam. The situation in Africa is perceived as the best current example of this development.

The US is viewed from an environment in which there is a tradition of a very strong executive, with power wielded by an elite that distrusts and fears the masses. At present the government is controlled and supported by a conservative military that is strongly anti-Communist and convinced that Brazil is a prime target of the international Communist movement.

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The general populace is somewhat more sensitized to the issue of human rights than people in the rest of the Southern Cone because of the low incidence of terrorist activity in the country and the growing civil rights movement among the black population. The Brazilian church has also been a factor through its long championing of the human rights cause and its protests against government policies. Nevertheless, like other Latin American countries, Brazilians in general adhere to authoritarian, paternalistic cultural patterns and are much more tolerant of limitations on the individual than North Americans. In a recent conversation the chief of the Brazilian National Intelligence Service rhetorically questioned which posed the greater threat to Brazil--the US or the Soviet Union? The intelligence chief went on to wonder why the US did not understand Brazil's problems and why Washington would not assist a gradual move toward democratic government rather than engage in constant and unproductive criticism.

Chile

Chilean leaders have long been convinced that US policy on human rights has been aimed specifically at them. The Pinochet government is bewildered by this because it believes that it has made substantial progress in eliminating human rights violations, but it has yet to hear any favorable comment from Washington. President Pinochet is disappointed by the lack of US recognition of the improving situation in Chile. He believes that he is being criticized with the same intensity as before he tried to make improvements. The Chileans will be interested in the US vote on the UN Human Rights Committee's attempt to provide funds to "victims" of Chilean human rights violations.

Among the human rights advances the Chileans cite are: a relaxation of press controls and an end to the state of siege; a reduction in the curfew; an amnesty for political prisoners and official consent for most exiles to return; a sweeping reorganization and reform of the

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intelligence service, which had been responsible for much of the abuse of human rights; civilian appointments to the cabinet, including the key Interior Ministry, which is responsible for the intelligence service; accelerated completion of a new constitution and advancement in the timetable for an elected government; preparation of a new labor code with plans to reinstitute collective bargaining next year; and the visit of the UN Human Rights Committee delegation.

The Chilean military sees itself as a traditional ally of the US and believes that Washington "encouraged" the coup against Allende. Once Allende was overthrown, however, the military believes that the US was forced by domestic political concerns to become strongly critical of the new government and to deny any part in the coup.

The Chileans are now convinced that US-Chilean relations will never be the same. They believe that there is a small coterie in Washington that is actively working to undermine the Pinochet regime. They find it incomprehensible that the US does not realize that the stringent government controls in Chile were a necessary course of action after the overthrow of the Marxist Allende regime. They also think that the US is being overzealous in its prosecution of the Letelier case; the Chilean media have contrasted this enthusiasm with what it describes as a lack of interest in finding out the "truth" in the Kennedy assassination. Anti-US nationalism is easily aroused. For example, a Washington Post editorial in June calling for Pinochet to resign and be replaced by a Christian Democratic government was denounced in a series of man-in-the-street interviews and was described by nearly everyone as an unwarranted intrusion in Chilean affairs.

The opposition political parties, meanwhile, view US human rights policy as made to order for their own campaign against the government. The Christian Democrats, in particular, hope that the fallout from the Letelier case will bring down Pinochet.

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While the Chileans believe they are being unfairly treated by Washington, there is still a strong pro-US feeling in the country. Military officers and civilian officials alike admire the US and would like their country eventually to evolve along US lines. Despite a current perception distrust of the US, the Chileans' great concern is that the poor relations between the two countries will deteriorate even further. The Chileans appear determined to refrain from any hostile act or statement against the US and continue to hope for better treatment. For example, Foreign Minister Cubillos recently devoted most of a meeting with Secretary Vance to setting forth the Chilean position in the Beagle Channel negotiations with Argentina. Despite the poor relations with the US, Cubillos clearly hoped that Washington would use its influence to soften Argentina's position in the dispute.

Cubillos went on to explain the evolutionary process of the return to democratic government in Chile. He acknowledged the Chilean belief that civilian government is impossible now, but pointed out that political institutionalization is under way. Cubillos' remarks and the general atmosphere in Santiago suggest that even though there are strong feelings in Chile favoring an accommodation with the US, there is little chance of a quick return to civilian rule. Not only has the government been successful in solving the country's chronic economic problems, there are strong memories of the political and economic chaos of the Allende years--in sum there is little desire to return the country to the politicians.

Paraguay

President Stroessner has been in power since 1954, and there appears to be little chance for any change in the policies that, in his view and in the view of many Paraguayans, have brought the country internal peace, stability, and economic progress. The Stroessner regime has a poor human rights record, but there is some evidence that improvements are being made and indications

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that combined Western diplomatic pressure is beginning to have an effect, however slight.

One recent example is the case of arrested human rights activist, Domingo Laino, in which the combined efforts of the US, West Germany, the United Kingdom, and France resulted in Laino's release from prison. Indeed, largely as a result of US pressure, Paraguay has released almost all of its political prisoners from jail. Human rights, however, will probably continue to be a problem because of the subservience of the judiciary to presidential authority and the lack of control over police interrogation methods.

The US Ambassador in Asuncion noted as early as last May that the Paraguayans were improving their human rights performance. He called the move by the Senate Foreign Relations Committee to cut expansion credits and the military training program for Paraguay from the fiscal year 1979 Foreign Assistance Bill too harsh in the face of improved conditions. He argued that Washington's continued ignorance of improvements played into the hands of hardliners who urge suppression of all dissidence.

The Paraguayan Government's public response to the US human rights policy has been negative. President Stroessner often cites his staunch anti-Communism as well as concern over terrorism and subversion as reasons for strict controls. Many members of the Paraguayan political elite are plainly worried by what they see as the US failure to meet the Soviet-Cuban challenge in Africa. They see the US as a weakened ally that can no longer be counted upon to fight against Communist aggression. They regard US criticism of their country as naive and an invasion of their domestic affairs.

Because of the extent of media censorship in the country, it is difficult to determine what the populace thinks of the Stroessner regime. The President appears to be personally popular, however, and his travels about the country are enthusiastically received by the citizens.

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A return to civilian rule any time soon is highly unlikely.

Uruguay

Uruguay has taken some steps during the past year to improve human rights conditions, although the overall situation remains poor. The government retains extensive statutory powers of control that it is reluctant to give up. On the average, fewer political arrests have been made in 1978 than last year, and there have been far fewer instances of mistreatment of political prisoners. Although the judicial system is hamstrung by executive controls and is far from independent, military courts are reducing the backlog of political and subversive cases and are ordering the release of increasing numbers of detainees. The local press is beginning to advocate more freely--if cautiously--an expeditious return to civilian government.

Among the positive measures taken by the government are: permission for an American Bar Association visit in April; plans to publish a list of prisoners released since 1 January 1978; an intention to invite the International Red Cross to visit Uruguay and to open talks with the Inter-American Human Rights Commission on ground rules for a visit; and curtailment of prisoner detentions under emergency powers. Most indications are that the regime would like to improve its image abroad and will move steadily to change its human rights practices.

Once South America's most liberal democracy, Uruguay may now be the region's most highly controlled society. To explain this, Uruguayan leaders point out that Washington has no appreciation for the intensity of the struggle against the Tupamaro guerrillas. The Uruguayan military sees this battle as a defense of its national moral values, patriotism, and honor. For this reason, it remains adamantly opposed to US human rights policies and has attempted to discredit the US through a well-managed media campaign.

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Many rightist military officers oppose the US and want to follow the Brazilian political mode. On the other hand, General Gregorio Alvarez, the commander in chief of the Army who wants to be President some day, supports a new evaluation of the human rights situation and is moving cautiously to compel military officers to accept his reform measures. The strength of the rightist officers, however, should not be underestimated, however. Their recent pique at remarks of the US Army attache and subsequent campaigns to have him recalled are instructive.

Moreover, even if General Alvarez is successful in his campaign, the Uruguayan military has no intention of ending its control of the government until 1986. Meanwhile, Uruguay's poor human rights performance, together with US legislative and policy restrictions on economic and military assistance, are impediments to better relations. Uruguayans hope that a new, more positive attitude toward human rights will result in better relations with the US, but they insist that Washington should have no illusions about the prospects for an early return to civilian government.

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