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DEPARTMENT OF STATE  
BRIEFING MEMORANDUM

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S.S. [redacted]

June 4, 1976

ARGENTINA PROJECT (S200000044)

U.S. DEPT. OF STATE, A/RPS/IPS

Margaret P. Grafeld, Director

☒ Release ☐ Excise ☐ Deny

Exemption(s):

Declassify: ☐ In Part ☒ In Full

☐ Classify as ☐ Extend as ☐ Downgrade to

Date ☐ Declassify on ☐ Reason ☐

To: The Secretary

From: INR-Harold H. Saunders

Murders in Argentina--  
No Intergovernmental Conspiracy

The recent murders in Argentina of former Bolivian president Juan Jose Torres and ex-Uruguayan parliamentarians Zelmar Michelini and Hector Gutierrez Ruiz raise questions about the security practices of the governments of the Southern Cone (Argentina, Brazil, Bolivia, Chile, Paraguay and Uruguay). Most precisely:

--What degree of cooperation exists among the security forces of the Southern Cone? and

--Do these security forces actively participate or passively acquiesce in a program to execute political exiles who oppose one of the governments involved?

The fact that all the countries cited are controlled by conservative military regimes whose record on human rights has been criticized will generate rumors and allegations of the existence of an intergovernmental assassination program. However, there is no evidence of any such conspiracy.

Southern Cone security forces undoubtedly coordinate their anti-subversive efforts insofar as information exchanges are concerned, and Argentina and Brazil may provide advice and limited training to smaller neighbors. Cooperation of this sort is logical:

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--all the Southern Cone governments consider themselves targets of leftist subversion of an international character;

--there is irrefutable evidence that terrorists move back and forth across Southern Cone boundaries; and

--terrorists based in Bolivia (ELN), Uruguay (Tupamaros), Chile (MIR), and Argentina (ERP) are formally, if somewhat ineffectually, associated together in a Revolutionary Coordinating Junta (JCR). The JCR is primarily a creature of the Argentine ERP, and according to available information, it has not sponsored any major operations.

There is no evidence to support a contention that Southern Cone governments are cooperating in some sort of international "Murder Inc." aimed at leftist political exiles resident in one of their countries. Furthermore, it is difficult to understand why the Uruguayan or Bolivian authorities would themselves execute or conspire to have the Argentines execute men like Gutierrez Ruiz, Michelini and Torres. These men pose no threat to their governments.

The fact that these incidents are occurring in Argentina and not elsewhere in the Southern Cone suggests that they are attributable to a uniquely Argentine set of circumstances. Amidst the murderous three-cornered battle going on in Argentina amongst left-wing terrorists, government security personnel and right-wing goon squads, exiles can become victims for a number of reasons:

--Operational involvement with one of the Argentine terrorist groups, as appears to have been the case with Chilean MIR leader Edgardo Enriquez.

--Past association with foreign and/or Argentine leftist groups, a fact that, in and of itself, is sufficient cause for death in the eyes of fanatical Argentine right-wingers. This may have been the crime of Michelini, Gutierrez Ruiz and Torres.

--Efforts by hardliners in the Argentine government to force President Videla into more stringent suppression of terrorists, a motivation which also may lie behind

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the death of the prominent Uruguayan and Bolivian exiles.

In all likelihood, the assassinations are the work of right-wingers, some of whom are security personnel. Argentine President Videla probably does not condone or encourage what is happening, but neither does he appear capable of stopping it.

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