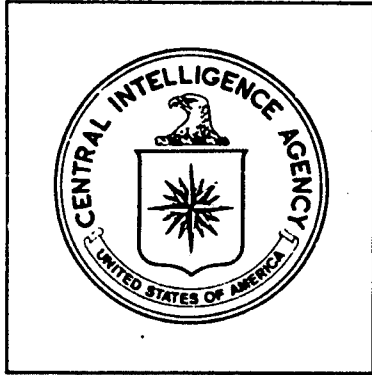


3.5(c)

~~Secret~~



# Latin American Trends

NOTE

~~Secret~~

151

CI SNLA 76-040  
No. 0720-76  
August 16, 1976

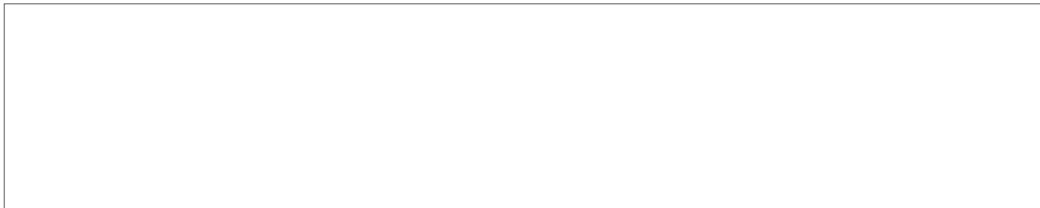
~~SECRET~~

**LATIN AMERICAN TRENDS**

This publication is prepared for regional specialists in the Washington community by the Western Hemisphere Division, Office of Current Intelligence, with occasional contributions from other offices within the Directorate of Intelligence. Comments and queries are welcome. They should be directed to the authors of the individual articles.

*CONTENTS*

August 16, 1976

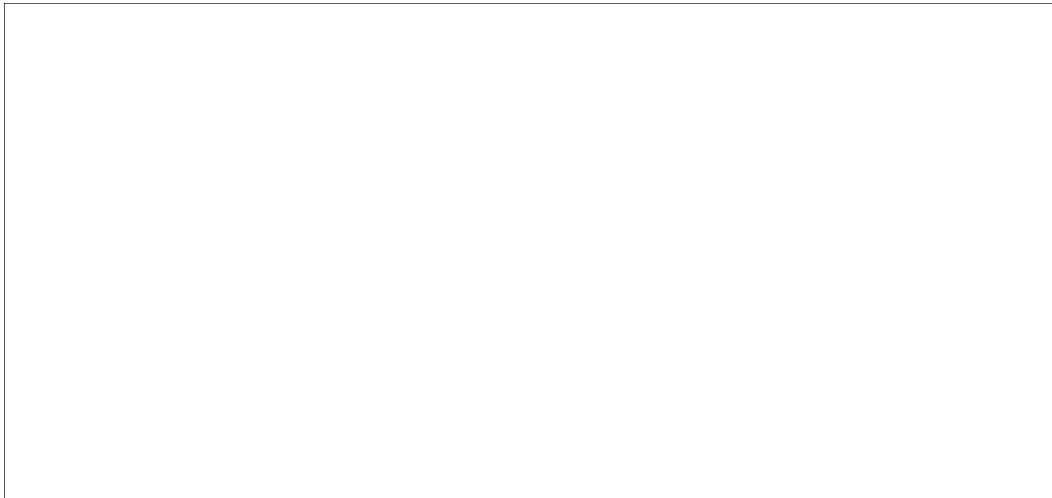


NR

Argentina: Missing Persons. . . . . 7

Argentine Church Protests Anti-Clerical Actions. 9

Argentina: Possible Changes at the Top. . . . . 11



NR

~~-i-  
SECRET~~

~~SECRET~~

3.5(c)

Argentina: Missing Persons

The Argentine government faces growing international and domestic protests over missing or arbitrarily detained persons.

Within the last few months, several foreign nationals have been arrested and charged with subversive political activity. Some have simply disappeared without explanation. Most diplomatic attempts to gain their release or even information on their status have failed.

A US priest arrested last week has been denied consular access despite a protest note from the US embassy. The West German, Italian, and Cuban embassies have tried in vain to obtain information on missing nationals.

Only the Israeli government has been successful in freeing some of its nationals, and then only after persistent protests brought the intervention of top Argentine officials.

Until recently the Argentine public, anxious for an end to terrorism, has generally accepted the need for the government's tough countersubversion policy. Now, however, military leaders are facing increasing pressure to settle the cases of dozens of detained Peronist labor and political leaders. Moreover, popular concern is growing for the hundreds of individuals--both Argentine nationals and foreign exiles--who have been detained or have mysteriously disappeared since the March coup.

One of the most sensational detentions was that of former president and retired army general Alejandro Lanusse. The military recently placed him under five days "disciplinary arrest" for his forceful

August 16, 1976

-7-  
~~SECRET~~

~~SECRET~~

public criticism of the government's treatment of a university professor who served as Lanusse's education minister. The minister and other faculty members were accused of marxist sympathies.

Even the pro-government Buenos Aires press has begun cautiously protesting some of the excesses. One conservative journal praised Lanusse's courage in raising "the issue that is on everyone's mind-- respect for human rights."

It is unlikely that domestic or international pressures will move military leaders to put effective brakes on the counter-terrorist campaign. Violence that has for years plagued Argentine society was a primary factor in the downfall of the five preceding governments. Now that some progress is being made against organized terrorists, human rights considerations will not deter security officials from their efforts to restore public order.

3.5(c)

August 16, 1976

-8-  
~~SECRET~~

**SECRET**

3.5(c)

Argentine Church Protests Anti-Clerical Actions

The arrest of a US priest in Cordoba last week and the murder of seven Roman Catholic clergymen in recent months have finally prompted the Argentine church hierarchy to make an official protest to the government.

Argentine security officials have long assumed that "progressive" elements of church clergy and lay organizations have been encouraging and assisting left-wing subversive groups. The nebulous organization known as the "Movement of Third World Priests," in fact, may be deeply involved with the terrorists, especially in the Tucuman area. Organized in 1968, the movement claims a large following in Argentina and several other South American countries.

Official pronouncements by the "Third World Priests" usually include denunciations of capitalism and imperialism. The members appear to disagree over the use of violence to achieve their aims. Some believe that the Argentine social and economic system is so entrenched that "authentic socialism" can be brought about only by revolution. Others claim that violence may be necessary, but all other methods should be tried first. Individual members of the movement have had frequent contact with leftist labor and militant student groups in Argentina and some of them may have given support to terrorists.

Initially, the arrests of priests only served to exacerbate the long-standing tension between conservatives and progressives in the church hierarchy. Historically, the Argentine church has been closely identified with the government. The Papal Nuncio, in fact, has been offering support for the army's campaign against the guerrillas. In recent years,

August 16, 1976

-9-  
**SECRET**

**SECRET**

some church leaders have made an effort to adopt an independent position from the government, but for the most part they have avoided criticism of governmental policy. The progressive priests, on the other hand, have called for the elimination of unjust and oppressive political and social institutions and have not hesitated to place the military government in this category. This group has been loudly protesting the arrests of priests.

The most recent murders and arrests have unified the conservatives and progressives in a common cause. Pope Paul VI sent a message to the Argentine clergy denouncing "execrable crimes" against churchmen. His demarche prompted the executive commission of Argentine bishops to meet with President Videla and demand an explanation. The letter of protest the bishops presented to Videla was later leaked to the press.

The church's position for the present appears to be one of willingness to make peace with the government if there is an end to unofficial repression. President Videla apparently had told church leaders that he understands the church's position, but that he is determined to rid the country of terrorists and this may be a long process demanding tough methods. The church is likely now to work quietly for the release of the detained priests. Further arrests and murders, however, undoubtedly will provoke more vocal criticism of the government.

3.5(c)

August 16, 1976

-10-

~~SECRET~~

~~SECRET~~

[redacted] 3.5(c)

Argentina: Possible Changes at the Top

Changes at the top of the government and in the military hierarchy may be in the offing.

Widespread speculation is centering on the possibility that President Videla will shortly announce the creation of a new cabinet-level post and shift several top military men. Embassy [redacted] sources are giving credence to the possibility of such moves by later this month.

3.3(b)(1)

3.3(b)(1)

Videla is said to be considering the creation of a planning secretariat reporting directly to him, and responsible for over-all policy coordination. Such a move could be in response to growing criticism that post-coup government policy has lacked direction and at times appears confused. At the same time, the advent of the new post could enable Videla more readily to exert his own control over policy making, thus responding to other detractors who charge he is not sufficiently assertive.

The President may also be on the verge of re-assigning top army officers. Videla's confidant, army chief of staff General Viola, may move up to another newly-created job, that of deputy army commander. This would allow Videla, who heads the army, to devote more of his time to strictly presidential duties, with the army in the hands of a trusted supporter.

Regional army commanders Generals Diaz Bessone and Suarez Mason would go, respectively, to the planning secretariat and the army general staff. Both have frequently been viewed as serious rivals of Videla. In their new positions neither would lose prominence, but both would be deprived of the all-important troop commands on which to build a political base.

August 16, 1976

-11-  
~~SECRET~~

~~SECRET~~

The new governmental arrangement could prove more trouble than it is worth. The planning position, for example, could turn out to be nothing more than an additional layer of bureaucracy, rather than a boon to efficiency. Moreover, there is no guarantee that Diaz Bessone, regarded as an advocate of sterner practices than those favored by the President, would be compatible with Videla, Viola, and their supporters in a policy making role. Finally, the new scheme could conceivably hamstring the efforts of Economy Minister Martinez de Hoz, at a time when he has begun to make sorely needed progress.

3.5(c)

3.5(c)

August 16, 1976

-12-

~~SECRET~~