

KISSINGER TO THE ARGENTINE GENERALS IN 1976:

"IF THERE ARE THINGS THAT HAVE TO BE DONE, YOU SHOULD DO THEM QUICKLY"

Newly declassified document shows Secretary of State gave strong support early on to the military junta

While military dictatorship committed massive human rights abuses in 1976, Secretary Kissinger advised: *"you should get back quickly to normal procedures."*

[Memorandum of Conversation](#), National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book No. 133, Edited by Carlos Osorio and Kathleen Costar, Posted August 27, 2004

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Washington, August 27, 2004 - A newly declassified document obtained by the National Security Archive shows that amidst vast human rights violations by Argentina's security forces in June 1976, Secretary of State Henry Kissinger told Argentine Foreign Minister Admiral Cesar Augusto Guzzetti:

"If there are things that have to be done, you should do them quickly. But you should get back quickly to normal procedures."

Kissinger's comment is part of a 13-page [Memorandum of Conversation](#) reporting on a June 10 meeting between Secretary Kissinger and Argentine Admiral Guzzetti in Santiago, Chile.

After a series of pleasantries, Guzzetti went into the substance of the meeting by stating: *"Our main problem in Argentina is terrorism. It is the first priority of the current government that took office on March 24. There are two aspects to the solution. The first is to ensure the internal security of the country; the second is to solve the most urgent economic problems over the coming 6 to 12 months. Argentina needs United States understanding and support...."*

Replying to Guzzetti's report on the situation, Secretary Kissinger said: *"We have followed events in Argentina closely. We wish the new government well. We wish it will succeed. We will do what we can to help it succeed."*

At a time when the international community, the U.S. media, universities, and scientific institutions, the U.S. Congress, and even the U.S. Embassy in Argentina were clamoring about the indiscriminate human rights violations against scientists, labor leaders, students, and politicians by the Argentine military, Secretary Kissinger told Guzzetti: *"We are aware you are in a difficult period. It is a curious time, when political, criminal, and terrorist activities tend to merge without any clear separation. We understand you must establish authority."*

Only two weeks earlier, on May 28, Ambassador Robert Hill had presented a U.S. demarche on human rights to Admiral Guzzetti. The Embassy was deeply concerned about the kidnapping and torture of three American women, among them the Fulbright coordinator for Argentina, Elida Messina, and the wave of attacks against political refugees from the Southern Cone. In contrast to Hill's efforts, according to the memorandum of conversation Secretary Kissinger told Guzzetti: *"In the United States we have strong domestic pressures to do something on human rights... We want you to succeed. We do not want to harrass [sic] you. I will do what I can...."*

Another document recently unearthed by the National Security Archive and **posted for the first time here**, shows that on July 9, 1976, Secretary Kissinger was explicitly briefed on the rampant repression taking place in Argentina: *"Their theory is that they can use the Chilean method,"* Kissinger's top aide on Latin America Harry Shlaudeman informed him, *"that is, to terrorize the opposition - even killing priests and nuns and others."*

Documents published earlier by the National Security Archive show that in September 1976 Ambassador Hill complained again to Guzzetti about the astounding human rights violations occurring in Argentina. Guzzetti rebuffed him saying that, *"When he had seen SECY of State Kissinger in Santiago, the latter had said he 'hoped the Argentine Govt could get the terrorist problem under control as quickly as possible.' Guzzetti said that he had reported this to President Videla and to the cabinet, and that their impression had been that the USG's overriding concern was not human rights but rather that GOA 'get it over quickly.'"*

Kissinger reiterated this message during another meeting with Guzzetti in New York on October 7 telling him *"the quicker you succeed the better."* Later, Ambassador Hill sent a bitter complaint to the Department of State that Guzzetti had returned to Argentina in a *"state of jubilation"* after meeting the Secretary. [See [Kissinger to Argentines on Dirty War: "The quicker you succeed the better", December 4, 2003](#)]

"The Memorandum of Conversation explains why the Argentine generals believed they got a clear message from the Secretary that they had carte blanche for the dirty war," said Carlos Osorio, Director of the Southern Cone Documentation Project at the National Security Archive. "It appears that Secretary Kissinger gave the 'green light' to the Argentine military during the June 1976 meeting with Guzzetti in Santiago," he added.

The June 10 Memorandum of Conversation was obtained by the National Security Archive's Southern Cone Documentation Project through a Freedom of Information Act request to the Department of State filed in August 2002 and appealed in February 2004. The document was misdated June 6, 1976. The meeting took place during the morning of June 10, 1976, when Secretary Kissinger met with several foreign dignitaries attending the OAS General Assembly in Santiago. That afternoon he traveled to Mexico City [See [Secretary Kissinger's travels](#) at the Department of State Historian's web page and the [Secretary's calendar of events](#) for that day].

In Santiago, Guzzetti told Secretary Kissinger of the difficulties the Argentine security forces faced in dealing with the refugees, mostly because of lack of information:

"[refugees] do not want to register... We have no names. Only the refugee committees know something in detail..."

A day earlier, on June 9, 1976 clandestine Argentine security forces had ransacked the Catholic Commission for Refugees in Buenos Aires and stolen refugee records. The day after Guzzetti and Secretary Kissinger met, on June 11, twenty-four Chilean and Uruguayan refugees were kidnapped, held illegally for two days, and tortured by a combined Argentine-Chilean-Uruguayan squadron.

Guzzetti also described the intelligence coordination with neighboring dictatorships: *"The terrorist problem is general to the entire Southern Cone. To combat it, we are encouraging joint efforts to integrate with our neighbors... All of them: Chile, Paraguay, Bolivia, Uruguay, Brazil."* This collaboration was codenamed Operation Condor.

At the time of the meeting, the Department of State suspected that the Southern Cone military regimes were carrying out a coordinated attack against refugees in Argentina; indeed Kissinger received a special telegram from Washington briefing him on this issue just before he met with Guzzetti that morning. But the Memorandum of Conversation contains no reference by Secretary Kissinger regarding the human rights concerns posed by the Southern Cone security cooperation.

By the end of 1976, 10,000 Argentines had been disappeared or assassinated by the Argentine security forces; half a dozen American citizens had been kidnapped and tortured. On the international front, the cooperation between Argentine military and intelligence forces and other Southern Cone militaries left hundreds of Uruguayans, Chileans, Bolivians, Paraguayans, and Brazilians disappeared, tortured, and/or dead.

What follows are excerpts from the **Memorandum of Conversation** and a [chronology of events](#) surrounding the June 10 meeting, based on previously declassified documents.

[Chronology of events surrounding the June 10, 1976 Kissinger-Guzzetti meeting](#)

Includes links to source documents

Excerpts from the [meeting](#):

"Guzzetti: Our main problem in Argentina is terrorism. It is the first priority of the current government that took office on March 24. There are two aspects to the solution. The first is to ensure the internal security of the country; the second is to solve the most urgent economic problems over the coming 6 to 12 months. Argentina needs United States understanding and support..."

The Secretary: We have followed events in Argentina closely. We wish the new government well. We wish it will succeed. We will do what we can to help it succeed.

We are aware you are in a difficult period. It is a curious time, when political, criminal, and terrorist activities tend to merge without any clear separation. We understand you must establish authority.

Guzzetti: The foreign press creates many problems for us, interpreting events in a very peculiar manner. Press criticism creates problems for confidence. It weakens international confidence in the Argentine government...

The Secretary: The worst crime as far as the press is concerned is to have replaced a government of the left.

Guzzetti: It is even worse than that.

The Secretary: I realize you have no choice but to restore governmental authority. But it is also clear that the absence of normal procedures will be used against you.

...

Guzzetti [on thousands of refugees in Argentina]: They have come from all our neighboring countries: Uruguay, Paraguay, Bolivia, as well as Chile... Many provide clandestine support for terrorism. Chile, when the government changed, resulted in a very large number of leftist exiles. The Peronist government at the time welcomed them to Argentina in large numbers.

The Secretary: You could always send them back.

Guzzetti: For elemental human rights reasons we cannot send them back to Chile... No one wants to receive them. There are many terrorists.

The Secretary: Have you tried the PLO? They need more terrorists. Seriously, we cannot tell you how to handle these people. What are you going to do?

...

The Secretary: I understand the problem. But if no one receives them, then what can you do?

Guzzetti: We are worried about their involvement in the terrorism problem. But many fear persecution, and do not want to register.

...

The Secretary: And how many of these do you feel are engaged in illegal activities?

Guzzetti: It is difficult to say. Perhaps 10,000. Only 150 Chileans are legal. We have no names. Only the refugee committees know something in detail. But their problems create unrest, and sometimes even logistic support for the guerrillas

The Secretary: We wish you success.

...

Guzzetti: The terrorist problem is general to the entire Southern Cone. To combat it, we are encouraging joint efforts to integrate with our neighbors... All of them: Chile, Paraguay, Bolivia, Uruguay, Brazil.

The Secretary: I take it you are talking about joint economic activities?

Guzzetti: Yes. Activities on both the terrorist and the economic fronts.

The Secretary: Oh. I thought you were referring only to security. You cannot succeed if you focus on terrorism and ignore its causes.

...

The Secretary: Let me say, as a friend, that I have noticed that military governments are not always the most effective in dealing with these problems...

So after a while, many people who don't understand the situation begin to oppose the military and the problem is compounded.

The Chileans, for example, have not succeeded in getting across their initial problem and are increasingly isolated.

You will have to make an international effort to have your problems understood. Otherwise, you, too, will come under increasing attack. If there are things that have to be done, you should do them quickly. But you must get back quickly to normal procedures.

...

The Secretary: It is certainly true that whatever the origin, terrorism frequently gains outside support. And this outside support also creates pressures against efforts to suppress it. But you cannot focus on terrorism alone. If you do, you only increase your problems.

Guzzetti: Yes, there is a need for balance between political rights and authority.

The Secretary: I agree. The failure to respect it creates serious problems. In the United States we have strong domestic pressures to do something on human rights.

Guzzetti: The terrorists work hard to appear as victims in the light of world opinion even though they are the real aggressors.

The Secretary: We want you to succeed. We do not want to harrass [sic] you. I will do what I can...

...

[At 9:10 the Secretary and Guzzetti leave for a word alone. At 9:14 they re-emerge, and the meeting ends.]"

Thanks to:

Martin Andersen, author of *Dossier Secreto: Argentina's Desaparecidos and the Myth of the 'Dirty War'* (Westview, 1993) and first to report on Secretary Kissinger's "green light" in *The Nation* in 1987; John Dinges, author of *The Condor Years* (The New Press, 2004); and Peter Kornbluh, author of *The Pinochet File* (The New Press, 2003) for their instructive books and advice.

US Declassified Documents: Argentine Junta Security Forces Killed, Disappeared Activists, Mothers and Nuns

US officials were split in blaming the Generals, made considerable efforts to find and save victims, but then dropped demands to find those responsible

On the 25th anniversary of the disappearance of leaders of the internationally renowned civil disobedience group the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, recently declassified US documents show that the Embassy in Buenos Aires had evidence of the Argentine Military Junta's responsibility in the crime. The US dedicated substantial resources to establish the whereabouts of the victims and protect their lives, but once it learned they had been killed, it dropped the demand to the Junta to find and punish the perpetrators and discipline officers condoning it.

Between December 8 and 10, 1977, Azucena Villaflor de Vicenti, along with 11 members and friends of the Mothers were kidnapped by Argentine government forces and never seen again. De Vicenti had helped found the group of mothers of victims precisely because of this new type of atrocity: those kidnapped and then disappeared by security forces. ([Sequence of events as described by a Political Officer at the Embassy](#))

A review by the National Security Archive of the Department of State's recently declassified documents on Argentina reveals that as early as 10 days after the disappearances the U.S. Embassy intelligence sources started reporting on the involvement of [the Argentine Navy](#), the [Army First Corps](#), and later the [Presidential State Intelligence](#) Service and a [military detention facility](#) in the crime and cover up.

On March 30, 1978, the US Embassy informed having "*[c]onfidential information obtained through an Argentine government source (protect) that seven bodies were discovered some weeks ago on the Atlantic beach near Mar del Plata. According to this source, the bodies were those of the two nuns and five mothers who disappeared between December 8 and December 10, 1977. Our source confirmed that these individuals were originally sequestered by members of the security forces...*"

It is known today that the 12 disappeared victims were detained and tortured at the Navy Mechanical School. One of the most dramatic documents in this selection is an eyewitness' detailed [description](#) and [sketches](#) of the unit's clandestine center, torture chambers, and chain of command. A detainee himself, the eyewitness also reported seeing and talking to one of the French nuns who were part of the Mothers group. The document was circulated to foreign press and the Embassies in 1977.

The string of numerous cables between December 1977 and March 1978 attests to the US Embassy's considerable efforts to find and protect the kidnapped Mother's group members.

"We have tried hard to clarify the circumstances surrounding the disappearance of two French nuns and some 11 other Argentine citizens in a series of abductions December 8-10. Our findings are contradictory and inconclusive, and the fact remains that at this

writing we have no sure knowledge regarding the nuns' abductors or their - present whereabouts -our sources generally agree that the operation was carried out by some arm of the security forces..."

The documents also show that Embassy staffers were split on whether to blame the Argentine Military. In one [memorandum](#), a political officer in charge of human rights at the Embassy, frustrated at the Embassy's failure to blame the Military Junta for the crime, wrote:

"I presented a full description of what had happened to [the mothers]. This was voted down by the country team as being mere speculation and the Embassy once again stated that we continued to be puzzled by the disappearance of the nuns... Although the country team is puzzled regarding the nuns disappearance, based on the facts presented it is clear by [blank] of the circumstantial evidence that this is not an out of control operation... I have done a number of cables which tied in reported events to targeting by the Argentine security forces of individuals for intellectual subversion. This has been taken out of all of messages going out. Just this week one of our military attaché had one of his reports turned back by the front office"

On learning from the US Embassy of the heinous death of the mothers, the Department of State instructs the Embassy to present a demarche before President Videla.

"Department believes we must act forcefully now to make GOA aware of our outrage at such acts... Ambassador should continue presentation by suggesting that GOA consider actions which can be taken against the people who committed this crime. They should be brought to trial and if some in authority winked at the crime those involved should be disciplined."

Ambassador Castro did present a demarche but then the US followed the path of the French and the Catholic Church, as well as Ambassador Castro's suggestions of not pressing for accountability of the disappeared. The declassified documents show that the issue of finding and punishing those responsible for the mothers' and nuns' assassination was dropped from further human rights discussion between the US and Argentina.

In a [remarkable document](#), Ambassador Raul Castro foresaw what would happen after the Argentine government issued a final list of detainees that did not account for thousands of disappeared:

"The one-issue groups, such as the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, will clamor for the government to make an accounting for the missing. The issue will be increasingly and dramatically reported internationally... [But] We should avoid... demanding accountability for the disappeared, since that does nothing directly to eliminate further abuses."

The following 16 documents were selected from the 4,700 declassified last August by the US Department of State on human rights violations in Argentina.

The Documents

Document 1

[December 19, 1977 - Mothers of Plaza de Mayo](#)

Memorandum of Conversation from Regional Security Officer (RSO) James Kelly to Ambassador Castro

Only ten days after the disappearance of the Mothers, the Embassy's security official receives information from a source implicating the Navy in the crime. *"[The] RSO recently met with a senior member of the Argentine Security Forces who has been involved in the counter - subversion program for approximately 5 years. Source has reported reliably in the past and is knowledgeable concerning Army and Federal Security Service operations in the greater Buenos Aires region. Source stated that the Federal Security Service and, to the best of his knowledge, the Army, were not involved in the Plaza de Mayo Mothers or of the two French nuns. Either they were taken into custody by the Navy or they were kidnapped by Montonero forces. The most likely explanation is that they are victims of the political ambitions of [Navy] Admiral Massera who has been seeking ways of undermining President Videla's influence. The kidnapping of the Mothers and Nuns just prior to Christmas holidays would undermine Videla's 'Peace by Christmas' position and hold him up to international ridicule. Also, it would weaken his Position as President and leader of Government in Argentina..."*

Document 2

[December 20, 1977 - Disappearance of Mothers Group's 'Supporters': latest developments](#)

Telegram from Ambassador Castro to Department of State

The First Army Corps, led by renown human rights violator General Carlos Guillermo Suarez Mason, had announced that they possessed a letter in which insurgent Montoneros acknowledged responsibility for the kidnapping of two of the Mothers' collaborators. A group of relatives of the disappeared mothers visited the Embassy on December 19, *"to urge the US government to continue its pressure against the government of Argentina to release their relatives. They claimed that international pressure from the US and France was the only hope for their relatives' release. They characterized the Montonero document as being a fabrication. The family members argued that all the events bear the clear hallmark of a security force operation... Family members are also concerned that in the "Montonero" document only the two French nuns were mentioned with no discussion of the others taken. We have deployed embassy resources as best we could to try and get to the bottom of this murky business. Not surprisingly even our contacts within government privately discount the "Montonero ploy."*

Document 3

[Circa, January 1978 - List of Mothers Group Members Who Disappeared on December 8 and 10, \[1977\]](#)

The victims listed in this document are:

Maria Ponce de Bianco
Esther Cariaga
Eduardo Gabriel Orane
Patricia Cristina Oviedo

Raquel Bulit, Angela Aguada
Jose Julio Fondabila
Gustavo Nino
Remo Berardo
Azucena de Vicenti
Alicia Domon (Sister Alicia)
Renee Duquet (Sister Leonie)

Years later, Argentine investigators identified Gustavo Nino as Navy Lieutenant Alfredo Astiz, who had infiltrated the Mothers group. According to the 1984 report of the [National Commission of the Disappeared](#), "[b]etween the months of October and November of 1977, Astiz began to attend masses, public acts and meetings carried out then by the relatives of the disappeared, using the identity of Gustavo Nino."

The report concluded that "[t]he twelve people finally kidnapped were held in the [Navy Mechanic School's] 'capucha' for very few days; they were then transferred. During that time they were lead to the cellar where they were interrogated and tortured by [Navy] Capt. Acosta, Antonio Pernía, [Army] Major Coronel, Lt. Schelling or Scheller (aka.) 'Pinguino' and Subprefect (aka.) 'Selva' (Silvia Labayru - Legajo N° 6838)."

Document 4

[January 16, 1978 - Information Concerning the Disappearance of Two French Catholic Nuns](#)

Memorandum of Conversation between American Consul General and Coca Cola President

The President of Coca Cola informed the American Consul that *"two intelligence officers of the Argentine Army are employed by Coca-Cola on a part-time basis as plant security advisers... As they have been completely reliable informants in the past, Sr. Ornstein is inclined to believe what they told him regarding the nuns. He said that one of these officers 'works on cases of people being held under the Poder Ejecutivo Nacional,' and that when he discussed the matter of the nuns with the officers he asked, 'Why be so stupid as to blame the Montoneros for taking the two into custody?' They replied that their colleagues took the nuns into custody because they were angry at the moderateness of the government and want sterner measures taken. They stated that their colleagues regard the order of nuns to which the two nuns belong as leftist... According to the two officers with whom Sr. Ornstein spoke, the nuns are being held in one of the [Argentine President's State Intelligence Service] SIDE places of detention... Sr. Ornstein went on to say that he subsequently had dinner with General Jofre, Under Secretary of the Presidency, and asked him, jokingly, what he was going to do with the nuns. Jofre replied, "Isn't this a disaster?" According to Sr. Ornstein, Jofre implied that the Presidency is desperate because the intelligence officers have been given considerable latitude and now the government doesn't know how to stop them. The dilemma is how to release the nuns when the commander of the regiment in Buenos Aires announced that the nuns were in the hands of the Montoneros."*

Document 5

[January 20, 1978 - Disappearance of French Nuns and Mothers' Group Supporters](#)

Telegram from Ambassador Raul Castro to Department of State

The Ambassador indicates the Embassy does not know the level of responsibility for the disappearance. He also states that important players estimate that the Mothers' group had been killed, that the Argentine government considers the case closed, and that diplomatic protests will not be helpful.

"Summary: we have tried hard to clarify the circumstances surrounding the disappearance of two French nuns and some 11 other Argentine citizens in a series of abductions December 8-10. Our findings are contradictory and inconclusive, and the fact remains that at this writing we have no sure knowledge regarding the nuns' abductors or their - present whereabouts -our sources generally agree that the operation was carried out by some arm of the security forces, but which specific group and the level of responsibility is unclear. The supposed Montonero note claiming responsibility for the abduction has been generally discounted and the government's failure to follow up or publicly play that lead indicates that not even GOA is seriously convinced of Montonero involvement. End summary."

"[D]espite an 'exhaustive search' GOA has no information on what happened to the nuns. [A source] believes Minister of Interior Harguindeguy is suggesting that the case should be considered closed."

"The French and Vatican embassies appear to have lapsed into resignation and doubt that any further action would have any positive effect. Officials from both embassies have speculated privately to embassy officers that they fear the nuns are dead. There is also no indication that the French are inclined to take any dramatic action which might prejudice other bilateral interests, including important commercial ties. At this point there seems to be little more that diplomatic protest can produce, except possibly even greater frustration for the government in its inability to determine what happened in this case--or more surely reticence if it is deliberately withholding information which would prove too damaging to reveal. Castro"

Document 6

[January 26, 1978 - Diplomatic Efforts on Behalf of the Thirteen Argentines and Two French Nuns who Disappeared in December](#)

Memorandum from acting Assistant Secretary for Inter-American Affairs John A. Bushnell to Deputy Secretary of State Warren Christopher

The Department of State was preparing to decide on how the US should vote at the upcoming spring World Bank meeting. This Memorandum, based on US Embassy reporting, informed the Deputy Secretary of State Warren Christopher that *"[t]he question of who engineered the kidnappings remains totally unresolved. Our Embassy has sought assiduously to come up with reliable information, but none is available. Some blame the Navy, some blame the Army, and some blame the Federal Police. No one doubts that elements of the Argentine government are implicated in this affair, but hard facts are unavailable. We will continue to press for information and to make representations on behalf of those who disappeared."*

But the Deputy Secretary was not receiving all the information from the Embassy. As Political Officer Tex Harris complained to Assistant Secretary for Human Rights Patt Derian a few months later:

"We were asked just before the IFI Christopher Committee [1] *vote to send in a balance sheet of human rights activities. I presented a full description of what had happened to [them]. This was voted down by the country team as being mere speculation and the Embassy once again stated that we continued to be puzzled by the disappearance of the nuns...*"

The point Harris made was that although it was not clear which unit kidnapped the Mothers, the modus operandi clearly pointed to official Argentine sanction of it. *"Although the country team is puzzled regarding the nuns disappearance, based on the facts presented it is clear by [blank] of the circumstantial evidence that this is not an out of control operation."* [See the May 31, 1978, Human Rights Overview below]

[1] One of the tools the Department of State used to exert pressure on the Argentine Military Junta to improve their performance in human rights was the U.S. vote on funding by the International Funding Institutions (IFI's). The vote in these institutions was decided by a Department of State committee headed by Deputy Secretary of State Warren Christopher, who usually served as arbiter between Assistant Secretary for Human Rights Patt Derian and Assistant Secretary for Inter-American Affairs Terence A. Todman.

Document 7

[February 22, 1978 - US Position on IBRD Loans for Argentina](#)

Press Guidance

The US abstained from voting on \$120 million by the World Bank's International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD). In light of [the past U.S. votes against](#) funds for the Argentine Military Junta, the abstention was a clear recognition of the Military Junta.

Q: What Position did the US take with respect tot he two loans for Argentina which were approved by the IBRD yesterday? (Loan facts: \$109 million for grain sales; \$9 million for a cement plant.)

A: The US representative abstained on these loans. Our position reflects our continuing concern over the human rights situation in Argentina, particularly as reports of disappearances continue.

Q: But doesn't abstention represent a change? Hasn't the US been voting "no" previously?

A: The US decision to abstain was taken in view of indications that the Argentine Government may be recent taking steps to correct its human rights practices.

Q: What recent indications are you referring to?

A: Recent actions by the Government of Argentina include publication of prisoner lists, action to speed up the request of option whereby political prisoners may opt for voluntary exile, and recent prisoner releases."

Document 8

[March 28, 1978 - The Problem of Those Who Disappeared](#)

[More Quotes](#)

Telegram from Ambassador Raul Castro to Department of State

Ambassador Castro had spent months in talks with Argentine government officials on publishing a list of all the detainees, establishing the right for dissidents to exile, and

working to restore the rule of law. In this cable, the Ambassador analyzes US options at a time when the Argentine Military Junta was about to publish a final list of detainees that will not necessarily account for scores of disappeared people.

"6. The problem for the GOA:

Those who have been maintaining the hope that disappeared relatives may turn up will feel their sense of loss acutely. The one-issue groups, such as the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, will clamor for the government to make an accounting for the missing. The issue will be increasingly and dramatically reported internationally. However, we doubt that it will assume significant domestic political proportions..."

"The publications of the lists of detainees, however, together with the implementation of the right of option (voluntary exile) program have set the stage for further modifications of the GOA counter-terrorist practices. These moves, minimal though they be, create some momentum in the direction of a return to due process and normality. We already see -- as in the church's letter to the government -- growing pressures to charge or free those held under the executive authority and to cease the irregular detention practices (abduction) regularly used by the security forces."

"8. The problem for the United States government:

When events require that there be public acknowledgment of many thousands of presumed dead in Argentina, the USG will have to comment on the situation in dealing with Congress and international organizations, human rights groups, and particularly friends and relatives of the missing. The embassy recommends that the US avoid supporting demands that the GOA account for the missing. We believe this would be fruitless and might divert us from the opportunity that lies in the current situation... The embassy recommends that in correspondence and public statements about the problem of those missing in Argentina, the USG avoid language that would stigmatize this government and instead focus attention on the prospects for improved observance of human rights in Argentina."

Ambassador Castro proposes that this is the right time for a demarche that "[c]ould usefully set forth some specific reforms which would permit the USG to abstain on further IFI votes on Argentine loans. We should concentrate on the arrest procedures at this stage, for they are the mechanism for the worst abuses. We should avoid pressing for individual releases--a tactic which the GOA has successfully used to blunt the force of the USG pressures--and should avoid demanding accountability for the disappeared, since that does nothing directly to eliminate further abuses."

Document 9

[March 30, 1978 - Report of Nuns Death](#)

Telegram from Ambassador Castro to Department of State

A source informs the Embassy "that the nuns were abducted by Argentine security agents and at some point were transferred to a [prison located in the town of Junin](#), which is about 150 miles west of Buenos Aires.

4. Embassy also has confidential information obtained through an Argentine government source (protect) that seven bodies were discovered some weeks ago on the Atlantic beach near Mar del Plata. According to this source, the bodies were those of

the two nuns and five mothers who disappeared between December 8 and December 10, 1977. Our source confirmed that these individuals were originally sequestered by members of the security forces acting under their broad mandate against terrorists and subversives. Source further stated that few individuals in GOA were aware of this information.

5. This source has reported reliably in the past and we have reason to believe that he is knowledgeable concerning disappearance questions. Embassy requests that his report be protected in order to avoid compromising a source who has proven helpful in reporting information concerning missing and disappeared individuals. Castro"

Document 10

[April 7, 1978 - Reports of Nuns Death](#)

Telegram from Secretary of State Cyrus Vance to Ambassador Castro

On learning of the heinous death of the Mothers, the Department of State instructs the Embassy to present a demarche before President Videla.

"Department believes we must act forcefully now to make GOA aware of our outrage at such acts... Ambassador should continue presentation by suggesting that GOA consider actions which can be taken against the people who committed this crime. They should be brought to trial and if some in authority winked at the crime those involved should be disciplined."

Document 11

[April 10, 1978 - Conversation with president Videla on nuns death](#)

Telegram from Ambassador Castro to Department of State

Ambassador Castro presented a demarche before President Videla. *"I said the reports of the deaths of the two nuns had dealt a serious blow to USG views of argentine progress on observance of human rights. It was our view that it is crucial for the GOA to establish responsibility for the deaths of nuns and punish those responsible."*

"In a discussion with French ambassador on April 7, he told me that the GOF had concluded that it is fruitless to press the GOA further on the whereabouts of the nuns--bilateral relations had now become severely strained. The GOF had decided upon a course which parallels that of the argentine church; pressing for improved treatment of prisoners, trial or release of executive detainees, and regularized arrest procedures. We will continue to report any plausible information we receive about the nuns and their associates. Castro."

Subsequently, the US followed the path of the French and the Catholic Church, as well as Ambassador Castro's suggestions of not pressing for accountability on the disappeared. The issue of finding and punishing those responsible for the mothers' and nuns' assassination was dropped from the [demarche made in Washington the day after](#), and from the issues raised by Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs [Newsom in his mid-year visit to Argentina](#).

Document 12

[April 10, 1978 – \[Letter Implicating the Argentine Navy in the Disappearance of the](#)

[Mothers of Plaza de Mayo](#)

Letter from escaped Navy prisoner Horacio Domingo Maggio to Associated Press

On March 17, 1978, Maggio escaped from the Navy Mechanical School. In this letter he describes how he was able to talk to French nun Sister Alice Domon the day after she was kidnapped. *"[S]he told me that they had been kidnapped and that they had been made, under torture, to write a letter by hand in French, addressed to the Superior of their Order, and that photographs had been taken of them in what they thought was the basement of the above mentioned building. She also told me that 11 other persons had been kidnapped with them. They remained at the Navy Mechanical School for about ten days and later were 'transferred' with eleven other persons to an unknown place."*

The U.S. Embassy doubted the veracity of Maggio's statements. It was not [until January 1979](#) that the US Embassy believed the contents of the letter and sent it to the Department of State. Maggio was recaptured and disappeared in August 1978.

Document 13

[April 26, 1978 - \[Human Rights\]](#)

[More Quotes](#)

Letter from US Embassy Political Officer Tex Harris to Department of State desk officers Michelle and Jim

"We got a fabulous letter today -- a detailed report of the detention and torture facilities at the [Argentine Navy's] Mechanical School. The sender claims to have seen the Nuns. The smart \$\$\$\$ here believes that is an Army intelligence black operation..."

"One of the jargon breakthroughs we have made recently concerns DAMS --Personas bajo disposicion autoridad militar. This is the argot for the disappeared but alive non recognized prisoners. In a casual conversation last week with a military contact, I asked when such DAMS would be recognized and I was told that the PON (ie SOP) was that DAM prisoners' names are secret. I am trying to work out a report listing all the possible places where DAMS could be housed. Most of the places that we know of are small, with one exception - a recently built military prison outside of Junin, Prov. B.A. We have been told that the new facility has not been placed into service. The attaches have filed an intelligence report about the place and estimate that it would hold up to a 1000 persons with some crowding. I hope that I can get something out that will be meaningful. The problem is that very few people are released from the detention centers which are outside of the law."

"They have started harassing the mothers group again on the Plaza de Mayo. Evidently, the number of mothers meeting there on Thursday has started to grow. It fell sharply after the leaders were disappeared in early December. Recently, according to the mothers, there have been about 200 mothers present. Last Thursday, the cops moved in and cleared off the entire square. There was no violence; the mothers are becoming experts at civil disobedience you only get arrested when you want to be arrested. I will close with my best regards and a bon mot -- Argentina is the only country in the world where you are safe in the streets, but not in your home."

Document 14

[April 27, 1978 - Letter Accusing Argentine Navy of Human Rights Violations -- Possible Provocation](#) [More Quotes](#)

Telegram from Ambassador Castro to Department of State

"1. On April 20 the Embassy received a registered letter of ten pages and three pages of enclosures purportedly written by a Montonero who had recently escaped from 13 months imprisonment in the Naval Mechanics School in Buenos Aires. The letter cites cases number of prominent Argentines who have disappeared over the past year who were held and tortured at the Mechanics School. It states that the two French Nuns who disappeared in December 77 were also held there..."

"2. A review of the letter purportedly signed by Horacio Domingo Maggio raised suspicions in our minds that it may be some sort of provocation. It seems only too convenient for many of the most prominent atrocities of the past year to have been the work of one Naval unit... We are trying confirm that other copies of the letter exist. The Embassy is actively seeking informed Argentine opinion about this letter and will report promptly when sufficient information has been received."

Document 15

[May 15, 1978 – Drawing of the Navy Mechanical School](#)

Note from US Embassy Political Officer Tex Harris to Department of State desk officers Jim and Michelle

"These are the drawings of the navy mechanical school provided by our mysterious source."

[Officers' Club](#)

[Entrance to the Officers' Club](#)

[Third Floor](#)

[Basement \(torture chamber\)](#)

Document 16

[May 31, 1978 - \[Human Rights Overview\]](#)

[More Quotes](#)

Transcription of cassette audio report from Political Officer Tex Harris to Assistant Secretary of State Patt Derian

In a detailed and broad report, Harris described the status of the human rights situation in Argentina, the counterinsurgency campaign by security forces including those which President Videla considered guilty of 'bad thoughts', and the dissenting opinions of staffers regarding the Embassy reporting about human rights.

"Reporting

The Embassy sent a report on the [disappearance of the Mothers and the French] nuns during my absence; it ended up by saying that we were puzzled. We were asked just before the IFI Christopher Committee vote to send in a balance sheet of human rights activities. I presented a full description of what had happened to [them]. This was voted down by the country team as being mere speculation and the Embassy once again stated that we continued to be puzzled by the disappearance of the nuns..."

"Although the country team is puzzled regarding the nuns disappearance, based on the facts presented it is clear by [blank] of the circumstantial evidence that this is not an out of control operation... Unfortunately the Embassy official position is that the disappearance of the nuns is still inexplicable. The reason it is inexplicable is because it is another concrete manifestation that the government has changed its targeting. The first phase of the targeting repression in the country was of course the hardcore Montonero and [unintelligible] terrorists, they have been virtually eliminated. The second phase which began some six months ago which the Embassy has still not reported on was focusing its repressive midnight operations on the Marxists intellectuals subversives, people who in Videla's definition are guilty of 'bad thoughts.' Our files are bulging with student leaders, psychologists, psychiatrists, members of socialist discussions groups, etc. who have disappeared... "

"I have done a number of cables which tied in reported events to targeting by the Argentine security forces of individuals for intellectual subversion. This has been taken out of all of messages going out. Just this week one of our military attaché had one of his reports turned back by the front office in which one of his military contacts in the Argentine Air Force described the government's efforts at weeding out Marxists and subversives..."

"The Chacarita cemetery story which you heard from [unintelligible] has also been surfaced around in the French Embassy. The French are convinced that among that group were there nuns. One police sergeant who evidently stumbled across the truck bringing the cadavers to... [a] field outside of, on the outskirts of greater Buenos Aires. Local people did not know that they existed until an armed helicopter came down and finger printed them. Another story is between 36 and 40 women who were washed ashore Amandayaho [sic] which is near a beach resort area 200 miles from Buenos Aires down the river. "

"This later appearance with information that we developed, but again [were] unable to report, from the Argentine police official who bragged to one of our Embassy officers regarding the Argentine method for disposing of bodies. This is now according to the source been centralized in an operation in for all actions occurring within the first corp. People after they have been interrogated or are deemed no longer of use and a decision has been made at a senior level they should be executed. The people are then being told that they are being transferred to Corrientes Province and must receive an injection before they go for health reasons. The people gracefully submit to the injection which contains curia which is a derivative of the poison used by Amazon natives in their blow guns. Evidently it has the effect of contracting the muscles. By receiving the dose the people very shortly there after die and one of the effects of the poison is to contract their lungs. They are then placed in planes which take off at the de Campo de Mayo airfield and are dropped in the mouth of the river where they sink and are quickly devoured by the fish..."

Fecha: 21 de julio de 1976

Título: [Refugiados en Argentina]

Tipo: Carta [clasificación desconocida], Departamento de Estado

De: Henry Kissinger, Secretario de Estado de EEUU

Para: Edward H. Levi, Jefe del Departamento de Justicia de los Estados Unidos

> Ver Documento 760721dos (Archivo *.pdf en Adobe/Acrobat)

Henry Kissinger le solicita al Departamento de Justicia que permita la entrada a una cierta cantidad de refugiados desde Argentina. Al explicar la racionalidad de esta decisión, el Secretario de Estado sigue la línea del gobierno argentino, según la cual el gobierno argentino ha intentado protegerlos, pero no ha podido.

"Los refugiados en la Argentina están en una situación muy grave. Muchos de los que están en el grupo que queremos ayudar han sido víctimas de secuestros, torturas y asesinato. El gobierno argentino, junto con sus fuerzas de seguridad no han sido capaces de lidiar con esta situación de violencia y caos en el país...". 23 de julio de 1976- La libertad de prensa en Latinoamérica ha sufrido serios reveses en estas pasadas seis semanas. El mes anterior, dos de los diarios más independientes en la Argentina, Crisis y Cuestionario, decidieron finalizar las publicaciones porque no poseían las mínimas garantías para sus miembros. Un editor le declaró: "Parece estúpido esperar hasta que efectivamente maten a alguien". Ambas revistas fueron fundadas en Mayo de 1973, tras la partida del último régimen militar en la Argentina. Crisis rápidamente se estableció como una revista cultural y política de vanguardia, ocupando el lugar que dejó la revista Marcha cuando cerró ese mismo año. Cuestionario ha sido frecuentemente mencionada como una de las revistas más balanceadas y sensible a los comentarios de los desarrollos en la Argentina. (760723LANL)

Fecha: 23 de julio de 1976, 21:10 horas

Título: El Gobierno Militar luego de cuatro meses en el poder

Tipo: Cable [Secreto-XGDS-2], Departamento de Estado

De: Maxwell Chaplin, Subjefe de Misión, Embajada de EEUU en Argentina

Para: Secretario de Estado

[> Ver Documento 760723dos2](#) (Archivo *.pdf en Adobe/Acrobat)

En un cambio radical de su posición desde que la Junta llegó al poder, un cable para el Secretario de Estado de sumo secreto, la Embajada de los Estados Unidos reconoce la responsabilidad del gobierno de Videla en la vasta "contraviolencia". El documento hace una apreciación real de las atrocidades cometidas en Argentina y corre el velo de la mítica división entre oficiales militares duros y moderados que ha utilizado la Embajada.

"Los escuadrones de la muerte llamados Triple A, estaban actuando antes del Golpe de Estado del 24 de marzo, pero la mayoría de los argentinos esperaba que sus actividades finalizaran cuando se dio el Golpe. Sin embargo, este no fue el caso. Si algo ocurrió, las acciones de los grupos paramilitares, o parapoliciales fueron en aumento desde el 24 de marzo. Los mismos no identificados Ford Falcon están siendo utilizados, y muchos Policías Federales que participaron en la Triple A están activos en las operaciones que se llevan a cabo. Estimaciones de cuántos han sido secuestrados ilegalmente se elevan hasta los miles, de los cuales muchos han sido torturados y asesinados. Muchas de las víctimas no han tenido relación alguna con el ERP, o con Montoneros. Los blancos han incluido a curas católicos, y miles de refugiados chilenos y uruguayos en la Argentina... El objetivo era reunir inteligencia, e intimidar a todo aquel que pudiera tener relación alguna con los terroristas... La violencia contra personas inocentes, por ejemplo, puede ser contraproducente. La muerte de cuatro curas el 14 de Julio en manos de policías sobre entusiasmados ciertamente dañó a la causa del gobierno mucho más de lo que la ayudó. En realidad, es difícil intentar ver en cómo la ayudó, en esta, o en los otros cientos de casos en los cuales el gobierno los describe como "errores". Si estos "errores" continúan por mucho tiempo más, podrían en su momento producir una reacción popular contra el gobierno mismo"

"...[he aquí] el dilema en que se encuentra Videla. No desea ver dañada la imagen de su gobierno por los abusos de derechos humanos. Pero al mismo tiempo, su objetivo principal es el mismo que el de los de línea dura: derrotar a los terroristas de izquierda. Esto tendrá precedencia sobre todo lo demás, incluyendo los derechos humanos... Él tolerará los excesos de parte de las fuerzas de seguridad porque él mismo debe depender de ellas"

"El USG le ha dado al gobierno de Videla impresionantes demostraciones de apoyo, pero ha intentado constantemente hacerles comprender (aparentemente con poco éxito) la necesidad de controlar los excesos por parte de las fuerzas de seguridad si es que desean mantener ese apoyo. Chaplin". Fines de julio de 1976- La usina eléctrica deja sin suministro a todo el Departamento de Ledesma en la Provincia de Jujuy, mientras policías, gendarmes, militares y capataces del ingenio azucarero local allanan y saquean viviendas en los pueblos de Libertador Gral. San Martín y de Calilegua. En vehículos de la empresa son trasladados más de cuatrocientos trabajadores, estudiantes y profesionales a los galpones de mantenimiento de la

empresa dónde permanecerán días y meses atados y encapuchados. Tras la tortura e interrogatorios, algunos son liberados, otros son enviados a comisarías o cuarteles militares y aparecen en cárceles de distintas provincias. "La noche del apagón" es un ejemplo de la colaboración de algunos sectores empresariales con la represión (CELS)

4 de agosto de 1976- Monseñor Enrique Angelelli, Obispo de la Diócesis de La Rioja muere en circunstancias sospechosas cuando su automóvil se estrella a la altura de la localidad de Punta de Llanos, Provincia de La Rioja. El Obispo posee documentación que denuncia el asesinato de los sacerdotes de Chamental. Voceros del Comandante de la Armada, Almirante Emilio Massera, pedían a altos personeros de la iglesia el remover de su puesto a los obispos de Neuquén, La Rioja y Formosa, monseñores, Jaime Francisco de Nevaes, Enrique Angelelli, y Augusto Scozzina, respectivamente. (CELS, 760804FBIS)

4 de agosto de 1976- Durante las audiencias del Subcomité de Organizaciones Internacionales en la Cámara de Representantes de EEUU, liderada por Donald M. Fraser, Hewson Ryan, Asistente del Secretario de Estado para asuntos Latinoamericanos, justifica las capturas ilegales y las detenciones de ciudadanos uruguayos por parte de las fuerzas de seguridad uruguayas operando en la Argentina. Según Ryan, los uruguayos capturados pertenecen a la organización OPR-33. Al menos 16 uruguayos han desaparecido en Buenos Aires desde enero de 1976. (760804CIRHR; PIT-CNT)

17 de agosto de 1976- Son secuestrados y desaparecidos Hipólito Solari Yrigoyen y Mario Abel Amaya, dos destacados líderes y abogados de presos gremiales y políticos. A raíz de la presión política, es legalizada su situación y puestos a disposición del Poder Ejecutivo Nacional. Amaya no sobrevive a las torturas y muere en el hospital penitenciario de la Cárcel de Devoto. Solari Yrigoyen es expulsado del país. Los Radicales, quienes han estado manteniéndose al margen desde el Golpe, han incitado una protesta abierta por el secuestro de los senadores Hipólito Yrigoyen y Mario Amaya quienes, tras haber sido liberados de su detención ilegal por parte de la Marina, todavía siguen bajo arresto. (CELS; 760924LANL)

20 de agosto de 1976- Treinta cuerpos, muchos de los cuales están desmembrados por poderosos explosivos, fueron encontrados ayer en un basurero en las afueras de Pilar, a 79 kilómetros al norte de Buenos Aires. Sus cuerpos dinamitados, y una señal a su lado, proclamaba que tal lugar era una tumba de Montoneros ejecutados por ser 'traidores de su país'. Cuerpos de otras 16 víctimas fueron encontrados en otros lugares de Buenos Aires. Han habido tres bombas en Buenos Aires, que han causado daños, pero no heridas la noche del 21 de agosto. La identificación de 46 de las víctimas podrá ser establecida; dos fueron mutiladas, por lo que no será posible ni siquiera reconocer su sexo. Esta imposibilidad de identificar los cuerpos incrementa los rumores de que prisioneros están siendo usados para aumentar las bajas en la lucha contra de la subversión. Pero sus muertes han forzado a una crítica pública hacia el gobierno referido a los escuadrones de la muerte de grupos derechistas. El presidente Videla expresó su repudio ese mismo día, respecto al destructivo episodio, y lo atribuyó a "la demencia de grupos irracionales", e instó a todo el gobierno a utilizar todo su poder para encontrar y castigar a los responsables. (760827LANL, CELS, 760821FBIS [Buenos Aires Herald])