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DEPARTMENT OF STATE
TELEGRAM

CONTROL 3741
7 Jun 76
1208

INDICATE
☐ COLLECT
☐ CHARGE TO

(VOL)

International Security
6/7/76

~~FOR~~

FROM Amembassy BUENOS AIRES

CLASSIFICATION

E.O. 11652:
TAGS:
SUBJECT:

XGDS-2
PFOR, AR, UY, PA, CI, BR, BL, SHUM
Possible International Implications of Violent Deaths
of Political Figures Abroad

DDO167

ACTION: Secstate WASHDC IMMEDIATE

INFO

Amembassy ASUNCION PRIORITY
" BRASILIA "
" LA PAZ "
" MONTEVIDEO "

ARGENTINA PROJECT (S200000044)
U.S. DEPT. OF STATE, A/RPS/IPS
Margaret P. Grafeld, Director
(X) Release () Excise () Deny

Exemption(s):
Declassify: () In Part (X) In Full
() Classify as () Extend as () Downgrade to
Date Declassify on Reason

REF

BUENOS AIRES 3741

State 137156

AMB
DCM
POL-5
POL/R
ECOM
USIS
LEGAT
DAO
CHRON

1. Elements of GOA security forces may well have been involved in murders of Uruguayans Michelini and Gutierrez Ruiz and of Bolivian ex-President Torres. Embassy has no positive evidence that this is the case but there is considerable circumstantial evidence. Those who kidnapped Gutierrez Ruiz, for example, remained at his home for something like an hour, made no effort to hide their presence and obviously did not fear intervention on part of police. Left-wing terrorists unlikely to have behaved with such impunity. Further, Federal Police at first refused to even accept denuncia of Mrs. Michelini when she attempted to report that her husband had been kidnapped, and they made no effort to investigate until

DRAFTED BY:

POL:RSteven/WSSmith:cc WSS

DRAFTING DATE

6/7/76

TEL. EXT.

128

CONTENTS AND CLASSIFICATION APPROVED BY:

AMBASSADOR ROBERT C. HILL

CLEARANCES: IN DRAFT:

POL/R:DSmock WSS LEGATT:RScherrer WSS

DCM:MChaplin me

DAO:PACoughlin WSS

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several days later.

2. Even though elements of govt security forces may be involved, it is by no means clear that such operations are condoned by top echelons of GOA. On contrary, Videla and moderates may well disapprove. Videla reportedly very disturbed over Torres murder and is said to have given orders that matter must be investigated thoroughly and those guilty brought to justice. So far, however, despite his seemingly good intentions, Videla has not been able to stop abuses. Sources close to him insist that he will shortly take measures to bring situation under control. So far, however, he has not asserted himself and taken effective measures. This could simply reflect his cautious style. On the other hand, some observers are convinced that Videla does not have the strength to confront the hardliners and that a confrontation would lead to his removal as President; hence, this theory holds, he must ride along and hope that a propitious moment presents itself.

3. Whatever the reason for Videla's continued inertia in this area, the results are the same. Our best estimate is that elements of security service are involved, that they have approval at least of their immediate superiors and count with tolerance (or more) of levels even higher.

How high acquiescence goes is impossible to determine

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at this time. One thing is clear, Videla cannot long

hide behind protestations of innocence. If such abuses continue much longer without effective countermeasures, culpability (whether by omission or commission) inevitably will be imputed to his govt.

4. Argentine security forces are certainly in touch with sister services in neighboring countries and there may well be cooperation among them. UNHCR here has told Emboff his office has names of Uruguayan security officers now in Buenos Aires who are cooperating with GOA security forces in identifying Uruguayan exiles of interest to GOU. UNHCR is investigating five specific cases of Uruguayans believed to have been taken back to Uruguay. UN rep suggests that hardline elements within Uruguayan military sponsored deaths of Michelini and Gutierrez Ruiz, with executive assistance of like-minded elements in Argentine security forces. Theory is that this was intended as warning to others in GOU against any "apertura" to moderate or leftist elements, and would have practical effect of eliminating potential leaders of Uruguayan opposition. Embassy Montevideo is in better position to comment on this theory. Whether GOU was involved or not in Michelini/Gutierrez Ruiz affair, we believe, as indicated above, that Argentine security forces, or elements thereof, were. GOA would have limited interest in elimination

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of such exile leaders for its own ends, however, hence,
it is likely that killings were meant as a favor
(whether requested or not) to GOU or to elements in
Uruguayan military/security forces.

5. In case of former President Torres of Bolivia, we
have less to draw upon. Reports have reached us that
Torres was considered by GOA to have been directly and
actively involved with Bolivian extremists such as ELM/ and Argentine Montoneros.

GOA, or its hardline elements, might have had sufficient
cause to kill him for own ends, or same situation may
have existed as outlined above for Uruguay. UNHCR
rep, who knows countries of region well, feels that
killing of exile leader such as Torres is not in Bolivian
style--Embassy La Paz will be better judge of that. On
other hand, UN rep told us that posters have been reported
in city of Salta and Argentine/Bolivian border areas
which carry photos and names of prominent Bolivian
exiles such as Torres and which ask Argentine public to
report whereabouts to Argentine (sic) police. Posters
are said to carry seal of Bolivian govt. We have no
confirmation of this.

6. UN rep also reports presence of Chilean security officers
in Mendoza, and says he is certain there are Brazilian
officers on liaison missions here as well. He has no
firm reports as yet of forcible repatriations or arranged

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killings of nationals of these countries, however, but he believes they are taking place.

7. In realm of speculation, UN rep suggests that there may be an informal "understanding" and cooperation among hardline elements in military governments of Southern Cone to purge area of what they consider "Communist and leftist" elements, by specific killings and by intimidation of various exile communities and resultant exodus to countries out of region. The theory is interesting and would possibly explain developments.

HILL

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