

HEWSON RYAN

The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training
Foreign Affairs Oral History Project

*Ryan was
at 8/3/76
ARA/CIA Briefing*

AMBASSADOR HEWSON RYAN

Interviewed by: Richard Nethercut
Initial interview date: April 27, 1988
Copyright 1998 ADST

Now, as far as the other things that I did in the ARA Bureau, I also handled South America, and in this I was very much involved in the human rights problems. The pressures from human rights organizations in the United States on the U.S. Government to intervene in Argentina, Uruguay, Brazil and Chile, were very strong. Secretary Kissinger was adamant in that we would do this by quiet diplomacy and not public statements or public diplomacy. Therefore, we did a great deal, some of which is slowly coming out into the public domain, in bringing pressure on the governments of Argentina, Uruguay, Paraguay to some extent, and certainly Chile, by calling in ambassadors, by sending private groups down and sending officials to talk to these governments about their miserable human rights image in the United States. I personally went to Argentine and Uruguay, Brazil, on this. We were able to successfully arrange the release of a good number of intellectuals and scientists during this period. Usually when we would get word from an American group we would immediately go to the post and ask them to go in and talk privately to the people.

But I think that we were remiss in some ways.

I know of one case, which has never come to public attention, of the fact that we knew fairly early on that the governments of the Southern Cone countries were planning, or at least talking about, some assassinations abroad in the summer of 1976. I was Acting Assistant Secretary at the time and I tried to get a cable cleared with the 7th Floor instructing our ambassadors to go in to the Chiefs of State, or the highest possible level in these governments to let them know that we were aware of these conversations and to warn them that this was a violation of the very basic fundamentals of civilized society. Unfortunately that cable never got out and about a month later former Chilean Ambassador Letelier was assassinated on the streets of Washington. Whether there was a direct relationship or not, I don't know. Whether if we had gone in, we might have prevented this, I don't know. But we didn't. We were extremely reticent about taking a strong forward public posture, and even a private posture in certain cases, as was this case in the Chilean assassination.