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BUREAU OF INTELLIGENCE AND RESEARCH

SOUTH AMERICA: SOUTHERN CONE SECURITY PRACTICES

Recent attacks on leftist exiles in Argentina raise questions about the security practices of the Southern Cone nations: Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Paraguay, and Uruguay.

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

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

The fact that Southern Cone governments are all conservative military regimes, none of which has an exemplary record on human rights, invites speculation concerning the existence of an inter-governmental assassination plot. The evidence supporting such speculation is scanty, however, and it is equally possible that at least some of the exiles' problems are traceable to exclusively Argentine factors.

Argentine Setting. In recent months, Argentina has become a less attractive haven for leftist exiles than it was before the March 24 military coup, which elevated General Videla to the presidency. After the Peronists resumed power in May 1973, opponents of the conservative military governments on Argentina's borders, and especially pro-Allende Chileans, swelled the refugees' roles in Argentina. Since the coup, however, Argentina has been governed by conservative officers bent upon eradicating the subversive threat, and exiles have been victimized by a tri-cornered battle among security personnel, leftists, and right-wing assassins. In the most publicized incidents:

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--on May 21, Zelmar Michelini and Luis Hector Gutierrez Ruiz, ex-parliamentarians from Uruguay, were found murdered;

--on June 4, the slain body of ex-Bolivian president Juan Jose Torres was discovered; and

--on June 11, 24 Chilean and Uruguayan refugees were kidnapped en masse and later released after interrogations accompanied by beatings and threats.

Fear approaching panic swept the exile community in the wake of these incidents, and one UNHCR\* source estimated that about 1,000 Chileans and perhaps 400 other exiles were in immediate danger either from Argentine security forces or from right-wing extremists in Argentina or in their home countries.

Victims of Argentine Circumstances. The fact that these events are occurring in Argentina and not elsewhere in the Southern Cone lends credence to the idea that their origins lie in a uniquely Argentine set of circumstances rather than in an elaborate international conspiracy. Given the tense and volatile security environment that has existed since the coup, exiles can become victims for a number of reasons:

- operational involvement with one of Argentina's terrorist groups;
- 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 rightwingers; this may have been the "crime" of Michelini, Gutierrez Ruiz, and Torres;
- efforts by rightist extremists to frighten leftist exiles into fleeing Argentina, which may have been the intent behind the mass kidnapping on June 11; and
- attempts by so-called hardliners to intensify the antisubversive campaign, which they believe the Videla government is not pursuing vigorously enough. For those who hold this view, the assassination of exiles would serve a dual purpose--eliminating

\* United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

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alleged security threats and undermining the Videla government by exposing it to pressure on the human rights issue.

Argentine Security Forces Implicated. Official Argentine security personnel are clearly involved in the anti-exile activities, although it is impossible to assess in what numbers or at what level of command. An operation like the mass kidnapping of refugees could not have been executed without police and/or military connivance. President Videla does not condone or encourage these actions, but neither does he appear capable of halting them.

Intergovernmental Cooperation. Southern Cone security forces undoubtedly coordinate their counterterrorist efforts insofar as information exchanges are concerned, and Argentina and Brazil may provide limited training and advisory service to their smaller neighbors. Over two years ago, security officials from all the Southern Cone countries except Brazil met in Buenos Aires and reportedly formalized arrangements to facilitate information exchanges and the movement of security officials on government business.

Cooperation of this nature is logical:

- all the Southern Cone governments consider themselves targets of international leftist subversion;
- irrefutable evidence shows that terrorists move back and forth across Southern Cone borders; and
- terrorists based in Bolivia (ELN), Uruguay (Tupamaros), Chile (MIR), and Argentina (ERP) are formally, if somewhat ineffectually, organized in the Revolutionary Coordinating Junta (JCR). The JCR is primarily a creature of the ERP; and according to available information, it has not sponsored any major Southern Cone operations. JCR representatives in Western Europe provide assistance to cohorts temporarily residing there and publish propaganda against Southern Cone governments.

In early June of this year, representatives of the intelligence services of Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Paraguay, and Uruguay met again, in Santiago, with Brazilian observers present, to further organize long-range cooperation among the participating countries. The following decisions were made:

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- an intergovernmental computerized data bank of information on known and suspected subversives will be established in Santiago;
- Brazil will become a full-fledged member of the group; and
- Argentina, Chile, and Uruguay will cooperate covertly against the activities of the JCR in Paris.

Evidence that cooperation among the security forces extends to some sort of "Murder, Inc." is, however, inconclusive at best.

- The 24 exiles kidnapped on June 11 insist that they recognized Chilean and Uruguayan nationals among their interrogators.
- Edgardo Enriquez, a high-level leader of the Chilean MIR who reportedly was captured in Argentina in late March or early April, may have been turned over to and subsequently killed by Chileans.

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[REDACTED] Brazilian and Argentine military units reportedly have operated jointly and inside each other's border when necessary.

- Despite pointed GOA denials, published charges persist to the effect that Argentine authorities are forcibly repatriating political exiles.

On balance, the evidence does not conclusively establish the existence of formal, high-level coordination among Southern Cone security forces for the express purpose of eliminating exiles. It strongly suggests, however, that cooperation does occur on at least a localized and opportunistic basis, particularly in border areas and in instances involving the capture of terrorist leaders.

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