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THE SECRETARY OF STATE
WASHINGTON

OFFICE OF THE
SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

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DECLASSIFIED IN FULL
Authority: EO 13526
Chief, Records & Declass Div, WHS
Date: SEP 01 2017

August 18, 1978

Dear Harold:

Like you, I was concerned by the tenor of General Agosti's letter. He appears sincerely to misunderstand our position regarding Argentina.

We asked our Ambassador in Buenos Aires for his views on the letter. Because of the sensitivity of intra-governmental rivalries in Argentina, Ambassador Castro checked with President Videla who sent word that there would be no problem in inviting General Agosti after September 15, when Admiral Massera is expected to retire. Beyond that, however, Ambassador Castro saw serious difficulty in inviting Agosti so long as relations remained as strained as they are now.

I agree with Ambassador Castro that we should invite Agosti when there is a possibility that we can react favorably to some of their defense needs. Otherwise, an Agosti invitation might only exacerbate matters. Unfortunately, the human rights situation in Argentina still remains bad, though a measure of long term optimism is warranted. Thus, I would suggest a forthcoming response to General Agosti that does not, however, say anything about an invitation. Should events lead to an improvement, then by all means we should move on an invitation. Our staffs have discussed a possible reply, and I enclose a draft that might be helpful in responding to General Agosti's concerns.

In the meantime we are making every effort to let the Argentines know that we do want a positive relationship with them and are prepared to recognize human rights improvements. Pete Vaky will be going to Buenos Aires shortly and we will have a better feel for the situation.

Sincerely,

The Honorable
Harold Brown,
Secretary of Defense.

Office of the Secretary of Defense 5 USC 552
Chief, RDD, ESD, WHS
Date: 01 Sep 2017 Authority: EO 13526
Declassify: X Deny in Full:
Declassify in Part:
Reason:
MDR: 17 -M- 2315

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DRAFT REPLY

Page determined to be Unclassified
Reviewed Chief, RDD, WHS
IAW EO 13526, Section 3.5
Date: SEP 01 2017

Dear General Agosti:

I wish to thank you for your thoughtful letter concerning your desire for an improvement in the relations between our two countries.

Like you, I am concerned about the difficulties which have arisen in our bilateral relationship. I am hopeful, however, that these can be overcome and that the cordial and close contacts which have existed between our countries can soon be restored.

The ties between Argentina and the United States should be based on mutual comprehension and understanding. We are mindful of the serious terrorist threat which faced your government when it assumed power in March 1976 and are gratified that terrorist violence has been very greatly reduced. As you know, the United States has publicly condemned these terrorist campaigns. At the same time, however, my government is troubled by the reports it continues to receive about the human rights situation in Argentina.

Lieutenant General Orlando Ramon Agosti Echenique,
Member, Ruling Junta
of the Argentine Republic,
Buenos Aires.

Especially now that terrorist acts have so sharply diminished, we hope that the Argentine Government will consider it possible to return to normal legal methods and procedures to combat the remaining terrorists.

We are deeply concerned in the human rights area with issues involving security of the person. With respect to the domestic political order in other countries, we naturally favor democratic processes, but we do not seek to impose our particular form of government on other countries. Our concern in the field of human rights is solidly based in international law and accords to which both of our countries subscribe.

The United States wishes to maintain close and cooperative relations with Argentina. We are fully convinced that such cooperation can be mutually beneficial and important for both of our countries. However, as you know, U.S. law and policy impose severe restrictions on the approval of export licenses for military equipment and training in relation to the human rights situation in the recipient country.

We believe every effort should be made to maintain the close ties which have existed between our countries on commercial questions, nuclear cooperation, scientific research, cultural interchanges and in numerous other areas. It is our desire to expand these positive contacts wherever possible.

General, we do wish better relations with Argentina and hope that you will work with us to make this possible.

Sincerely,

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Reviewed Chief, RDD, WHS
IAW EO 13526, Section 3.5
Date: SEP 01 2017

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THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
WASHINGTON, D. C. 20301

17 JUL 1978

Honorable Cyrus R. Vance
Secretary of State
Department of State
Washington, D. C. 20520

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Authority: EO 13526
Chief, Records & Declass Div, WHS
Date: SEP 01 2017

Dear Cy:

I am forwarding for your consideration a letter just received by Dave Jones from General Agosti, Air Force member of the ruling junta in Argentina. I think it bears careful reading, because it constitutes the clearest statement we have seen from the Argentine leadership on a number of points.

Agosti as Air Force Commander points out the practical consideration of keeping his force operationally ready. Clearly he prefers the U.S. as the prime source. Agosti as junta member points out the approaching requirement for a hard political decision to turn to Europe for new equipment--a decision which would also involve considerable monetary cost, as well as detracting from our own efforts to reduce arms trade in the hemisphere. Agosti the man expresses deep concern over the current course of events, encouraging further dialogue aimed at a "new current of understanding."

It is Agosti's call for further dialogue which I see as seeking and offering us an opportunity to continue what was started by the Newsom mission, which you recommended. I think this is encouraging--in sharp contrast to the Montes reaction described in Ambassador Castro's message (BA 5169). Clearly Agosti represents a moderate element in the leadership closely akin to the approach of President Videla (BA 5209). My view is that we should seize on this opportunity and try to work with Agosti.

First, I recommend that we respond to him promptly, reaffirming our own deep concerns and expressing the hope that mutual respect, common interests and the search for mutual understanding will lead to early solutions. Second, I believe we must be prepared to assure him that meaningful Argentine initiatives, including an opening for the IAHRG visit, will be recognized by prompt and positive steps on our part. Finally, I believe we should invite Agosti to Washington and hear him out. General Allen would host the visit. Charles Duncan or I would find time to meet with him, as would Dave Jones. You might also wish to receive him, countering the Montes charge that GOA officials are slighted in Washington.

Argentina 2 091.3

17 July 78

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I hope you will agree to this approach, and will so advise me at your very earliest convenience. I am available to discuss this further if you wish.

Sincerely,

Harold

Attachment
a/s

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Date: SEP 01 2017

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Fuerza Aérea Argentina
Comandante en Jefe

Page determined to be Unclassified
Reviewed Chief, RDD, WHS
IAW EO 13526, Section 3.5
Date: SEP 01 2017

BUENOS AIRES, June 28th 1978.

Dear General Jones:

Deeply concerned with the development of the relations between our Governments, I have considered convenient to let you know these opinions on the matter.

I have taken into account for this the true communication that we have established in our previous meetings, identified by the true vocation characteristic of an authentic military man, and conscious of our responsibility on decisions of the outmost importance for our countries.

The present situation of the relationship between our countries is not encouraging and it is hard for me to clearly understand the meaning of the policy of the United States towards Argentina.

In all the fields it is essential to know where our friends and enemies are. Above the difference in some important cases, most of the Argentine have believed in the friendship of your country, based on the defense of mutual values.

But beyond those considerations, we have believed to find the existence of common interests on which we could build up our relationship. We haven't asked special favors or concessions but only to work within a frame of mutual respect.

We could even understand your indifference towards us. But we cannot do it in front of an attitude that sometimes seems harder than that bestowed to potential enemies.

We think we are really understanding and ready to exchange ideas. Nevertheless we cannot accept impositions on decisions that are only ours; that would mean to give up a principle of sovereignty always claimed by our countries.

Fuerza Aerea Argentina
Comandante en Jefe

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The continuity of present conditions will unfortunately lead to a restatement of Argentine position towards the United States. Anyhow, up to this point, the damage caused to our trust in your country will be very difficult to repair.

As you know, dear General, as military men, we have the unavoidable responsibility of being permanently prepared for the fulfillment of our mission.

For that reason, it is particularly serious not to count today with guaranties in order to be able to keep in working conditions the material acquired in the U.S.

Therefore the Air Force will not be able to neglect in the future the need to resort in a higher degree to other sources for its equipment.

We are looking forward to the surging of a new current of understanding that will strengthen the relations between our Governments.

Because I believe in that possibility, because I wish to remain confident in that result, because reasonable conditions are given to that end, it has been my wish to let you know my concern for the present situation.

Wishing you success in your arduous functions and your personal happiness, I remain,

Sincerely yours,