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SECURITY AFFAIRS

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ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20301

Office of the Secretary of Defense

Chief, RDD, ESD, WHS

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MEMORANDUM FOR THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

THROUGH THE UNDER SECRETARY OF DEFENSE FOR POLICY

71 21 NOV 1983

SUBJECT: Certification for Argentina - INFORMATION MEMORANDUM (U)

(U) According to the 1981 amendment to the 1977 Humphrey-Kennedy Amendment, military assistance may be extended to Argentina only if the President certifies to the Congress that "the Government of Argentina has made significant progress in complying with internationally recognized principles of human rights, and that the provision of such assistance, credits, loans guarantees, defense articles, defense services, or export licences is in the national interest of the United States." Over the past two years there have been only a handful of human rights incidents and no cases of disappearances. The extensive political opening and the recent elections highlight an improved human rights environment far beyond the expectation of the Congress when the 1981 certification amendment was passed.

It will be argued that certification of Argentina without simultaneous certification of Chile would not be evenhanded between two countries with major political tensions. The GOC has campaigned hard against certification for Argentina alone. But Chile's real security interest is not in the symbolic act of certification but in the possibility of arms sales thereafter. In addition, we believe that the election of a civilian government and the advent of democracy in Argentina weighs more heavily in enhancing Chile's security and improving bilateral relations between the countries.

The UK has consistently urged the US to withhold certification from Argentina pending its agreement to formally declare an end to the state of hostilities over the Falklands. Mrs. Thatcher apparently views US certification as a significant political bonus for Argentina that could work against the UK in the upcoming UN discussions on the disputed islands. Interestingly, we note that both Argentina and the UK have found ways around confrontation when it is convenient, i.e., the UK has delivered engines for the FRG MEKO frigates being built for the Argentine Navy and indirect conversations on the acquisition of British helicopters for these ships have continued between the UK and FRG. In addition, the Argentines have been able to purchase medical products and automobile components from various British companies. Even though British government seems to demonstrate a dual standard toward arms transfer, we would agree that the USG should not make any major arms sales to Argentina over the short term. In fact, we believe that Alfonsin's stated intention to reduce military spending due to their huge international debt and the Argentine military's view of the US as an unreliable security partner will preclude any early major arms requests from Argentina.

330-85-0023, bx 1, Argentina (Apr-Dec)

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(u) In sum, we feel that the pluses override the negative aspects of Presidential certification for Argentina and that DOD should support the certification of Argentina. Such a move by the US would recognize the efforts of the present military government in moving the country toward democracy and provide the new civilian government with a sign of our interest in improving relations. Prior to any announcement, the US should once again reaffirm to the UK our intention to consult closely on any major equipment or parts sales until the Falklands problem is settled. Chile should be informed that we are moving to recognize Argentina's political opening, but that the US will continue to maintain a tight control over any arms transfers to Argentina.

(u) For your information, John Bushnell, US Charge d'Affaires in Buenos Aires and Frank Ortiz, the US Ambassador-designate, strongly favor certification for Argentina but recommend a very tight rein on arms sales for at least the next couple of years. In addition, the JCS and Services support certification for Argentina but continue to desire equal treatment for Chile when the political situation permits.

(u) Ambassador Ortiz has indicated that he would like to obtain USG authority to notify the Argentines of US certification just prior to the inauguration on 10 December. He believes this would be a positive gesture toward the Argentine military establishment and would eliminate a sensitive issue for President Alfonsin during the transition period. Prior to making the announcement he would privately discuss the matter with the President-elect and gain his concurrence. State seems to favor an announcement at, or after the inauguration by the US representative attending the ceremony, probably Vice President Bush.

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