

DIAIAPPR 39-76
1 MARCH 1976

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ARGENTINA:
POLITICAL CHANGE LIKELY (U)

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3-28



DEFENSE INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

INTELLIGENCE APPRAISAL

DECLASSIFIED IN FULL
Authority: EO 13526
Chief, Records & Declass Div, WHS
Date: APR 11 2018

Office of the Secretary of Defense
Chief, RDD, ESD, WHS
Date: 11 APR 2018 Authority: EO 13526
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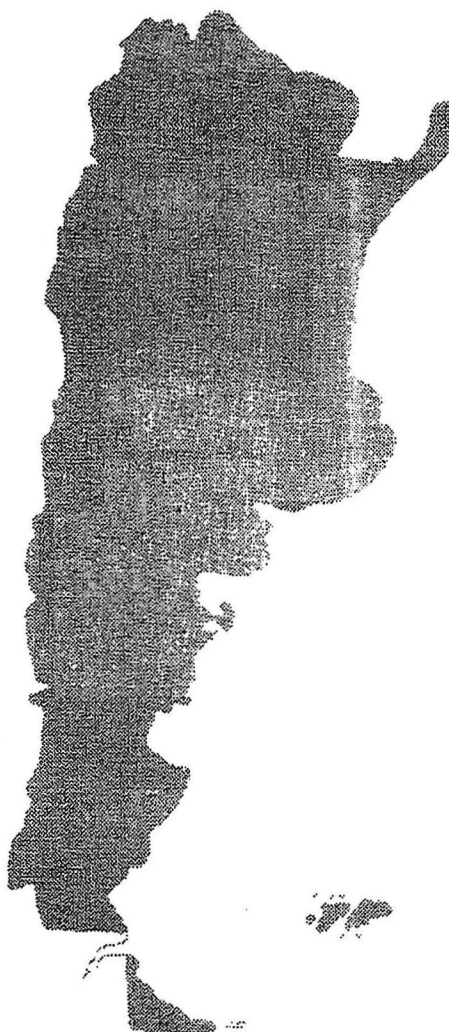
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ARGENTINA: POLITICAL CHANGE LIKELY (U)

Summary

~~(S//NOFORN//UNINTEL)~~ Argentina's military high command has most likely decided to carry out a coup against the troubled regime of President Maria Estela Peron (80% confidence) before 5 March (70% confidence). The situation is grave and there are only a few options left open to the embattled President. Mrs. Peron could either resign, in effect turning power over to her constitutional successor, Senate President Italo Luder, or the military (10% confidence), or Congress could declare Mrs. Peron incapable of continuing in office, forcing her from the position constitutionally (20% confidence). Heretofore, the President has refused to resign, and a move to impeach her has failed. Mrs. Peron could also agree to make political and economic changes in a last-ditch move to buy more time (90% confidence), possibly putting off a military move (10% confidence).

~~(S//NOFORN)~~ Current military plans favor the installation of Army Commander Gen Videla as head of government following a takeover (90% confidence). A military government possibly modeled after that of Brazil is envisioned, with Videla aided by a predominantly military Cabinet. A junta-style arrangement of three or more senior officers with Gen Videla as chief is also possible (40% confidence). A third, less likely possibility would be a civilian figure-head president acting at the behest of the military (30% confidence). A constitutional succession -- the installation of Senate President Italo Luder as Chief Executive -- seems least likely (20% confidence). All alternatives indicate that the military would play a dominant role, suspending constitutional guarantees and rounding up leftists and Peronist opposition elements (95% confidence). The country's devastated economy, with a daily inflation rate of approximately one percent, will have to be restored as well, through strict austerity measures, possible import curtailment, and immediate international financial credits.

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~~(S//NOFORN)~~ It is very unlikely that any successor regime will change the country's pro-US stance (95% confidence). In any event, Washington would almost certainly be looked to for economic and possibly other assistance.

Background

~~(S//NOFORN)~~ Open speculation about an imminent military coup has been circulating for months. There have been rumors and reports of a planned military move almost from the day Vice-President Peron became President after the death of her husband in July 1974. The aggressive, sometimes defiant attitude of Mrs. Peron, her firm determination to remain in office, the military's desire for a constitutional solution rather than a military takeover, and the absence of a viable political alternative have been the dominant deterrents to a military move.

~~(S//NOFORN)~~ The military's attitude toward their assumption of power has been the most decisive factor in the length of Mrs. Peron's tenure in office. Having ruled from 1966 to 1973 following a coup, the armed forces have been extremely reluctant to resume the reins of government, fearing they would again be blamed for the nation's problems. The military, long opposed to the labor-oriented populist ideology of Juan Peron, and particularly to the man himself, nonetheless allowed him to resume power in 1973. The majority of military officers by that time had become convinced of the need for Peronists to return to power in order to prevent chaos in the country. Some military leaders also hoped that Peronism would be unable to solve pressing national problems, and would be totally discredited by the populace, and thus would no longer constitute a viable political force. This rationale has been the primary reason for their reluctance to move against the government of Mrs. Peron.

~~(S//NOFORN)~~ Some elements in the military have consistently been dissatisfied with Mrs. Peron and have urged extra-legal action against her. However,

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Date: APR 11 2018

until last week, the armed forces leadership was inclined to let the domestic political and economic situation "totally disintegrate" before making a move. Peronism and Mrs. Peron would thus receive the full blame for the nation's maladies, while at the same time casting the military in a favorable public light. In the meantime, demarches were made to the President requesting changes in the government's political and economic policies -- which at the time might have prevented a military decision to move -- but to no avail.

~~(C/NOFORN)~~ In recent weeks, labor -- the traditional bastion of Peronism -- politicians, and significantly the central organ of Mrs. Peron's own party, had joined in the call for policy changes. Labor leader Lorenzo Miguel reportedly has now convinced the President of the need for an immediate turn-around in the economy, including a wage boost followed by a 90-day wage-price freeze. If successful, the curbing of inflation would go a long way toward placating the rank and file as well as Peronist Congressmen.

~~(C/NOFORN)~~ Lack of direction by the Congress has contributed another element of instability. Factionalism within that body among the pro-labor element, the Peronist Party, and the major opposition party, Radical Civic Union, and a scattering of minor parties have hampered the Peron Government in its effort to develop political and economic solutions to the nation's problems. Factionalism has also prevented the formation of a unified opposition. Nevertheless, there is still a slim chance that Congress will be able to obtain enough unity to act constitutionally against Mrs. Peron, either through impeachment or by declaring her unable, for health or other reasons, to continue in office (10% confidence). Luder has called a joint session of Congress for the week of 1 March to study the crisis and recommend solutions. Luder noted that no action would occur until 8 March, however. The Argentine Congress is characteristic of other Latin American legislatures in that it does not have the power base to confront the military in a dispute over presidential tenure or succession.

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Significant Determinants ~~(S, NOFORN, UNINT)~~

- On 18 February, the navy and air force commanders-in-chief convinced still-reluctant Army Commander Videla that the situation had deteriorated sufficiently and that pressures within their own institutions would force a move regardless of the army's position (80% confidence). Subsequently, it was agreed that a military coup before 5 March was necessary. Planning for the coup is apparently in an advanced state of readiness, and individual units have their orders.

- Armed Forces Chief of Staff Maj Gen Viola has been concentrating almost exclusively on political matters including direct supervision of coup planning (75% confidence). This has included examination of specific policies and prospective ministers in the successor government, and liaison with widely varying groups representing political, economic, and labor interests.

- Numerous reliable reports indicate a coup is likely before 5 March (70% confidence).

- On 26 February, the Argentine Army urgently sent a military officer to Washington to confer with their attache. The officer was to provide guidelines to the attache for courses of action to be taken regarding relations with the US Government and the news media if a coup occurs (90% confidence).

- The Argentine Army G-2 personally and unprecedentedly called the US Defense Attache to ask his urgent help in securing a visa for the officer, who was to return within 72 hours.

- The civilian national airline may have been included in the final coup plans in order to have aircraft on a "standby" basis to transport Peronist leaders into exile (50% confidence).

- Minister of Defense Guardo resigned and departed the country last week, possibly to be spared having to choose between the government -- the source of his authority -- and the military commanders.

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- On 25 February, congresssional deputies failed to rally enough support to call a special congressional session to impeach the President for misconduct while in office, a move that would have provided a constitutional solution.

- On 27 February Mrs. Peron departed for a four-day holiday. There is a good chance that this action reflects her declining ability to deal with the present crisis (80% confidence).

Significant Uncertainties ~~(S/NOFORN)~~

- The ability of Congress to rally enough support to declare Mrs. Peron "unable" to continue in office.

- The outside chance that the military has orchestrated this latest round of coup plotting as an attempt to force President Peron to implement a radical reversal in economic policy immediately.

- The success of a last-ditch effort by organized labor to achieve economic policy changes, including a wage boost and a wage-price freeze for 90 days. This would placate both labor and the dissident Peronists and could calm the military fervor for intervention, but positive results would be required almost at once.

- The ability of Mrs. Peron to make governmental policy changes and to implement them effectively if she sees such actions as her only chance for survival.

- The likelihood of the military -- primed and ready to move -- accepting a presidential promise to change policies, thereby allowing Mrs. Peron to remain in office.

- The possibility that Mrs. Peron's "vacation" will develop into a failure to return to office.

Collection Capabilities



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DIA E.O. 13526 Section 3.3(b)(1)
CIA E.O. 13526 Section 3.3(b)(1)

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Crisis Point of Contact (U)

- The Assistant Director for Intelligence/National Military Intelligence Center (ADI/N) is the focal point for queries regarding urgently needed information.

- The ADI/N can be reached 24-hours a day at OX 5-0175. (~~REF 2 Declassify upon notification of originator~~)

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1 Mar 76

DIA Intelligence Appraisal

Page 6

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