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ARGENTINA: TERRORISM AND THE
MILITARY GOVERNMENT (U)



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Summary

~~(S//NOFORN//UNRELIABLE)~~ Left- and right-wing terrorism continues to plague the country. Despite a stepped-up antiterrorist effort, acts of violence since the first of April have almost reached precoup levels. The new military government has established as one of its two primary goals the elimination of terrorism. The other objective is the restoration of a viable economic order. The military possess the capability to eradicate known terrorist elements and are pursuing a moderate antiterrorist course. Under the most favorable conditions, however, it will probably take from six months to a year before the military can rid the country of the serious threat to internal security that the terrorist problem poses (90%, A). With a moderate approach to the situation, the military will maintain public support in their antisubversive activities, and a steady improvement in the security situation is likely (90%, A). In the final analysis, the establishment of a political atmosphere free of violence depends to a large extent on the acceptance by the labor movement's rank and file of an austere economic program to halt crippling inflation and erosion of the workers' real wage (90%, A).

Background

~~(S//NOFORN//UNRELIABLE)~~ Terrorism poses a serious threat to the country's internal security. It is carried over from the days of Mrs. Peron's administration and is being fueled by both left and right elements. Leftist activities have been conducted primarily by two organizations -- the Montoneros, who are breakaway Peronists, and the Peoples Revolutionary Army (ERP), whose ultimate goals are to overthrow the government and to establish a workers'

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state. On the right, such acts have been carried out for the most part by a few labor, military, and police personnel taking antisubversive matters into their own hands. Although there has been some speculation that Mrs. Peron's government condoned the rightist violence, no supportive evidence has ever surfaced. In any event, such an endorsement would not likely be made public.

Recent Developments

~~(S/NORFOR/WHINTEL)~~ A lull that occurred in terrorist activities for two weeks after Mrs. Peron's ouster can probably be attributed to a "fear of the unknown" attitude on the part of the Montoneros and the ERP. As soon as these groups learned that the military junta would follow a moderate antisubversive campaign, they renewed their antigovernment activities but with an apparent change in their tactics. Generally, the terrorists now are employing "hit and run" techniques, with assassinations as the primary purpose of their operations. Their targets seem to be those of opportunity, and their attacks are primarily directed at police and security personnel. For the moment, it does not appear that the diplomatic community has become a specific target. If leftist activities become sufficiently suppressed or if the ERP or Montoneros should begin to feel an economic pinch, they are expected to resort to kidnaping for ransom diplomatic or wealthy individuals, Argentine or foreign. They have conducted this type of activity in the past with great success and should still be judged capable of doing so.



~~(S/NORFOR/WHINTEL)~~ Meanwhile, President Videla is attempting to halt right-wing violence by ordering military commanders to crack down on those participating in such activities. At the same time, he has ordered that all terrorist detainees receive good treatment. These orders have probably been issued to assure that the government avoids committing any questionable act of repression

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that might be construed as a violation of human rights and in turn bring about world condemnation as has occurred in Chile. By the same token, Videla in ordering the end of such rightist activities is asserting his authority amid accusations by military hardliners that he has been indecisive in leadership. In pursuing such a course, the President has directly challenged those hardliners in the armed forces who demand such drastic measures against the left as the use of rightist death squads. The fact that army commanders have heeded Videla's words to curb right-wing violence indicates that the junta chief, at least momentarily, has won an endorsement for his moderate approach to terrorism.

(S//NOFORN//SI//NF) Any thought that Videla might be forced out as junta President in the near future because of hardline demands for a stronger stand on terrorism should not be taken too seriously (90%,A). He appears to be as qualified as any Argentine can be for the position under the present circumstances of uncertainty and to date has brought some cohesion to the politically torn country. Videla was successful in postponing any attempt to overthrow Mrs. Peron's government until the military were sufficiently prepared to do so. This postponement lasted for a period of more than a year. His successful handling of the December 1975 air force revolt further demonstrates that he can effectively deal with and control dissidents under his command.

Outlook

(S//NOFORN//SI//NF) Right-wing violence will probably be brought under control rapidly. However, leftist terrorism will remain the principal threat to internal public security for the near term (90%,A). The leftists will continue in their attempts to infiltrate and agitate unrest among the rank and file members of the labor movement, hoping for a turn to a hardline approach in the junta's dealings with them. This they believe would turn public support away from the government and result in a political polarization which would improve their chances of building a popular base

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of support leading to a bid for power. On the other hand, the military must convince their hardliners through success in the antiterrorist campaign that a moderate approach to terrorism is the most feasible way of correcting the problem and of maintaining vital public support. At the same time, serious violations of human rights must be avoided in order not to discredit the junta on the world stage. Any such foreign criticism might jeopardize the government's chances of obtaining international loans badly needed for full economic recovery, and in turn stir more terrorism. The successful implementation of a moderate course by the government will go a long way toward reducing the leftists to an insignificant force (90%,A). In the final analysis, the establishment of a political atmosphere free of violence depends to a large extent on the workers' acceptance of the economic austerity measures needed to halt the crippling inflation and erosion of the labor paycheck (90%,A). ~~(NOTE - 2 - Declassify upon receipt of direction of originator)~~

PREPARED BY:

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