

Office of the Secretary of Defense
Chief, RDD, ESD, WHS
Date: 22 Dec 2017 Authority: EO 13526
Declassify: X Deny in Full: _____
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Reason: _____
MDR: 17 -M- 2198

DEPARTMENT OF STATE
WASHINGTON

March 13, 1975

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Dear Jim:

In the wake of the murder of our Consular Agent in Cordoba, Argentina, I have again reviewed the exchange of correspondence between our Departments relating to the proposed temporary reduction in DOD official personnel in Argentina. This step is part of an over-all effort to limit the targets for possible terrorist action against the U.S. mission in Argentina. I firmly believe that the wise course of action is to support the temporary reductions which are recommended by Ambassador Hill.

The threat to the U.S. Government personnel in Argentina at this time is incontrovertible. The intelligence reports referred to in my letter of November 26 to Bill Clements provide graphic evidence of this. Ambassador Hill, with the endorsement of the Embassy's Security Watch Committee, has advised me that terrorism in Argentina remains a great danger to our mission. In the circumstances, prudence dictates that we reduce manning levels throughout the mission to the absolute minimum required to conduct essential U.S. business in Argentina until the security situation improves. We must act now to attempt to avert further tragedy and not react later to a fait accompli.

In his letter Bill Clements proposed that dependents of mission personnel be withdrawn from Argentina rather than principals. However, we believe that this measure would not serve to lower appreciably the mission's vulnerability to terrorist attack. Dependents have not been a major target for terrorist groups in Argentina. Women and children have been occasionally affected by the violence, but only as a

The Honorable
James R. Schlesinger,
Secretary of Defense.

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result of physical proximity to a principal terrorist target. The only effective action is to diminish the number of targets among the official personnel in Argentina, especially those considered by the Security Watch Committee to be high risks. All military personnel are considered to be in this category.

The specific reductions proposed for each mission component were carefully programmed by the Ambassador in conjunction with members of his country team. I understand that the Commander of the MILGRP and the DATT participated in these deliberations. It was agreed that the vital duties of the mission elements could be carried out by the smaller staff which would remain. Other important work would necessarily be deferred until the security situation permitted the restoration of full personnel complements.

It is essential that every agency support the Ambassador's effort to conduct the mission in Argentina at the level he deems most advisable in this difficult period. Any absence of unanimity in applying the reduction leads to interagency recrimination and undermines the Ambassador's leadership. A determination by one agency not to reduce its personnel in Argentina will have an adverse impact on the morale of other mission sections hardpressed to meet work requirements with reduced personnel.

In his letter, Bill Clements noted that the U.S. military accepts assignments in high risk areas as a necessary aspect of military service. While I respect this fact, it is also true that the kidnapping or assassination of a U.S. military officer or enlisted man in Argentina would involve even greater diplomatic and political complications than a terrorist act against a U.S. civilian because of the possible implications of a U.S. military involvement in Argentina.

I share Bill Clements' concern that this matter be handled in keeping with the mission agreements in effect between the U.S. and Argentina. Although the

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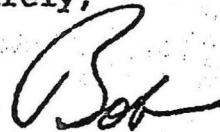
record is not clear that the Government of Argentina was consulted prior to each reduction in MILGRP personnel from peak levels in FY-68, I agree that it would be desirable to consult in this instance. Accordingly, I would appreciate your concurring in a message to Buenos Aires instructing the Ambassador and the MILGRP Commander to call on the Minister of Defense or his designee to explain these reductions, and to emphasize their temporary nature. We would then be in a position to effect the proposed reduction of the MILGRP from 20 to 13. With respect to the DAO, I propose that we move ahead immediately to approve and implement the proposed temporary reduction from 11 to 7 by moving the Attache aircraft to a neighboring country for a time.

Let me emphasize that the Department of State regards it as important to the U.S. interest to maintain good relations with the Argentine military. At such time as the terrorist threat in Argentina diminishes significantly, it is fully intended that the MILGRP and DAO personnel complements be returned to normal levels. Meanwhile, Ambassador Hill has urged that we not postpone action on this matter any longer. I hope you will agree with me to support his position.

I wanted you to have this explanation of our view in writing before discussing it with you. I will be telephoning you within the next twenty-four hours to solicit your support.

With warm regards,

Sincerely,



Robert S. Ingersoll
Acting Secretary

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