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Argentina's Military Coup of 1976: What the U.S. Knew

U.S. had ample forewarning of coup plotting

Ford Administration knew Argentine military planned to commit human rights violations



Washington, D.C., March 23, 2021 - On the eve of the 45th anniversary of the military coup in Argentina, the National Security Archive is today posting declassified documents revealing what the U.S. government knew, and when it knew it, in the weeks preceding the March 24, 1976, overthrow of Isabel Peron's government. The documents provide evidence of multiple contacts between the coup plotters and U.S. officials. "[Admiral] Massera sought opportunity to speak privately with me," U.S. Ambassador to Argentina Robert Hill reported in a cable sent one week before the putsch after meeting with a leading coup plotter. "[H]e said that it was no secret that military might have to step into political vacuum very soon."

The documents posted today record the U.S. government's knowledge of the plotters, their preparations for the coup, and their potential plans for what State Department officials described as "military rule for an extended duration and of unprecedented severity." They show that the U.S. "discreetly" advised the military more than a month before the actual coup that Washington would recognize the new regime.

"The United States accepted, and tacitly supported, regime change in Argentina," said Carlos Osorio, Director of the National Security Archive's Southern Cone documentation project. The documents, Osorio noted, "indicate that U.S. officials wanted to believe that General Videla, the coup leader, was a moderate. The military dictatorship that followed killed and disappeared more than 20 000 people."

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