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AR 10 010
DIA 100-10

COUNTRY: Argentina (AR)

REPORT NO: (b)(3):10 USC 424

TITLE: Political/Social - Attitudes in Argentina (U)

DATE OF INFO: 800215

(YY MM DD)

REPORT DATE: 800331

(YY MM DD)

ORIGINATOR: (b)(3):10 USC 424

REQ REFERENCES: (b)(3):10 USC 424

SOURCE: AMEMB Buenos Aires

SUMMARY: ~~(c)~~ This report describes attitudes and ideals held by influential segments of the Argentine population, including the Argentine military. Bilateral relations, internal tensions, resentment toward the United States foreign policy, Soviet influence, lack of U.S. military training, and the Argentine rational for nuclear development are discussed.

DETAILS: None

ORIGINATOR COMMENTS: ~~(c)~~ Enclosure (1) to this report is recommended for use in preparation of the National Intelligence Estimate on Argentina and for distribution to DIA (DB-3E1/JS14/DIS), FICEURLANT, CNO (OP613), USCINCSO (SCJ2-AD), DOD/ISA, Hq USAF (XOXXW).

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(b)(3):10 USC

~~CLASSIFIED BY:~~

~~DECLASSIFY ON:~~ 31 March 1986

~~DECLASSIFICATION~~

~~DATA~~

DECLASSIFIED IN FULL
Authority: EO 13526
DIA FOIA & Declassification Services Offices
Date: Oct 19, 2018

0256

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SUPPLEMENTAL DATA**

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REPORT NO: (b)(3):10 USC 424

PROJECT NO: N/A

COLL MGMT CODES: N/A

SPECIAL INSTRUCTIONS: DIRC ☐ Y ☒ N

PREPARED BY:

(name, rank/grade, position)

(b)(3):10 USC 424

APPROVED BY:

(name, rank/grade, position, signature)

(b)(3):10 USC 424

REQUEST EVALUATION: ☐ Y ☒ N

Request Evaluation Releasable To:

1 ENCLOSURE(S):

1. AMEMB Buenos Aires cable dtg 101914Z Feb 80,
8 pgs, 1 cy, (U)

MICROFICED BY RTS-3B

DISTRIBUTION BY ORIGINATOR:
DIA (Original)

**SUBJECT/LOCATION CODES
(For DIA Use Only)**

104200
102100
105323 } AR, US
715000
807400
104220 AR, UW

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5 Page determined to be Unclassified
4 Reviewed DIA FOIA & Declassification Services Offices
3 IAW EO 13526, Section 3.5
2 Date: Oct 19, 2018
1

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TELEGRAM

 INDICATE
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 12065
 E.O. 11652
 TAGS:

SUBJECT: BILATERAL COMMUNICATION ESSAY

ACTION: USICA WASHDC PRIORITY

FROM

AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES

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(b)(3):10 USC 424

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1. In spite of certain affinities, the course of US-Argentine relations over the past forty years has seldom been smooth. To this day, differences between the two countries dating from the first Peron era remain vividly unpleasant memories in the minds of Argentines. The juxtaposition in February 1980 of pictures of then Ambassador Braden and Ambassador Castro to underline an article about the recent General Goodpaster visit well illustrates how long memories can be here. Many Argentines have been offended by U.S. Human Rights policy and particularly by the methods chosen to express it in this country. Their reaction to the U.S. grain suspension plan, (the most recent example) was by their own admission as much emotional as economic. A feeling of injured pride, wounded nationalism and infringed sovereignty will last for sometime to come. All bilateral

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DRAFTING DATE

2-14-80

TEL EXT.

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 AMB/RCastro
 DCM/MChaplin(Draft)
 POL/WHallman(Draft)

SCT/CMetzner(Draft)

(b)(3):10 USC 424

ECON/JAmott(Draft)

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relationships will be affected by it. So, too, will all communications.

2. Argentines contend that they live in one of the world's most blessed countries. Recent newspaper ads by the COA, for example list the "Five ~~and~~ major problems of the world". "Argentina has none of them", say the ads. Citing two previous lost opportunities to take advantage of these blessings, the ad concludes, "To take advantage of this third great opportunity (the present moment) depends solely on us. Depends on a change of mentality". Many accept this need for change, but few would focus it on learning to face facts and admit mistakes, characteristics not all that prevalent in the make-up of Argentines. Unable over decades to organize their political and economic affairs in a satisfactory manner, they have become alternately self-deprecating and dogmatically defensive. Many admire, maybe even envy a bit, the European and U.S. modern ways, but are, nonetheless, still more comfortable with older, more traditional mores and values. God, country and home are no mere slogans here; they describe Argentina as the Argentines want to see themselves. Despite outward signs to the contrary, there are, however, some restless and worldly aware Argentine young people who chafe at the pervasive pressures of the society to maintain ~~the~~ 40-year old manners, mores and attitudes. Confronted by U.S. paternalism (e.g. the manner in which the recent grain ~~the~~ suspension was handled), the average Argentine responds with

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[a nationalism mixing justified pride and a latent inferiority]
complex. The justified pride is based on the scientific, cultural,
and economic levels of Argentine society. The latent inferiority
complex has much to do with the failure of the Argentine political
system to work because of a lack of a sense of community in the
society that puts individual and special interest goals before the
common good. Communication with the Argentines is inhibited by
the fact that the Argentines feel much more comfortable ~~lambasting~~^{lambasting} ~~lambasting~~
us for real and imagined slights than turning an objective eye on
their shortcomings as a society. The Argentine sense of moral
superiority derives from the still strong influence of European
culture, which many Argentines assume, as many Europeans have,
that the culture of the Old World is so much more truly intellectual
and antimaterialistic than that of the New World. This sense of
moral superiority is also a convenient defense posture assumed
when Argentines wish to avoid a frank exchange of ideas. Another
important factor in our relations is the Argentine view of themselves,
as opposed to other Latin American nations, as being similar to the
U.S. in terms of development and European immigration.

3. Virtually all Argentines and notably the present military
government and its many supports (mainly the industrial-agricultural-
business complex plus some elements of the Catholic Church) resent
what they firmly believe to be U.S. incursions into their domestic
affairs, currently best but not exclusively illustrated by our
human rights and non-proliferation policies.

4. They question the sincerity of the U.S. positions on many matters and generally misunderstand the processes that underlie these policies. Moreover, they are skeptical of U.S. understanding of the real nature of the Marxist enemy and its use of armed and intellectual subversion (per Argentina, e.g.). Recent U.S. firmness is scoffed at as "knee-jerk", too-little-too-late, and transitory. Confidence in the steadiness and comprehensiveness of U.S. views of the world is notably lacking.

5. There is a growing Soviet presence in Argentina. Beyond the many cultural and sports offerings, Soviet equipment, technology, grain purchases and fishing rights requests combine to point up this new influence. Present Argentine leadership sees the U.S., or at least the present Administration as naïve in trusting the Russians, but consider themselves perfectly safe in their dealings and easily able to handle the political implication of these growing and technical contacts.

6. While there is some negative fall out from reduced direct contacts between the Argentine and U.S. military, leaving younger officers with scant U.S. models to follow, on the whole there ~~is~~ ^{are} more private interchanges with the U.S. than in the recent past. "Americanization" is proceeding apace. While those over 50 still cling to the European cultural past, a younger generation marches to the U.S. creative cultural beat. This may not imply any deep, real impact on societal mores. The Argentine Church does not follow U.S. norms nor does the Argentine family pattern

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itself on the U.S.; Argentine understanding of legality does not approximate U.S. standards. On the other hand, U.S. consumerism and fashion modes are very much in view. Beyond all of this, lies a very discernible Argentine sense of greater refinement and sophistication.

7. Argentina must be firmly listed among those third world countries that are subscribing to the idea that the U.S. has selfish and duplicitous commercial reasons for opposing its nuclear energy programs and for denying transfers of technology. While in fact Argentina, with large reserves of hydro-electric and other alternative power sources, does not really need nuclear energy -- which at best will provide only 6% - 10% of the country's energy needs by 2000 -- prestige, pride and determination to contribute to Latin American nuclear development impel its leaders to continue developing technologies associated with eventual full-cycle operations. The motivations behind the U.S. position, while understood privately at the highest levels of the GOA, are painted publically as obstructionist and economically self-serving.

8. There are no serious differences between the two countries over economic and trade policies. Argentina is caught in a strange economic paradox. Abroad, its firm monetary and fiscal policies are applauded by international bankers and economists as the only way back from the near-bankruptcy and despair of 1976. At home these ^{same} ~~are~~ policies are little understood and much resented by many Argentines. Personal sacrifices, which in the past year have grown in number and severity, are eroding the wide and deep support that

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the military government has enjoyed until now. There is concern about the apparent unwillingness or inability of the U.S. to respond to its own energy crisis and to strengthen the dollar. These preoccupations color Argentine reactions to international trade decisions with potentially important effects on both bilateral and multi-lateral relations. The slide of the dollar, ~~vacillation~~ ~~vacillation~~ on energy policy and perceived weakness in international fora all reinforce an Argentine sentiment that, for practical reasons as well as national pride, it is wise to turn more to non-U.S. suppliers, bankers, and brokers including the Soviets and the Third World.

9. On the plus side, many well-placed Argentines have studied, trained or lived in the United States. They have a well-tempered admiration for the U.S. educational system, especially at the university level. U.S. technological and scientific achievements are openly praised. There exists a well-educated, well-read, rather worldly and highly articulate public on every Mission interest. These people are ~~approachable~~ approachable and well aware that solutions to today's problems are not to be found in isolation.

10. Some military officers, labor leaders, x lawyers, judges, media professionals, scientists, intellectuals and politicians, especially those with some personal exposure to American life and people, know and understand U.S. positions on the basic issues. A serious dialog exists with ~~many~~ many influential people at the highest levels. Additionally, the Post has good access to the print and radio media, which willingly continue to support Government positions even as censorship controls slacken.

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11. The once proud and active academic community remains quiet, under funded and politically neutered. Nonetheless, the Fulbright Commission continues to function well.

ISSUES AND CONCERNS

- A. U.S. Human Rights and Non-Proliferation policies are viewed by the Junta, the President, most ministers and, with only slightly less conviction, by editors, businessmen, bankers, publishers, radio and TV program directors and other "influentials" as evidence of the continuation of U.S. patronizing and a renewed attempt to impose North American values on a sovereign nation. As the country slowly and painfully seeks achieve the rule of law, whether on the level of personal freedom, the normalization of police power or the reincorporation into the affairs of state of such previously excluded elements as political parties, labor unions, intellectuals and academics, U.S. reactions to each step will be crucial.
- B. Argentine government officials, jurists, educators, editors, scientists and economic leaders smart under real or imagined U.S. insensitivity toward their historical nationalism and sense of pride. They view recent U.S. foreign policy as ~~vacillating~~ ^{vacillating}, confused and inconsistent as well as unfairly harsh on the one country which, they firmly believe, has fought Marxism and won. They need a broader understanding of the process by which these policies are determined and specifically a constant discussion of U.S. objectives in

Latin America and Argentina.

C. Argentine ~~ax~~ nuclear policy makers and COA top leaders, generally supported by even well-informed media and intellectual circles see U.S. non-proliferation positions as anti-Argentine, commercially self-serving and aimed at preventing Argentina from developing a self-sufficient nuclear energy system and completing a nuclear fuel cycle.

D. Argentina is a major importer of materials, goods and services which has presented an opportunity for the U.S. to improve its own balance of payments situation. Argentine bankers, importers, buyers and economic policy makers need constant access to up-to-date data about U.S. trade policies and exports.

E. Argentine bankers, businessmen, economic planners and COA top officials attach great importance to their fears that the U.S. dollar is seriously and more permanently weakened than generally thought. They worry about and base decisions on these fears. Information as well as serious discussions about the reality of the U.S. monetary, fiscal and energy situation and policies are called for to alleviate over reaction.

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