

## 157. Telegram From the Embassy in Argentina to the Department of State<sup>1</sup>

Buenos Aires, July 22, 1980, 2050Z

5903. Subject: Argentina and the Coup in Bolivia.

1. (C—Entire text)

2. I believe you should have in mind as you plan your trip to Buenos Aires that—whatever the degree of actual Argentine involvement in the Bolivian coup—the consensus here among our diplomatic colleagues is that the Argentine Government aided and abetted the event.<sup>2</sup> This consensus was brought home to me last night (7/21) when I had a chance to discuss this in depth with the Dean of the Diplomatic Corps, Vatican Ambassador Pio Laghi.

3. At this point it is hard for us to judge the accuracy of these perceptions. There is no well sourced information available to us that points definitively to Argentine involvement in making the Bolivian coup. Despite earlier protestations of non-involvement we detected great Argentine Government concern over events in Bolivia—concern which intensified with the emergence of Siles Zuazo as the next likely President.<sup>3</sup> Our best earlier assessment was nevertheless that the Argentines had given up the idea of activating the “Golpe”. Even after elections we believed that if there was impetus toward abetting a coup the decision would be made later, contingent even upon the election process becoming hopelessly muddled and divisive or incoming President Siles Zuazo swamped by his country’s problems. In our talks with military officers subsequent to Garcia Meza’s takeover we see a large measure of satisfaction—which says, of course, only that Argentine

<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, RG 59, Central Foreign Policy File, D800352-0669. Confidential; Immediate; Exdis. Sent for information Immediate to La Paz.

<sup>2</sup> For Bowdler’s planned trip to Buenos Aires, which was ultimately cancelled, see Document 113. In a July 25 memorandum to Carter, Brzezinski reported: “all indications are that the Argentine military, if not the government itself, had a hand in the coup.” He continued, “If Buenos Aires is, in effect, exporting its human rights malpractices, we will have to revise our estimate that they are significantly cleaning up their act.” Carter wrote, “I agree” in the left-hand margin next to this sentence. (Carter Library, Plains File, NSC Weekly Reports, Box 30, 6-12/80)

<sup>3</sup> In telegram 4532 from Buenos Aires, June 3, the Embassy reported on its conversations with GOA officials regarding “continuing insistent reports of statements by senior Bolivian army officers that Bolivian army had received assurances of financial support from Argentine army in the event of a successful golpe.” In response, Vaquero stated “unequivocally that in no way was Argentina encouraging a golpe. A golpe solved nothing.” The Embassy noted that “Vaquero’s denial of encouraging golpistas was energetic and unqualified. At the same time he displayed a set of attitudes which lead him and other Argentine military to be sympathetic to their Bolivian colleagues.” (National Archives, RG 59, Central Foreign Policy File, D800271-0658)

officers are pleased that Bolivia is not headed toward rule from Moscow or Havana, their earlier expectation. It does not necessarily indicate participation.

4. We have been told by the Buenos Aires Associated Press representative—but have not yet seen the reports themselves—that his colleague in La Paz is reporting that Argentine military supplies are entering Bolivia. If reports of these supply efforts are accurate this could indicate either ongoing assistance or stepped up deliveries designed just to assure Garcia Meza's staying on. (More potentially alarming was a report from the same source that a released Bolivian political prisoner alleged that an Argentine took part in a tough interrogation session. We would welcome comment on this allegation from AmEmbassy La Paz.)<sup>4</sup>

5. As a final straw in the wind we have been given credible testimony by a member of an Argentine Security Service that a popular belief exists at least in his service that Argentine military attaches in La Paz gave Garcia Meza assurances of support in the event of a coup, but that these assurances were put in limbo when world opinion crashed down upon the new Bolivian military regime.

6. As of 1700 there still has been no official Argentine declaration concerning the coup.<sup>5</sup>

**Castro**

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<sup>4</sup> In telegram 6151 from La Paz, July 23, the Embassy reported that "the Argentines are up to their necks in this coup; perhaps not the government per se, but certainly the Argentine army and its intelligence apparatus." In addition, the Embassy reported, "we are getting reports from many sources that persons actively involved in the detention and interrogation of prisoners are speaking with obvious Argentine accents." (National Archives, RG 59, Central Foreign Policy File, D800354-0080)

<sup>5</sup> Argentina resumed normal relations with Bolivia on July 29. (Telegram 6065 from Buenos Aires, July 29; National Archives, RG 59, Central Foreign Policy File, D800363-0015)