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THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

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MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Summary of the President's Meeting with
Argentine President-designate General
Roberto O. Viola

PARTICIPANTS: President Ronald Reagan
Secretary of State Alexander Haig
Edwin Meese, III, Counsellor to the President
Richard V. Allen, Assistant to the President
for National Security Affairs
US Ambassador Thomas O. Enders, ARA
US Ambassador to Argentina Harry W. Shlaudeman
General Vernon Walters (Retired), Special Emissary
to Latin America
Roger Fontaine, NSC staff Member (notetaker)
Donald Barnes, State Department Interpreter

President-Designate of Argentina General
Roberto O. Viola
Argentine Ambassador to the US Jorge A. Aja Espil
General Luis Santiago Martella, Chief Adviser to
General Viola

DATE, TIME AND PLACE: March 17, 1981, 4:00-4:46 p.m.
The Oval Office

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Review 3/17/2011
Extended by Richard V. Allen
Reason: NSC 1.13(b)

DECLASSIFIED

NLRR M06-015 #5

BY LOJ NARA DATE 10/14/05

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The President said he wanted to see better relations between the countries of North and South America -- better than we have had in the past. The President said the peoples of this hemisphere have much in common, especially a love of freedom. He then welcomed the President-designate to the United States, and the President looked forward to a better relationship between the two countries. 9

President-designate Viola expressed great satisfaction at meeting the President, and he apologized for his lack of English despite living in the US for two years.

The President assured General Viola that he knew how that felt. After living 40 years in California with its large Spanish-speaking community, he did not speak any Spanish.

The President-designate then mentioned his talks with Secretary Haig, and that they were wide-ranging and satisfactory. He said there is an obvious need for good relations between the US and Argentina despite differences of the past. He mentioned too that in Argentina there is no anti-American feeling. Also, the government of Argentina wants to have good and broad relations with the US. And he was happy to discuss whatever questions and issues the President wanted.

The President said that the proper relationship is one of open communications. If that is all this meeting accomplishes, then we have accomplished something. The President added that he recognized the strain in the past relationship, and he believed the factors that caused it could be easily eliminated and will be in his Administration.

The President-designate shared these views totally, and his trip was to open clear channels of communications. The US and Argentina belonged to the same group of nations who shared a love of freedom, and the US is acknowledged as the leader of those nations.

The President believed the Americas can stand together on their common desire for freedom and do much to preserve the peace and improve the lives of even those who live outside the hemisphere.

The President-designate stated Argentina will cooperate in any effort to contain Communism and promote freedom.

The President thanked General Viola.

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President-designate Viola continued by saying the only requirement was to clear channels of communication. There should be no surprises -- that leads to frictions. The President agreed by underlining the need for full consultation with our neighbors and friends and Allies in Europe. 10

The President-designate said there was nothing special to ask except a comprehension of our problems.

Secretary Haig then stated that during yesterday's discussion there was an agreement to remove disabling legislation on arms sales; that Tlatolco would be ratified by Argentina after some study.

The President-designate then added that three points needed to be touched on. First, the objectives of the military government; second, human rights policy; third, nuclear policy.

The President understood from Secretary Haig there was agreement and that the Administration spoke with one voice.

Secretary Haig added there would be on human rights no finger-pointing. If there are problems, they will be discussed quietly and confidentially.

The President continued and said there would be no public scoldings and lectures.

President-designate Viola said he hoped there would be no private scoldings either.

The President remarked that anything we ask for will be with a por favore.

The President-designate then outlined the objectives of the military government. He explained that Argentina had suffered from 50 years of political instability. The goal of the military in taking power was to reestablish free, democratic, and representative government -- but government that would be stable too.

As far as human rights are concerned, the President-designate assured the President that human rights were respected today. Repression did not exist now. The problems belonged to the past, and in the past a real war was fought in Argentina.

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The President observed that in Argentina's past, a real terrorist war had been launched, and the terrorists felt free in taking human life. The President believed that the right to life was a very basic human right, and that he understood that firm actions needed to be taken to curb the violence. 11

The President-designate then said he did not oppose human rights. Argentina has a long history and tradition of respect for human dignity. He only opposed a human rights policy that was discriminatory and was not global in reach. He then added during the Argentine war -- and this he told members of the US Congress -- that ten generals were killed, two police chiefs, numerous labor leaders and political leaders.

As for nuclear matters, the President-designate had two basic points. First, nuclear development was strictly for peaceful uses. As proof, Brazil and Argentina have signed an agreement to exchange nuclear-related information. Second, Argentina was the first country in Latin America to develop a nuclear industry and thus would like to keep that advantage.

The basic question is Tlatolco. In 1977, President Videla promised President Carter that Argentina would ratify Tlatolco. That promise is still good. Argentina only asks time to negotiate appropriate safeguards with the appropriate international agencies.

The President observed that the US too was once a leader in the nuclear area, and now we are taking steps to improve prospects for expansion of nuclear energy sector, because it is a valuable source of energy.

The President-designate added that Argentina today has one plant, and nuclear power is not a major part of the energy picture, but four more plants will open in the 1980s.

The President-designate said that he was extremely happy to have had an opportunity to meet personally with the President, and that if a personal relationship had been established between the two, he felt he had achieved the objective of his visit to Washington. He said it would be a source of deep personal satisfaction to receive the President in Buenos Aires during his own term as President between 1981 and 1984. (S)

The President said that he would have to see what his schedule would be during those years and that he would like to make the visit. (S)

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