

63. Draft Memorandum of Conversation¹

Washington, September 9, 1977, 9 a.m.

SUBJECT

President Carter/President Videla Bilateral

PARTICIPANTS

ARGENTINA

Lt. General Jorge Rafael Videla
 President of Argentina
 Oscar A. Montes, Minister of Foreign
 Affairs and Worship
 Jorge A. Aja Espil, Ambassador to the
 United States
 Julio Cesar Carasales, Ambassador to OAS
 Enrique Quintana, Chief of Protocol
 Cdr. Eduardo Alberto Traid, Aide-de-camp

US

President Carter
 Vice President Mondale
 Secretary Vance
 Dr. Zbigniew Brzezinski
 Assistant Secretary Todman
 Robert Pastor, NSC
 Charge Maxwell Chaplin

President Carter opened the conversation by expressing his pleasure at the attendance of the Argentine President and emphasizing its significance as a demonstration of hope for the Panama Canal Treaty. He was also pleased that it provided an opportunity for the hemispheric leaders to have conversations about issues of common concern.

President Videla expressed his satisfaction over the opportunity to witness an event of such major importance as the Canal Treaty signing, as well as the opportunity to have a face-to-face discussion with the President. He observed that the signature of the treaty not only denotes the end of one era but opens a new one in which the United States has demonstrated its sincerity and goodwill toward Latin America. He added that the Argentine presence was his government's effort to establish its goodwill in response. He observed that while US-Argentine relations have had their ups and downs throughout history, the temporary circumstances which impeded close relations have always been overcome by the basic identity of interests of the two nations.

As a parenthetical comment, President Carter observed to Videla that his Spanish was the clearest and easiest to understand he had ever

¹ Source: National Archives, RG 59, Office of the Deputy Secretary: Records of Warren Christopher, 1977-1980, Lot 81D113, Box 13, Human Rights—Argentina I. The meeting took place at the White House. Drafted by Chaplin. A typed note at the top of the memorandum reads, "Text has not been revised by the NSC." No other record of this meeting has been found. Portions of this document relating to non-proliferation are printed in *Foreign Relations, 1977-1980*, vol XXVI, Arms Control and Nonproliferation, Document 420.

heard—the President either chose simple words or had an unusually clear manner of expressing himself. He found this typical of the Argentina which he and his wife had visited some years previously. President Carter also added his thanks for the hospitality that President Videla had shown to Assistant Secretary Todman during the latter's recent visit to Argentina.²

President Carter said he hoped to have a frank discussion of two major issues with the objective of optimizing relations between the two nations.

Non-Proliferation

President Carter considered the threat of nuclear explosives the greatest problem facing the hemisphere. Because Argentina leads the Latin American nations in nuclear technology—which is a great credit to Argentina—he hoped that Argentina could also lead in the establishment of a nuclear free zone in the area and the prevention of introduction to nuclear explosives. He observed that all hemispheric countries but Cuba and Argentina had signed and ratified the Treaty of Tlatelolco and that Chile and Brazil had conditioned their approval of that treaty upon Argentina's ratification and acceptance of it. He expressed the hope that Argentina would ratify this treaty which would provide unrestricted use of nuclear energy for power but no introduction of nuclear explosives.

President Carter said that the United States, the European Community, Canada and Australia were now evolving a study of fuel cycle from ore to reactor wastes and safeguards. On October 19 there will be a three-day meeting on this subject,³ and it would be helpful if the GOA could be represented at this meeting. He envisaged establishing common policies with regard to the export of nuclear technology, heavy water and enriched uranium. He said this policy envisages restriction of sale of these items to countries which do not cooperate in the non-proliferation effort. President Carter said he understood that Argentina was cooperating with Canada with respect to limited safeguards but stressed the importance the United States places on the NFZ and the NPT.

President Videla responded by observing that the two countries' coincidence of interest was mirrored by the fact that the two Presidents' agendas were the same. He did not perceive these issues as problems

² See Document 61.

³ The first International Nuclear Fuel Cycle Evaluation Organizing Session took place at the Department of State October 19–21. The press release, Carter's October 19 remarks in plenary, and the text of the communiqué issued on October 21 are in the Department of State *Bulletin*, November 14, 1977, pp. 659–664.

but as opportunities for progress. He reviewed Argentina's 25 years' work in developing the peaceful use of nuclear energy, noting that one power reactor is currently in use, a second under construction and a third in the planning phase. He understood President Carter's concern over the misuse of nuclear energy and said Argentina had offered to establish safeguards beyond those which were really needed. However, he understood that even this may not be sufficient reassurance for Latin America and the world.

President Videla said the GOA had considered ratifying the Treaty of Tlatelolco but stressed that President Carter must be aware of the great need for proper political timing of such an action. Argentina was only 18 months away from its gravest national crisis, so the government must be particularly careful not to disturb the progress toward normalcy. He stated that as soon as political conditions permit—perhaps before the end of the year—he would give proof of the GOA goodwill with regard to non-proliferation by ratifying the Treaty of Tlatelolco. He asked if this reassured President Carter.

President Carter said it did, and stated that if the GOA decided to send a delegation to the fuel cycle conference, it would be particularly exciting if it would be possible to announce intended ratification of the treaty at that time, but he would defer to President Videla on the best political timing. With Argentine ratification, the treaty would be in effect for all countries but Cuba, and the United States would be raising this issue with the Cubans. The President added that Argentine ratification would also remove our concerns about technology and heavy water supply to Argentina from the United States and other suppliers. The President had discussed this very issue the previous day with Prime Minister Trudeau in the interest of establishing a common export policy.

Human Rights

The political changes in Argentina have been given careful study by the American government, and recent developments there, said President Carter, have impressed me as much as the natural beauty of the country. He stated his admiration for the achievements of President Videla's government in dealing with the problem of terrorism and the reconstruction of the Argentine economy. He said the study of the achievements of President Videla's government led to the conclusion that the GOA had achieved great strength, stability and influence. He hoped that the security and the strength of the government would lead to the alleviation of concerns expressed by many about the observation of human rights in Argentina. The President stated he did not have a way to assess the many charges of human rights violations and noted the particularly high press interest in this subject in the United States.

Certain cases drew particularly intense interest here, such as that of editor Timerman and the Deutsch family, who have many relatives in the California area.⁴ He said that a Washington group concerned with the subject of human rights had provided a list of 3,000 people being detained in Argentina without public notice of their arrest or charges against them.⁵ The President acknowledged that some of these allegations may be false or exaggerated, but he felt that in the privacy of the room he could express our concerns about the state of human rights in Argentina. He would make the list available so the State Department could provide it to President Videla's government for its use. President Carter felt that the friendly bilateral relations of over a hundred years were of great value, and he was concerned that this issue could come between the two countries. He felt that more progress in this area would be welcome. In summary, he said he personally admires and approves of what President Videla has been able to do for his country and asks what can be done to alleviate the concern in the United States (which, indeed, may have been exaggerated) about the state of human rights in Argentina.

President Videla recounted the situation in which Argentina found itself in March 1976, with an economic, political and social crisis aggravated by terrorism, which led the armed forces as an institution reluctantly to take over to fill the power vacuum and protect those enduring values and human rights of which President Carter spoke. Those who recognized that man was created in God's image must recognize his dignity as an individual. Terrorists wanted to change that view of man, and Argentina had faced what amounted to a war over the issue. All wars have their undesirable consequences, and President Carter as a military man would know of this. Argentina has suffered all of these misfortunes of war.

President Videla said that the war, while virtually over in a military sense, continued in the political arena, both domestically and internationally. The terrorists wish to isolate the GOA from a civilized world, but their charges were not true; the people of Argentina opposed terror-

⁴ In telegram 212170 to Buenos Aires, September 3, the Department notified the Embassy that five members of the Deutsch family were abducted on the night of August 26 from their home in Cordoba, Argentina. A Deutsch family relative in California reported the disappearance to Senator Cranston. (National Archives, RG 59, Central Foreign Policy File, D770320–1154) (U) In telegram 6629 from Buenos Aires, September 7, the Embassy reported that the Argentine Army announced that it had arrested the Deutsch family. The Embassy commented, "Unusual late evening issuance of Army announcement is indication of GOA effort to avoid Deutsch family disappearance adversely affecting Videla visit. Prior to last night's announcement Army in Cordoba had denied any knowledge of Deutsch family whereabouts." (National Archives, RG 59, Central Foreign Policy File, D770323–0318)

⁵ Not found.

ism and the system it advocated. They were dedicated to democracy. Argentina faced the intentionally exaggerated publicity abroad of admittedly unfortunate incidents. President Videla said there were incidents for which the government was responsible, and he accepted that responsibility for them and stressed his efforts to control abuses of power.⁶ He said, however, that he could not accept the image of a brutal and uncivilized Argentina and the attempt to isolate his country from those other nations which shared its basic values. He stressed that he would do his utmost to reestablish order and control, and meanwhile he needed the understanding of Argentina's friends, especially natural friends such as the United States.

With the war almost over, President Videla felt that the need for repressive action was less. He felt that within a short period the negative consequences of the repression would be eliminated.

He agreed to accept the list of names of those who were reportedly detained in Argentina and welcomed the opportunity to comment on the Timerman case. He assured President Carter that Timerman was detained under due process, charged with dealing with subversive elements. He was not detained because of his name—there was definitely no anti-Semitic connection to this detention. The same was the case of the detention of the Deutsch family: they were detained for investigation of possible connection with subversion, not for racial reasons.

President Videla stated that 1,990 persons had been detained under the national executive power in the first year of his government and 2,020 in the subsequent six months. Since March 1976, 300 of these cases had been tried in the civilian courts with 73 found guilty, and 370 in the military courts with 187 found guilty. In the last two months, 300 persons detained on suspicion of terrorist activities have been liberated. President Videla was most reluctant to give a date, but he hoped and wished the problems of the detainees might be resolved by Christmas 1977. He would make a major effort to achieve this and meanwhile hoped for US understanding.

President Carter ventured a question about the Argentine judicial system, noting that one of the great concerns expressed in the United States is the fact that there are no announcements of the arrest of Argentines or the charges on which they were being held. He asked if this is customary. President Videla responded that the Argentine courts are independent institutions and operated beyond the control

⁶ In his personal diary, Carter wrote that Videla "was calm, strong, competent, sure of himself enough to admit Argentina does have problems in the eyes of the world." (*White House Diary*, p. 94)

of the executive. In cases dealing with subversives and their detention as a preliminary security measure, no announcements of the detentions were made. As soon as the case was investigated, it was turned over to the military or civilian courts or the individual was released. While for security reasons it is not convenient to provide public information on detentions at the initial stage, the GOA has an office charged with providing information to relatives about the possible detention and charges against family members.

President Carter expressed his desire to help restore world appreciation of Argentina and what its government stands for. He hoped that President Videla would give the United States the opportunity to do so. As President, he said he knew how much opportunity he had to preserve the liberties of the US citizens. He asked if, at sometime in the future after Christmas, it might be possible for representatives of the OAS or the UN to visit Argentina, not in the sense of investigating events there, but to confirm the progress made by the GOA.

President Videla said he was pleased to respond with the same frankness shown by President Carter and observed that facts were infinitely more important than words. The visits of Mr. Todman, Mrs. Derian, the Congressmen and the Senators⁷ is the best way to show that Argentina is not ashamed of its record. He thanked President Carter for sending these groups and for providing lists of detainees. He admitted that there were disappearances in Argentina for four reasons: first, when an individual joins the subversive underground, second, when a terrorist is killed by his associates who may suspect betrayal, third, terrorists were killed in battle and fourth, people were killed by excesses committed by forces of repression. He said this fourth case is under our control, and it is his responsibility to eliminate it. He said he was not concerned about visits or lists or any future visit made in goodwill which can testify to the facts in Argentina.

President Videla regretted that it was necessary to devote the short time available to discussion of the two fundamental issues raised. Since there were a number of important remaining bilateral issues which should be covered, he wished to invite Secretary Vance to visit Argentina after his trip to Brazil to complete the consultations.

President Carter and Secretary Vance both accepted the invitation for Secretary Vance to visit Argentina.⁸ President Carter said he regretted that the two items had dominated this discussion, which would have to be ended because the President of Uruguay was arriving

⁷ See Documents 61 and 60. A number of Members of Congress had visited Argentina in the previous months, including Yatron and Gilman. See footnote 6, Document 62.

⁸ See Document 68.

shortly. Should President Videla wish, he said that Vice President Mondale could meet with him now,⁹ or the conversations could be continued during the Secretary's visit. President Carter expressed his hope he could return to Argentina before long and presented President Videla with his book and a collection of satellite photographs of the world. The meeting terminated with expressions of mutual goodwill.

⁹ No record of the meeting between Videla and Mondale has been found.
