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**Paraguay-Latin America:  
The Case of Dr. Mengele (U)**

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The search for German war criminal Josef Mengele has centered on South America, long a haven for Nazi fugitives. Paraguay has been a special target for investigators. Mengele reportedly lived there during the early 1960s, and some Nazi hunters believe he still resides in Paraguay under official protection.

Mengele, a physician, is accused of selecting tens of thousands of inmates at the Auschwitz concentration camp for medical experiments or extermination in gas chambers. Most of the information we have on his postwar activities is unsubstantiated—the last confirmed sighting was in the late 1960s, according to press reports—and serves more to document Mengele's past movements than to provide indications of whether he is still alive or his current whereabouts.

The Paraguayan Government has been only mildly responsive to inquiries about Mengele, and President Stroessner has barred independent investigations, labeling them as interference in internal affairs. In our view, if Mengele—who would now be 73 years old—is alive and residing in Paraguay, the regime's attitude, combined with the lack of recent information on his whereabouts, gives him a reasonable chance of continuing to evade capture.

**Past Residence in Paraguay**

Last December two sources provided US Embassy personnel with what appear to be plausible, although unconfirmed, accounts of Mengele's movements until the early 1970s. The first source, a lawyer from New York, was visiting Paraguay to gather information for a book on Mengele. He met several times there with Alejandro von Eckstein, a Russian emigre who has lived in the country for 50 years and claims a long relationship with the Nazi fugitive. Von Eckstein told the lawyer that Mengele started visiting Paraguay in the mid-1950s while residing in Buenos Aires, became a Paraguayan citizen in 1959, and lived in and around Asuncion until 1965. Mengele then moved to Brazil, according to von Eckstein, and visited Paraguay



Reward poster placed by Nazi hunters in a Paraguayan newspaper last November. The picture of Mengele was obtained in 1976, but its date or origin is uncertain. The reward for information is about \$25,000 in Paraguayan currency. (C NF)

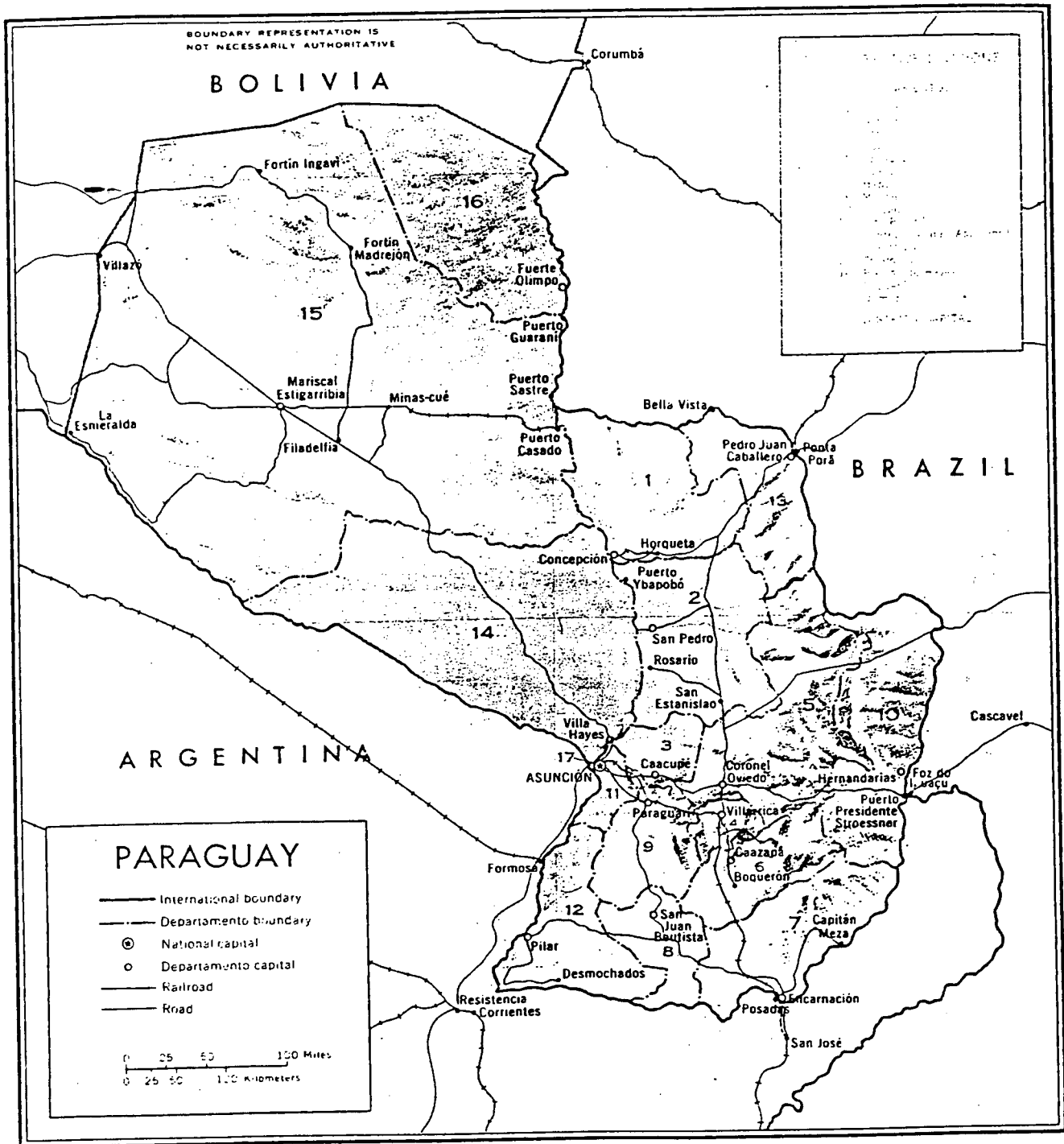
several times in the late 1960s. Von Eckstein said Mengele lived in Brazil until several years ago. The Russian claimed that he knew the exact location in Brazil and that he could easily find out if Mengele were still alive.

- EXEMPTIONS Section 3(b)**
- (2)(A) Privacy
  - (2)(B) Methods/Sources
  - (2)(G) Foreign Relations

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Conrado Pappalardo, a high-level official in the Paraguayan Government, corroborated and added to this information in a later meeting with US Embassy personnel. According to Pappalardo, Mengele was a partner in a large hardware store in Asuncion between 1959 and 1965, and used his own name during that period. The store had ties to a farm implement factory owned by the Mengele family in Germany, and Mengele allegedly visited Germany several times. Pappalardo said Mengele left Paraguay for Brazil in 1965 after Nazi hunters discovered his whereabouts. Eventually, according to Pappalardo, the Nazi fugitive went on to Portugal but continued corresponding with friends in South America until around 1980. Pappalardo said that Mengele's friends believe the absence of correspondence since then indicated that Mengele had died.

#### **How Mengele Evaded Capture**

*Halfhearted Pursuit.* The lawyer from New York told US Embassy personnel he had obtained evidence that the Israelis had broken off their efforts to capture Mengele two decades earlier. He said a high-level Israeli intelligence officer assigned to tracking Nazis had told him that in the early 1960s Israeli operatives trailed Mengele to a farm near Encarnacion in southern Paraguay. The farm was heavily fortified and difficult to storm. The Israelis, according to the intelligence official, were also inhibited from taking action by the international uproar over their 1960 kidnaping of Nazi fugitive Adolph Eichmann in Buenos Aires. The Israeli said that, by the mid-1960s, Tel Aviv had more pressing concerns elsewhere and the search for Mengele was shelved.

The West Germans also balked at about the same time, according to von Eckstein. He claimed that the West German Ambassador in Asuncion had queried him about Mengele's whereabouts, but then asked von Eckstein to withhold the information. Von Eckstein believed that the Ambassador did not want to be put in a position in which he would have had to press Paraguay to extradite the fugitive to West Germany.

*Paraguayan Protection.* Even more important, in our view, was the official protection Mengele evidently enjoyed in Paraguay. Stroessner, who has been in power since 1954, is of German background, and he sympathized with the Axis powers during World War

II. Moreover, according to an unconfirmed report from a retired US military officer who lived in Paraguay in the 1960s and early 1970s, Mengele served on occasion as Stroessner's personal physician. Stroessner agreed only under strong international pressure to revoke Mengele's Paraguayan citizenship in 1979.

Mengele reportedly also received considerable help from the network of prosperous people of German origin living in Paraguay.<sup>1</sup> For example, his partner in the Asuncion hardware store, according to Pappalardo, was of German descent. The fortified ranch at which Mengele was staying when the Israelis located him belonged to a family of German background.

#### **Recent Developments**

Although the last confirmed sighting of Mengele was nearly two decades ago in Paraguay, there have been numerous unsubstantiated reports in recent years. In January 1982, longtime Nazi hunter Simon Wiesenthal claimed that Mengele was alive, although afflicted with cancer, and was moving between Paraguay, Uruguay, and Bolivia. Another Nazi hunter believes Mengele has abandoned Paraguay and is traveling between Brazil, Chile, and Uruguay. Others claim to have spotted him at various times in Brazil, Venezuela, Argentina, and the United States. Last August, Mengele was allegedly seen by informants in the Paraguayan cities of Filadelfia, Puerto Stroessner, and Pedro Juan Caballero. In mid-February, a Paraguayan exile in Buenos Aires claimed Mengele was living on a military base in Laureles, a town to the east of Desmochados in southwestern Paraguay, where Stroessner has his summer home.

Stroessner has been only mildly cooperative in investigating such rumors. Last November, in response to a request from a delegation led by a former member of the US Congress, the President

<sup>1</sup> The German-origin community includes people whose families began emigrating to Paraguay in the late 19th century and others who arrived after World War II. According to open sources, some 200,000 Paraguayans out of a total population of 3.6 million are of German descent.

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ordered a nationwide manhunt for Mengele and offered to allow outsiders to assist Paraguayan police investigators. Press reports indicate, however, that the Paraguayan inquiry was halfhearted—Asuncion announced within days that it had found nothing—and Stroessner soon reneged on his offer to allow non-Paraguayans to assist his investigators. We believe his initiative was little more than a gambit aimed at easing international pressure.

#### Prospects for Capture

If Mengele is still alive, we believe his personal wealth, his connections among Germans in Paraguay and elsewhere in South America, the porosity of borders in the region, and the lack of recent confirmed sightings will hinder efforts to locate and capture him. Moreover, we see little indication that Stroessner currently intends to be cooperative. If Mengele is now residing in Paraguay, the President would probably want to avoid the embarrassment of having him found there. Paraguayan resentment of US human rights policies will also impede efforts to persuade Asuncion to help track Mengele down. We expect that only a combination of intense international pressure and economic or political incentives would prompt Stroessner to cooperate.

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