



**Directorate of
Intelligence**

~~Secret~~

25X1

Argentina: Prospects for Military Intervention in Politics

25X1

An Intelligence Assessment

~~Secret~~

*ALA 85-10089
August 1985*

Copy **289**

Page Denied



**Directorate of
Intelligence**

Secret

[Redacted]

25X1

Argentina: Prospects for Military Intervention in Politics

[Redacted]

25X1

An Intelligence Assessment

This paper was prepared by [Redacted] of the
Office of African and Latin American Analysis, with
contributions by [Redacted]
[Redacted] of the Office of Central Reference, and the
Political Instability Branch of the Office of Global
Issues. It was coordinated with the Directorate of
Operations. [Redacted]

25X1

25X1

25X1

25X1

Comments and queries are welcome and may be
directed to the Chief, South America Division, ALA,
[Redacted]

25X1

Secret

*ALA 85-10089
August 1985*

Secret

25X1

**Argentina: Prospects
for Military Intervention
in Politics** [redacted]

25X1

Key Judgments

*Information available
as of 6 August 1985
was used in this report.*

One of President Alfonsin's fundamental goals is to promote political stability and democracy in Argentina by ending his country's tradition of military intervention in politics. After taking office in December 1983, Alfonsin frontally challenged the military. He prosecuted top generals for human rights abuses committed during the counterterrorist struggle of the late 1970s, slashed the services' budgets, and purged most generals promoted under military rule. Although he also took steps to placate the military, his relations with the armed forces have deteriorated steadily.

We believe that the military is once again asserting itself politically and now views the government as an adversary. The armed forces complain that the human rights trials have become a direct attack on military honor and fear they will eventually include junior and middle-level officers.

[redacted] officers feel the budget cuts have prevented them from carrying out their minimal national security functions. The military is also agitated by what it sees as resurgent leftist subversion and influence in Alfonsin's Radical Party.

25X1

To intervene successfully in politics, the military, in our view, must overcome its internal divisions and acquire influential civilian allies and public support. Although plagued by interservice rivalries and disputes between conservative, pro-American senior officers and more nationalistic, anti-US junior officers, the military's institutional solidarity in the face of an unfriendly civilian government and its basically authoritarian, anti-Communist outlook serve as uniting forces. Acquiring civilian allies and popular support poses a greater problem. At present, the armed forces, according to the US Embassy, have only the backing of several marginal political factions. The military remains discredited by human rights abuses, the 1982 Falklands debacle, and past economic failures. Moreover, Alfonsin's popularity is high, and we believe that only a severe deterioration of the political and economic climate could garner the military the popular support—either active or tacit—it would need to mount a coup.

In our judgment, the odds are roughly 4 in 5 that Alfonsin will stay in power over the next year. Given his track record, the President probably will not mishandle key issues so severely as to provoke a coup. Buenos Aires' new austerity measures, in our view, stand a good chance of reducing inflation and keeping the danger of economic collapse and massive social disorder at bay. US Embassy [redacted] sources report that

25X1

Secret

25X1

Alfonsin will probably end the trials of military leaders once a few symbolic convictions have been obtained, and that he recognizes he cannot cut the armed forces budget further with impunity. There is little serious leftist subversion at present, and the government would probably counter any resurgent violence before it threatened political stability. Isolated garrison uprisings or abortive coups may occur soon, but we judge that Alfonsin can probably contain such threats.

The key risk on the downside would be an unraveling of Alfonsin's economic program, leading to hyperinflation, a severe recession, and a break with the IMF. This probably would set the stage for widespread social disorder, growing leftist and rightist violence, and a sharp decline in the government's popularity. Given the lack of any credible civilian alternative to the President's Radical Party, we believe that the military would meet little resistance if it moved to seize power under such circumstances.

Any kind of military regime could adopt policies directly harmful to US interests. Nevertheless, we believe that a government backed by moderate generals would probably be basically pro-American, pursue orthodox economic policies, and try to avoid the human rights abuses and foreign adventurism that discredited past military rulers. There is a good chance, however, that an ultranationalist military regime would refuse to repay or renegotiate the foreign debt, make a military move against the Falklands, purchase arms from the USSR, expand military-related nuclear programs, and engage in massive human rights violations.

A military government in Buenos Aires, however, would represent a severe setback for the US goal of fostering stable democratic institutions in Argentina and throughout South America. The damage to Argentine democracy could be especially great if the coup was bloody or was followed by a prolonged period of military rule. The ensuing legacy of bitterness and strife would hinder future efforts to restore democracy and to extricate Argentina from its endemic political instability and economic decline.

25X1

Secret

Secret



25X1

Contents

	<i>Page</i>
Key Judgments	iii
Introduction	1
The President Versus the Military	1
Military Fears	3
Military Cohesion and Factionalism	6
Civilian Allies and Popular Support	10
Outlook	11
The Most Likely Case: Military's Influence Remains Limited	11
An Alternate Scenario: Military Intervention	12
Implications for the United States	13



25X1

Secret

25X1

Figure 1



Boundary representation is not necessarily authoritative.

705771 8-85

25X1

Secret

Secret

25X1

Argentina: Prospects for Military Intervention in Politics

25X1

Introduction

The euphoria following President Alfonsin's election in October 1983 led many Argentines to predict that the cycle of unstable civilian and military regimes that had plagued their country for 50 years was over. The military was internally divided, discredited by defeat in the Falklands as well as by human rights abuses and failed economic policies, and eager to return to the barracks. Polls showed that the armed forces had achieved a state of public disrepute unequalled in Argentine history.

25X1

Now, after almost two years of civilian rule, it appears that expectations of a decisive break with the praetorian past in Argentina were misplaced, or at least premature. Alfonsin has remained popular, according to opinion polls, but his government has brought the country to the brink of domestic economic disaster and—at least until recently—has been viewed by many Argentines as weak and vacillating. Although the armed services have not recovered their prestige and influence, they are asserting themselves politically by seeking civilian allies and trying to limit government control over the military. This paper examines civilian-military relations under Alfonsin, analyzes the factors that unite and divide the armed forces, and discusses the prospects for military intervention in politics over the next year.

25X1

The President Versus the Military

Alfonsin has publicly declared that his main political goal is to end military interference in politics and consolidate Argentine democracy by serving a full six-year term and handing power to a freely elected civilian successor. During the 1983 campaign, Alfonsin—unlike his Peronist opponent—hammered at the evils of military rule. He singled out the armed forces as responsible for the human rights abuses of past counterterrorist campaigns and as the cause of Argentina's perennial political instability.

25X1

Upon taking office in December 1983, Alfonsin and his Radical Party administration quickly confronted the armed forces. A review of the public record as well as US Embassy and defense attache reporting shows that, during its first few months in power, the new government took a variety of measures to cut military power and influence:

- *Prosecution for human rights abuses.* Congress repealed a law promulgated by the previous regime that had absolved all military personnel of responsibility for human rights abuses. Alfonsin then named a commission to investigate the fate of some 9,000 persons who “disappeared” during the “dirty war” of the late 1970s. Members of the juntas that ruled from 1976 to 1983 were put on trial, first in military and then in civilian courts, for their role in organizing the repression of those years.
- *Massive budget cuts.* The government cut military service budgets in half by slashing weapon procurement programs, reducing conscript intake by over 50 percent, and limiting training exercises to a bare minimum.¹ These drastic actions, in our view, were taken partly out of financial necessity but mainly to reduce the weight of the military in Argentine politics and society.
- *Purging the officer corps.* Alfonsin began staffing the general ranks with officers of his choosing—mainly, in our view, to protect himself from a coup. He ordered a rash of forced retirements during his first months in office. By March 1985, he had removed from active duty all but two of 53 Army generals promoted under the military regime.

25X1

The Legacy of Military Rule

Argentina's tradition of military intervention in politics began in 1930 when the Army overthrew President Hipolito Yrigoyen, the founder of Raul Alfonsin's Radical Party. Since then, the armed forces have mounted five successful coups against constitutional presidents and launched innumerable abortive uprisings. The military has held power for all but five of the last 20 years. Only one freely elected president—Juan Peron—has completed his term of office in the past halfcentury, and he was an Army colonel who first achieved prominence through a coup. The armed forces have toppled nearly every variety of administration: conservative, Peronist, radical, and military. In recent decades, moreover, the duration of military regimes has increased while the lifespan of the civilian governments separating them has become shorter and more tenuous. [redacted]

The responsibility for this pattern, in our view, rests not only with the military but with Argentine political culture in general. Academic studies have concluded that the armed forces have become accepted by the public and the politicians as one among many political power brokers, barely distinguishable in this regard from the parties or labor unions. Recourse by politicians to the military as a source of power has become a tacit rule of the Argentine political game. The services have worked in tandem with virtually every significant political force over the last 50 years. Few of the country's politicians can truthfully claim never to have knocked on the barracks door. [redacted]

Some scholars and Argentine politicians have speculated that Alfonsin's election marked a decisive shift

from military intervention in politics. They argue that the systematic and massive counterterrorist campaign launched by the preceding military regime involved a degree of repression and violation of constitutional liberties unprecedented in Argentine history. This, combined with the Falklands disaster and the military's economic failures, uniquely discredited the armed forces, according to these observers. The result, in their view, has been a salutary affirmation by Argentine society of democratic processes and the rule of law. [redacted]

We agree with much of this analysis, but hesitate to conclude that Argentina's basic political dynamics have changed. The armed forces, in our view, remain key players, and the political impact of their human rights abuses will fade in time. The Argentine press still lavishes attention on the political views and maneuverings of the officer corps, and reporting from the US Embassy [redacted] indicates that politicians, labor leaders, and businessmen are cultivating military contacts as eagerly as ever. Most of the underlying causes of past coups—the absence of a powerful conservative party, labor's recourse to politicized strikes and protests, and the confrontational style of the political parties—continue unabated. We believe that, at a minimum, Alfonsin needs to complete his term and hand power to an elected successor before the revolving door of military and civilian regimes in Buenos Aires will begin to close. [redacted]

25X1

25X1

25X1

25X1

25X1

Secret

- *Civilian control over the armed forces.* The President increased the authority of the newly civilian-controlled Defense Ministry over the individual services, and loosened the military's grip on the extensive government-owned armaments industries.
- *Symbolic gestures.* The government also instituted some changes that we believe were designed in part to propagate the notion that the military's days as a political power were over. Among these was dismantling the 1st Army Corps in Buenos Aires—a nexus for coup plotting in the past—and the transfer of its units away from the capital. [redacted]

25X1



Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo protest military human rights abuses [redacted]

25X1

Alfonsin's treatment of the military, though designed to curb its power and influence, was not wholly punitive. According to press reports, the government decided early to limit prosecutions for human rights abuses to top generals and to a handful of subordinate officers accused of especially egregious acts of wrongdoing:

- Congress, according to the US Embassy, amended the military code of justice to protect most junior and middle-level officers on the grounds that they were only "obeying orders" during the "dirty war."

25X1

[redacted]

Military Fears

Notwithstanding these efforts to deal with the officer corps in a relatively balanced way, civilian-military relations have degenerated sharply since Alfonsin came to power. When he was inaugurated, the armed services, according to US Embassy officials, were exasperated with politics and eager to focus on their military tasks. Now, however, we believe the military views the government as an adversary that is attempting to destroy what remains of the armed forces' influence and public standing. [redacted]

25X1

Alfonsin made other efforts not to alienate the armed forces as a whole. According to the US Embassy, he limited forced retirements to flag ranks to assuage junior officers' fears of a wholesale purge. Moreover, once the housecleaning of top military ranks was under way, he publicly identified with and praised Argentina's "new" and "democratic" military and repudiated the vociferous antimilitary sentiments of some human rights groups that were clamoring for the virtual abolition of the armed forces. Most important, in our view, Alfonsin's government prosecuted leftist terrorists accused of capital crimes in an effort to demonstrate evenhandedness and to show that it was not carrying out, as some critics asserted, a vendetta against the uniformed services. [redacted]

25X1

One of the military's main complaints, according to US Embassy [redacted] is that the human rights trials have become a forum for attacking military honor in general and the services' record in the war against subversion in particular. Despite the government's decision to limit prosecutions to the military elite, press reports state that junior and middle-level officers still fear they will be held accountable in civilian courts for their role during the repression of the late 1970s. [redacted]

25X1

[redacted] struggle as an unmitigated success; they maintain that only a few individuals committed excesses, and that

25X1

Secret

Page Denied

Next 1 Page(s) In Document Denied

Secret



Discontented military officers [redacted]

those people have already been punished through military channels. [redacted]

Officers also fear the consequences of Alfonsin's massive military budget cuts. [redacted] military morale is at an alltime low and that cadets and NCOs, frustrated by low pay and seeing no future in the military, are leaving the Army in droves. In addition to being concerned for their professional and financial well-being, disgruntled officers have publicly complained that current funding levels do not enable the services to carry out their minimal national security functions, let alone modernize and retain trained personnel. [redacted]

The military, according to the US Embassy, is also agitated by the specter of resurgent leftist terrorism. We believe that there is currently little threat from the left, and that the security forces could quickly suppress efforts by the radical Montoneros or other groups to resume the violence of the mid-1970s. The armed forces, however, tend to believe unsubstantiated reports of leftist activity and blame the civilians for not stemming the perceived rising tide of subversion.

[redacted]

[redacted]

Officers also worry that the ruling Radical Party—which we view as basically moderate—is being taken over by “leftists.” This charge is particularly grave, in our judgment, because past coups have often been justified by claims that the government was being infiltrated by the left. [redacted]

[redacted]

Military Cohesion and Factionalism

Although these attitudes toward the Alfonsin administration appear to be widely shared within the military, the armed forces are not monolithic. In our view there are three major rifts within the military:

- *Interservice rivalries.* The longstanding animosity among the Navy, the Air Force, and the politically and militarily dominant Army was highlighted by the Falklands defeat, where the services proved incapable of mounting joint operations. According to the US Embassy, the war worsened existing divisions by letting each service highlight the others' failures and by driving a new wedge between the Air Force—which believed that it alone had fought creditably—and the Army and Navy. Alfonsin's appointment this year of an Air Force general (in lieu of the customary Army man) to head the Joint Chiefs of Staff has probably aggravated interservice rivalries, in our view.

[redacted]

25X1

25X1

25X1

25X1

25X1

25X1

25X1

25X1

25X1

25X1

25X1

Secret

Austerity and the Military

After Argentina's defeat in the Falklands conflict in 1982, the armed forces, anticipating that the military would soon be yielding control of the government to civilians, moved quickly to purchase as much foreign military equipment and technology as possible before giving up power. When President Alfonsin took office in late 1983, his administration was faced with a long list of weapon contracts negotiated by the military government. Alfonsin considered canceling many of these, but provisions for penalties made this an unattractive option. He decided instead to delay deliveries of equipment and extend payment deadlines as much as possible. These economizing measures were not enough, however, and Alfonsin ordered a 50-percent cut in the 1984 defense budget. His 1985 budget envisages an additional reduction of 10 percent. [redacted]

25X1

25X1

[redacted] reporting, Alfonsin's spending reductions have had a sharp impact on military salaries and benefits, and have raised considerable grumbling among junior officers and noncommissioned personnel. Military pay increases have not kept pace with inflation, and the government is often late in making salary and pension payments. These cuts in pay and other benefits have prompted an exodus of personnel from all three services. Ten percent of the Army's noncommissioned officers resigned or requested early retirement in 1984, and the Navy lost a third of its noncommissioned officers and about one-fourth of its officer corps. The Air Force is coping more successfully with the cutbacks, but many servicemen have taken second jobs to make ends meet. [redacted]

25X1

The budget cuts have also had a severe impact on operational readiness. According to the press, many Army posts have closed down, and equipment maintenance has declined sharply because of the shortage of spare parts and technical personnel. The Navy has ordered two exercise slowdown periods in 1985, and restricted training [redacted] Combat systems aboard naval vessels are deteriorating rapidly, and the Navy has been forced to forgo participation in joint exercises during the past year. The Air Force has reduced flight training to minimal levels. [redacted] sources report that in late 1984 some personnel were refusing to fly, fearing that the danger of malfunctions was increasing because of maintenance cutbacks. [redacted]

25X1

25X1

25X1

25X1

25X1

The Alfonsin government is trying to generate funds for the armed forces by seeking export markets for Argentine-manufactured weapons and foreign-made equipment in the Argentine inventory, but this effort has been largely unsuccessful according to US Embassy [redacted] In our view, the military budget squeeze will continue for the next few years at least. Military manpower levels will probably continue to decline as low salaries and depressed living conditions encourage more retirements and discourage new enlistments. Equipment maintenance will continue to deteriorate, further reducing operational capabilities. The proficiency of pilots and other skilled personnel will suffer further as more training restrictions are imposed. [redacted]

25X1

25X1

25X1



• *Junior versus senior officers.* Growing differences between flag officers and lower ranks have been aired in the press, which has carried articles in which junior officers have denounced their superiors for failing to stand up to the military's enemies. [redacted]

25X6

25X1

25X1



[redacted] US Embassy officials have reported that officers below the rank of colonel generally are more willing to confront the government, are more anti-American, and are more receptive to radical political and economic prescriptions than their seniors.

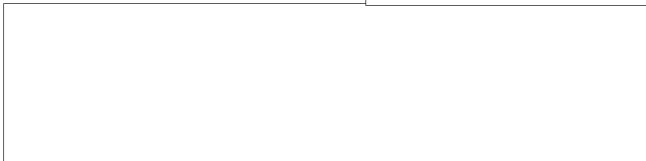
25X1



25X1

The importance of rifts within the military should not be overstated, however. Indeed, in the past, internal divisions have not impeded political action by the military. Academic studies reveal that the services were even more disunited during the 1960s and 1970s—an era of recurring coups and almost continuous military rule. Above all, institutional solidarity in the face of a perceived external threat—the Alfonsin administration—has enabled the military to keep internal disputes under control. [redacted]

25X1



25X1

• *Intraservice disputes.* A welter of bureaucratic and personality-related rivalries weaken solidarity within each service. Perhaps the most crippling, [redacted] [redacted] is the rivalry between the infantry and cavalry. This struggle goes back for decades and persists—although less acutely, according to defense attache reporting—today.

Another force for military unity is the authoritarian, anti-Communist, and pro-US outlook shared, according to the Embassy, by most senior officers. Even where ideological and partisan differences exist within the officer corps, we believe they are less acute than in recent years. Numerous academic studies have highlighted the fact that, in the past, internal struggles between liberals and nationalists or Peronists and anti-Peronists split the military in half and affected officers of all ranks. Present-day divisions between the

25X1

25X1

Page Denied



preoccupy the services would, in our view, be sublimated if enough officers came to believe that Argentina faced a political and economic crisis that only they could resolve. [redacted]

25X1

25X1

Civilian Allies and Popular Support

We believe the major factor that limits the military's ability to influence democratic institutions is its lack of powerful allies within the major political parties, trade unions, and other interest groups. According to US Embassy and press reporting, the armed forces are more isolated from civilian society now than at any time in recent Argentine history. The ruling Radical Party, most factions of the splintered opposition Peronists, the Peronist-dominated labor movement, and the minor parties on the left are openly opposed to any political role for the military. [redacted]

25X1

This is not to say that the military is completely without influence. US Embassy reporting [redacted] [redacted] for example, indicate that individual politicians, labor leaders, and businessmen are cultivating military connections as eagerly as ever. [redacted]

25X1

25X1

25X1

25X1

[redacted] We believe that these contacts between the military and some of the following groups, if maintained, could lay the groundwork for more substantial and wide-ranging plotting at a later date, assuming external conditions proved favorable:

25X1

- *Rightwing Peronists.* This faction of Peronism seldom pledges even verbal allegiance to democratic legality [redacted] [redacted] Herminio Iglesias, the leader of the Peronist right, publicly lauds the armed forces for the Falklands invasion, echoes their fear that leftist subversion is reemerging, and, according to reliable press and US Embassy reporting, is cultivating both retired and active-duty officers who are eager to move against the government.

25X1

25X1

minority of ultranationalist and anti-American junior officers and the conservative, pro-American majority are not so deep, affect fewer officers, and consequently are not nearly as debilitating. [redacted]

25X1

Considering all the countervailing forces, we conclude that the military on balance is more united than divided. Most of the internal quarrels that currently

• *Arturo Frondizi and the MID.* Ex-President Frondizi, who heads the small, center-right Movement for Integration and Development (MID), has told US officials that he is working with Iglesias, several small conservative groups, and unnamed military figures to oppose Alfonsin. While Frondizi claims to abhor extraconstitutional measures, he admits that some of his military colleagues are not so squeamish. [redacted]

[redacted]

• *Rightist elements in the Church.* The Church as an institution officially supports the Argentine Constitution, but a few rightist priests have publicly urged the military to abolish the “pornographic democracy” inaugurated by Alfonsin. Academic studies reveal that, although these clergymen are bereft of significant influence beyond the barracks, they are respected by some senior officers who have used rightwing Catholic ideology to help legitimize past military governments. [redacted]

The military’s ability to act either within or outside of the system will, in our view, be tempered by the level of perceived public support. We believe that public clamor for a military government is unlikely; the armed forces could act, however, if there was a widespread popular conviction—expressed through polls, the press, and the general tenor of public debate—that there was no credible civilian alternative to a vitiated Radical Party government. [redacted]

[redacted]

We agree with the US Embassy’s assessment that the overall political and economic climate would have to deteriorate considerably before the public would tolerate a military regime. Memories of the services’ human rights abuses during the “dirty war,” of the Falklands debacle, and of the military’s economic failures still outweigh unhappiness over the inadequacies of Alfonsin’s government. The President remains highly popular, according to opinion polls. Even as inflation raged at nearly 1,000 percent annually last May, over half of the country gave Alfonsin a positive

rating, and since he decreed a new economic adjustment package in June his standing in the polls has risen sharply. [redacted]

We do not believe, however, that the failures of the last military regime have inoculated Argentina against the threat of military rule. The public still views the services as political actors. A recent poll, for example, revealed that almost 60 percent of Argentines believe the military is willing—although not currently able—to mount a coup. Finally, the main bulwark against renewed praetorian activity—Alfonsin’s popularity—could, in our view, quickly collapse in the event of a severe political and economic crisis. [redacted]

Outlook

The Most Likely Case: Military Influence Remains Limited

We believe that the odds are roughly 4 in 5 that Alfonsin will stay in office over the next year and that the military’s political influence will remain limited. The fundamental basis for this judgment is our conviction—shared by the US Embassy and most US academic observers—that the President probably will govern well enough to prevent the emergence of a consensus against him, either among military and civilian power brokers or among the public at large. Alfonsin, in our view, is unlikely to seriously mishandle the key issues that might provoke a move by the military:

- *The economy.* The austerity measures launched by the government in June stand a good chance, in our judgment, of reducing inflation and enabling Buenos Aires to meet its commitments to the IMF and foreign creditors in the short term. For the time being, the danger that hyperinflation will spark political instability, a deep recession, and massive social disorder appears to have receded.
- *Human rights.* Alfonsin remains aware of the threat that wholesale trials of the military for human rights abuses could present to his government. For

25X1

25X1

25X1

25X1

25X1

25X1

25X1



25X1 President Alfonsin with military [redacted]

example, US Embassy [redacted] sources have reported that he may grant immunity to most of the officer corps once convictions have been obtained in the ongoing trials of former junta members.

- **Military austerity.** All three services will continue to suffer from low funding, but Alfonsin and his Defense Minister appear to realize that not much more can be cut from the military budget. The President, according to the US Embassy, has even contemplated a wage hike for officers, and the Defense Ministry plans a general reorganization to enable the military to use its financial resources more efficiently.

- **Subversion.** Leftist terrorism, in our view, is unlikely to take on major proportions over the next year. Alfonsin almost certainly would let the security services nip in the bud any resurgent leftist violence. [redacted]

25X1 This scenario, however, does not preclude military-inspired violence in the form of garrison uprisings, abortive coup attempts by junior officers, or an increase in terrorist acts by military-linked rightist squads. Nevertheless, we believe that Alfonsin can contain the political repercussions of such actions, which would probably be committed by extremist elements bereft of significant military and civilian support. The armed forces as a whole will almost

certainly remain disgruntled, but their political isolation, combined with adroit maneuvering by the President, will probably keep them in the barracks. [redacted]

25X1

An Alternate Scenario: Military Intervention

In our view there is about a 1-in-5 chance that the armed forces will intervene over the next 12 months. The most likely precipitant of military action would be an unraveling of Alfonsin's ambitious austerity program, resulting in hyperinflation and a severe recession. This would almost certainly cause Buenos Aires to fall out of compliance with IMF guidelines and lose access to foreign funds, while strengthening politicians within and outside the government who favor a debt moratorium. Such economic reverses, in our view, could set the stage for widespread social disorder, growing rightwing and leftwing violence, and a plummeting of Alfonsin's popularity leading to Radical Party losses in the legislative elections scheduled for November. [redacted]

25X1

25X1

We judge that the political chaos engendered by an economic collapse might alone suffice to discredit Alfonsin completely and spur a military response. The chances for rapid military intervention would rise further in the event that the government slashed the military budget again, or failed to control resurgent leftist terrorism. [redacted]

25X1

"Constitutional Coup." The most likely form of military intervention, in our view, would be what the Argentine press has dubbed a "constitutional coup" that would use quasi-legal means either to force Alfonsin from office or to surround him with military and other conservative advisers. Such a move would almost certainly have to be backed by top military leaders in conjunction with parts of the conservative and moderate Peronist political opposition, and might also include disgruntled elements in Alfonsin's own party. A "constitutional coup" would give de facto power to the military and its allies, while preserving a facade of constitutional legality that would probably lessen the stridency of domestic and international opposition to the move. [redacted]

25X1

Secret

Full-Fledged Coup by Senior Officers. A constitutional coup would require the active participation of a large sector of the political elite. It is possible, however, that economic and political conditions could degenerate to a point at which the Joint Chiefs decided to intervene but could secure only passive acquiescence from the public and the politicians. The military then would probably mount a genuine coup. It would, however, lack the legitimacy granted by formal compliance with the Constitution and would almost certainly generate more internal opposition and international criticism than a regime born of a constitutional coup. []

25X1

Ultranationalist Coup. The least probable form of intervention, in our view, would be a coup—presumably violent—by ultranationalist, junior, and middle-level officers and a handful of generals. We believe that such a move could succeed only under extremely volatile economic and political conditions and if a group of these officers managed to steal a march on the Joint Chiefs. The result would probably be a populist and nationalist regime supported by the far right wings of Peronism and organized labor. []

25X1

Implications for the United States

We believe that the first months of military rule in Buenos Aires would be fraught with uncertainty. The armed forces would almost certainly come to power only after the Alfonsin government had been thoroughly discredited and the economy had collapsed. Under such circumstances any military regime might take unusual measures to revive the economy and deal with the foreign debt, adopt a belligerent stance on the Falklands issue, or engage in anti-US rhetoric to bolster its domestic support. Only after it was firmly in power would a military government's long-term intentions become clear. []

25X1

Nevertheless, we believe that in the long run either a "constitutional" or an overt coup led by the Joint Chiefs would probably do less harm to US interests than an ultranationalist junior officer revolt. Although such a coup would be a setback for the movement toward democracy in Latin America, the economic and foreign policies of a government controlled by moderate generals probably would not

directly challenge US interests and might be preferable to unchecked political and economic deterioration under an unpopular civilian government. Such a regime would probably be less prone to antagonize the United States and other Western countries through risky actions regarding the foreign debt, the Falklands dispute, and human rights. It would also—perhaps after an initial period of experimentation—probably adopt relatively orthodox austerity measures to cure the domestic economy. []

25X1

If an ultranationalist coup succeeded, however, we judge that the impact on Argentine-US relations would be uniformly negative. A nationalist/populist military regime would, in our view, probably engage in extensive anti-US and "anti-imperialist" posturing. Moreover, such a government might well move beyond bluster and take actions harmful to US interests. These could include refusal to repay or renegotiate Argentina's foreign debt, a military move against the Falklands, arms purchases from the USSR, and expansion of military-related nuclear programs. Finally, a regime of this type would probably have a stormy tenure, committing serious human rights violations and leaving the country's political and economic structures in a shambles. []

25X1

Any military government in Buenos Aires, however, would, in our view, harm important US goals and strain bilateral ties; the US aim of fostering democratic stability in Argentina would be directly undermined. Only if the coup was "constitutional," or the interregnum of outright military rule very brief, could the damage to Argentina's representative institutions be at least partially contained. We believe it is more likely that the coup would involve considerable bloodshed or be followed by a prolonged period of military rule, thereby generating widespread public discontent. If such a regime made little headway in resolving the country's pressing economic and political problems and lost power under humiliating circumstances, we believe that the resulting legacy of bitterness and strife would seriously hinder future efforts to extricate Argentina from its endemic political instability and economic decline. []

25X1

Secret

A coup would also, in our view, fuel traditional Argentine anti-Americanism. This would be most dramatic in the case of an ultranationalist junior officer coup, which would probably try to legitimize itself through crude anti-US words and deeds. It would also be the case following a coup led by moderate officers or the Joint Chiefs. The left would almost certainly portray such a coup as orchestrated by the United States and would allege that austerity measures taken by a military regime were implemented at Washington's behest. Such accusations, however unfounded, would, in our view, find a receptive audience in sectors of the Argentine public. When the military left power, recriminations over supposed American involvement could poison US relations with a civilian successor government.

25X1

The regional implications of military rule in Argentina would be varied. Major powers such as Brazil, or stable democracies such as Venezuela and Colombia, would, in our view, barely be affected by a change of regime in Buenos Aires. The continent's dictatorships—especially those of Chile and Paraguay—might be bolstered by the Argentine military's return to power, but we believe this effect would be short lived. The demonstration effect of a coup would be greatest—and the impact on the US goal of promoting democracy throughout the region most severe—in Bolivia, Peru, and Uruguay, where weak or untested civilian governments are facing formidable political and economic challenges. All three countries have close ties to Argentina and possess politically active armed forces that probably would take heart from a coup in Buenos Aires when considering any move against their own elected governments.

25X1

Secret

Page Denied

Next 2 Page(s) In Document Denied

25X1

25X1

Secret

Secret