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ARGENTINE SEIZURE OF FALKLANDS PRODUCES GROWING REGIONAL CRISIS

--BRAZIL AND CHILE PROVIDE NO COMFORT

--VENEZUELA REPAYS ARGENTINE DICTATORSHIP FOR SIGNING "DECLARATION OF CARACAS"

--LAWLESS ARGENTINA CITES PROVISIONS OF RIO PACT

--ROTTEN FRUIT HARVEST OF REAGAN COURTSHIP OF ARGENTINE MILITARY DICTATORSHIP

The Reagan administration's inability to have prevented the Argentine invasion of the Falklands is a serious indictment of the effectiveness of its policy of seeking intimate relations with some of the world's worst human rights violators. Since seizing power in 1976, the current Argentine military government, which in the past several months has been led by Gen. Leopoldo Galtieri, is responsible for the murder of upwards of 15,000 Argentine political dissidents.

Because of its alleged anti-communism--ironically today the Soviet Union is Argentina's closest international friend--the Argentine regime, along with other Latin American dictatorships, became a prime candidate for being wooed by the newly-elected Reagan administration. Argentina became the target of the heaviest concentration of visits by U.S. generals and admirals, as well as by almost every ranking member of the State Department remotely concerned with regional affairs, of any Latin American nation. If there was a hemispheric nation that could be thought to be influenced by U.S. advice, it had to be Argentina.

Failure of this policy of opportunism and lack of principles pursued by the Reagan administration is highlighted by its alienation of democratic forces in the region while having no real impact on dictatorial regimes that today dominate Latin America. The attempt to rehabilitate relations with Latin American authoritarian regimes irrespective of their dismal human rights records has not only failed to produce diplomatic clout in the region, but has had a profoundly divisive effect on Washington's European allies. U.S. policy in El Salvador is an example of this failure.

Of all of the U.S. NATO allies, only Britain sent official observers to oversee the March 28 Salvadoran elections and almost every European country has sharply attacked the U.S. over its unmoving support of the Salvadoran security forces. In spite of a British Latin American policy that is now calling Argentina a dictatorship but has consistently emulated the Reagan administration's policy of courting Latin American right-wing regimes, the British are being repaid with lukewarm support from the U.S. over the Falklands.

Venezuela

If Britain has been the strongest advocate of the Reagan administration's Latin American policy in Europe, the Venezuelan government of Pres. Herrera Campins has been its most consistent advocate in the region. After the French-Mexican initiative of last August which recognized the Salvadoran guerrillas as a legitimate political force and called for a restructuring of that nation's security forces because of its notorious human rights record, Venezuela engineered the "Declaration of Caracas" which strongly condemned the initiative. It didn't embarrass the Venezuelan government that it aggressively sought the signatures of 6 right-wing military regimes, including that of Argentina, while only attracting two nominally democratic adherents. While condemning the French-Mexican initiative as an act of intervention, the Venezuelan president is not on record as denouncing the scores of Argentine military advisers now in Honduras who are reported to be training Nicaraguan exiles to conduct military forays into Nicaragua.

Venezuela's support of the Argentine action over the Falklands is merely the latest example of a Caracas policy that increasingly makes no distinctions between the conduct of unconstitutional right-wing military governments and the actions of democratic societies. In contrast to the firm human rights stand taken by his predecessor, Herrera Campins has provided scant comfort to embattled democrats throughout the hemisphere.

The Ric Pact

The Rio Pact was brought into existence in 1947 by the Truman administration to enlist Latin America's support in the Cold War against the Soviet Union. In spite of the intention of the Argentine government to enlist the treaty to generate support of its invasion of the Falklands, article one clearly disqualifies such protection under its terms:

"The High Contracting Parties formally condemn war and undertake, in their international relations, not to resort to the threat or the use of force in any manner inconsistent with the provisions of the Charter of the United Nations or of the Treaty."

While one can appreciate the instincts of Latin American nations to join together to oppose an extra-hemispheric power, what Argentina has done is offensive in nature, rather than defensive. It has disturbed the status quo, not sought to maintain it and rely on the peaceful settlement of disputes. If the Panamanians, Peruvians and Venezuelans continue to defend the Argentine actions, they are sanctioning the alteration of borders by force, a condition that may adversely affect their own existing or future border disputes with neighboring nations.

Argentine Interior Minister Alfredo Saint Jean's remark that "in a civilized world...one cannot think of a decision" by Britain to wage war over the Falkland Islands is a rather curious statement for an officer who helped preside over the physical liquidation of more than 15,000 people. The Argentine armed forces bloody war against urban terrorism from 1976-1980 left thousands dead and countless more missing. That merciless campaign ignored the same rules of conduct which Gen. Saint Jean is now calling to Argentina defense.

The ultimate question is why Argentina has chosen this moment to act against the Falklands. The Galtieri government, in office for under four months, moved against Britain with no prior consultation with its neighbors. By supporting Argentina, not on the merits of its case, but by its actions, Venezuela, Peru and Panama are directly giving aid and comfort to a military regime whose motivation to invade the Falklands was to consolidate itself in office by distracting the Argentine population from a disastrous economic situation and a human rights record which is again deteriorating.

The proper time for supporting the Argentine claim against the Falklands was when a civilian government returned to office in Argentina, and concerted pressure could have been exercised for a government deserving that support. By its defense of Argentine actions, Venezuela, Panama and Peru not only sanctioned the use of force and violated the principle of peaceful change, but may have directly prolonged the agony of the Argentine people and brought about the loss of life through a military encounter.
