

Latin America was directly concerned, backing one side or the other. Other revolutionary movements were fighting in Central America, in neighboring Uruguay (the Tupamaros); across the Andes Mountains in Chile, another military government was struggling against its domestic enemies.

Can the OAS refuse to get drawn into a divisive conflict, polarizing its 35 Member States, or is it compelled to act on the newly emerging principles of international responsibility for human rights? Does it have the ability to help resolve the conflict and strengthen return to democratic rule?



Relatives of the missing persons in Argentina demonstrating in 1977 in Buenos Aires. Associated Press

Are Member States with conservative governments compelled to line up behind their endangered counterparts in Argentina? Must revolutionary states and sympathetic governments elsewhere strive to undermine the military government and support the revolutionaries of the ERP? Or is there a middle path that allows for the restoration of democratic constitutionalism and respect for basic human rights, that avoid the pitfalls of military rule and revolution?

³ 'OAS: Our History', *Organization of American States*, 2023, www.oas.org/en/about/our_history.asp

⁴ Ibid.

Introduction: the OAS

While some historians can trace the “inter-American system” back to the Congress of Panama in 1826, it was in 1889 that the American states decided to meet periodically to create a shared system of norms and institutions.³ The first International Conference of the American States was held in Washington D.C. from October 1889 to April 1890,

...for the purpose of discussing and recommending for adoption to their respective Governments some plan of arbitration for the settlement of disagreements and disputes that may hereafter arise between them, and for considering questions relating to the improvement of business intercourse and means of direct communication between said countries, and to encourage such reciprocal commercial relations as will be beneficial to all and secure more extensive markets for the products of each said countries.⁴

Eighteen American States participated in the initial conference and agreed to ‘constitute the International Union of American Republics for the prompt collection and distribution of commercial information.’⁵

As the years went on the organization was named the Pan American Union and then the General Secretariat of the Organization of American States (OAS). The conference of 1889 and 1890 recommended the adopting of provisions to “govern extradition...declared that conquest does not create rights...produced guidelines for the drafting of a treaty on arbitration that could avoid...war as a means to resolve controversies among American nations.”⁶ The conference also established the foundation of the inter-American system which included “commercial concerns directed toward

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

achieving greater integration; legal concerns with a strengthening state and private sector...in a peaceful environment of regional cooperation and security; and the establishment of specialized institutions in different spheres.”⁷

The OAS was re-established in 1948 with the signing of the Charter of OAS and came into force in December of 1951. It was amended by the Protocol of Buenos Aires, signed in 1967, becoming effective in February 1970.⁸ Article I of the Charter established the goal of achieving an order of peace and justice, promoting solidarity, strengthening collaboration, defending their sovereignty, territorial integrity, and independence.⁹ In 1982, 31 states had membership in the organization. Today there are 35 Member States, the number used at ODUMUNC.¹⁰

Background: Argentina’s Dirty War

The Dirty War is marked by a military junta, also known as a military dictatorship, in the state of Argentina beginning in 1974. The Dirty War started with Operation Condor where military forces of the Argentine Anti-Communist Alliance (AAA and or Triple A) hunted and killed anyone who they believed were associated with “socialism, left-wing Peronism, or the Montoneros movement.”¹¹ It is estimated that 9,000 to 30,000 people were killed or “disappeared” due to targeted attacks by the military junta to silence social and political opposition to their dictatorship; the victims of these disappearances were called “desaparecidos” due to the fact that they seemed to disappear without a trace of their existence.¹²



Actors in the war included the Argentina Army, Navy and Air Force, Federal Police, National Gendarmerie, Anticomunist Alliance, and the right wing faction, Justicialist Party; these groups were supported by the United States, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay, and France.¹³ The revolutionary side was dominated by the People’s Revolutionary Army (ERP), as well smaller groups such as the Montoneros and Fuerzas Armadas Peronistas Resistencia Libertaria. All these groups were supported morally, financially and militarily by Cuba.¹⁴

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ ‘Organization of American States’, *Wikipedia*, n.d., https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Organization_of_American_States

¹¹ ‘Dirty War’, *Wikipedia*, n.d., https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dirty_War

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

Although the causes of the Dirty War are complicated, it was heavily influenced by inequality and foreign support for revolutionary movements. The Argentine situation was largely the result of social and political tensions left unresolved from the Perónist era (1946-76). Juan Domingo Perón, a charismatic, pioneering populist leader who was fervently supported by some and deeply hated by others, was President of Argentina initially from 1946 until 1952.



Perón and the ailing Evita during his second inaugural parade, June 1952. Eva died the following month.

Perón was most popular among the working-class voters, who benefited from his social welfare policies. Perón invested in “public works, expanded social welfare, and forced employers to improve working conditions.”¹⁵ Trade unions under Perón grew and his support for women’s suffrage was granted by his second wife, Eva Perón. Perón and Eva were heavily supported not only because of their progressive policies, but also because of “their efforts to eliminate poverty and...dignify labor.”¹⁶

Despite his progressive policies, dissidents were likely to be fired. Private companies could not afford to challenge his policies and protect his opponents, who were exiled, arrested, and tortured. The media was controlled. War criminals from Nazi Germany, like Josef Mengele and Adolf Eichmann, leaders in crimes against humanity during the Holocaust, were given refuge in the country. So was Ante Pavelić, the former dictator of Croatia.¹⁷

Peronism quickly emerged as political movement, a “blend of nationalism and labourism or populism.”¹⁸ The pillars of Peronism then and today are social justice, economic independence, and political sovereignty. Still highly influential in Argentina today, the Peronist “third position ideology” rejected both capitalism and communism. It supported a semi-fascist corporatism to “mediate tensions between the classes of society” with the state being responsible for negotiating the compromises between employers and employees.¹⁹ At the time it was a unique and unprecedented phenomenon. Today, Peronism seems to foreshadow populist politics that emerged in Europe, Russia, and the United States.

Those who defended Peronism said it “embodies the interests of the masses and...the most vulnerable social strata.”²⁰ It was a unique mix of left and right. Peronists admired Perón’s administration for its international anti-imperialism and non-alignment in the Cold War. At home, he won support with socially progressive agendas such as the expansion of social security, free education, creation of low-income housing, paid vacations, free healthcare, paid maternity leave, and worker recreation centers.²¹ Peronism and the Peronism Party

¹⁵ ‘Juan Perón’, *Wikipedia*, n.d., https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Juan_Perón

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ ‘Peronism’, *Wikipedia*, n.d., <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peronism>

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.*

remain a major force in Argentine politics to this day.²²

Opponents of Peronism viewed it as authoritarian and destabilizing. Perón's critics compared him to fascist dictators. Perón himself declared he was the embodiment of nationality. His government silenced their opponents by claiming they were unpatriotic, a labeling campaign that intensified during his second term. Peronism was opposed across the political spectrum. Socialists claimed that Perón's administration was "preserving capitalist exploitation and class division." Conservatives rejected the ideology due to its modernist tone and believed it threatened their status in society. Liberals also criticized Perón and his political party for promoting arbitrariness and dictatorial tendencies.²³

Political Instability

Perón never united Argentine society. His movement used nationalism to conceal the growing tensions. But opposition rapidly accumulated among traditional and revolutionary groups. His second term as president began in 1952, but ended in 1955 when he was overthrown by a military coup.

Perón was exiled by the military dictatorship, but returned to be elected for his third term in October 1973. His third term ended prematurely with his death in July 1974. During his third presidency, Perón began siding more and more with the far right, attempting to strengthen his support against potential revolutionaries. His minister, José López Rega, formed the Argentine Anti-Communist Alliance.

After Perón's death in 1974, his third wife, Isabel Perón, succeeded him as leader of the

Peronist Party and Argentine President. But she was unable to manage the conflicts her husband just barely managed to control. Rising political tension and an unstable economy led the Argentine military to overthrow her government in a second military coup, on 24 March 1976.

Civilian rule was replaced by the military *junta*, formally known as the Proceso de Reorganización Nacional, often simply known as el Proceso, "the Process," initially under the presidency of Lt. Gen. Jorge Rafael Videla.²⁴ After the successful coup and the eradication of democracy, a military dictatorship ruled the country and all its affairs.



The junta in 1977: Admiral Emilio Massera, President Jorge Videla and General Orlando Agosti (Getty Images)

But the military inherited a society full of extreme conflict, which even Perón had lost the ability to control, and his wife Isabel could not deal with. Struggling for stability, the *junta* suspended Congress, banned political parties, civil rights were limited, and a free market along

²² The Economist. "The persistence of Peronism". *The Economist*, 15 October 2015, <https://www.economist.com/the-americas/2015/10/15/the-persistence-of-peronism>

²³ 'Peronism', op.cit.

²⁴ 'National Reorganization Process', *Wikipedia*, n.d., https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Reorganization_Process

with deregulation were introduced.²⁵ The military persecuted Peronists and leftists alike to diminish opposition of the current government. But their heavy-handed efforts only seemed to inflame rebel movements. The Dirty War emerged as the most violent and arbitrary part of a broader struggle by the country's military rulers to suppress small, but rising, revolutionary movements and broader social discontent.²⁶

The other Argentine problem facing the OAS

Since the 19th Century, Argentina claimed sovereignty over the Falkland Islands (as they are called by the United Kingdom) or the Malvinas (as they are called in Argentina). The United Kingdom has controlled the islands as a legal territory since 1833.²⁷ With the Dirty War declining, on 2 April 1982, Argentine troops invaded the Falklands/Malvinas in an effort to conquer the disputed territory.

It widely believed that the military junta authorized the invasion in an attempt to unify the country, to distract attention from growing concerns that it was mismanaging the economy, and growing public anger over the human rights abuses of the Dirty War.²⁸ The invasion was well received by the Argentine public and where they previously sat to protest the tragedies of the Dirty War, crowds now gathered at Buenos Aires' central Plaza de Mayo to celebrate the conquest of the islands.

The junta invaded under the assumption that the British government would accept the attack as an accomplished fact. Instead, British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher quickly decided to reverse the invasion. The UK deployed two aircraft carriers and much of its navy to retake

the islands. Major European powers and, surprisingly, the United States, supported the British cause.

The US allowed its ally to use its "air-to-air missiles, communications equipment, aviation fuel, and other military stockpiles...as well as...military intelligence."²⁹ By the end of the war the Falklands/Malvinas were back under British rule. The British armed forces had captured 11,400 Argentine prisoners, 650 Argentine soldiers and 255 British soldiers had died.³⁰

The defeat at the Falklands/Malvinas was embarrassing and discredited the Argentine military and the military government. With accusations of destroying the country's economy and committing human rights abuses such as murder, torture, sexual assault, and kidnapping, the military junta began to lose its favorable public opinion. Battling leftist guerilla groups, other political opposition, and losing the public's backing, the Argentine military was at a loss of what to do next.

Country positions in the OAS

Supporters: There was extensive cooperation among certain countries in South America in order to uphold the dictatorship in Argentina. It was a consensus among these countries that the threat of communism was immense and should be eradicated together.

The strongest support for the Argentine military government and its dirty war came from other military governments, especially the Brazilian military dictatorship (1964-85) and military-ruled Chile. Brazil was ruled in these years by Gen. Ernesto Geisel and Gen. João Figueiredo.

²⁵ "Ibid.

²⁶ Pike, John. 'Argentina Dirty War - 1976-1983', *Global Security*, 18 May 2016, www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/war/argentina.htm.

²⁷ Falkland Islands War, 28 June 2023,

www.britannica.com/event/Falkland-Islands-War

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

Intelligence agencies worked with one another to monitor and capture terrorist groups such as individuals in the Argentine Montoneros; in fact, two members of the Montoneros were captured in Brazil on the authorization of the Brazilian military intelligence.³¹ The main based of foreign intelligence and torture center, in Argentina, Automotores Orletti, held prisoners from Chile, Uruguay, Paraguay, and Bolivia and with the help of officials from each respective country, were interrogated.

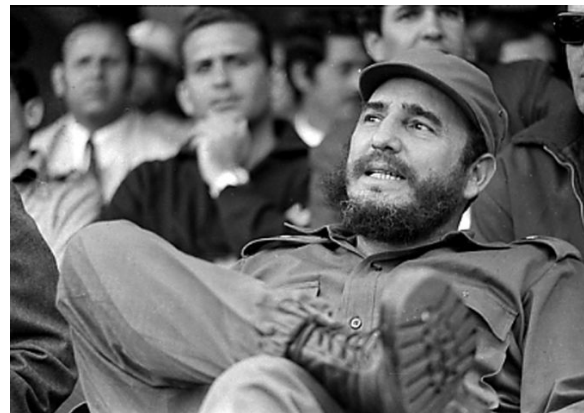
At this time, Chile was ruled by the military dictatorship of Gen. Augusto Pinochet. Chile had important differences with Argentina, especially regarding control over the contested Beagle Channel and strategic islands. But they two countries generally cooperated on the fight against rebels. Chileans who fled to Argentina to escape the dictatorship were threatened by the military junta, through Operation Condor, to leave Argentina. The Chilean secret police, Dirección de Inteligencia Nacional (DINA) had been stationed in Buenos Aires, Argentina in 1974, where it carried out the assassination of Chilean General Carlos Prats.³²

The Chilean DINA killed, kidnapped, and “disappeared” an estimated 22,000 individuals in its own dirty war, many in Argentina; these individuals were placed in detention camps throughout the country, but was managed by Chilean authorities.³³ During Operation Condor, Chileans Uruguayans, Paraguayans, and Bolivians were prisoners of these detention camps and were subject to interrogations and torture. The Argentine Army unit, Batallón de Inteligencia 601, assisted in the “Cocaine Coup” in 1980 of Luis García Meza.³⁴

During the Dirty War in Argentina there were various countries in Latin America who were being ruled by military dictatorships. Any proposals for action to dismantle the junta

dictatorship in Argentina would be immediately rejected by these countries: Bolivia, Chile, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Peru, and Uruguay.

Opponents: Cuba led international opposition to the Argentine military government during the Dirty War. Fidel Castro’s Cuba was a one-party socialist state, under the Communist Party. Industries and businesses were nationalized, and socialist reforms were put into place throughout the country.³⁵ Under the leadership of Fidel Castro, Cuba actively and vocally supported revolutionary organizations. Castro tried to funnel advice, money and military equipment to revolutionary groups in Argentina, Its explicit goal was to overthrow the Argentine government, whether it was the democratically elected Peron government or the military dictatorship.



Cuban President Fidel Castro.

While Cuba supported revolution at all costs, it also supported Latin American countries fighting anything Cuba saw as imperialism. Cuba fought the Argentine junta in the Dirty War, but it supported Argentina completely against the United Kingdom in the Falklands/Malvina.

United States: US policy on the Dirty War waivered from cautious support to outright

³¹ ‘Dirty War’, *Wikipedia*, n.d., https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dirty_War

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ ‘Fidel Castro’, *Wikipedia*, n.d., https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fidel_Castro

opposition, depending largely on the preferences of each US President. For Republican Presidents, anti-communism was most important. Democrats tended to stress human rights and restoration of democracy more.



U.S. President Richard Nixon talks with his National Security Advisor, Henry Kissinger in 1972

Under President Richard Nixon and his National Security Advisor, later Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger, Washington provided military aid to the junta when the Dirty War first began. Kissinger's role remains highly controversial to this day. Whether he encouraged the Dirty War is not clear, but he did little or nothing to suppress it.³⁶ In 1977, the Gerald Ford administration requested a grant of USD 50 million in security assistance to the junta and the U.S. Congress approved the grant, while the US Department of Defense funded assistance to train Argentine military officers. The following year, the US sold USD 120 million in spare military parts to Argentina.

The United States waived under President Jimmy Carter, who met with the leader of the military dictatorship, Lt. Gen. Jorge Rafael Videla, on 9 September 1977. But less than one year later in 1978, Carter secured a

Congressional cutoff of all U.S. arms transfers to Argentina due to the human rights violations of the Dirty War. It was a turning point in US policy, the start of systematic attention to global human rights.³⁷

Under the Republican President Ronald Reagan, the relationship between the United States and Argentina improved at first. Reagan dropped his predecessor's elevation of human rights. Instead, he saw an ideological affinity with the anti-communist military governments. Reagan reversed Carter's condemnation of the human rights violations by the Argentina junta. However, the relationship turned again in 1982, when Reagan switched to support the United Kingdom in the Falklands/Malvinas War.³⁸

Other Member States: Most are not directly involved in the Argentine Dirty War. Many countries will follow the lead of Cuba or United States. If they are ruled by a military government, they are likely to support the Argentina government, to some degree. Democratically elected governments tend to be concerned about the human rights situation, although some democracies continue to adhere to older practices of domestic national sovereignty and regard a state's internal affairs as their own business alone. After the invasion of the Falklands/Malvinas, most Latin American states will strongly support Argentina in its war against the United Kingdom.

³⁶ For example compare Borger, Julian, 'Kissinger backed dirty war against left in Argentina', *Guardian*, 28 August 2004, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2004/aug/28/argentina.julianborger> versus Schemo, Diana Jean, 'Papers show no protest by Kissinger on Argentina', *New York Times*, 27 August 2004,

<https://www.nytimes.com/2004/08/27/world/papers-show-no-protest-by-kissinger-on-argentina.html>

³⁷ Legg, Beth, 'The emergence of United States human rights policy during Argentina's Dirty War', *Trinity University*, Autumn 2017,

https://digitalcommons.trinity.edu/infolit_usra/37/

³⁸ 'National Reorganization Process', op. cit.

Some possible proposals for action

There is virtually no limit of the range of action available to the member states of the OAS. They can stick to old precedents or create completely new principles on which to act, so long as their responses are consistent with international law and the OAS Charter. Below are some important possibilities for action.

Do nothing. Many OAS member states regard domestic matters as the elusive affair of each country. So long as they do not threaten the security of other OAS countries, each member is completely sovereign within its territory. This doctrine of domestic non-interference is widely, but not universal respected. In practice, countries do get involved in each other's domestic situation, often giving political support to like-minded political parties who can help them when in power, but such intervention tends to be discrete.

Create a commission. Rather than act, it might suit the member states of the OAS more to study the Argentine situation and recommend further action, possibly including innovative action. Such a study commission would be highly political. The OAS would have to decide how it is to be given a mandate of responsibilities, staffed—with officials sent by each government or independent experts chosen for their neutrality perhaps—and a schedule for its report. The OAS also would have to decide how the report is to be received, whether it is to be acted upon or just taken into consideration.

Suspend Argentina from the OAS. Just as Cuba's membership in the OAS was suspended

in 1962 after its communist revolution, Argentina could be suspended as a reaction to the excesses of its Dirty War. The Cuban suspension was justified by the threat it posed to other member states and Cuba's assistance to revolutionary movements in other OAS countries. Most member states at the time saw revolutionary activism as a violation of the OAS Charter, however Argentina is different. Its gross human rights violations may be appalling, but they do not threaten the peace and stability of its neighbors, other OAS members.³⁹ Later, in 1991, the OAS will modify its Charter to encourage democratic principles, but that was not the case during the years of this simulation at ODUMUNC. A different justification is required, based on violating other regional principles, such as *American Declaration of the Rights and Duties of Man* (the Bogotá Declaration).⁴⁰

Encourage Member States not to intervene in the war. Non-intervention is controversial. Its great appeal is neutrality. But is neutrality acceptable in the face of revolutionary threats and gross human rights violations? Non-intervention would make it harder for activist countries to support the side they regard as more just and important to them. Opposition will come from activist governments, or those too honest to conceal covert assistance to one side or the other. But non-intervention is easy to authorize, since it is consistent with the OAS Charter.⁴¹

Encourage Member States to support one side or the other. The most divisive path is actual intervention and involvement in the Dirty War. Cuba and other revolutionary governments will seek to legitimize their support for revolutionary parties and insurgencies. Conservative governments will seek to support

³⁹ Charter of the Organization of American States, 1948, <https://treaties.un.org/doc/Publication/UNTS/Volume%20119/volume-119-I-1609-English.pdf>

⁴⁰ American Declaration of the Rights and Duties of Man, O.A.S. Res. XXX, adopted by the Ninth

International Conference of American States (1948), Human Rights Library, <http://hrlibrary.umn.edu/oasinstr/zoas2dec.htm>

⁴¹ Charter, op.cit.



an authority for their assistance to the Argentina military government. Such intervention might be justified under the OAS Charter, although that

might require some creative interpretation, even an amendment to the Charter.⁴²

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⁴² Charter, *ibid.*



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