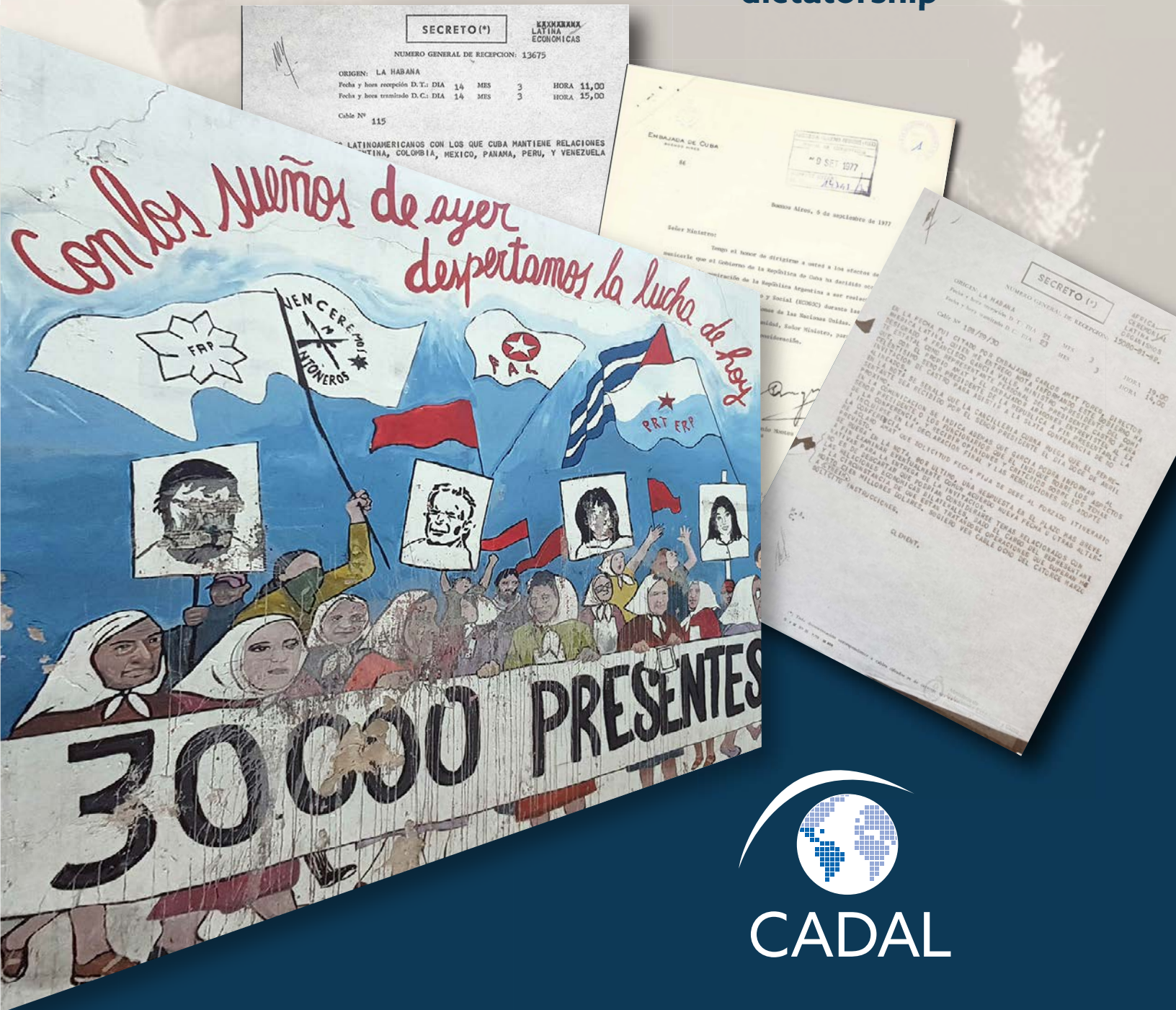


GABRIEL C. SALVIA

CLOSED MEMORY

The complicity of the
Cuban revolution with
the Argentine military
dictatorship



CLOSED MEMORY

The complicity of the Cuban revolution with the Argentine military dictatorship

MARCH 24, 2020

BY **Gabriel C. Salvia**

The Memory, Truth and Justice policy regarding human rights violations and state terrorism during the last military dictatorship in Argentina (1976-1983) finds, among its exceptions, the relations during that period with the Cuban government of Fidel Castro. There are several documented examples of this de facto alliance between a communist dictatorship, the Cuban one, and an extreme right-wing and anti-communist dictatorship, the Argentine one; and since it is excluded by the traditional human rights organizations from the Memory, their partial use of it becomes evident, as does something that very few dare to question them: their biased view with anti-democratic characteristics.



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Introduction

It is known that Fidel Castro's dictatorship trained in Cuba¹ the Argentine guerrilla that was illegally fought, first by the Triple AAA (Argentine Anticommunist Alliance) during the constitutional government of Isabel Martínez de Perón; and then by the military dictatorship (1976-1983), illegally and arbitrarily detaining, torturing, killing and disappearing political and social militants, intellectuals, journalists, and many of those who aspired to repeat the Cuban "revolutionary deed" in Argentina. Even among those who were disappeared and murdered in 1976 during the Argentine military dictatorship, the cases of two young Cuban diplomats, Crescencio Galañena Hernández and Jesús Cejas Arias, 27 and 22 years old, respectively, are recorded. However, despite the latter, Cuba did not break diplomatic relations with the Argentine government of the self-named "National Reorganization Process". In addition to Argentina, during that period Cuba only maintained diplomatic relations with five other Latin American countries: Colombia, Colombia, Colombia and Argentina.

Thus, the Argentine "anti-communist" military dictatorship was the only dictatorship in the Southern Cone that maintained diplomatic relations with the Cuban communist regime. This can be explained by a combination of concrete interests, which took precedence over its "principles", and totally differentiated it from Augusto Pinochet's dictatorship in Chile.

So how did this situation come about? Cuba played an important role in the genesis of political violence in Argentina, but this did not prevent the two countries from maintaining a mutually convenient alliance between 1976 and 1983. This alliance was facilitated by the role played by the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

¹ Muchnik, Daniel and Pérez, Daniel: «Furia ideológica y violencia en la Argentina de los 70» (Ariel, 2007) and Masetti, Jorge (Jr.): «El furor y el delirio: Itinerario de un hijo de la Revolución cubana» (Tusquets, 1999).



(USSR), the Argentine Communist Party (PCA) and the participation of both non-democratic regimes in the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM).

This alliance included the exchange of favors through support for candidacies in UN bodies and, most importantly, allowed the Argentine military dictatorship not to be condemned by the then UN Commission on Human Rights, based in Geneva.

What is striking is that relatives of the victims of State terrorism and –up until now unquestioned– referents of human rights in Argentina, exclude the “pragmatic” attitude of Fidel Castro from the Memory, Truth and Justice policy in the face of these documented facts. Only through “ideological blindness” can it be understood that the relatives of victims of State terrorism in Argentina continue to support the Cuban dictatorship that was an accomplice of the executioners of their loved ones, and that they decide to ignore or justify the current serious and systematic violations of Human Rights that are taking place on the island, according to numerous reports from both the Inter-American system and the universal system for the protection of Human Rights, as well as from prestigious international organizations such as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International.



CUBA PLAYED AN IMPORTANT ROLE IN THE GENESIS OF POLITICAL VIOLENCE IN ARGENTINA, BUT THIS DID NOT PREVENT THE TWO COUNTRIES FROM MAINTAINING A MUTUALLY CONVENIENT ALLIANCE BETWEEN 1976 AND 1983.

For example, last February 20, the head of the Grandmothers of Plaza de Mayo, Estela de Carlotto, received at the headquarters of her organization the Cuban ambassador in Argentina² and expressed via twitter: “Cuba is an example, it is a country that has fought and continues to fight”³. Three years earlier she had received the former representative of the Cuban dictatorship and the Cuban Embassy in Argentina published: “Estela de Carlotto, president of this non-governmental organization and UN Human Rights Award 2003, took the opportunity to reiterate her admiration for the Cuban Revolution and especially for its leader, Commander in Chief Fidel Castro. The historic Argentine human rights activist recalled parts of her last visit to Cuba and highlighted the efforts made by the largest of the Antilles to guarantee its people full access to basic rights for any human being”⁴.

Moreover, in its 2020 Annual Report, the prestigious international human rights organization Human Rights Watch (HRW) included a categorical report on Cuba, in which it states: “The Cuban government continues to carry out arbitrary detentions

2 <http://misiones.minrex.gob.cu/es/articulo/visita-embajador-cubano-las-abuelas-de-plaza-de-mayo>

3 <https://twitter.com/abuelasdifusion/status/1229871575433928705>

4 <http://misiones.minrex.gob.cu/es/articulo/sostiene-embajador-de-cuba-emotivo-encuentro-con-estela-de-carlotto>



to harass and intimidate critics, independent activists, political opponents, and others.... Security officials almost never present court orders to justify the detention of critics.... Police and state security agents continue to harass, mistreat and detain members of the Ladies in White (an organization founded by the wives, mothers and daughters of political prisoners).... The government controls virtually all of Cuba's media and restricts access to information from abroad... Cubans who criticize the government continue to face the threat of criminal prosecution. They are not afforded due process, such as the right to be heard in public and fair hearings by a competent and impartial tribunal. In practice, the courts are subordinate to the executive and legislative branches (...) The Cuban government still does not recognize human rights advocacy as a legitimate activity, and denies legal status to local human rights organizations"⁵.

That is to say, Estela de Carlotto, whose action in Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo deserves respect and admiration, and representatives of other human rights organizations in Argentina that have played such an important role during our dictatorship deny, on the one hand, that Cuba was an accomplice of the military dictatorship and, at the same time, that human rights are violated in that country. Carlotto acknowledged, in an article she wrote following the death of Fidel Castro, that she was invited to Cuba in 1984, that is, after the return to democracy in Argentina.⁶ Why does Carlotto not ask herself why she did not receive the "solidarity" of the revolution by inviting her to Cuba during the military dictatorship?

This report presents the facts, duly documented, with the aim of raising awareness among honest people, whatever their ideology, who are unaware of the relations between Cuba and the Argentine military dictatorship; to try to put aside what Robert Cox⁷ has defined as "ideological blindness" ("This mental illness causes people to ignore what they do not want to see"), and to ensure that there are no double standards in judging authoritarian regimes, whatever their label, and that there are no aggravating or mitigating circumstances depending on the political color of such regimes.



**CARLOTTO
ACKNOWLEDGED, IN
AN ARTICLE SHE WROTE
FOLLOWING THE DEATH OF
FIDEL CASTRO, THAT SHE WAS
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WHY DOES CARLOTTO NOT
ASK HERSELF WHY SHE DID NOT
RECEIVE THE "SOLIDARITY" OF
THE REVOLUTION BY INVITING
HER TO CUBA DURING THE
MILITARY DICTATORSHIP?**

5 Human Rights Watch: Cuba, eventos 2019 <https://www.hrw.org/es/world-report/2020/country-chapters/337309>

6 Salvia, Gabriel C., *Fidel Castro y la integridad de Estela de Carlotto en la defensa de los derechos humanos*. <https://www.infobae.com/opinion/2016/11/30/fidel-castro-y-la-integridad-de-estela-de-carlotto-en-la-defensa-de-los-derechos-humanos/>

7 Cox, Robert: Prologue of the book «Otra grieta en la pared. Informe y testimonios de la nueva prensa cubana» by Fernando J. Ruiz (CADAL/KAS, 2003). <https://www.cadal.org/libros/?id=1520>

SECRETO (*)

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Cable N° 115

SU 103. PAISES LATINOAMERICANOS CON LOS QUE CUBA MANTIENE RELACIONES
DIPLOMATICAS: ARGENTINA, COLOMBIA, MEXICO, PANAMA, PERU, Y VENEZUELA

CLEMENT

M. A.
C.

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(*) Toda documentación correspondiente a cables cifrados es de carácter
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Ministerio de
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República Argentina



The role of the USSR and the PCA in the Argentine-Cuban alliance between 1976-1983 facing Jimmy Carter

During the last military dictatorship, Argentina was the main exporter of grains to the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), whose transactions were mainly channeled through Banco Credicoop, created on March 19, 1979 and linked to the Argentine Communist Party (PCA). In turn, the PCA considered dictator Jorge Rafael Videla a “dove” and the moderate alternative to the “Pinochetista” sectors of the military.

Both the role of the USSR and the PCA during the last Argentine military dictatorship are documented, as well as the important commercial exchanges that Argentina signed during that period with countries of the socialist bloc.⁸ It is also well known the important role played by the US government of Jimmy Carter in denouncing human rights violations in Argentina and, in particular, the role played by his Secretary of Human Rights, Patricia Derian,⁹ and the diplomat Allen “Tex” Harris,¹⁰ the latter working at the US Embassy in Buenos Aires.

According to Isidoro Gilbert, “For the Soviet Union and the countries of the East, but also for Cuba and China, this pragmatic alliance with the Argentine military government was based on the assumption that they were confronting Carter’s foreign policy, which made the defense of human rights one of the tools used against the socialist countries. Whatever the internal opinion of the foreign ministries of these countries about the dictatorship, which was generally critical, it did not change the reality of support in those places where the dictatorship was challenged. The saying that the enemy of my enemy is my friend came into play.”¹¹

One piece of evidence in this regard is the complicity of the PCA with the military, documented in one of its minutes, in which it repudiates the U.S. policy of Jimmy Carter: “We feel obliged to point out that the Carter administration, set up as a supreme court that claims the right to judge the other nations of the world, has

8 Ross, Greg: «Los derechos humanos y la política económica bajo la dictadura militar argentina, 1976-1983». https://www.cadal.org/documentos/Documento_154.pdf

9 Newspaper *La Nación*: «Patricia Derian: la funcionaria que enfrentó a la dictadura argentina». <https://www.lanacion.com.ar/el-mundo/patricia-derian-la-funcionaria-que-enfrento-a-la-dictadura-argentina-nid1901203>

10 Newspaper *Perfil*: «Murió Tex Harris, el diplomático que denunció los horrores de la dictadura argentina». <https://www.perfil.com/noticias/sociedad/murio-tex-harris-el-diplomatico-que-denuncio-los-horros-de-la-dictadura-argentina.phtml>

11 Gilbert, Isidoro: *La Fede, alistándose para la Revolución. La federación juvenil comunista 1921-2005* (Sudamericana, 2011)



interfered in the internal affairs of our country, hypocritically using the argument of violation of human rights..."¹².

Kezia McKeague argues that "For Argentina, the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan led to improved commercial and political relations with the superpower. When the Argentine government refused to comply with the grain embargo enacted by the Jimmy Carter administration, exports from the USSR increased dramatically, solidifying Argentina's position as Moscow's most important trading ally in the region. While the Junta voted in the General Assembly to condemn the Soviet invasion and to boycott the Moscow Olympics, bilateral contacts increased in frequency and cordiality. This new level of cooperation was soon evident at the 1980 session of the Commission. In its efforts to prevent a resolution in support of Russian dissident Andrei Sakharov, Argentina joined Cuba as the only Latin American countries to support the Soviet Union."¹³



THIS NEW LEVEL OF COOPERATION WAS SOON EVIDENT AT THE 1980 SESSION OF THE COMMISSION. IN ITS EFFORTS TO PREVENT A RESOLUTION IN SUPPORT OF RUSSIAN DISSIDENT ANDREI SAKHAROV, ARGENTINA JOINED CUBA AS THE ONLY LATIN AMERICAN COUNTRIES TO SUPPORT THE SOVIET UNION."

Another interesting contribution on this subject is that of the Italian diplomat Enrico Calamai, who, as consul in Santiago de Chile and in Buenos Aires, did an excellent job of defending human rights and managed to save a significant number of lives. In a book dedicated to diplomacy, human rights and the disappeared¹⁴, Calamai recalls that his brother was in charge of the foreign policy section of Rinascita, the magazine of the Italian Communist Party, and that he was sent to Chile and Argentina. Regarding the articles published by his brother, Calamai affirms that they had "an immediate and unexpected effect: the protests of the Argentine Communist Party, which, worried about its own political survival and the physical survival of its members, multiplied its contacts with Moscow and with sister parties, including the Italian one, to affirm that Videla was a moderate, the lesser evil in the current Argentine situation."

Calamai also refers to the difficulty at the time of finding allies, among international organizations and embassies, willing to denounce the atrocities that were being committed in Argentina, highlighting the following: "Everyone comments on Moscow's attitude, that is in great need of Argentine wheat and flirts with the Military Junta, while the Argentine Communist Party acts as an intermediary". And

12 Sigal, Jorge: «El día que maté a mi padre: Confesiones de un ex comunista» (Sudamericana, 2006)

13 McKeague, Kezia F.: «Extraña alianza: relaciones cubano-argentinas en Ginebra, 1976-1983». https://www.cadal.org/documentos/Documento_50.pdf

14 Calamai, Enrico: «Razón de Estado. Perseguidos políticos argentinos sin refugio» (Asociación Cultural Toscana de Buenos Aires, 2007).



he adds: "No one knocks on the door of the Soviet Embassy, because they know that they will be immediately handed over to the military".

The complicity of the USSR and Cuba with the Argentine military dictatorship can be summed up in one sentence of the testimony given in 2003 by Héctor Timerman, as director of the magazine *Debate*: "I, who was a victim of human rights violations in Argentina, and as the son of a disappeared person who was lucky enough to survive the military dictatorship, can tell you that the countries that helped the most, the colleagues that helped the most to obtain the freedom of political prisoners in Argentina, were the media colleagues, such as *The New York Times*, *Le Monde*, *Corriere della Sera*, *La Repubblica of Italy* and *El País* of Madrid. I have never heard of *Granma* or *Pravda* having any influence in the struggle for freedom of expression in Argentina. Because at the end of the day, there is no difference between the concept of the press that General Videla had and that of Fidel Castro."¹⁵



THE NOAL WAS THE IDEAL ENVIRONMENT FOR THE ARGENTINE MILITARY DICTATORSHIP TO GAIN INTERNATIONAL ALLIES FOR THE MALVINAS CAUSE, WHILE AT THE SAME TIME SHIELDING ITSELF FROM CRITICISM IN THE FACE OF ALLEGATIONS OF HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS.

Argentina and Cuba in the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), 1976-1983

The Non-Aligned Movement was formally constituted at the First Summit Conference in Belgrade, held from September 1 to 6, 1961, with the participation of 25 member countries and 3 observers, with Cuba being the only Latin American country participating as member. Argentina became a member at the Algiers Conference in September 1973.

The NOAL was the ideal environment for the Argentine military dictatorship to gain international allies for the Malvinas cause, while at the same time shielding itself from criticism in the face of allegations of human rights violations.

For Kezia McKeague "Despite its ideological opposition to non-aligned objectives, the military junta had remained in the movement to gain the support of the numerically important group on issues such as human rights and the Falkland Islands. Its pragmatism was rewarded in 1979, as a Foreign Ministry report later acknowledged: "The evolution of Argentine participation in the Movement shows that it has been as a consequence of positive and fertile diplomatic activity that the Republic was able to obtain the necessary support for a decent treatment of the Argentine case in the Commission on Human Rights, as a consequence of the determined action in its favor by the Non-Aligned members of the Commission. This

¹⁵ <https://www.cadal.org/videos/?id=3471>



became evident at the 35th Session (February 1979) shortly after the attendance of the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Vice Admiral Oscar Antonio Montes, at the Conference of Foreign Ministers held in Belgrade in July 1978.”

One of the most reprehensible facts of Cuba’s complicity with the Argentine military dictatorship was Fidel Castro’s invitation to Jorge Rafael Videla to attend the NOAL summit in Havana in 1979. Several cables from the Argentine Ministry of Foreign Affairs during the dictatorship, declassified by the Center for Legal and Social Studies (CELS), bear witness to this.¹⁶



**ONE OF THE MOST
REPREHENSIBLE FACTS
OF CUBA’S COMPLICITY
WITH THE ARGENTINE MILITARY
DICTATORSHIP WAS FIDEL
CASTRO’S INVITATION TO
JORGE RAFAEL VIDELA TO
ATTEND THE NOAL SUMMIT IN
HAVANA IN 1979.**

For example, the one that appears as File No.: 80AH002102_235 and dated March 21, 1979 in Havana: “On this date I was summoned by Ambassador Carlos Amat Fores, Director of Latin America, who handed me a note informing me that this government has designated Francisco García Valls, Minister-President of the State Committee as personal representative of President Castro so that, with Amat himself and Ambassador Aragonés, they may interview His Excellency the President of the Republic in order to present Castro’s invitation to attend the sixth conference of the Non-Aligned Movement. The note indicates that the Cuban Foreign Ministry requests that the representative be received by the President on April 12. The communication also indicates that García will be able to inform the President or the officials he may indicate on the aspects of the conference, and receive opinions and criteria on the topics to be included in the final declaration and the resolutions to be adopted by the conference”.

Finally, Videla did not attend the Non-Aligned Summit in Havana, but an Argentine representation did, as recorded in a cable dated October 19, 1979: “Considering that between August 26 and September 7, the VI Conference of Heads of State and Government of the Non-Aligned Countries was held in Havana (Cuba), and Considering: That the Argentine Republic is a member of said movement. That it was appropriate to accredit a delegation to represent the Republic at the conference. Therefore, The Minister of Foreign Affairs and Worship resolves: Article 1.- The designation of Commodore Carlos Roberto Francisco CAVANDOLI, Undersecretary of Foreign Affairs, as president of the Argentine delegation, who attended the VI Summit of Non-Aligned Countries held in Havana (Cuba) from August 26 to September 7, 1979, is hereby validated. Article 2.- The appointment of Mr. Edgar Joaquín Flores Gómez, Embassy Counselor, and Mr. Carlos Arturo Francisco Spinoza, First Class Secretary, who accompanied the Undersecretary of Foreign Affairs

¹⁶ Salvia, Gabriel C., «Para un dictador, nada mejor que otro dictador». https://elpais.com/internacional/2014/11/26/actualidad/1417016947_741626.html

SECRETO (*)

AFRICA
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15080-81-82.

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Fecha y hora tramitado D.C.: DIA 23 MES 3 HORA 14.00

Cable Nº 128/29/30

EN LA FECHA FUI CITADO POR EMBAJADOR CARLOS AMAT FORES, DIRECTOR AMERICA LATINA, QUIEN ME ENTREGO NOTA INFORMANDO ESTE GOBIERNO HA DESIGNADO A FRANCISCO GARCIA VALLS, MINISTRO -PRESIDENTE DEL COMITE ESTATAL COMO REPRESENTANTE PERSONAL DEL PRESIDENTE CASTRO PARA QUE, CON EL PROPIO AMAT Y EL EMBAJADOR ARAGONES ENTREVISTEN AL EX CELENTISIMO SENOR PRESIDENTE DE LA REPUBLICA A FIN PRESENTARLE LA INVITACION DE CASTRO PARA ASISTIR A LA SEXTA CONFERENCIA DE NO ALINEADOS.

EN LA NOTA SE SENALA QUE LA CANCELLERIA CUBNA RUEGA QUE EL REPRESENTANTE SEA RECIBIDO POR EL SENOR PRESIDENTE EL DIA DOCE DE ABRIL PROXIMO.

EN LA COMUNICACION SE INDICA ADEMAS QUE GARCIA PODRA INFORMAR AL SENOR PRESIDENTE O LOS FUNCIONARIOS QUE EL INDIQUE SOBRE LOS ASPECTOS DE LA CONFERENCIA, Y RECIBIR OPINIONES Y CRITERIOS SOBRE LOS TEMAS A INCLUIRSE EN LA DECLARACION FINAL Y LAS RESOLUCIONES QUE ADOpte LA CONFERENCIA.

HE ACLARO AMAT QUE SOLICITUD FECHA FIJA SE DEBE AL FORZADO ITINERARIO PREVISTO.

SE RUEGA EN LA NOTA, POR ULTIMO, UNA RESPUESTA EN EL PLAZO MAS BREVE, A FIN EXAMINAR EVENTUALMENTE COMUN ACUERDO NUEVA FECHA U OTRAS ALTERNATIVAS PARA LA ENTREGA DE LA INVITACION.

NO ES DE DESCARTAR QUE PODRIAN CONSIDERARSE TEMAS RELACIONADOS CON LAS RELACIONES ECONOMICAS BILATERALES, DADO EL CARGO DEL REPRESENTANTE Y LA CIRCUNSTANCIA DE QUE ESTAN TRATANDOSE OPERACIONES QUE SUPERAN UN MONTO CEN MILLONES DOLARES. SUGIERO VER CABLE OCHO DEL CATORCE MARZO A CYHEIM.

SOLICITO INSTRUCCIONES.

CLEMENT.

M. A.
C.

(*) Toda documentación correspondiente a cables cifrados es de carácter SECRETO.
D. y M. Nº 25 - 7/75 - 30 000

Ministerio de
Relaciones Exteriores y Culto
República Argentina



to the meeting referred to in Article 1 of this resolution, is hereby validated". And Article 4 of the resolution stated: "Approve the allocation of the sum of one thousand five hundred U.S. dollars granted to the Undersecretary of Foreign Affairs for courtesy and tribute, incidental and miscellaneous expenses, with the charge of rendering a documented account of its investment".

The 1979 NAM Summit in Havana produced a declaration that included a section on "Latin American Issues", at the end of which it states: "Condemns the existence of military bases in Latin America and the Caribbean; supports the anti-colonial struggle of the peoples of the Caribbean, and, in particular, Puerto Rico, Belize, Guadeloupe, Martinique and French Guiana; welcomes the new Treaty on the Panama Canal; shows its concern for the situation in Chile; and salutes with satisfaction the victory of the people of Nicaragua and its vanguard, the Sandinista Front, over the dictatorship and imperialist intervention."

As can be seen, there is no reference to the situation in Argentina, which implies a clear complicity and silence of NAM in general and Cuba in particular, regarding the military junta's human rights violations.

At the same time, the part of the Declaration on "Non-Alignment Policy" formulates the opposition to the use of force and the support for the peaceful settlement of disputes. However, Cuba was the state that most enthusiastically supported the armed invasion of the Falkland Islands, initiated on April 2, 1982 by the Argentine military dictatorship, which included a warm reception in Havana for the then Argentine Foreign Minister Nicanor Costa Méndez.¹⁷ Where, then, was Cuba's opposition to the use of force and support for the peaceful settlement of disputes? Beyond the honor owed to the heroic action of combatant and fallen soldiers, clearly the beginning of the Malvinas war was an irresponsible adventure of the Dictatorship, which was not interested in recovering the sovereignty of the Islands, but in consolidating itself on the domestic political front with the aim of perpetuating itself in power.

On the Argentine-Cuban alliance between 1976-1983, it is worth quoting the speech of Reynaldo Benito Bignone, de facto president in the final stage of the Argentine military dictatorship, during the seventh Summit of the Non-Aligned Movement, held in 1983 in New Delhi.



CUBA WAS THE STATE THAT MOST ENTHUSIASTICALLY SUPPORTED THE ARMED INVASION OF THE FALKLAND ISLANDS, INITIATED ON APRIL 2, 1982 BY THE ARGENTINE MILITARY DICTATORSHIP, WHICH INCLUDED A WARM RECEPTION IN HAVANA FOR THE THEN ARGENTINE FOREIGN MINISTER NICANOR COSTA MÉNDEZ.

¹⁷ Costa Méndez en Cuba junto a No Alineados, 2 al 4 de junio de 1982: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L4HysCLVzZw>



On the one hand, Bignone formulates some exculpatory expressions that in no way differ from those of Fidel Castro: "Madam President, allow me to point out the attitude in which industrialized countries incur for political purposes when applying coercive measures of an economic nature against developing countries. A practice to which the Argentine Republic has been subjected. The Latin American countries have repeatedly maintained, within the Latin American Economic System (SELA), that all nations have the sovereign right to follow their own economic, social and political path in peace and freedom, free from external pressures, aggressions and threats. Expressing their solidarity with member states and other developing countries, they condemned such practices and demanded the elimination of embargoes, blockades and all other illegal and arbitrarily applied coercive measures aimed at undermining and preventing the affected countries from fully exercising their national sovereignty over their territories and resources and obstructing their economic and social policies. This Latin American position should inspire us to once again affirm, within the movement of non-aligned countries, our rejection of economic aggression and our specific condemnation of the application of coercive, arbitrary and illegal economic measures for political purposes".



ON THE OTHER HAND, IT IS STRIKING THAT HUMAN RIGHTS ORGANIZATIONS IN ARGENTINA HAVE NEVER CRITICIZED FIDEL CASTRO FOR HIS SILENCE REGARDING WHAT BIGNONE SAID AT THE SUMMIT (...)

On the other hand, it is striking that human rights organizations in Argentina have never criticized Fidel Castro for his silence regarding what Bignone said at the summit: "Madam President, I wish to emphasize that I represent a government that had to assume power in circumstances in which the legal order, the political process and the social dynamics were at the mercy of terrorist chaos that even endangered the very viability of Argentina as an organized society. The aggression carried out by this artful enemy was defeated and the destructive actions and constant threats to peace and security were left behind".

Finally, after his speech at the Summit, Bignone answered questions from Argentine journalists in New Delhi. In one of them he was asked about Argentina's presence at the Non-Aligned Summit and the gratitude he expressed to Cuba. In his answer, Bignone said: "I am going straight to the hard facts: Fidel Castro, Head of State, outgoing president of the Non-Aligned Movement to which we have belonged since 1964 and then as a full member, was very emphatic, categorical and deployed a lot of action on an issue that really interests us, hurts us and we want to move forward, as you know, the Malvinas issue. And, furthermore, allow me to say that he himself had the courage to state that this went beyond the ideological differences which, of course, exist between the regime presided over by Fidel Castro and the Argentine regime".



Pinochet yes, Videla no: Cuba's role vis-à-vis the different treatment of the Argentinean and Chilean military dictatorships in Geneva

The scholarly research by Kezia McKeague details the complicity of Fidel Castro's regime with the Argentine military dictatorship and highlights how it differed from the Pinochet dictatorship. There, McKeague notes that "The multiple sources of Cuban-Argentine cooperation can best be understood by examining the contrast with Cuban policy toward Chile. The Chilean military regime became a pariah of the United Nations, subject to country-specific investigations and several public condemnations. Cuba, along with the rest of the socialist bloc and most of the non-aligned countries, consistently voted in favor of these condemnatory resolutions. The difference with Argentina was not related to the two countries' human rights issues, as the repression in Argentina was even more far-reaching (though more hidden) than in Chile."

This was made very clear at the start of the first sessions of the new United Nations Human Rights Council, where several representatives spoke in Geneva at the "High-level Segment" between June 19 and 30, 2006. In this regard, it is worth highlighting the interventions of Paulina Veloso, then Minister Secretary of the Presidency of Chile, and Jorge Taiana, then Foreign Minister of Argentina.

The Chilean official, Paulina Veloso, stated the following: "I would like to take this opportunity to give special recognition to the work carried out by the Human Rights Commission during its sixty years of existence. Among the Commission's achievements, we must undoubtedly highlight the special procedures, which were decisive in helping our country overcome a dark period in its history, when Chile's democracy was abruptly interrupted and serious violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms were committed".

And then she added: "It is with great emotion that I address this assembly to thank and give personal testimony about the work carried out, in relation to my country, by the Commission on Human Rights. In 1977, my husband Alexei Jacard, a Swiss-Chilean student at the University of Geneva, was made to disappear in Argentina as part of 'Operation Condor', carried out jointly by the Chilean and Argentinean police. Then, when I was 20 years old, I was welcomed and supported by the Special Rapporteur for Chile, Mr. Abdoulaye Dièye, and by the Director of the then Human Rights Division, Mr. Theo van Boven. Although these approaches did not have concrete results, the Commission's effort to claim the rights of the disappeared, together with international condemnation, had a dissuasive impact that may have reduced the number of disappeared. In those moments of loneliness and anguish, that interest of the Commission meant for me a strong support that gave



me the strength to continue trusting in people, in human rights and in the organized community that defends them”.

In contrast to the recognition made by Paulina Veloso, the most interesting part of the speech of the former Foreign Minister of the Argentine Republic was when he recalled the following: “The Commission that is ending its functions today was indeed many times politicized, ineffective and inoperative. In fact, my country suffered from this politicization, when under a bipolar balance that was indifferent to human rights, the massive and systematic violations of human rights in Argentina during the military dictatorship were never considered by the plenary of this Commission”.

The relatives of the victims of human rights violations in Argentina should ask themselves the following question: Why was the Pinochet dictatorship condemned and Argentina was not? Really, those who are interested in “the fight against impunity: memory, truth, justice and reparation” should demand explanations from the Cuban government, because if the Pinochet dictatorship was condemned in Geneva, while the Argentine military were spared from such international condemnation, it was partly due to the intervention of the Cuban regime.

Kezia McKeague makes further arguments in this regard: “Cuba and Argentina cooperated in the Human Rights Commission despite their conspicuous ideological differences. Why did a communist regime support a fervently anti-communist military junta whose main objective was to eliminate leftist subversion? And she adds: “the military regime actively sought allies such as Cuba to avoid the international isolation experienced by Chile. Facing criticism from European governments and the Carter administration, typical alliances were reversed in Geneva, with an anti-communist, pro-Western junta turning to socialist and developing countries for protection from human rights issues. Cuba’s simultaneous membership in the Latin American bloc, the socialist camp and the non-aligned movement put it in a particularly influential position for Argentina’s interests.”

Mc Keague notes that “A basic convergence of interests made Cuba willing to condone Argentina’s human rights violations, although other pragmatic motivations that had little to do with human rights determined the disparate treatment of Argentina and Chile”.



**KEZIA MCKEAGUE:
“CUBA AND ARGENTINA
COOPERATED IN THE
HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION
DESPITE THEIR CONSPICUOUS
IDEOLOGICAL DIFFERENCES.
WHY DID A COMMUNIST
REGIME SUPPORT A FERVENTLY
ANTI-COMMUNIST MILITARY
JUNTA WHOSE MAIN OBJECTIVE
WAS TO ELIMINATE LEFTIST
SUBVERSION?”**



Graciela Fernández Meijide, in her book “The Intimate History of Human Rights in Argentina”¹⁸, dedicated to Pablo, her disappeared son, describes the following: “The day the final discussion on the continuity or suppression of the Working Group on Disappearances took place, from the beginning we saw it go back and forth from one end of the table to the other in a horseshoe shape,¹⁹ with messages from the Argentine delegation to the Soviet Union delegation and vice versa. The ambassador of that country proposed to terminate the work of the group, arguing that the \$500,000 required to sustain it was an excessive sum for the UN. He received the expected support but, fortunately, the votes in favor of the continuation of the group were more numerous and those present, with their headphones on and their eyes on the protagonists, experienced the result as a victory over the dictatorship. At the end of the session, I approached the Cuban delegate –her last name was Flores– and complained about her lack of solidarity with the suffering of the disappeared and their families. I think she felt bad, or so it seemed to me. However, ideological discipline prevailed over her sensitivity”.

Previously, Fernandez Meijide quoted in her book an interview with the Dutch diplomat Theo Van Boven, who was president of the UN Human Rights Commission in Geneva: “The main problem was that the relationship between the East and West blocs completely covered this issue. The case of Chile was easier to introduce than that of Argentina, because Pinochet installed a clearly anti-communist dictatorship. Argentina, on the other hand, had a very good relationship with the Soviet Union and had not banned the Communist Party. The Soviets protected Argentine interests and were clearly against any resolution condemning the Argentine dictatorship, along with other African and Arab countries”²⁰.

McKeague concludes by stating that “As one of the most influential, if controversial, members of the nonaligned countries in the Commission, Cuba played an important role in the nonaligned movement’s defense of the Argentine regime. The Cuban government maintained an active delegation since becoming a member of the Commission in 1976, while its election to the presidency of the nonaligned movement in 1979 raised its profile among developing countries. Along with



MCKEAGUE CONCLUDES BY STATING THAT “AS ONE OF THE MOST INFLUENTIAL, IF CONTROVERSIAL, MEMBERS OF THE NONALIGNED COUNTRIES IN THE COMMISSION, CUBA PLAYED AN IMPORTANT ROLE IN THE NONALIGNED MOVEMENT’S DEFENSE OF THE ARGENTINE REGIME.

18 Fernández Meijide, Graciela: «La historia íntima de los derechos humanos en la Argentina» (Sudamericana, 2009)

19 This refers to an advisor to Gabriel Martínez, Ambassador of the Argentine military dictatorship to the UN headquarters in Geneva.

20 Interview with Theo Van Boven in the newspaper *Página 12*, March 8 2006: <https://www.pagina12.com.ar/diario/dialogos/21-66607-2006-05-08.html>



improved relations with the Soviet Union in the late 1970s, this leadership position also established Cuba as a negotiating agent between the developed world and the socialist bloc.”

For Gabriel Martinez, McKeague adds, “Cuba also acted as an ‘interlocutor’ between the Argentine delegation and those from Eastern Europe. When Martinez needed to pass a message to an Eastern bloc country, he would usually ask the Cuban ambassador to be his messenger. Cuba also helped arrange meetings of the non-aligned delegates on behalf of Argentina. Such favors reflected a relationship between the Cuban and Argentine representatives in Geneva that Martinez describes as ‘optimal’ and ‘extremely close’. Unconcerned about ideological differences, the support was mutual, according to Martinez. ‘The Cubans always, always supported us, and we supported them.’ This support from Cuba and the other non-aligned and socialist countries in the Commission proved crucial in February 1979.”

Exchange of votes at the UN reflecting “the cordial relations existing between the two countries”

Another example of the good relations between the Argentine and Cuban dictatorships between 1976-1983 were the exchanges of support for membership in UN organizations, including the support of Fidel Castro’s government for Argentina to be re-elected to the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), during the 32nd General Assembly of the United Nations in 1977, to fill one of the three vacancies in the Latin American Group (GRULA) for a three-year term beginning in 1978.

The Argentine diplomacy made an important deployment to achieve his reelection and several cables document the formal support received for his candidacy. In a cable signed by Ambassador Julio Barboza, Head of the International Organizations Department, it was assured that Argentina’s re-election to the ECOSOC had the support of: Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Chile, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru and Uruguay, which added to that of Argentina itself reached 18 votes.

The only Latin American country that did not support Argentina’s candidacy was Venezuela, arguing that it had already pledged its votes in favor of the candidacies of Ecuador, the Dominican Republic and Trinidad and Tobago. Venezuela, it should be remembered, was one of the most solidary Latin American countries regarding human rights violations during the last military dictatorship, taking in thousands of politically persecuted people.



In the end, Argentina obtained 113 votes, second only to Trinidad and Tobago with 117, while Ecuador obtained 86 and the Dominican Republic 84. With a required majority of 96 votes, only Trinidad and Tobago and Argentina were declared elected.

A later cable from the Argentine Foreign Ministry makes the following analysis of that vote: "The result must be considered satisfactory for Argentina since, although we obtained second place, our reelection to this important body was not in danger: We received seventeen votes more than the minimum of two thirds required; we obtained twenty-seven votes more than the country that obtained third place". The cable adds that "However, thirty countries out of 143 did not vote for Argentina", which it attributes, among other reasons, to "Possible unfavorable attitude to Argentina's election by certain countries due to: 1) Our position in the United Nations in the field of Human Rights (Nordic countries)".

Cuba cared nothing for the human rights situation in Argentina, including the disappearance of two of its diplomats in the country, and expressed its support for the candidacy of the military dictatorship in the following note, dated September 6, 1977, addressed to Vice Admiral Oscar Antonio Montes, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Worship of the Argentine Republic, in Buenos Aires: "Mr. Minister, I have the honor to address you for the purpose of informing you that the Government of the Republic of Cuba has decided to support the aspiration of the Argentine Republic to be re-elected as a member of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) during the elections of the XXXII session of the United Nations. I take this opportunity, Mr. Minister, to reiterate to you the assurances of my high consideration".

On September 10, 1977, the Argentine Foreign Ministry responded as follows: "the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Worship - Department of International Organizations presents its compliments to the Embassy of Cuba and is pleased to refer to its note No. 86, dated September 6, 1977, in which it communicates the decision of the Government of Cuba to support the candidacy of Argentina for re-election as a member of the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations during the elections to be held during the XXXII session. In this regard, this Foreign Ministry is pleased to express its gratitude for the valuable support given by the government of your country to the Argentine candidacy. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Worship, Department of International Organizations reiterates to the Embassy of Cuba the assurances of its highest consideration.



IN THE END, ARGENTINA OBTAINED 113 VOTES, SECOND ONLY TO TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO WITH 117, WHILE ECUADOR OBTAINED 86 AND THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC 84. WITH A REQUIRED MAJORITY OF 96 VOTES, ONLY TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO AND ARGENTINA WERE DECLARED ELECTED.

EMBAJADA DE CUBA
BUENOS AIRES

86

MINISTERIO DE RELACIONES EXTERIORES Y CULTO
CENTRAL DE DOCUMENTACION
Nº 9 SET 1977
NUMERO CITAR: 14298/2



Buenos Aires, 6 de septiembre de 1977

Señor Ministro:

Tengo el honor de dirigirme a usted a los efectos de comunicarle que el Gobierno de la República de Cuba ha decidido otorgar su apoyo a la aspiración de la República Argentina a ser reelecta como miembro del Consejo Económico y Social (ECOSOC) durante las elecciones del XXXII Período de Sesiones de las Naciones Unidas.

Aprovecho la oportunidad, Señor Ministro, para reiterarle el testimonio de mi más alta consideración.

A Su Excelencia el Vicealmirante D. Oscar Antonio Montes
Ministro de Relaciones Exteriores y Culto de la
República Argentina
Buenos Aires



Ministerio de
Relaciones Exteriores y Culto
República Argentina



Previously, on April 14, 1977, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Worship -Department of International Organizations- addressed a letter to the Embassy of Cuba, Buenos Aires, in which it "presents its compliments to the Embassy of Cuba and is pleased to refer to the note verbale of that Representation No. 7 as well as to No. 608 of this Ministry, related to the request for support in favor of the Cuban candidacy to the Executive Board of the World Health Organization (WHO). In this regard, it brings to your knowledge that the Argentine Government welcomes the aforementioned aspiration and, in view of the fact that the Republic is also running for re-election to the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations (ECOSOC), it suggests, given the cordial relations existing between both countries, an exchange of votes that would strengthen the possibilities of the respective candidacies".

Cuba also requested support from the Videla dictatorship for its candidacy for membership in the UN Commission on International Trade Law, and in May 1977 Argentina supported Cuba's candidacy for WHO membership before receiving Cuba's response to its request for support for Argentina's re-election to ECOSOC.

Incidentally, Argentine diplomacy also agreed on reciprocal support with Chile, which aspired to a place in ECOSOC, and maintained a very pragmatic foreign policy, clearly prioritizing interests over principles. Even with Cuba, it was all pragmatism, since a cable from Havana dated January 12, 1978 on "invitations extended to governments, armed forces and parties of friendly countries" states that the entire socialist group -with the exception of China, Cambodia and Albania- "Progressive" African countries and all Latin American countries with which Cuba maintains relations were included, with the "only exclusion of Argentina". The cable mentions that the meeting was attended by representatives of the Argentine Communist Party Arnedo Alvarez and Pedro Tadioli, Secretary of the Buenos Aires Province Committee, and that Western Europe, Japan and Canada were also excluded. The cable clarifies that the mechanism of invitations was concentrated in the Government and the Central Committee, and the local Foreign Ministry expressed the belief that Argentina had been included.

Something similar to the above is indicated in a cable dated February 1979, in which the Argentine diplomat Molina Salas states that he met with the director of Latin America of the Cuban Foreign Ministry, at the latter's request, who gave him documentation on the organization of the Non-Aligned summit conference in Havana. The Argentine diplomat points out that "At the end of the conference and



THE CUBAN DIPLOMAT WAS VERY CLEAR IN PROPOSING "TO AVOID SITUATIONS THAT COULD EVENTUALLY BE UNCOMFORTABLE GIVEN THE NATURE OF THE CELEBRATIONS", SINCE IT MEANT TOO MUCH WHITEWASHING OF A VERY PRAGMATIC RELATIONSHIP OF MUTUAL CONVENIENCE BETWEEN A COMMUNIST REGIME AND AN ANTI-COMMUNIST ONE.

ECOSOC

Nº *1298*
Letra: DTOIN, DEPTA

El Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores y Culto -Departamento Organismos Internacionales- presenta sus atentos saludos a la Embajada de Cuba y tiene el agrado de referirse a la nota verbal de esa Representación N°7 así como a la N°608 de este Ministerio, relacionadas con la solicitud de apoyo en favor de la candidatura cubana al Consejo Ejecutivo de la O.M.S.

Sobre el particular, lleva a su conocimiento que el Gobierno argentino ve con beneplácito la citada aspiración y en razón que la República también se ha postulado para su reelección al Consejo Económico y Social de las Naciones Unidas (ECOSOC), sugiere, dadas las cordiales relaciones existentes entre ambos países, un intercambio de votos que permitiría afianzar las posibilidades de las respectivas postulaciones.

El Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores y Culto -Departamento Organismos Internacionales- reitera a la Embajada de Cuba las seguridades de su más distinguida consideración.

BUENOS AIRES, 14 de abril de 1977

Ministro **BENIGNO L. M. ECHEGÚI**
del Departamento de Organismos Internacionales

ES COPIA

E. R. M.

Otto Alori

Otto Alori
a/c Div. Candidaturas

A LA EMBAJADA DE CUBA
Buenos Aires.-

MINISTERIO DE RELACIONES
EXTERIORES Y CULTO
14 ABR 1977
DEPARTAMENTO DE ORGANISMOS
INTERNACIONALES



Ministerio de
Relaciones Exteriores y Culto
República Argentina



as a casual and friendly comment, he told me that high spheres had decided not to invite the Argentine government to the celebrations of the 20th anniversary of the revolution in order to avoid situations that could eventually be uncomfortable given the nature of the celebrations". And the Argentine diplomat added: "It is thus clear that Cuba does not include the Argentine government among those described as 'friends'".

The Cuban diplomat was very clear in proposing "to avoid situations that could eventually be uncomfortable given the nature of the celebrations", since it meant too much whitewashing of a very pragmatic relationship of mutual convenience between a communist regime and an anti-communist one.

How much of a human rights advocate are Argentinean organizations?

After the documentation presented, the brazenness of the Cuban president appointed by Raúl Castro, Miguel Díaz-Canel, who, taking advantage of his trip to Buenos Aires to attend the presidential inauguration of Alberto Fernández, visited the Parque de la Memoria, which commemorates "the victims of State terrorism, detainees-disappeared and murdered, and those who died fighting for the same ideals of justice and equity"²¹, is striking.

The apprentice dictator laid flowers at the foot of the plaque of the two young Cuban diplomats murdered in 1976 by the military dictatorship in Argentina, Crescencio Galañena Hernández and Jesús Cejas Arias. Nobody reproached Díaz-Canel for the fact that despite the disappearance of its diplomats, Cuba did not break off relations with Argentina –as it did with Chile– and, above all, that it maintained a more than friendly relationship with the military dictatorship.

But what is most worrying is that among the traditional Argentine human rights organizations, which were formed during Isabel's government and later during the dictatorship, there is not a single voice that reminds the Cuban regime of its complicity with the military dictatorship and at the same time denounces the ongoing systematic violations of fundamental freedoms in Cuba, a country that has not even ratified the two most important international conventions on human rights, the Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

²¹ Salvia, Gabriel C., *La desmemoria de Díaz-Canel y los organismos de DD.HH.* https://www.clarin.com/opinion/desmemoria-diaz-canel-organismos-dd-hh-_0_PtGhTXhS.html



Indeed, having received so much international democratic solidarity, local human rights bodies have been consistent in their ingratitude, remaining indifferent to people in different parts of the world suffering from repressive regimes. Unfortunately, the list of remnant autocracies is too long: North Korea, China, Cuba, Belarus, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan, Saudi Arabia, Eritrea, Equatorial Guinea, Laos, Bahrain, Sudan, Venezuela, Russia and Nicaragua, to mention a few cases about which no pronouncement will ever be heard from Argentina's historic human rights organizations.




In Tibet alone, the Chinese Communist Party regime has already murdered 1.2 million people.

One response to this inconsistency is the defense by these local organizations of the human rights establishment of political violence in the 1970s, nothing less than of "ideals" contrary to civil and political liberties, that is, democracy. That is why they defend Cuba's one-party regime and its human rights-violating state policy, and do the same with Venezuela and other dictatorships that are the product of that "ideological blindness" so well defined by journalist Robert Cox.

A fundamental principle of human rights activism is that no double standards should be applied in judging authoritarian regimes regardless of whether they respond to left-wing or right-wing traditions. Human rights organizations must ensure the protection of human rights everywhere, given their universal character, and not only in those places where they are violated by governments with which they have no ideological affinities, and also consider that international democratic solidarity has as its priority those countries in which freedom of association, expression, assembly, protest and the right to political participation are repressed, i.e. dictatorships.



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