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Officers in this Bureau expressed their dismay and concern over the disappearances as soon as we learned of them. The matter has been raised with the Ambassador, as well as the military attaches. Deputy Assistant Secretary Frank McNeil reiterated our concern to the Argentine Ambassador on January 25. The Ambassador replied that Videla told him that the disappearances were "barbaric" and that he would get to the bottom of this matter. The Ambassador promised to keep us informed.

The French have taken an active role in this case because of the two nuns. French President Giscard d'Estaing has written personally to President Videla, and the French Embassy has raised the issue at all levels of the Argentine government. The French military attache informed us that his government did not believe that President Videla or the military service chiefs can possibly be implicated in the case.

The Papal Nuncio is another active participant who has raised the issue with Argentine officials, including the Minister of Interior. Both the Nuncio and the French, according to a January cable from our Embassy, fear the worst in this case.

The question of who engineered the kidnappings remains totally unresolved. Our Embassy has sought assiduously to come up with reliable information, but none is available. Some blame the Navy, some blame the Army, and some blame the Federal Police. No one doubts that elements of the Argentine government are implicated in this affair, but hard facts are unavailable.

We will continue to press for information and to make representations on behalf of those who disappeared.

Attachment:

Cable (Buenos Aires 0640)

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