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## “Washington’s Pope”? Who is Pope Francis I? Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio and Argentina’s “Dirty War”

By Prof Michel Chossudovsky

March 14, 2013

The Vatican conclave has elected Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio as Pope Francis I

### Who is Jorge Mario Bergoglio?

In 1973, he had been appointed “Provincial” of Argentina for the Society of Jesus.

In this capacity, Bergoglio was the highest ranking Jesuit in Argentina during the military dictatorship led by General Jorge Videla (1976-1983).

He later became bishop and archbishop of Buenos Aires. Pope John Paul II elevated him to the title of cardinal in 2001

When the military junta relinquished power in 1983, the duly elected president Raúl Alfonsín set up a Truth Commission pertaining to the crimes underlying the “Dirty War” (*La Guerra Sucia*).

The military junta had been supported covertly by Washington.

US. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger played a behind the scenes role in the 1976 military coup.

Kissinger's top deputy on Latin America, William Rogers, told him two days after the coup that "we've got to expect a fair amount of repression, probably a good deal of blood, in Argentina before too long." ... (National Security Archive, March 23, 2006)



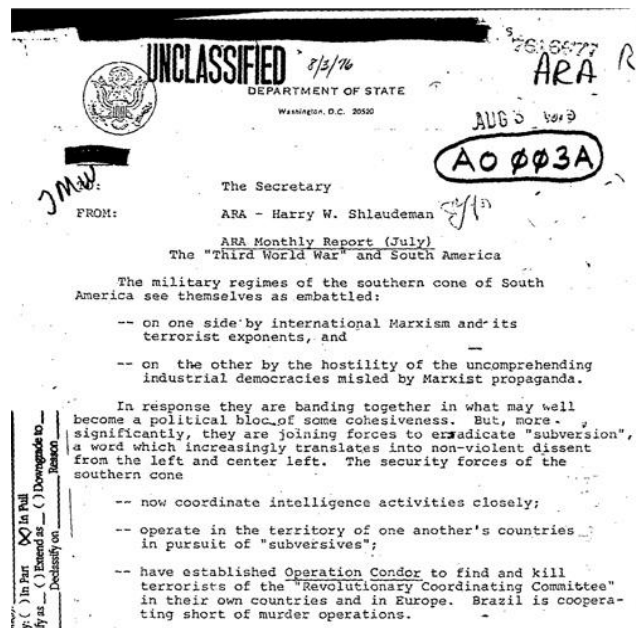
### "Operation Condor"

Ironically, a major trial opened up in Buenos Aires on March 5, 2013 a week prior to Cardinal Bergoglio's investiture as Pope. The ongoing trial in Buenos Aires is:

"to consider the totality of crimes carried out under Operation Condor, a coordinated campaign by various US-backed Latin American dictatorships in the 1970s and 1980s to hunt down, torture and murder tens of thousands of opponents of those regimes."

For further details, see **Operation Condor: Trial On Latin American Rendition And Assassination Program** By Carlos Osorio and Peter Kornbluh, March 10, 2013

Henry Kissinger and General Jorge Videla (1970s)



The military junta led by General Jorge Videla was responsible for countless assassinations, including priests and nuns who opposed military rule following the CIA sponsored March 24, 1976 coup which overthrew the government of Isabel Peron:

”Videla was among the generals convicted of human rights crimes, including “disappearances”, torture, murders and kidnappings. In 1985, Videla was sentenced to life imprisonment at the military prison of Magdalena.”

### **Wall Street and the Neoliberal Economic Agenda**



**One of the key appointments of the military junta was the Minister of Economy, Jose Alfredo Martinez de Hoz, a member of Argentina’s business establishment and a close friend of David Rockefeller.**

The neoliberal macro-economic policy package adopted under Martinez de Hoz was a “carbon copy” of that imposed in October 1973 in Chile by the Pinochet dictatorship under advice from the “Chicago Boys”, following the September 11, 1973 coup d’Etat and the assassination of president Salvador Allende.

Wages were immediately frozen by decree. Real purchasing power collapsed by more than 30 percent in the 3 months following the March 24, 1976 military coup. (Author’s estimates, Cordoba, Argentina, July 1976). The Argentinean population was impoverished.

Under the helm of Minister of Economy Jose Alfredo Martinez de Hoz, central bank monetary policy was largely determined by Wall Street and the IMF. The currency market was manipulated. The Peso was deliberately overvalued leading to an insurmountable external debt. The entire national economy was precipitated into bankruptcy.

### **Wall Street and the Catholic Church Hierarchy**

Wall Street was firmly behind the military Junta which waged “The Dirty War” on its behalf. In turn, the Catholic Church hierarchy played a central role in sustaining the legitimacy of the military Junta.

The Order of Jesus –which represented the Conservative yet most influential faction within the Catholic Church, closely associated with Argentina’s economic elites– was firmly behind the military Junta, against so-called “Leftists” in the Peronista movement.

### **“The Dirty War”: Allegations directed Against Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio**

In 2005, human rights lawyer Myriam Bregman filed a criminal suit against Cardinal Jorge Bergoglio, accusing him of conspiring with the military junta in the 1976 kidnapping of two Jesuit priests.

Bergoglio, who at the time was “Provincial” for the Society of Jesus, had ordered two “Leftist” Jesuit priests “to leave their pastoral work” (i.e. they were fired) following divisions within the Society of Jesus regarding the role of the Catholic Church and its relations to the military Junta.

Condemning the military dictatorship (including human rights violations) was a taboo within the Catholic Church. While the upper echelons of the Church were supportive of the military Junta, the grassroots of the Church was firmly opposed to the imposition of military rule.

In 2010, the survivors of the “Dirty War” accused Cardinal Jorge Bergoglio of complicity in the kidnapping of two members of the Society of Jesus Francisco Jalics y Orlando Yorio, (El Mundo, 8 November 2010)



### Revelations concerning Bergoglio’ Role During the Military Dictatorship

In the course of the trial initiated in 2005, “Bergoglio twice invoked his right under Argentine law to refuse to appear in open court, and when he eventually did testify in 2010, his answers were evasive”:

“At least two cases directly involved Bergoglio. One examined the torture of two of his Jesuit priests — Orlando Yorio and Francisco Jalics — who were kidnapped in 1976 from the slums where they advocated liberation theology. Yorio accused Bergoglio of effectively handing them over to the death squads... by declining to tell the regime that he endorsed their work. Jalics refused to discuss it after moving into seclusion in a German monastery.” (Los Angeles Times, April 1, 2005)



The accusations directed against Bergoglio regarding the two kidnapped Jesuit priests are but the tip of the iceberg. According to lawyer Myriam Bregman:

“Bergoglio’s own statements proved **church officials knew from early on that the junta was torturing and killing its citizens, and yet publicly endorsed the dictators.** “The dictatorship could not have operated this way without this key support,” (Los Angeles Times, April 1, 2005 emphasis added)

The Catholic hierarchy was tacitly complicit in torture and mass killings, an estimated “22,000 dead and disappeared, from 1976 to the [1978] Thousands of additional victims were killed between 1978 and 1983 when the military was forced from power.” (National Security Archive, March 23, 2006)

*image right: Jorge Mario Bergoglio grants communion to General Jorge Videla (1970s)*

### **The Catholic Church: Chile versus Argentina**

It is worth noting that in the wake of the military coup in Chile on September 11, 1973, the Cardinal of Santiago de Chile, Raul Silva Henriquez openly condemned the military junta led by General Augusto Pinochet. In marked contrast to Argentina, this stance of the Catholic hierarchy in Chile was instrumental in curbing the tide of political assassinations and human rights violations directed against supporters of Salvador Allende and opponents of the military regime.

Had Jorge Mario Bergoglio taken a similar stance to that of Cardinal Raul Silva Henriquez, thousands of lives would have been saved.

### **Operation Condor and the Catholic Church**

The election of Cardinal Bergoglio by the Vatican conclave to serve as Pope Francis I will have immediate repercussions regarding the ongoing “Operation Condor” Trial in Buenos Aires.

The Church was involved in supporting the military Junta. This is something which will emerge in course of the trial proceedings. No doubt, there will be attempts to obfuscate the role of the



Catholic hierarchy and the newly appointed pope Francis I, who served as head of Argentina's Jesuit order during the military dictatorship.

### **Jorge Mario Bergoglio: “Washington’s Pope in the Vatican”?**

The election of Pope Francis I has broad geopolitical implications for the entire Latin American region.

In the 1970s, Jorge Mario Bergoglio was supportive of a US sponsored military dictatorship.

The Catholic hierarchy in Argentina supported the military government.

Wall Street's interests were sustained through Jose Alfredo Martinez de Hoz' office at the Ministry of Economy.

The Catholic Church in Latin America is politically influential. It also has a grip on public opinion. This is known and understood by the architects of US foreign policy.

In Latin America, where a number of governments are now challenging US hegemony, one would expect –given Bergoglio's track record– that the new Pontiff Francis I as leader of the Catholic Church, will play *de facto*, a discrete “undercover” political role on behalf of Washington.

With Jorge Bergoglio, Pope Francis I in the Vatican (who faithfully served US interests in the heyday of General Jorge Videla) the hierarchy of the Catholic Church in Latin America can once again be effectively manipulated to undermine “progressive” (Leftist) governments, not only in Argentina but throughout the region, including Venezuela, Ecuador and Bolivia.

This instatement of “a pro-US pope” occurs a week following the death of president Hugo Chavez.

Washington's Pope in the Vatican?

The US State Department routinely pressures members of the United Security Council with a view to influencing the vote pertaining to Security Council resolutions. US covert operations and propaganda campaigns are routinely applied with a view to influencing national elections in different countries around the World.

Did the US government attempt to influence the election of the new pontiff? Were undercover pressures discretely exerted by Washington, within the Catholic Church, directly or indirectly, on the 115 cardinals who are members of the Vatican conclave, leading to the election of a pontiff who will faithfully serve US foreign policy interests in Latin America?

### **Author's Note**

*At the outset of the military regime in 1976, I was Visiting Professor at the Social Policy Institute of the Universidad Nacional de Cordoba, Argentina. My major research focus at the time was to investigate the impacts of the deadly macroeconomic reforms adopted by the military Junta.*

*I was teaching at the University of Cordoba during the initial wave of assassinations which also targeted “progressive” members of the Catholic clergy.*

*The industrial city of Cordoba was the center of the resistance movement. I witnessed how the Catholic hierarchy actively and routinely supported the military junta, creating an atmosphere of intimidation and fear throughout the country.*

*Three years earlier, at the time of Chile's September 11, 1973 military coup, leading to the overthrow of the Popular Unity government of Salvador Allende, I was Visiting Professor at the Institute of Economics, Catholic University of Chile, Santiago de Chile.*

*In the immediate wake of the coup in Chile, I witnessed how the Cardinal of Santiago, Raul Silva Henriquez –acting on behalf of the Catholic Church– confronted the military dictatorship.*