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An Argentine federal court handed down life sentences on Dec. 19 to former Buenos Aires province interior minister Jaime Smart (1976-1979), former Buenos Aires province police investigations director Miguel Osvaldo Etchecolatz and 14 former police and military personnel for genocide and crimes against humanity in the cases of 280 people detained during the 1976-1983 “dirty war” against suspected leftists.



Jaime Smart was Province of Buenos Aires Minister of Interior from 1976 to 1979

Another seven police agents and civilians were given sentences of two to 25 years.

Smart, the first civilian minister sentenced for crimes committed under Argentina's military dictatorship, was convicted of the murder of Jorge Rubinstein, attorney for the banker David Graiver, and the illegal deprivation of liberty of 43 people.

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The prosecution held that the two men were responsible for setting up six illegal detention centers at which detainees were tortured and murdered. Among the cases considered during the trial were the presumed murders of six high school students, the subject of the film *“La Noche de los Lápices”* (“The night of the pencils”), and the detention and torture during two and a half years of the popular journalist Jacobo Timerman, who was then the editor of the left-leaning newspaper La Opinion.

One of his sons, current foreign minister Héctor Timerman, was present during the sentencing.

Etchecolatz protested his sentence by holding up a sign reading “Judgment and punishment for the corrupt justice system”.

He was removed from the courtroom while members of the public shouted “murderer” and accused him of genocide, Dec. 19.