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Former Argentine dictator Gen. Jorge Rafael Videla (1976-1981) died the morning of May 17 in the Marcos Paz prison in Buenos Aires province, where he was serving a 50-year sentence for crimes against humanity. He was 87. Videla led the coup that removed then-president Isabel Perón from office on Mar. 24, 1976 and started a period of military rule that lasted until 1983. Videla himself was made de facto president on Mar. 29, 1976 and held the office until March 1981, when he was replaced by Gen. Roberto Viola.

Human rights groups estimate that 30,000 people were disappeared during the “dirty war” against suspected leftists that the military junta carried out. Some 5,000 people are known to have died, and about 500 children were given up for adoption under false names after their parents were killed; so far 108 of the children have learned their real identities. The military leaders were sentenced to life in prison during the presidency of Raúl Alfonsín (1983-1989), but two laws passed in 1986 and 1987 gave them immunity from any further trials, and President Carlos Saúl Menem (1989-1999) granted pardons in 1989 and 1990. The Supreme Court overturned the immunity laws in 2005, and in December 2010 a court convicted Videla of crimes against humanity. At the time of his death the former dictator was on trial for his role in Operation Condor, in which South American military dictatorships of the 1970s and 1980s aided each other in repressing opponents; his last court appearance was on May 14.

Videla never apologized for the violence of the military regime. “Our objective was to discipline an anarchized society,” he said in an interview published in 2012 [see [Update #1125](#)]. The generals wanted “to get away from a populist, demagogic vision; in relation to the economy, to go to a liberal market economy. We wanted to discipline unionism and crony capitalism.” On the military practice of keeping pregnant captives alive until they’d given birth and then executing them, Videla said in court that the women, “whom I respect as mothers, were active militants in the machinery of terror. And many of them used their embryonic children as human shields at the time that they were operating as combatants.” (

[Adital \(Brazil\) 5/17/13](#)

from TeleSUR;

[La Jornada \(Mexico\) 5/18/13](#)

from correspondent)

The US government was aware of the military junta’s crimes. “We want a stable situation,” then-secretary of state Henry Kissinger told Argentine foreign minister, Adm. Cesar Augusto Guzzetti in 1976, according to [declassified US documents](#). “We won’t cause you unnecessary difficulties. If you can finish before [the US] Congress gets back, the better” [see

[Update #723](#)

]. In December 1982 then-assistant secretary of state for human rights Elliott Abrams described a discussion he had with Argentine ambassador Lucio Alberto García del Solar about the “[c]hildren born to prisoners or children taken from their families during the dirty war.”

Abrams wrote that he told the ambassador that “[w]hile the disappeared were dead, these children were alive and this was in a sense the gravest humanitarian problem.” Despite the “humanitarian problem,” Abrams had the US government certify that the dictatorship was making progress on human rights [see

[Update #1110](#)

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