Operation Condor
United States Department of Defense

By the early 1970s, Latin American society was deeply polarized over such fundamental questions as the role of the state in economic development, diplomatic relations with revolutionary Cuba, and the definition of national identity itself. These divisions were brought to the forefront especially in Chile, following the narrow electoral victory of Marxist President Salvador Allende in September 1970. Three years later, Allende was overthrown in a violent coup led by General Augusto Pinochet and supported by the United States (see Documents No. 103 and 105). By 1976, every country in South America with the exception of Colombia and Venezuela was ruled by a military regime that pursued so-called “dirty wars” against groups and individuals seen as threats to domestic political stability, often with the encouragement of the United States. In November 1975, military officers from Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Paraguay and Uruguay met in Santiago, Chile to formalize a system of shared information exchange among their intelligence organizations, focusing on “persons and organizations connected directly or indirectly with Marxism.” The project, code-named “Operation Condor,” extended the dirty wars across international borders and eventually counted on the cooperation of Brazil, Ecuador and Peru. Among Operation Condor’s targets were such high-profile exiled members of the political opposition as Orlando Letelier, Salvador Allende’s foreign minister, who was killed along with his coworker, U.S. citizen Ronni Moffitt, in a car bombing organized by Chilean security forces in downtown Washington, D.C. on September 21, 1976. What follows is a report, written ten days after the Letelier assassination, by the legal attaché (not identified by name) in the U.S. embassy in Buenos Aires, on what he had learned about Operation Condor from his sources in the Argentine government. Evidently, the author was unaware that Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger and his deputies in the State Department not only knew about Condor, but since August had already been discussing the advisability of