
RESEARCH REPORTS AND NOTES

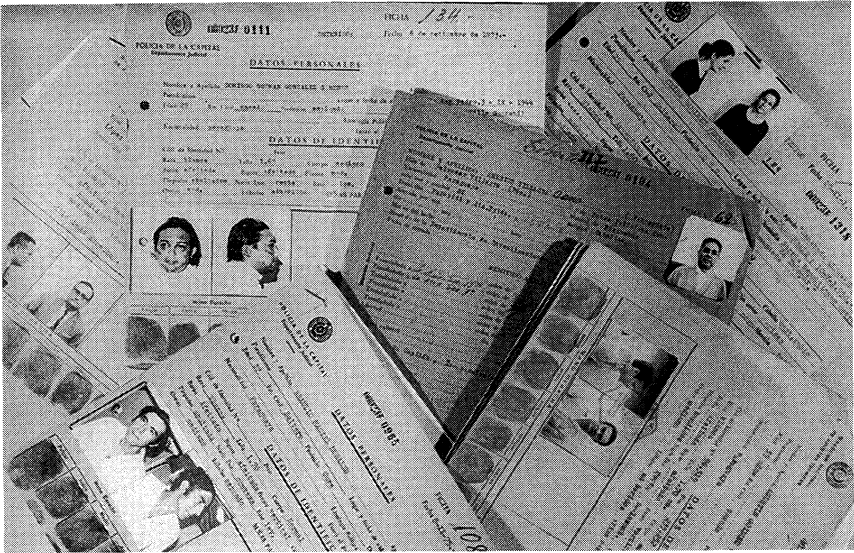
PARAGUAY'S ARCHIVO DEL TERROR

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A major archive has recently been established in Paraguay that reveals the internal operations of the security forces during the lengthy authoritarian regime of President Alfredo Stroessner (1954–1989). Featuring open access, the archive dubbed by the media as “el archivo del terror” comprises a wealth of primary material on a significant but little researched aspect of the contemporary history of Latin America. This archive provides unique insight into the day-to-day workings of a totalitarian security system and the objectives and strategies of those who headed it. The archive also has regional significance because no comparable archive exists for the period of military rule in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, or Uruguay. Thus it should prove to be of considerable interest to academics analyzing topics like the nature of Latin American military regimes, the practice of national security doctrine, human rights, and related themes.

The contents came to light only three years ago, following a tip-off from a police informant. On 22 December 1992, the Dirección de Producción of the Policía de la Capital in the residential suburb of Solares de Lambaré (near Asunción) was raided by a judicial team headed by Judges José Agustín Fernández and Luís María Benítez Riera, accompanied by Congressional Deputy Francisco José de Vargas. They were acting under the habeas data provisions, inscribed in Article 135 of the Constitution of 1992, under which citizens may access information about themselves held by the state. A writ of habeas data to this effect had been issued earlier in favor of former political prisoner Martín Almada, an educator detained



Illustrations 1 and 2 Box files and identity documents in the Archivo del Terror. Photos courtesy of the Archivo del Terror.

from November 1974 until he was expelled from Paraguay in mid-1977. To the judges' amazement, they discovered nearly two tons of documentation on the activities of the Departamento de Investigaciones de la Policía de la Capital (DIPC), commonly known as Investigaciones, the nerve center of state repression during the Stroessner regime. Acting swiftly and accompanied by the press and television cameras, the judges ordered immediate confiscation of the documentation and its transfer by a fleet of vehicles to the Palacio de Justicia (High Court) in Asunción.

This discovery led to two subsequent raids in the following weeks by judges acting on the basis of additional writs of habeas data. On 4 January 1993, the Departamento Judicial of the police headquarters was raided. A wealth of documentation was confiscated on repression of the peasant league movement, Ligas Agrarias Cristianas, and the case of Captain Napoleón Ortigoza, the political prisoner held longest during the Stroessner regime. On 8 January 1993, a third raid targeted the Departamento Técnico para la Represión de Comunismo of the Ministerio del Interior, commonly known as La Técnica. It had been established in the early 1960s with U.S. government support in the wake of the Cuban Revolution to repress communism. In this instance, however, relatively little documentation was confiscated apart from a collection of some seven hundred "subversive" books, which had been stolen from private residences during police raids. Most of the volumes are Marxist tracts, but they include a surprising number of pure science titles (such as *Problemas de ecuaciones diferenciales ordinarias*). The raid confirmed that La Técnica had continued to operate long after the February 1989 putsch that overthrew Stroessner. Following the first raid in December 1992, the senior officers of La Técnica, Antonio Campos Alúm and Felipe Nery Zaldívar, disappeared after apparently disposing of sensitive documentation.

The consolidated archive is currently located in two cramped rooms on the eighth floor of the Palacio de Justicia. Another small part of the archive, as yet unclassified, contains internal documentation of the security forces from 1941 until the beginning of the Stroessner regime in 1954. Referred to as "el archivo muerto," it is located separately in the basement of the Palacio de Justicia.

The archivo del terror may be divided into two broad sections. The first comprises materials confiscated by the security forces such as personal correspondence, political literature (leaflets and pamphlets), internal party documents, newspaper clippings, and analyses of the economic and political situation. The second section encompasses materials produced by the security forces themselves such as reports by informants, internal reports on political and trade-union matters, reports obtained by tapping telephones, statements extracted from detainees, evidence submitted as part of legal charges, and lists of detainees.

Most of the archive's contents derives from the first raid carried

out on 22 December. At the core are the 740 bound folios (or volumes) of internal documents of the DIPC, which are arranged and internally classified by subject matter. When combined with another 100 folios bound and classified following their confiscation, 574 folders, and 385 box-files, the total approaches 700,000 individual pages.

The documentation includes many kinds of items: detention and release data on all political prisoners from 1952 to 1989 (5 volumes); *libros de novedades* of the Oficina de Vigilancia y Delitos of the DIPC (where most torture was carried out) detailing the daily entry and exit of detainees from June 1976 to December 1990 (56 volumes); internal correspondence between the head of the Departamento de Política y Afines (DPA) responsible for political surveillance and the head of the DIPC from 1981 to 1989 (21 volumes); a total of 8,369 personal files, listed in alphabetical order, on political detainees including photographs and fingerprints as well as information on the circumstances of their arrest and their political, trade-union, and cultural activities; some 1,500 books and magazines, personal documents, and publications that were considered subversive and were confiscated during police raids; 10,000 photographs of political detainees and dissidents, many taken during public events using telephoto lenses; 543 audio cassette recordings of radio programs or public meetings considered subversive; transcriptions of conversations obtained by telephone tapping; transcriptions of 400 statements extracted under torture; and more than 500 passports and identity documents of foreigners of different nationalities.

The following random selection gives a sense of the wide-ranging contents of the folios: volume 4, telephone tapping from September to November of 1984; volume 36, surveillance of persons entering and leaving Paraguay; volume 40, surveillance of the independent teachers' union (Organización de Trabajadores de la Educación del Paraguay, or OTEP); volume 47, the inaugural meeting of Operación Cóndor; volume 111, surveillance of hotels; volume 179, correspondence from Pastor Coronel, head of the DIPC, to Stroessner; volume 203, membership list of the Partido Demócrata Cristiano, stolen from party headquarters in the 1970s; and volume 216, a file on the Grupo de Acción Anticomunista (GAA).

The contents of the archive have already cast serious doubts on the conventional view that the repressive apparatus of the Stroessner regime was cumbersome and poorly organized. On the contrary, the documents show that the government kept a meticulous updated list of all political prisoners, even to the extent of encoding the records of those who subsequently died under torture. The archive also contains detailed evidence substantiating human rights violations by the security forces.

A number of generalizations can already be made. First, torture was commonly used on political prisoners. Second, opponents of the Stroessner regime were kidnapped from exile with the cooperation of the

security forces of neighboring countries. Third, detainees who disappeared were in fact murdered and their records were filed under the special classification of "*empaquetados*" (packaged). Fourth, activities of leading opponents of the regime, both inside and outside Paraguay, were closely monitored. Fifth, President Stroessner received regular written reports on surveillance activities by the security forces. Sixth, an extensive network of informants (*pyragues*) was employed by the DPA and included well-known persons, among them a Catholic bishop. Seventh, Paraguay was an active member of Operación Cóndor, a collaborative network set up by the military regimes ruling Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay, Chile, and Paraguay in the 1970s and 1980s. Finally, the police continued to monitor the activities of opposition leaders well after the February 1989 putsch that overthrew Stroessner, as shown by the DIPC's *cuadernos de novedades*.

With the help of the Fiscalía General del Estado, two local non-governmental organizations, the Centro de Documentación y Estudios and the Comité de Iglesias, began the task of securing the physical integrity of the archive. On 26 March 1993, an agreement was signed between the Paraguayan government and U.S.AID for initial classification using Micro-Isis (a database software package used by librarians) and micro-filming at a total cost of 68,000 dollars. U.S.AID contributed 40,000 for a six-month period ending in September 1993. Although U.S. Ambassador Jon Glassman had earlier denied U.S. involvement in the state repression documented in the archive, he publicly acknowledged at the signing ceremony that members of U.S. security services had collaborated in establishing La Técnica.

Under the habeas data provisions of the Constitution of 1992, the archive is now open to the general public. Its files have already enabled relatives of disappeared prisoners and former political detainees who were tortured to substantiate formal charges against leading members of the Stroessner regime now under detention. Most if not all of them have denied involvement in or knowledge of violations of human rights.

Although classification and microfilming are still under way, funding has not yet been secured to ensure their completion. Nor has the long-term future of the archive been determined. Currently it belongs legally to the *juez de turno* (judge assigned to that jurisdiction). In August 1993, a bill was presented to the Paraguayan Congress proposing that the archive be declared part of the *patrimonio cultural* of the nation and providing the budget to transfer it to a permanent location with public access. As of summer 1994, this bill had not been processed by the congress. Further information about the Archivo del Terror may be obtained by contacting the archivist in charge, Rosa Palau, BASE-IS, O'Leary 1412, Casilla Postal 2917, Asunción, Paraguay (telephone: 595-21-447-834, FAX: 595-21-498-306).