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Argentina: Leader Of December Military Uprising Makes New Demands

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Category/Department: General
Published: Tuesday, June 27, 1989

Col. Mohammed Ali Seineldin, who led an army rebellion last December, recently announced from his prison cell on an army base that he no longer recognized the accord ending that rebellion and would accept responsibility "for leading any comrades ready to risk themselves in this new stage of our campaign for unity, honor and dignity." Seineldin and supporters are demanding a broad amnesty covering all retired and active-duty officers accused or sentenced for political killings and torture in the "dirty war" of the 1970s; the dropping of charges against officers participating in the three military rebellions since spring 1987; a reorganization of the army leadership; and, better pay, equipment and status. An unidentified future official in the government of President-elect Carlos Menem cited by the New York Times said that this debate essentially revolves around a confrontation between army chief of staff, Gen. Francisco Gassino, and Seineldin. Menem will be inaugurated July 8. According to the Times source, Gassino and Seineldin are waiting for the other "to do something." He said, "I have the impression that if Gassino moves firmly to take disciplinary action he will have the majority of the forces with him, although Seineldin does control an important number of colonels...Gassino is waiting for [President Raul] Alfonsin to give the orders. But Alfonsin wants Menem to take the responsibility, and Menem won't do that until July 8." An end to trials and disciplinary action would reportedly affect about 460 officers and noncommissioned officers. About 340 of the total were disciplined for direct participation or collaboration in one or more of the three rebellions. Most are back on active duty, but claim their careers have been negatively affected. A total of 92 officers, including Seineldin and Lt. Col. Aldo Rico, who led the first two rebellions, are under investigation by the military. About a third of the 92 are detained. Two former presidents and four other military officers are serving sentences ranging to life after being convicted for responsibility in thousands of killings and torture cases. A seventh person in this category, the former Air Force Commander, Orlando Ramon Agosti, was released in May after completing a 4-1/2 year sentence. Eighteen retired senior officers are being processed on similar charges. Next, three men who were members of the last junta of the military regime are serving sentences for mismanagement of the 1982 war with Britain for control of the Malvinas or Falkland Islands. About 1,100 cases were originally filed in the courts charging soldiers and police of killings and torture during the military regime. The vast majority of those cases were dropped after the first military rebellion when the Argentine Congress responded to rebel demands and approved legislation that effectively exempted men still on active-duty from being charged in the abuse cases. Menem, according to Shirley Christian of the Times, is not expected to move on amnesty for human rights crimes in the near future. This measure may have to approved by the Congress. Menem is expected to act relatively quickly on satisfying some military demands about privilege and perquisites, and to deal with the question of status of those soldiers who were involved in some way in the rebellions. On June 23, unidentified military sources told Notimex that pending suits against leaders of military rebellions will be taken up by the country's highest court within the next few days. Included are the cases of Col. Seineldin and Major Pablo Abete, both accused of leadership roles in the December 1988 uprising. (Basic data from Notimex, 06/23/89; New York Times, 06/25/89)