

Argentine Ex-President Charged With Rights Abuses



Associated Press

Isabel Perón, center, former president of Argentina, arriving at court in Madrid, where she lives, after a provincial court ordered her arrested on charges of human rights abuses during her administration.

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RIO DE JANEIRO, Jan. 12 — Acting at the request of Argentine officials, the Spanish police on Friday detained María Estela de Perón, the former president of [Argentina](#) and the widow of the founder of the ruling party, as part of a broadening investigation by the Peronist government of Argentina into past human rights abuses there.

A judge in the provincial city of Mendoza had issued an order on Thursday that Ms. Perón, known as Isabel, who lives in exile in Spain and gives her age as 75, be detained there for questioning regarding the disappearance of a student during her time in power. Almost simultaneously, a judge in Buenos Aires authorized the arrest of two other officials with ties to the late José López Rega, who was Gen. Juan Perón's private secretary and later Ms. Perón's closest adviser.

Those moves were made less than two weeks after Argentina requested that Spain extradite another notorious figure from that era. In each case, the proceedings focus on the Argentine Anti-Communist Alliance, or “Triple A,” a shadowy right-wing paramilitary death squad controlled by Mr. López Rega that first emerged when General Juan Perón was in power and accelerated its activities during his widow’s tenure.

Ms. Perón governed Argentina for less than two years, from her husband’s death in July 1974 until she was overthrown by a military coup on March 24, 1976. Human rights groups have blamed the Triple A for the killings of at least 1,500 political opponents, most of which occurred when Ms. Perón, a former cabaret dancer who was the general’s third wife, was in power.

Ms. Perón’s defense has always been that as “a poor ignorant woman” with no political experience or skills, as she put it in testimony in Spain in 1997, she had no idea what was being done in her name. But the Mendoza judge rejected that argument, saying in an interview with a local radio station that “she was the chief executive of the nation” and the abductions of people later killed “were made on the basis of decrees” she had signed.

Civilian democratic rule in Argentina was restored nearly 25 years ago. At that time, human rights and political leaders said, political parties negotiated an agreement that, at the insistence of the Peronists, effectively made human rights abuses that occurred before the military coup off limits to official investigations.

But President [Néstor Kirchner](#), himself a Peronist, has taken a different attitude, which the judges have apparently heeded. “When the president said he hadn’t left his convictions at the entrance of the seat of government and that there weren’t going to be deals on impunity with anybody, that included everyone, Ms. Perón too,” Interior Minister Aníbal Fernández said in an interview on Friday with a Buenos Aires radio station.

The Peronist movement is a broad one containing some factions that are regarded as right-wing and others that lean left, with Mr. Kirchner belonging to the latter group. At the time Ms. Perón was in

power he and his wife, Cristina, now a powerful senator, were college students with friends who belonged to the leftist Montonero group and were later abducted and killed.

A presidential election is scheduled for this year in Argentina, and while Mr. Kirchner has not declared himself as a candidate for re-election, he has been trying to build an alliance that would include left-wing groups outside his own movement. The move against Ms. Perón, which enhances his credentials as a crusader and nonconformist who fears nothing and no one, helps cement his ties with the left.

“No federal judge would make rulings like that of requesting the capture of former president Isabel Perón or to investigate the crimes of the Triple A if he perceived that such acts would perturb the national government,” Fernando Laborda wrote Friday in the conservative Buenos Aires daily La Nación. The timing “is not coincidental,” he added, but stems from what “is clearly a political decision.”

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