

Second arrest warrant issued for Argentina's Perón

A second judge ordered the arrest of Isabel Perón, former leader of Argentina, in a probe of kidnappings and killings during her rule between 1974 and 1976.

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BUENOS AIRES - A judge on Tuesday issued the second arrest warrant in less than a week against former President Isabel Perón, summoning her for questioning about a right-wing death squad that terrorized Argentina during her 1974-76 rule.

Judge Norberto Oyarbide ordered the arrest of the 75-year-old former leader in a probe of kidnappings and killings blamed on the Argentine Anti-communist Alliance, a shadowy paramilitary group best known as the Triple A, a judge's aide said on condition of anonymity because of court rules.

Oyarbide must now request Perón's extradition from Spain, where she has lived for 25 years, the court official said.

Last Thursday, Judge Raúl Acosta issued an unprecedented warrant for Perón's arrest in connection with the disappearance of a member of the Perónist party in the western Argentine province of Mendoza in February 1976.

The former president, whose formal name is María Estela Martínez de Perón, led a chaotic, 20-month government after her husband, Gen. Juan Domingo Perón, died in office during his third elected term in July 1974. She had been vice president.

Isabel Perón governed fitfully and was overthrown in a 1976 military coup, which ushered in a seven-year dictatorship blamed in official reports for nearly 13,000 deaths and disappearances. Human rights groups put the toll at closer to 30,000 victims from the campaign against dissent that later became known as the "dirty war."

Briefly detained and questioned by Spanish police on Friday, Perón has been allowed to remain free at her Madrid home while her lawyers address her mounting legal woes. She went into exile in Spain in 1981 after she was released by coup leaders who had jailed her.

Many human rights activists say the dirty war violence began under Perón, who in October 1975 issued decrees calling on the armed forces to "annihilate" the operations of those deemed "subversive elements."

Testifying as a witness in a 1997 Spanish case, Perón said she recalled approving the decrees but did not remember details and was unaware of any abuses during her presidency. Her lawyers say the decrees ordered the armed forces only to eradicate the operational capabilities of the guerrillas.

The Triple A is blamed for at least 1,500 killings between 1974 and 1976, a turbulent time of flagging democracy in Argentina when leftists, students, intellectuals, unionists and others were targeted for death. Some of their bodies were found badly burned, others with their hands chopped off during the reign of terror that led up to Perón's ouster.

The cases against Perón are the first in which Argentine courts have focused on human rights crimes before the dictatorship.