

Beneath the Surface:

Argentine-United States Relations as Perón Assumed the Presidency

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Juan Domingo Perón was elected President of Argentina on February 24, 1946,¹ just as the world was beginning to recover from World War II and experiencing the first traces of the Cold War. The relationship between Argentina and the United States was both strained and uncertain at this time. The newly elected Perón and his controversial wife, Eva, represented Argentina. The United States' presence in Argentina for the preceding year was primarily presented through Ambassador Spruille Braden.² These men had vastly differing perspectives and visions for Argentina. The contest between them was indicative of the relationship between the two nations.

Beneath the public and well-documented contest between Perón and United States under the leadership of Braden and his successors, there was another player whose presence was almost unnoticed. The impact of this player was subtly effective in normalizing relations between Argentina and the United States. The player in question was former United States President Herbert Hoover, who paid a visit to Argentina and Perón in June of 1946.

This paper will attempt to describe the nature of Argentine-United States relations in mid-1946. Hoover's mission and insights will be examined. In addition, the impact of his visit will be assessed in light of unfolding events and the subsequent historiography. The most interesting aspect of the historiography is the marked absence of this episode in studies of Perón and Argentina³ even though it involved a former United States President and the relations with

¹ Alexander, 53.

² "Democracy's Bull," *Time* (Nov. 5, 1945), www.time.com/time/printout/0.8816,852408,00.html.

³ Sources for background history include Robert J. Alexander, *The Peron Era* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1951); Martin Edward Andersen, *Dossier Secreto: Argentina's Desaparecidos and the Myth of the "Dirty War"* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1993); Joseph R. Barager, *Why Perón Came To Power: The Background to Peronism in Argentina* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1968); John Barnes, *Evita, First Lady: A Biography of Eva Perón* (New York: Grove Press, 1978); George I. Blanksten, *Perón's Argentina* (Chicago: University of Chicago

an important Latin American nation. Nevertheless, it can be argued that Hoover's 1946 call on Perón did influence the subsequent sequence of events as well as the relationship between the two nations.

Before we examine the documents detailing Hoover's visit to Argentina, it would be most helpful to set the stage with some background information. Both Argentina and Perón are often referred to as 'enigmas.' Eva Perón, 'Evita,' was an icon in her own right. Braden and Hoover each approached Argentina with an agenda. War time relationships and new international dilemmas strongly influenced Argentine-United States relations. A brief look at each of these components will be helpful in understanding the context of Hoover's visit as well as discerning its impact.

“The Sad Privilege of Being Argentine”⁴

It would not be an exaggeration to say that for many North Americans perceptions of Argentina are limited to its vague location in South America and its most famous female, Evita.

Press, 1953); Robert D. Crassweller, *Perón and the Enigmas of Argentina* (New York: W.W.Norton & Company, 1987); Eduardo Crawley, *A House Divided: Argentina 1880-1980* (London: C. Hurst & Company, 1984); Mark Falcoff and Ronald H Dalkart, eds. *Prolouge to Perón: Argentina in Depression and War, 1930-1943* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975); H.S. Ferns, *Argentina* (London: Ernest Benn Limited, 1969); Nicholas Fraser and Marysa Navarro, *Eva Perón* (New York: W.W.Norton & Company, 1980); Donald C. Hodges, *Argentina 1943-1976: The National Revolution and Resistance* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1976); Alberton Conil Paz and Gustavo Ferrari, *Argentina's Foreign Policy, 1930-1962* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1966); George Pendle, *Argentina*, 3rd ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1963); David Rock, *Authoritarian Argentina The Nationalist Movement, Its History, and Its Impact* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); James R. Scobie, *Argentina: A City and a Nation*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971); Thomas E. Skidmore and Peter H. Smith, *Modern Latin America*, 4th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); Arthur P. Whitaker, *The United States and Argentina* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1954). None of these mention Hoover's 1946 trip to Argentina at all.

⁴ Martin Edward Andersen, *Dossier Secreto: Argentina's Desaparecidos and the Myth of the "Dirty War"* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1993), 12.

Andrew Lloyd Webber's popular musical movie, starring Madonna, memorializing the life of Eva Perón, has enthralled the world since its release in 1996. The stage production has been making an impact since its debut in 1978.⁵ Aside from Webber's haunting music, there is something compelling about this woman, her country and its place in the world. North Americans who had no idea who Perón and Evita were, why Argentina is important, nor the foggiest notion of the relations between our two countries were and remain captivated by Madonna's portrayal of this woman.

Martin Anderson gave the following description of Argentina in 1993:

Argentina is a land of stunning paradoxes. A country of vast but mismanaged natural wealth and industrial potential, Argentina has seemingly lurched backward, away from the path of development. A place of vibrant cultural and intellectual traditions, it appeared incapable of nurturing tolerance or political stability. A society both sophisticated and more civilized than most of its neighbors, Argentina ... became South America's most efficient and brutal police state.⁶

The sheer size of Argentina, as well as its wealth of natural resources and location, has established it as a leader in the Latin American world. Prospective travelers can find enticing and curious descriptions such as this one from Lonely Planet:

Get people free-associating on the word 'Argentina,' and it's quickly apparent why the country has long held travelers in awe: tango, Patagonia, beef, soccer, Tierra del Fuego, passion, Mendoza wine country. ... Travelers who dig beneath the tourist-office version of Argentina will find a cultural climate electrified by discussion, argument and creative fervor. Argentina is in the throes of reinvention, and many people have a lot at stake. More than ever, Argentines have a lot to argue about. Spend any amount of time here, and you'll find yourself wrapped up in the discussion too, hopefully with a couple of

⁵ Brian Logan, "Lloyd Webber unveils his new Argentinian Evita," *The Guardian* (Feb. 7, 2006), www.guardian.co.uk/stage/2006/feb/07/westend.

⁶ Anderson, 12.

locals. Argentines are, after all, some of the most amicable, seductive, engaging folks on the planet.⁷

Within this glowing introduction from the Lonely Planet there appears a interesting question. What might Argentines have to argue about? In October 2007, Argentina elected its current leader, Cristina Fernandez, both a female and a Peronist, to the presidency.⁸ What a traveler finds in Argentina today is difficult to understand without a bit of historical background and impossible to imagine without Perón, Evita, and the stormy relationship with the United States.

Argentina's Complex History in Brief

Rulers and strategist, historians and journalists, felt the need to take a crash course in order to understand Argentina. To think that such a crash course is possible is to betray ignorance: because, out of all the contradictions on which it was built, Argentina has emerged as an extraordinarily complex country. Its complexity, moreover, is suffused by the high degree of emotionalism of its people.⁹

Spoken by Argentine Senator Rodolfo H. Terragno,¹⁰ these words caution away from any attempt to crush several hundred years of Argentine history into a “crash course”. Therefore, we will fast-forward past ancient records and the Spanish colonial years, during which Argentina was considered more of a “backwater”¹¹ than a treasured asset.¹² George Blanksten, writing for

⁷ “Introducing Argentina,” *Lonely Planet*, www.lonelyplanet.com/argentina.

⁸ “Country Profile: Argentina,” *BBC News*, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/country_profiles/1192478.stm (accessed 5-3-09), 2.

⁹ Rodolfo H. Terragno, Foreword in Eduardo Crawley, *A House Divided: Argentina 1880-1980* (London: C. Hurst & Company, 1984), xviii.

¹⁰ Terragno is a senator in the National Congress of Argentina representing Buenos Aires, vice-president of the senate Commission on Foreign Relations, a lawyer and journalist, with a number of publications on politics and development in Latin America to his credit. Yale University Office of Public Affairs, “Senator from Argentina to Speak at Yale on Latin American Economy,” <http://opa.yale.edu/news/article.aspx?id=2452>

¹¹ Skidmore, 68.

¹² Sources for background history are listed in the above historiographic footnote and below in the bibliography and are not repeated here.

the University of Chicago Press in 1953, points to the rivalry between the city of Buenos Aires and the interior areas of the country being a “basic and tragic schism in Argentine national life underlies much of what has been called the “Argentine riddle.”¹³

Two other major factors came into play in the twenty years straddling the fin-de-siècle. Argentina willingly absorbed a huge influx of both immigrants and capital from Europe. “Between 1880 and 1905, net immigration was 2,827,800, in a country whose entire population in 1869 had been 1,800,000.”¹⁴ Italians were the greatest in number, followed by Spaniards, French, Russians (meaning all Slavic peoples), Turks (all Middle Eastern people), and a lesser sized British group. While the British group was small in number, its impact was enormous due to the capital that accompanied it. Under British auspices, the Argentine railway multiplied its mileage by ten, ranking it only behind the U.S. and Canada in number of rail-miles by 1915. In addition, the British were very influential in the areas of education, utilities, insurance, banking, shipping, and sports.¹⁵ With this influx of ‘foreign’ influence, capital, and numbers, it is patently unsurprising that Argentina’s political system experienced some growing pains.

By 1912, about one million Argentine males were qualified voters and political parties had become important factors in the government.¹⁶ The Great Depression of the 1920’s took its toll in Argentina, as well as the rest of the world, and brought to light some of the weaknesses of their political system. This alone was not responsible for the political upheavals that shook Argentina between 1930 and 1946. The historic involvement of the Argentine military in

¹³ George Blanksten, *Perón’s Argentina* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953), 17-18.

¹⁴ Crassweller, 46.

¹⁵ Crassweller, 46.

¹⁶ Skidmore, 82.

political affairs and World War II were also key factors.¹⁷ The Argentine military had long admired German efficiency – in fact Germany had been helping train Argentine officers in “modern military technology”¹⁸ since 1899.

As the events surrounding World War II unfolded, the affinity that many in the Argentine military felt for Germany easily extended to include the rest of the Axis. Italy had long been considered the “second mother-country”¹⁹ and Mussolini’s rise was watched with admiration. The political situation at home was also being watched, with “increasing impatience,” by a military awestruck by their counterparts in Axis Europe who played “key roles in displacing the wavering civilian governments.”²⁰ Soured economic ties with Britain and antipathy towards the United States added to the push to remain neutral in the European conflict. This opinion took root among the Argentine elite of both civilian and military standing.

In the midst of a world torn by war, the democratic Argentine regime was discredited by its own corruption and lack of interest in the “welfare of the workers.”²¹ Change was in the air. “As the drama unfolded, the principal actors in Argentine politics turned out to be the military and labor.”²² On June 4, 1943, the Argentine Army enacted a coup and “the Argentine presidency was occupied by four army officers: General Arturo Rawson, General Pedro P.

¹⁷ Skidmore, 83.

¹⁸ Skidmore, 84.

¹⁹ Blanksten, 39.

²⁰ Skidmore, 86.

²¹ Robert J. Alexander, *The Peron Era*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1951), 11.

²² Skidmore, 87.

Ramírez, General Edelmiro J. Farrell,²³ and a particularly “enterprising Argentine Army officer,”²⁴ Colonel Juan Domingo Perón.

In the period immediately following the June 4 coup, Argentina experienced little of the relief hoped for by a governmental change. Both internal and external pressure to aid the Allies was met with fierce resistance. The regime closed down all groups designed to provide aid to the Allies “while pro-Axis groups remained untouched.”²⁵ By January 1944, all political parties were outlawed and the press was experiencing the most “stringent”²⁶ control in Argentine history. An underground network, similar to those in Nazi-occupied Europe, and concentration camps were established to house “dissident trade union leaders” and “especially Communists.”²⁷ These measures remained in effect until 1945 as preparations were being made for the presidential elections which were held in February 1946. As current vice-president and a major candidate, Perón’s place in the public eye was assured. “He was a soldier who became the boss and idol to a trade union movement...He divided public opinion of his country more deeply and more bitterly than anyone in a hundred years...[He was] what Latin Americans often like to call a Fenómeno.”²⁸

Enter “Democracy’s Bull”²⁹

On May 19, 1945 Spruille Braden arrived in Buenos Aires as the new ambassador from the United States.³⁰ Although he was only destined for a brief tour of duty, his impact and

²³ Blanksten, 13.

²⁴ Blanksten, 44.

²⁵ Alexander, 16.

²⁶ Alexander, 17.

²⁷ Alexander, 19.

²⁸ Lindon Ratliff, “Juan Domingo Peron: “Fenómeno,”” *Historical Text Archive* (2003), 1, www.historicaltextarchive.com/sections.php?op=viewarticle&artid=65.

²⁹ “Democracy’s Bull,” *Time* (Nov. 5, 1945), www.time.com/time/printout/0.8816,852408,00.html.

legacy were profound. He stated his policy succinctly: “The United States is against dictators everywhere...[and] for freedom everywhere – period.”³¹ Braden seemed to see himself as the “evangel to plant New Deal democracy and philosophy in the Argentine.”³² His legendary tenacity caused some to be “reminded of a bulldog, while to others he projected the image of a buffalo.”³³ Almost immediately, Braden “locked horns with Dictator Juan Domingo Perón, [and] threw every personal and official weight against him”³⁴ and “began to intervene openly.”³⁵

In addition to “explosive” personal meetings with Peron, Braden gave public speeches lambasting the Argentine government for “totalitarian domestic policies” and failing to take up the Allied side in World War II.³⁶ Accusations of Argentina’s support for the fascist Axis enemy was not only a major issue for Braden, it was also one of the most popular themes in the United States Press during the Argentine presidential campaign and for years to come.³⁷ For these reasons,

Braden was not sent down to Argentina to “make up” with the Farrell regime, but rather to make it very clear to the Argentine people that the United States government did not like that regime for the reason that General Farrell, Colonel Peron and their associates

³⁰ Crassweller, 140.

³¹ “Democracy’s Bull,” 2.

³² Herbert Hoover, 6/23/1946, “Memoranda of Hoover’s talks with Juan Peron,” *Hoover Library* (West Branch, IA).

³³ Crassweller, 140.

³⁴ “Democracy’s Bull,” 3.

³⁵ Crassweller, 141.

³⁶ Crassweller, 141.

³⁷ Examples of this sentiment include (in order of publication): Stanley Ross, “Peron: South American Hitler,” *The Nation* (Feb. 16, 1946); J. Alvarez del Vayo, “Peron on the March,” *The Nation* (May 31, 1947); Frank L. Kluckhohn, “Argentina: New-World Superstate,” *The Saturday Evening Post* (April 19, 1947); Albert Hicks, “Peron’s Expanding Empire,” *The Nation* (June 28, 1947); “Having a Wonderful Time at Little Eva, Arg.,” *The Saturday Evening Post* (July 31, 1948); J. Alvarez del Vayo, “Peron Has Not Changed,” *The Nation* (July 31, 1948); J. Alvarez del Vayo, “Argentina, Nazi Paradise,” *The Nation* (Jan. 7, 1950); Shirley Christian, “Buenos Aires Journal; On Selling Peronism with No Peron and Little Ism,” *The New York Times* (Dec. 12, 1987); “Menem, Peronist. What’s a Peronist?” *The New York Times* (May 16, 1989); Larry Rother, “Argentina, a Haven for Nazis, Balks at Opening Its Files,” *The New York Times* (March 9, 2003); Eduardo Amadeo, Ambassador of Argentina, “Argentina and the Nazis,” *The New York Times* (March 15, 2003); Larry Rother, “Half-Century Later, a New Look at Argentine-Nazi Ties,” *The New York Times* (April 4, 2005).

had been friends and co-workers with the late-lamented Axis and were menaces to democracy in the hemisphere.³⁸

By September of 1945, Braden had been “promoted to Assistant Secretary of State”³⁹ and left Buenos Aires. Chargé d’affaires, counselor John Moors Cabot,⁴⁰ candidly admitting to being the recipient of conflicting reports, included the following erroneous observations in his August 29 review:

Peron’s greatest strength was said to be the absence of any serious opposition within the military that would come within a half inch of sending him into oblivion only six weeks later. His greatest strength, which was his appeal for the broad, anonymous labor masses, was entirely overlooked, and his standing with labor was listed as one of his greatest weaknesses. The hatred of the oligarchy, which was certainly part of his appeal to the general electorate, was indicated as a significant and surprising weakness.⁴¹

Both contemporaneous sources and more current ones cite Braden’s “doctrine” as having “failed” in its “most conspicuous, most important test – in Argentina.”⁴² His actions are characterized as conforming to the “crusading psychology of the war years.”⁴³ Before he left Buenos Aires, however, Braden put in place what he intended to be a crushing blow to Peron’s candidacy – the infamous Blue Book.

Published “just two weeks before” the Argentine presidential elections set for February 24, 1946, the Blue Book had the “obvious intention of influencing the choice of the voters.”⁴⁴ Attributed to Braden and his staff, this “131-page booklet” was officially titled *Consultation among the American Republics with Respect to the Argentine Situation. Memorandum of the*

³⁸ Alexander, 203.

³⁹ Alexander, 204.

⁴⁰ Crassweller, 154.

⁴¹ Crassweller, 155.

⁴² “Democracy’s Bull,” 3.

⁴³ Crassweller, 142.

⁴⁴ Alexander, 206.

United States Government, but popularly known as the “Blue Book on Argentina.”⁴⁵ Intended to skew the election against Perón, the Blue Book instead worked in his favor. Perón featured prominently in the charges of aiding the “Nazi-Fascist” Axis.⁴⁶ Perón greeted this latest evidence of the “unhappy record of Big Stick diplomacy in Latin America” with “delight.”⁴⁷

Eva quickly took advantage of such a marvelous propaganda gift for those final days of the campaign. In her radio broadcasts, which went out to every town and village in the country, she called on Argentines to repudiate the threat of ‘Yanqui’ imperialism with the cry of ‘Perón yes! Braden no!’ It was an unbeatable slogan.⁴⁸

Although the Blue Book worked in Perón’s favor in the election, it hampered the Argentine economy by creating a “virtual blockade” against imports of “vehicles and other machinery which was available to other countries, but not to Argentina.”⁴⁹ In addition, in a move “intended to cripple Argentina economically” the United States froze Argentine “gold deposits” and enacted “a series of what were described by Sumner Welles as ‘minor and exasperating commercial restrictions.’”⁵⁰

On February 24, 1946, the Argentine elections were held “under Army supervision”⁵¹ with balloting being described as “scrupulously fair and open.”⁵² It is generally conceded that Perón won respectably, with various sources claiming he won by between 52 to 56⁵³ percent of the vote. He lost no time in putting his government in motion. “In the months between the

⁴⁵ Whitaker, 148.

⁴⁶ Whitaker, 148.

⁴⁷ Barnes, 60.

⁴⁸ Barnes, 62.

⁴⁹ Alexander, 207.

⁵⁰ Alexander, 207.

⁵¹ Whitaker, 149.

⁵² Crassweller, 181.

⁵³ Crassweller cites 52.4 per cent (181) whereas Whitaker cites 56 per cent (149).

election and his inauguration, Perón drafted a program and formed a cabinet reflecting all the various groups that supported him. It was a good cabinet composed of able people.”⁵⁴

Just after the Argentine elections, the “frigid atmosphere between Argentina and Tio Sam began to thaw.”⁵⁵ George Messersmith was sent to Argentina as the United States ambassador with instructions that “the United States is now willing to negotiate a hemisphere defense treaty with *all* the American republics.”⁵⁶ A State Department veteran with thirty two years of foreign service experience, he was charged with a “strenuous mission: to break, if possible, the impasses which has stultified the U.S.-Argentine relations for more than a decade and thus bring some realism and understanding to the U.S.-Latin American policy in general.”⁵⁷

President Perón

By Inauguration Day, June 4, 1946, Perón administrative policies were virtually in place. As perceived by Virginia Prewett, Buenos Aires correspondent for the Chicago Sun, these consisted of five major points. Perón set a course designed to “tightening the bonds with the nearby South American countries,” exert strict control over “all organizations that sparked the recent electoral opposition,” take over “complete control of the economic life of the country,” and control the battle between centrists and the Laborista Party which supported him in the election. Primary among these five points is Perón’s Third Position which planed to “play off

⁵⁴ Fraser, 74.

⁵⁵ Alexander, 207.

⁵⁶ Alexander, 207.

⁵⁷ “Career Man’s Mission,” *The New York Times* (Dec. 2, 1946), 1.

the United States against Russia.”⁵⁸ Jeane Kirkpatrick, United States Ambassador to the United Nations from 1981 to 1985,⁵⁹ describes Perón’s policy as “a jerry-built ideology often said to have been improvised from whole cloth, Perón’s system of welfare state, benefits, economic planning, and broad controls were consistent with this ‘third position’ (neither capitalist nor communist).”⁶⁰

Perón outlined his Third Position during his inaugural message on June 4, 1946. In response to the increasing international pressure, applied mainly by the United States, to participate in the Mutual Assistance Pact,⁶¹ Perón urged his Congress “choose between not validating the excesses which have been incurred or resorting to the reform of the Constitution...[and with] intelligence and patriotism...establish the certain definition of what best suits the Republic.”⁶²

Hoover’s Unheralded Visit

Although the presence of American businessmen at the inaugural events, such as Louisiana shipbuilder Andrew Jackson Higgins⁶³, is mentioned by Perón and Argentine scholars not all visitors have received comparable attention. One particularly interesting piece of archival evidence surfaced during the course of this research. Resting in the Herbert Hoover Library in a collection entitled Herbert Hoover Papers: Post Presidential Period, is a small set of memoranda covering a series of talks between Hoover and Perón in June of 1946. This evidence relates to a

⁵⁸ Virginia Prewett, “Colonel Peron’s New Order,” *The Nation* (June 8, 1946), 685.

⁵⁹ Tim Weiner, “Jeane Kirkpatrick, Reagan’s Forceful Envoy, Dies,” *The New York Times* (Dec. 9, 2006), 1.

⁶⁰ Kirkpatrick, 37.

⁶¹ Paz and Ferrari, 139.

⁶² Juan Domingo Peron quoted in Paz, 139-140.

⁶³ Alexander, 208.

visit of former United States President Herbert Hoover to Buenos Aires from June 6th through 10th of 1946 as part of the South American leg of his world-wide activities. In an effort to address the famine facing nations devastated by World War II, he sought aid from nations like Argentina.

The presence of a former president during the inaugural events of a new head of state is normally a newsworthy event. However, in this case, scant attention to Hoover was paid by the American press⁶⁴ and none by later scholars.⁶⁵ Nevertheless, this visit had great consequences for United States-Argentine relations and for European people threatened with starvation.

Hoover's Mission

In November of 1943, although the war was far from over, the United Nations founded the Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA). Forty-four nations agreed to “plan, coordinate, administer or arrange for the administration of measures for the relief of victims of war in any area under the control of any of the United Nations through the provision of food, fuel,

⁶⁴ The only U.S. article found is “The Hungry,” *Time*, (June 17, 1946). However, Hoover Institute Archivist Carol Leadham was able to point to several articles that document Hoover’s South American trip from the foreign press. Articles in their archives include those from the Mexican publications *Excelsior* (May 27) and *Novendades*, *El Universal* (May 29), *Panama American* (May 29), several publications from Lima, Peru, dating between June 1 and June 4, *La Esfera* from Venezuela (June 18) and the Cuban *Havana Post*, *Information*, *El (Nuevo) Mundo* (June 19). Argentine press ran articles on June 6 and 7 in the *Buenos Aires Herald*, *La Razon*, *The Standard*, *La Epoca*, and *La Nacion*. These articles are in Box 278 of the Hoover Subject Collection at the Hoover Institute Archives, Stanford, CA. Unfortunately, I was unable to procure them and have them translated in time for the current project.

⁶⁵ Please see historiographic note and bibliography for a detailed list of sources. There is documentation for Hoover’s visit outside the scope this project. According to Assistant Archivist for Reference, Hoover Institution Archives, Stanford, CA the following references are available for further research: *Herbert Hoover's memoirs, An American Epic*, Volume 4 (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1964), 210-214; Richard Norton Smith, *An Uncommon Man: The Triumph of Herbert Hoover* (Worland, WY: High Plains Publishing Co., 1984), 358, 359; *Herbert Hoover and Harry S Truman: A Documentary History*, edited by Timothy Walch and Dwight M. Miller (Worland, WY: High Plains Publishing Co., 1992), 88-90.

clothing, shelter and other basic necessities, medical and other essential services.”⁶⁶ President Harry S. Truman asked former president Herbert Hoover to act as a special representative to solicit supplies for the UNRRA. Hoover set out on a rigorous trip that took him to 25 countries during the first half of 1946⁶⁷ assessing the needs of some countries and the ability of others to help satisfy those needs, notably Argentina.⁶⁸

The Latin American Trip from Hoover’s Perspective⁶⁹

The purpose of Hoover’s visit was to “stimulate food exports from the Argentine”⁷⁰ for war-ravaged Europe. He found that the relationship between the U.S. State Department and Perón’s government was “bitter and filled with hate, it seemed impossible to do anything.”⁷¹ In general, the embassy staff and Ambassador George Messersmith, in particular, did little to aid in Hoover’s mission.⁷² Indeed, Messersmith was “not only opposed to me personally but had objected to the whole mission.”⁷³ Messersmith did nothing to impress Hoover and earned a rather scathing review as Hoover reported him to be “a number-two caliber man; earnest; wants

⁶⁶ United Nations Archives and Records Management Section, “United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA) fonds 1943-1948,” AG-018, 23/03/2006, page 1, http://archives.un.org/unarms/doc/archivalcollections/ag_018.pdf

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Argentina was a food exporter and considered to be crucial in this endeavor. Although the United States State Department had long sought to bring Argentina in line politically with the United States, Hoover was focused on procuring the necessary supplies.

⁶⁹ The collection of Memoranda, located in the Herbert Hoover Presidential Library, include Hoover’s diary entries from May 19, 1946 before his departure through June 23rd after his return. In addition, there is a memorandum by Julius Klein who acted as translator for Hoover and Perón at their second meeting on June 10, 1946. As pointed out by Hoover Library Archive Technician Spencer Howard, in an email message to the author (May 19, 2009), these memoranda are “unusually frank and detailed.”⁶⁹ Most curious to me was Mr. Howard’s disclosure that these documents have been available to the public for research for over forty years.

⁷⁰ Hoover, 1.

⁷¹ Hoover, 1.

⁷² Hoover, 2.

⁷³ Hoover, 3.

to restore relations; is a good deal confused as to how to move, and of course follows every whim of the State Department.”⁷⁴ Hoover found a well-connected Argentine ship-builder by the name of Alberto Dodero⁷⁵ to be more helpful in arranging a meeting with Peron and assessing the results.

At “10 am on the morning of June 7th, 1946,⁷⁶ Hoover met with Perón for thirty-five minutes.”⁷⁷ Although having been inaugurated only forty-eight hours before, Perón listened attentively while Hoover spoke about “world situation, our “gap” in supplies, my hopes from the Argentine of an additional 1,500,000 tons to the ordinary routine exports.”⁷⁸ Dodero reported immediately after the meeting that Hoover had made a “fine impression.”⁷⁹ Unexpectedly, the weekend brought some further opportunities for Hoover to promote his cause.

A luncheon was given by Messersmith on Saturday, June 9, where Hoover was able to meet and converse with the Argentine ministers of Industry, Agriculture and Foreign Affairs. Hoover also received a coveted invitation which further indicated that the earlier meeting between with Perón went well- an “invitation to attend a great State dinner by Perón to the delegates to his Inauguration Sunday evening.”⁸⁰ Hoover expressed great hesitation in accepting this invitation “for fear of incident by super-heated Argentines or by unfavorable publicity in the

⁷⁴ Hoover, 6/23/1946, 2.

⁷⁵ Hoover describes Dodero as “reserved,” “an important shipping man of large wealth, a large financial backer of Peron, and that his wife was a former American actress.” The wives of Perón and Dodero “were the most intimate of friends.” For more background on Dodero, please see: “Argentina to Build Fleet of Cargo Ships,” *New York Times*, August 18, 1918; “Eva Peron in Madrid/Europe,” *Famous Hotels*, www.famoushotels.org/article.835; “Abdication of a Tycoon,” *Time*, May 16, 1949, <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,853719,00.html>.

⁷⁶ Amato, n.p.

⁷⁷ Hoover, 4.

⁷⁸ Hoover, 4.

⁷⁹ Hoover, 5.

⁸⁰ Hoover, 5.

American anti-Argentine press.”⁸¹ Hoover, however, decided in favor of attendance and went in the company of Mr. and Mrs. Messersmith. He expressed chagrin at being placed 196th of 216 foreign and Argentine officials, and wrote afterwards that “Messersmith should have seen to it that I was placed properly. I was resolved however to eat even Argentine dirt if I could get the 1,600,000 tons.”⁸²

The next Monday, Doderó accompanied Hoover to a conference he had arranged with Perón at the Presidential Residence. Joining them as an interpreter was a fellow Republican, Dr. Julius Klein, who had been Under Secretary of Commerce in Hoover’s Administration.⁸³ Dr. Klein’s memorandum of the same day, indicated that Perón “wished a restoration of good-will and wished to cooperate”⁸⁴ with the United States. Perón laid out his “major complaints” which included the “freezing of Argentina’s gold in the United States Federal Reserve Bank (approximately \$250,000,000),” as well as the disruption to Argentine credit and the ensuing inflation. The “linseed controversy,” “shortage of railway supplies,” “very grave need for oil drilling machinery,” and the “black list” question regarding Germans in Argentina.⁸⁵ All the while, Hoover remained sympathetic but clearly reiterated that “he could not promise any influence on the Administration, since he was a leader of the Opposition” and recounted his own

⁸¹ Hoover, 5.

⁸² Hoover, 5.

⁸³ For more information on Dr. Julius Klein, please see “The League of Nations: 1,000 Delegates,” *Time*, May 16, 1927.

⁸⁴ Julius Klein, “Memorandum of Mr. Hoover’s luncheon conference with President Juan D. Peron, at the President’s Residence – Buenos Aires, Monday, June 10, 1946,” *Herbert Hoover Papers: Post Presidential Period: Subject File, compiled 1933-1946* (West Branch, IA: Herbert Hoover Library, 1946), 1.

⁸⁵ Klein, 2-3.

Latin American policies as an indication of personal “good-will.”⁸⁶ Perón refrained from mentioning “Braden or the personal campaign of the State Department.”⁸⁷

In conclusion, Perón offered to “issue a special decree announcing Argentina’s purpose to speed up exports in every possible way during the emergency.”⁸⁸ He did express, however, a “shortage of agricultural help” to which Hoover responded by suggesting that “some of the 300,000 displaced Poles, who would be thoroughly acceptable as farm hands and co-religionists of the Argentine” be considered. Perón promised to follow up on this “promptly” and requested that Hoover engage in personal correspondence with him to offer his “expert advice.”⁸⁹ Luncheon followed with Eva and “Minister of Commerce and Industry Lagomasinas”⁹⁰ joining them. Hoover described Eva as “an intelligent woman and very cordial. After lunch, she insisted upon putting on my coat and both of them insisted on accompanying me to the car.”⁹¹

In a memorandum dated June 23, 1946, Hoover summed up his assessment of Perón personally (or “examining the furniture of Perón’s mind”⁹²) and his thinking on relations with the U.S. in general. In reading the quote below, it is important to remember that this is written within two weeks of Perón’s election. It is written by a previous President of the United States, with all the experience, security clearances, and political savvy that goes with that position.

Peron is a naïve person, ignorant of economics and governmental housekeeping, an opportunist, ambitious, with a pleasing personality, a good intellect and a man of courage. I am convinced that he is anxious to pursue two real policies. First,

⁸⁶ Klein, 1.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Klein, 4.

⁸⁹ Klein, 5.

⁹⁰ Klein, 1. This name may have been incorrectly recorded by Dr. Klein as the *Clarín* article suggests a correction to Rolando Lagomarsino. Please see: Alberto Amato, “Peron y Hoover: los duelistas,” *Clarín* (Jan. 24, 1999), <http://www.clarin.com/suplementos/zona/1999/01/24/i-01001e.htm>.

⁹¹ Hoover, 7.

⁹² Hoover, 6/23/1946, 1.

collaboration with the United States; and second, a real program of social reforms, which are badly needed. He is an anti-Communist, anti-Socialist, he represents the military as against the social and landed aristocracy, the superficial elements of which are rotten. He is demagogic, but without any ideological philosophy, nor do his followers have much of any such philosophy. He is intensely nationalistic, but probably driven so, partly because of his demagogic personality but also partly from American intervention attitudes. He could with guidance be made into a constructive leader, as he is neither vindictive nor malicious, but very proud, being pure Spanish.⁹³

Hoover's assessment of United States involvement is no less striking. His opinion is clear and his recommendations straightforward:

There is only one course of action to pursue- and that is to end at once this interference and these American pressures. The seizure of their earmarked gold was not only illegal but unmoral. The blocking of their bank balances in the United States under the pretense that they may have German money is only subterfuge. The continuation of this blockade and the combination of the black list one year after the Germans are licked is only for pressure. The whole series of these actions, and others, were to force the opposition into power. In this we were rightly licked, and should properly realize it.⁹⁴

A little further on, Hoover offers his assessment of the Argentine seizure of American assets, compares it to the case in Mexico and offers this advice to the Truman administration: "If the United States reversed its policies, I am confident that Peron could be led away from his nationalization of foreign enterprises, as he has no ideological impulses....The Argentines will use the Russian bogie in their blind striking out against wrong on our part."⁹⁵

Hoover's words proved prophetic. "Even as Hoover's airplane was touching down on Argentine soil,"⁹⁶ Perón embarked on normalizing diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union by "formally receiving its ambassador."⁹⁷ This would have been no cause for concern a year or two before since Soviet Russia was allied with the U.S. and Britain during World War II. However,

⁹³ Hoover, 6/23/1946, 1.

⁹⁴ Hoover, 6/23/1946, 2.

⁹⁵ Hoover, 6/23/1946, 3.

⁹⁶ Amato, n.p.

⁹⁷ Whitaker, 217.

the Cold War began almost as soon as the other wrapped up. As the famine Hoover was charged to address ravaged the world, producing nations such as Argentina were pressured to choose sides. In a move reminiscent of Argentina's controversial 'neutrality' during the war, Perón began his administration by attempting to balance himself and Argentina between the West and the East.

Perón sought to find a "formula of getting along with the United States" at the same time as retaining the "prestige obtained as the champion of anti-Yankeeism" during his electoral process.⁹⁸ To accomplish this, he reverted to the "old technique of the Conservative governments" which sought to "contain Washington's pressure" by "gaining support from extrahemispheric countries." For Perón, this was not limited to traditional European partners such as Britain or Spain. Due to Cold War divisions of world power, Perón was able to up the ante by courting "the new Communist bloc."⁹⁹

The following statement, included in Perón's inaugural address, sums up his "very simple philosophy" and set the guidelines for Argentina's international relations: "Argentina respects all other countries, but this respect must be reciprocal. No one, great or small, can be permitted to intervene, openly or covertly, in matters that affect our sovereignty."¹⁰⁰ He pointed out that Argentina's critics had misrepresented certain facts and he was acting to demonstrate to the world that "no nation has gone further than we have in complying with international obligations."¹⁰¹ Thus, the Third Position was inaugurated along with Perón. Although balance and neutrality also been a cornerstone of Argentine World War II policy, Perón was determined

⁹⁸ Paz and Ferrari, 137.

⁹⁹ Whitaker, 217.

¹⁰⁰ Juan Domingo Peron, Inaugural Address, June 4, 1946, quoted in Whitaker, 217.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

to address what was considered to be the “core problem facing Argentina in the postwar period, namely, the problem of obtaining a place in the world commensurate with her capabilities and aspirations.”¹⁰²

That Argentina had enormous capabilities and high aspirations has been amply demonstrated elsewhere.¹⁰³ What remained unknown was how Perón would enact his simple philosophy of a Third Position. Also uncertain was how his actions and words would be interpreted and reacted to by world powers. President Hoover’s presence in Buenos Aires at the unveiling of Perón’s Third Position and his astute reading of Perón’s intentions, personality, and the political ramifications have gone virtually unnoticed by historians. And yet, Hoover’s impact can be concretely traced on at least one front.

Upon his return to the United States, Hoover met with Truman in person to give a preliminary report on June 20, 1946. Although Truman “expressed great satisfaction with the results of the mission,”¹⁰⁴ he did not appear well informed about the recent State Department activities in Argentina nor their negative impact on U.S. relations with South America in general. “He said it was all new to him and that he would look into it at once.”¹⁰⁵ Hoover reported that he anticipated enough resources to avoid mass starvation, with the possible exception of China. However, he warned that “the American people would have to keep their noses to the grindstone certainly until the end of July.”¹⁰⁶

¹⁰² Whitaker, 209-210.

¹⁰³ Barager, Blanksten, Crawley, Falcoff, Ferns, Pendle, Rock, and Skidmore.

¹⁰⁴ Herbert Hoover, “Notes of Meeting between Herbert Hoover and Harry S. Truman, June 29, 1946, on the subject of his visit to South America and the Argentine situation,” *Hoover & Truman: a presidential friendship*, Truman Library, <http://www.trumanlibrary.org/hover/internaltemplate.php?tldate=1946-06-20>.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

Although it is not stated as such, there appears to be an addendum to this note. This appearance is created by a date being referred to that falls after the original note was written. It is in this addendum we see the concrete effect of Hoover's impact on Truman as well as the U.S. relationship with Argentina: "On June 23rd, as the result of my urging, Truman's order was issued and the blocks on gold and bank deposits removed and the blacklist cancelled."¹⁰⁷ As mentioned above, these sanctions were imposed by the U.S. State Department as part of Ambassador Braden's attempt to skew the Argentine election against Perón. It is a curious anomaly that Hoover and the June 1946 events involving him were not referenced by the eminent historians of Perón, Argentina, or their relations with the United States.

However, one reference to Hoover's visit to Buenos Aires in June of 1946 did surface in the course of this research.¹⁰⁸ It comes from the Spanish language Buenos Aires publication, *Clarín*, and attempted to explain the absence of this information in scholarly reviews. In an article published on January 29, 1999, author Alberto Amato cites the recent "declassification"¹⁰⁹ of the Hoover Memoranda as the precipitating reason for his article. As mentioned above, this is a misperception of the status of these documents. They have been publically available in the Herbert Hoover Presidential Library for over forty years as they are properly considered "personal papers" rather than "official government records and were therefore not subject to legal restrictions."¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ This article was accessed online. The articles in the Hoover Institute Archives cited above were not known to this researcher and not available for this project.

¹⁰⁹ Alberto Amato, "Perón y Hoover: los duelistas," *Clarín*, Jan. 24, 1999, <http://www.clarin.com/suplementos/zona/1999/01/24/i-01001e.htm>. Translated for the author by Stephen Yant, 5/19/2009.

¹¹⁰ Spencer Howard, email message to author, May 19, 2009.

Alberto Amato, author of the *Clarín* article, reviewed the Hoover documents discussed above. He included discussion of Peron's "Third Position," and its intentions. Perón is presented as not wishing to be seen as eager to please the United States, especially due to the anti-imperialist nature of his recent presidential campaign. Amato conveys a similar impression to the one found in both Hoover's and Klein's memoranda that Perón would provide the requested aid, but on his own terms. Perón's terms included addressing the frozen assets held in the United States, the easing of restrictions on importing desperately needed equipment, and the facilitation of rubber imports from Argentina's neighbors.¹¹¹

Representing the only Argentine opinion available, Amato expressed doubt that Hoover's visit had the affect desired by Argentina. Amato indicates there was an expectation that Argentina would benefit from the Marshall Plan which became active as the Economic Cooperation Act of 1948.¹¹² However,

Peron's government through the AIPT (Argentine Institute for the Promotion of Trade) was buying the harvests of Argentine farmers at a very low price with the intent to sell them at a much higher price than had been set on the international market. The country had placed high hopes on the Marshall Plan to provide markets for this large profit, but Argentina was not included in the seller nations that provided the food for a hungry Europe. Thus the Third Position received its first blow.¹¹³

The coupling of Hoover's visit to procure immediate food supplies in June of 1946 with the intricacies of the Marshall Plan eighteen months later seems to place unreasonable expectations on Hoover's ability to direct United States policy as a former president of the opposition party. The discrepancy between the positive nature of the relationship forged by Hoover and Peron and the subsequent actions of the United States State Department might better

¹¹¹ Amato, n.p.

¹¹² "The Marshall Plan," Public Law 472, http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/featured_documents/marshall_plan/, (accessed May 24, 2009).

¹¹³ Amato, n.p.

be explained by the legacy of Braden. When Braden left Argentina in September of 1945, he became the Assistant Secretary of State for Latin America.¹¹⁴ Peron's Argentina was unlikely to receive favors with Braden's influence toward "club-footed intervention"¹¹⁵ at upper levels. By 1948 when the Marshall Plan began,

Braden was acting as a paid lobbyist for the United Fruit Company with vast interests in Central America. When the company's interests were threatened in Guatemala by President Jacobo Arbenz Guzmán, Braden helped to conceive and execute the 1954 coup d'état that overthrew him.¹¹⁶

Braden, "a big, jolly, working democrat whose object was to smash the Western Hemisphere's dictatorial bric-a-brac"¹¹⁷ undoubtedly left his mark on the State Department.

Conclusions

The Hoover Memoranda are fascinating. They offer fresh insight into the relationship between Argentina and the United States during the Braden years and at the inception of Perón's presidency. Much new information is offered in the Hoover Memoranda which adds depth and understanding to the existing body of Perón data. The opinion of a former United States President, sent on a mission of charitable procurement by an incumbent President, cannot fail to illuminate a variety of aspects of Perón, Argentina and its relations to other world powers.

Hoover's assessment of Perón is unique. Nowhere else can one find a detailed, insightful, and impartial examination of the "furniture in Peron's mind."¹¹⁸ In his description of

¹¹⁴ Democracy's Bull, 1.

¹¹⁵ "But, Sister, That's What We've Been Telling You!" *Saturday Evening Post* (April 27, 1946).

¹¹⁶ "A US diplomat and lobbyist who help carve recent Latinamerican history," *MercoPress* (April 30, 2009), <http://en.mercopress.com/2009/04/30/a-us-diplomat-and-lobbyist-who-helped-carve-recent-latinamerican-history>.

¹¹⁷ Democracy's Bull, 1.

Evita, Hoover does not go to either extreme of current opinion of her (either a brazen hussy or a saint) but instead presents her as warm, gracious, and very appropriate. Again, coming from a former President of the United States, this means a great deal as he had a wealth of experience by which to measure the qualities of both the Peróns and status of Argentine-United States relations. On the topic of Braden's meddling policy, Hoover's intuition and assessment has been borne out by many that of many scholars over the last fifty years of examining U.S.-Argentine relations. Hoover also points to continued resistance in the State Department in dealing with Perón, which in turn, illuminates subsequent behavior by all parties.

It is difficult to determine exactly why Hoover's 1946 visit to Argentina has not been included in this broad body of scholarly works. It is possible that the political climate in the United States relegated Hoover's work to insignificance. This approach would explain the lack of interest by the American press. Alternatively, all the scholars cited in this project may have deemed Hoover's contribution to the history and politics of Perón, Argentina, and their relations with the United States as insignificant. However, a more practical issue may underlie the omission of this inherently fascinating material. The ease with which information can be accessed in this day of internet searches could not be matched without hours of intensive searching in previously scholarly epochs. In addition, in the absence of American press coverage of Hoover's trip, it is a stretch of the imagination to look in the Herbert Hoover Presidential Library for information regarding Perón and Argentina in 1946 some thirteen years after Hoover's presidency.

¹¹⁸ Hoover, 6/23/1946, 1.

Notwithstanding the lack of scholarly attention and the ‘beneath the surface’ nature of Hoover’s 1946 visit to Argentina, Hoover’s presence did have a bearing on subsequent events. As Braden left Argentina and Messersmith arrived, it was perceived that a “completely new policy toward the Argentine regime” was in place.¹¹⁹ That very well may have been the intention of the United States State Department. However, Hoover described lingering resentment and mistrust in Perón’s perception of United States official intentions and Messersmith in particular.¹²⁰ On the other hand, Hoover was said to have made a “fine impression”¹²¹ on Perón. At their June 10 luncheon meeting, Perón agreed to “issue the necessary decrees (regulations in American terms) at once.”¹²² This agreement was not accomplished by either ambassador.

A subsequent entry in Hoover’s memoranda, dated June 23, 1946, indicates the real impact of his mission and its historical importance.

On my return to Washington I sent out this whole situations to President Truman and urged him to release the gold and bank deposits at once and to cancel the black list. I stated that if this were done quickly, Peron would, I felt, respond to the gesture. Truman had not known the whole truth of our goings on in maintaining the pressures thirteen months after the war was over. When he confirmed my statement from the State Department (and had me repeat my statements to them), my recommendations were put into action within 48 hours. I sent a telegram to Peron through Dodero, saying that this was a gesture of personal good will from Truman and I hoped that he Peron might respond. Peron sent me a cordial reply.¹²³

In light of having immediate access to President Truman and an immediate enacting of his recommendations, it is difficult to argue that Hoover’s impact of the relationship between the United States and Argentina was insignificant. It was simply beneath the surface.

¹¹⁹ Alexander, 207.

¹²⁰ Hoover, 4.

¹²¹ Hoover, 5.

¹²² Hoover, 6.

¹²³ Hoover, 6/23/1946, 4.

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