

KEYNOTE ADDRESS OF THE 37TH ANNUAL CONFERENCE OF THE ASSOCIATION OF GLOBAL SOUTH STUDIES

RELATIONS BETWEEN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA AND THE ARGENTINE REPUBLIC

EDUARDO LAZZARI

TRANSLATED BY RYAN ALEXANDER, EDITOR

The relationship between our two countries has spanned nearly a quarter of a millennium and seen periods of both closeness and distance. Nevertheless, during this time, both nations have maintained a commitment to Pan-Americanism. From their origins, both expanded into massive countries, full of open spaces that have been filled by immigrants from all over the world seeking a new home.

It is supremely interesting to compare the distinct moments of our two nations' histories within the context of the modern world. It is also important to note that when we talk about the Argentina of today, we are referring to a geography first occupied by the Viceroyalty of Río de la Plata, then the United Provinces of South America, then the Argentine Confederation, and finally the Argentine Republic.

Seventeen seventy-six was the year of independence for the United States, achieved by a legal declaration followed by a war against the British Empire.

Eduardo Lazzari is president of the Junta de Estudios Históricos del Buen Ayre. His office can be reached at info@eduardolazzari.com.ar.

© 2021 Association of Global South Studies, Inc. All rights reserved. *Journal of Global South Studies* Vol. 37, No. 2, 2020, pp. 351-356. ISSN 2476-1397.

During this time, in Argentina, the Viceroyalty of Río de la Plata was created as the last major reform of the Spanish Empire in the Americas. In the process, the port of Buenos Aires was established as the capital city, having been selected for strategic reasons (primarily to stop the advancement of the Portuguese Empire and to prevent an attack by the British Empire, which eventually occurred in 1806) over more important cities at the time, including Chuquisaca, Salta, and Córdoba.

Seventeen eight-nine was the year of the Constitution of the United States, converting the country into the most modern republican democracy in the world. Today, it is also the longest-lasting democracy in the world. The French Revolution began at the same time and, while it culminated in political failure twenty-five years later, it nonetheless would have a formidable ideological influence on the process of dissolution within the Spanish Empire in the 1810s.

Eighteen ten was the year of the revolutions of the *juntas* in all of Spanish America, which imitated the model of the Iberian peninsula during the French invasion at the hands of Napoleon Bonaparte, who had temporarily deposed the monarchy of the Bourbons. For Argentina, this was an opportunity not to be wasted. Indeed, it spurred the only process of independence to achieve immediate sovereignty, and the territory that became independent would grow to become the largest Spanish-speaking country in the world to this day.² At no point did it return to being under the control of the Spanish Empire, a unique case in Latin America.

Eighteen sixteen marked the beginning of the ideological and institutional influence of the United States over Argentina. The declaration of national independence, made on behalf of all South Americans, took as its inspiration the US declaration. “We the People of the United States . . .” was converted into “We the Representatives of the People of the United Provinces . . .” Neither the names of the countries, nor the wording of these introductions, were coincidental. And later that year, the congress of Tucumán met in the northern Argentine city, where it resolved to send its first-ever diplomatic delegate, Martín Thompson, to Washington.

Eighteen twenty-two marked a high point in the relations between Argentina and the United States, as US President James Monroe recognized the government of our country and sent the first US ambassador to Buenos Aires. The end of the war for South American independence in 1824 coincided with independent Argentina’s first international war, fought in 1825 against the Empire

of Brazil, which resulted in the imposition of Bernardino Rivadavia as the first president of Argentina.

Argentina endured a difficult internal process of civil war from 1828 to 1861 in order to establish a political system. The tensions between the Unitarios (who aspired to dissolve the provincial states into one national entity) and the Federales (inspired by the US model) reached varying degrees of intensity, but ultimately the idea of one nation and one state prevailed. This could only be achieved once the federal Constitution—which is still in force today, with only four major reforms over more than a century and a half—was ratified.

Eighteen fifty-three, the year the Constitution was signed, is thus the third founding date for Argentina. The document's first section was inspired by the French tradition of human rights, which are non-existent in the US Constitution. The second section, which stipulated the forms of government, including three branches of government, term limits, and electoral representation, was taken directly from the great US Constitution. From this moment, Argentina underwent an extraordinary process of social and economic progress that put it on the same road as the United States and converted the country into a modern nation, one that was integrated into the world and comparable from an institutional perspective to the great democracy of the north.

The year 1889, when the Pan American Congress of Private Law met in Montevideo, Uruguay, was an important moment for the Pan-American movement, as it was the first attempt to create a permanent international organization in the Americas. The following year, the first Pan-American Conference met in Washington, DC, where Roque Sáenz Peña and Manuel Quintana, sent by President Miguel Juárez Celman, represented Argentina. At this meeting the International Office of the American Republics, which eventually evolved into the Organization of American States, was founded.

The end of the nineteenth century marked a time of economic, social, and political progress for both nations, as each established itself as a subcontinental power, although the United States demonstrated some ambivalence about whether it would pursue an isolationist or imperial path. Argentina, on the other hand, expressed no extra-regional ambitions. Both nations expressed their spirit in distinct, even antagonistic, slogans: For the United States: "America for the Americans." For Argentina: "América for Humanity."

The twentieth century saw the progress of transportation and communication technology, including the telegraph, telephone, radio, and television. It was

also the century of presidential summits. The first meeting between the chief executives of our two countries was in 1913, when former president Theodore Roosevelt visited Argentina, where he was hosted by former president Julio Argentino Roca and officially welcomed by President Roque Sáenz Peña.

The First World War, which began as a conflict entirely within Europe, eventually drew in the United States and Argentina. But in 1917, the United States' and Argentina's roads diverged as the northern power decided to accompany the allies, Great Britain and France, into war. While those countries were economic and political allies of Argentina as well, circumstances allowed the nation to avoid war. It is worth noting that while Argentina did not contribute to the American mission during the war, Argentina in 1913 had ordered from the United States the construction of two enormous battleships, which were delivered in 1915, as a demonstration of good faith between the two countries.

In 1928, Herbert Hoover, just before assuming the office of President of the United States, arrived in Buenos Aires to meet with President Hipólito Yrigoyen. Ten years earlier, Yrigoyen had honored the flag of the Dominican Republic, when that country had been invaded by the United States, in a clear demonstration of the ideological and diplomatic distance in continental affairs between the American nations. In addition, Yrigoyen had established conditions in 1919 for the entry of Argentina into the League of Nations. Those conditions were not accepted by the winners of the war, which had concluded the prior year, indicating that Argentina would remain outside that organization until the following decade.

The decade of the 1930s saw Argentina dodge the great capitalist crisis that originated in the United States. Experimentation with the ideas of John Maynard Keynes in Argentina during the presidency of Agustín Pedro Justo motivated President Franklin Delano Roosevelt to come to Argentina in 1936, where he was received with all honors. This decade saw the best relations between our two countries in history.

One curious anecdote is that President Roosevelt's speech to the Argentine Congress was the first voice transmission by a president over short-wave radio. At the start of his speech, Roosevelt was interrupted by someone shouting, "Down with Yankee imperialism!" The person yelling was the Trotskyite son of the Argentine president, who was a staunch conservative.

In the late 1930s and early 1940s, the illness of Argentine President Roberto M. Ortiz, who suffered a diabetic coma that left him blind, mobilized US diplomacy.

Ortíz was considered a friend of the Allies, and had held regular talks with President Roosevelt. When Ortíz became ill, Roosevelt sent two of his personal physicians to Buenos Aires. While they initially proposed sending him to New York, the doctors ultimately deemed it a useless measure.

The Second World War marked a sharp split between the two nations. Argentina broke with the continental alliance established at the Río de Janeiro conference, declaring neutrality instead of war. Meanwhile, the United States broke off relations with Germany, Italy, and Japan. This stance initiated a shift in regional leadership from Argentina to Brazil and created an enormous gulf in the relations between the United States and Argentina, one felt equally by both countries.

The advent of the government of Col. Juan Domingo Perón signified a consolidation of the conflict with the United States, and Perón's active diplomacy within the South American continent became a source of constant friction between the two countries. With the Argentine economy in crisis by 1950, Perón sought to draw Argentina and the United States closer once again.³ This reconciliation was symbolized by the visit of Milton Eisenhower, the brother of President Dwight Eisenhower, toward the end of Perón's term.

The presidency of Arturo Frondizi marked the recuperation of trust between the two countries. Frondizi met with two US presidents, Dwight Eisenhower and John F. Kennedy (the latter twice), and with Eisenhower's vice president, Richard Nixon. In 1961, the Kennedy administration established the Alliance for Progress, a development program aimed at Latin America.

From the mid-1960s to 1982, political turbulence in Argentina put distance between the two countries, something that reached its height with the violations of human rights during the military dictatorship, which began in 1976. Tensions were increased by the Malvinas/Falklands War, which Argentina lost to Great Britain, a natural and historical ally of the United States. The US government had opposed the Argentine takeover of the islands, but ultimately sided with Great Britain once the invasion had taken place. When the United States erected a trade embargo against the Soviet Union in response to its invasion of Afghanistan in 1980, Argentina continued relations with the Soviets, which further strained Argentine-US relations.⁴

The recovery of republican institutions in Argentina was accompanied by a permanent resumption of positive economic relations with the United States. The series of summits between presidents Ronald Reagan and Raúl Alfonsín,

George H. W. Bush and Carlos Menem, Bill Clinton and Carlos Menem, and George W. Bush and Fernando de la Rúa marked a continuity that was interrupted by the diplomatic course of the government of Néstor Kirchner, which began with amicable relations with the George W. Bush administration but quickly deteriorated on account of Argentina's alignment with Venezuela's Hugo Chávez.

The arrival of President Mauricio Macri marked a new strengthening of the relations between the two countries, in spite of ongoing economic challenges.

History shows us that the United States of America and Argentina are called to realize the same ideals of liberty and fraternity proposed by the founding fathers of both nations. As the Argentine president Roque Sáenz said, "Everything joins us, nothing separates us."

NOTES

1. Editor's note: Argentina is, in geographic terms, the largest Spanish-speaking country in the world. In terms of population, it ranks fourth, behind Mexico, Colombia, and Spain.
2. Editor's note: For the three decades after World War II, Argentina pursued what has been called a developmentalist economic approach characterized by state-supported industrialization, resource nationalization, and wage increases. This economic model produced a mix of positive and negative results, but was prone to periodic balance-of-payments and debt crises.
3. Editor's note: It should be noted that in spite of concerns over human rights violations, and in spite of differences over the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the US government lent financial, material, and logistical support to the Argentine military dictatorship throughout its existence from 1976 to 1983.