

Nelson A. Rockefeller and the normalization of Argentina-U.S. diplomatic relations in 1945

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Summary

Argentina and the United States had basically no diplomatic relations towards the end of World War II. When Franklin D. Roosevelt appointed Nelson A. Rockefeller (NAR) to the State Department to plan the U.S. policy toward Latin America, he disturbed the normalization of bilateral relations. After sending a mission to negotiate with the government of Farrell and Perón, NAR pushed for the reincorporation of Argentina into the Inter-American system at the Chapultepec Conference. Soon after, he promoted the normalization of American-Argentine diplomatic relations and even the acceptance of Argentina at the San Francisco Conference. My research at the Rockefeller Archive Center (RAC) in October and November 2010, allowed me to discover unpublished documents which are very important in understanding the role of NAR in these negotiations, and also to discover his motivations, which differed from those of other senior officials at the Department of State.

Introduction

The objective of my research is to analyze the relationship between Argentina and the United States within the inter-American system. The context of the Pan-American Conferences is a vantage point to study the way in which the United States tried to prevail as a hegemonic

power in the region, by limiting the interference of other large economic and political blocs, such as Europe. Argentina's performance in the Conferences constituted a relevant aspect of its foreign policy and its relation with the U.S.

This research is a continuation of my dissertation project in history at the University of Buenos Aires. I studied the complex relation between both countries within the framework of the inter-American system from 1889 up to 1954. My current research intends to continue within this framework, analyzing the relationship between Argentina and the United States in the Pan-American Conferences during a key stage of the Cold War, which included the Cuban Revolution (1959) and the conflict of the Dominican Republic (1965), two central events that shaped the fate of the Organization of American States (OAS). I examine how the bilateral tensions of the previous years remained in place, but also how a period of relative understanding occurred during Onganía's presidency (1966-1970). This military president introduced the National Security Doctrine in Argentina, which to a certain degree, served as ideological sustenance for the *coup d'etat* against the government of Illia (1963-1966).

By extending understanding of the bilateral relationship in this 1955 through 1970 period, through an analysis of unpublished documentation, which in the case of the Archives of the Department of State, was released in 2008, I aim to shed light upon a fundamental aspect of Argentine foreign policy during these years. This period moves from the overthrow of the Peronism to the government of Onganía, the latter a moment of bilateral approach which prefaced new tensions, such as those related to the "opening towards the East" of Lanusse, first, and to the return of Peronism to the state, towards 1973.

Visiting the RAC was crucial to deepening my knowledge about this subject. I was able to access parts of its collections that are not published yet or available on-line. NAR played a

very privileged role in establishing American's foreign policy and, in particular, the relationship with Argentina. He negotiated with Perón during World War II in order to reintroduce Argentina into the Inter-American System. The possibility of having access to the documents he had collected, not yet systematized or studied in an integral way, helped me to understand the logic behind the positions of the Argentine and American delegations in the different conferences and points of debate in the Pan-American Union and the Organization of American States.

Having access to the RAC's collections allowed me to examine the performance of the Argentine and American delegations at the inter-American system (1940-1970). These collections contain not only abundant official documents, but also extensive journalistic material released by different embassies and most importantly, NAR's personal papers. In this report I am focusing on the year 1945, when, at the Department of State, he spearheaded U.S.–Latin American foreign policy. NAR had a long relationship with Argentina and the year 1945 was, in this respect, a major starting point.

During my three weeks at the RAC (October-November 2010), I had the chance to read and copy documents selected from the following groups: **Argentina File Report, Nelson Rockefeller Papers** (RG 15: NAR Gubernatorial; RG 4: NAR Personal; Series O, Subseries 8: Washington, D.C. Files, Presidential Mission to Latin America; Series O, Subseries 2: Washington, D.C. Files, Department of State); **NAR PAPERS – Files on Latin America and Inter-American organization** (RG 4, Series Washington, DC, Files: Subseries 1: Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs; Subseries 2: Assistant Secretary of State for American Republic Affairs; Subseries 3: Inter-American Development Commission and Corporation, 1943-1947; Subseries 7: Special Assistant to the President for Foreign Affairs, 1954-1955); and **RG 4, PROJECTS SERIES.**

NAR and Argentina during the Second World War

During World War II, NAR's position was crucial to restoring bilateral relations between the United States and Argentina, after the cooling that occurred in January 1942, when Argentina's government refused to follow the Department of State's recommendation to break relations with the Axis. By early 1943, the United States increased the pressure on the Argentine conservative government to force it to abandon its neutrality, subsequent to being isolated after Chile broke diplomatic relations with the Axis.

After the coup of June 4, 1943, it was the first time the U.S. Department of State had expectations about improving bilateral relations, mainly based on statements made by President Ramírez and Chancellor Segundo R. Storni, who spoke in favor of returning to continental solidarity and respecting existing agreements. Cordell Hull instructed his ambassador in Buenos Aires, Norman Armour, to express to the new Argentine government the steps that should be taken to restore bilateral relations, including the cessation of relations with the Axis. In the meantime, the "affair Storni" occurred, in which Hull rebuffed Storni's intention of improving relations with the U.S., and the Argentine Ministry was forced to resign because of the opposition of the nationalists. In the following months, Ramirez was under increased pressure, and he finally ordered the severance of diplomatic relations with the Axis, although this meant the internal opposition of most of his nationalist and neutralist supporters. Ramirez finally had to leave the government. Farrell took over the presidency and the White House, thinking that the severance of diplomatic relations wasn't enough, did not hesitate to condemn the Farrell government even more harshly than its predecessor. A few months later, Hull withdrew his ambassador in Buenos Aires, and applied pressure on both Britain and Latin American countries to follow in his footsteps. U.S. pressure increased Argentina's diplomatic isolation.

However, in November 1944, a significant change occurred at the Department of State with Hull's resignation and his replacement by Edward Stettinius Jr.¹, accompanied by NAR as Assistant Secretary of State for American Republics. These two officials tried to find an approach to the Argentine military government. While world leaders were discussing how to shape the postwar world, the U.S. wanted to show the alignment of every American country, and that is why they needed to negotiate the reinstatement of Argentina in the Inter-American system, a situation which, as we shall see, was achieved with the treatment of the "Argentine case," at the Chapultepec Conference. That process led Farrell, in March 1945, to declare war on the Axis and to begin the process of normalization of bilateral diplomatic, political and economic relations with the United States.

The substantive debate on the tense relationship between Argentina and the U.S. in this period, that attracted much attention in the literature, centers around what were the reasons of the Department of State's policy towards Argentina. In fact, during this period, there was no single U.S. policy toward the *Casa Rosada* but instead adopted different trends at different times, and this would continue into the early years of the Peronist government. One of them, in which we can find Hull, Vice President Wallace and Treasury Secretary Henry Morgenthau, defended the agricultural interests that had historically clashed with Argentina, given the competitive nature of both economies. In opposition to this sector were Under Secretary Sumner Welles, NAR and other officials of the Division of American Republics, such as Laurence Duggan and Philip Bonsal, who exhibited a greater understanding with Buenos Aires, according to the interests of the industrial, financial and oil U.S. companies operating in and with Argentina.² There were also ideological positions, personal interests and power struggles within the Department of State, but they were not, in my opinion, influential.

Hull's line was imposed while he headed the Department of State until the end of 1944, although there were "cracks" in its policy toward Argentina, like the one given at the Foreign Ministers meeting in Rio de Janeiro (January, 1942), when Welles was able to impose an alternative strategy to that taken by the Secretary of State. Since December 1944, when Hull was replaced by Stettinius, the sectors that had been struggling to have a closer relationship to the southern country gained prominence, pressured also by businessmen eager to expand their investments and trade relations with Argentina, and also by the U.S. Army, which was interested in supplying the Argentine military and achieving greater influence over them. This line, which allowed for the recognition of the Farrell government in 1945, also allowed Argentina's reentry into the inter-American system and, a few months later, the invitation to the San Francisco Conference.³

As we noted before, in late 1944 there was a change in the bilateral relationship, when Hull resigned on November 27 –he was already quite ill-, and was replaced by the Under Secretary Edward Stettinius Jr., who appointed NAR at the top post for Latin American Affairs, with the objective of seeking a rapprochement with the military government led by Farrell.⁴

The change in leadership at the Department of State, in addition to the discomfort engendered in many Latin American countries to what was considered excessive pressure on the Argentine government -which did not have relations with the Axis since January 1944-, and discomfort of the British Foreign Office (because of the tension between U.S. and Great Britain to strengthen economic ties with Argentina), pressed in favor of a new policy toward the *Casa Rosada*. The U.S. need to demonstrate its absolute hegemony in the continent also had an impact, in the period before the Yalta Conference, in which Roosevelt, along with Stalin and Churchill, discussed which countries would be admitted to the United Nations. Within the United

States, the sectors who claimed the need for the normalization of US-Argentina diplomatic relations and Argentina's re-entry into the Inter-American system began to outweigh opposing interests, for both strategic reasons and for investments by businessmen like Rockefeller himself, who promoted U.S. investment in the valuable southern market. The knowledge that Hull's "hard line" against Argentina was inadequate and ineffective would become increasingly dominant among those who shaped U.S. foreign policy. To "replace" Britain and unify a continent under U.S. domination, they argued, required a rapprochement with Argentina, putting an end to the positioning of this country as a "bad neighbor."

Before the start of the Chapultepec Conference, the Department of State, now led by Stettinius, sent a mission to negotiate with Farrell's government. Basically, the U.S. proposal was that, if the *Casa Rosada* agreed to sign what was resolved in the Mexico City Conference, Washington would put an end to the pressures that were exerted in the past three years. The new Secretary of State feared that the growing unease in Latin America due to the Argentine situation might crack the continental unanimity so necessary to the United States at the imminent San Francisco Conference, where the great powers would negotiate major points of the future United Nations Organization. In addition, as we noted before, in the Department of State, the representatives of the industrial and financial world who wanted to do business with Argentina were growing more influential.

In January 1945, the influential Argentineans Alejandro Shaw and Carlos Tornquist had suggested that NAR send a confidential mission to Buenos Aires to negotiate a settlement with Farrell and Perón. Earlier, after taking his new post, NAR received a memo from Bob Wells, sent from Buenos Aires on December 21, 1944, which presented a detailed analysis of how Americans could carry out a negotiation to solve the Argentine-American conflict.⁵ In that letter,

and in another telegram sent the following day, Wells explained to NAR that the U.S. needed to come to an agreement with Argentina, pushing that country to declare war on the Axis and to enter again into the inter-American system.

Based on these reports, NAR told Roosevelt what Buenos Aires should do in order to allow Washington to consult with other American countries to recognize the Argentine government: to declare war on the Axis; to establish an interim government, according to the provisions of the Constitution; to dissolve all the pro-Axis organizations and its interests in companies blacklisted; to lift the state of emergency; to restore the Constitution and to agree to the exchange of information about Axis activities in Argentina. He also argued that if Argentina followed this course of action, the U.S. policy towards that country should change significantly by selling the supplies needed for the war effort that would result from its entry into the war and removing other sanctions previously applied.

On January 27, 1945, the U.S. finally sent a secret mission to Buenos Aires, led by Rafael de Oreamuno, a diplomat from Costa Rica. He met with Vice President Perón to agree on the next steps with the aim of bringing Argentina into the Inter-American system and, subsequently, into the United Nations conference. Oreamuno presented an extensive report on his mission, on February 18, which detailed his conversations with Perón and the decision he had taken in the sense of declaring war on the Axis, beyond internal opposition, but also his refusal to hand over power to the Supreme Court, which was suggested by Oreamuno. According to Oreamuno, Perón said that Argentina was ready and willing to do whatever was required, but that there was no reason for the government or the country to be humiliated. Perón, then, was ready as early as January to declare war on the Axis and redirect the country to the inter-American system, though by no means to transfer power to the Supreme Court. Perón told Oreamuno that leaving power to

the Supreme Court, “would be unfaithful to the nation and would result in a complete loss of the work done since the revolution. In any case, the Army would veto it.”⁶ Oreamuno's report analyzed the growing power of Perón and predicted that, should elections be called, he would surely be elected as constitutional president given the broad support he had.

In early March, steps were taken by the *Casa Rosada* to comply with the agreements established with other American countries. On March 12, there was a meeting between the Argentine representative in Washington, García Arias, and NAR, and Avra Warren to decide how to materialize the following steps.⁷

NAR also played a crucial role in Argentina's invitation to the inaugural meeting of the United Nations. The San Francisco Conference was carried out between April 25 and June 26, 1945, the day it was unanimously adopted the Charter of the United Nations Organization. Argentina's participation was a subject of intense debate between Washington and Moscow.

Once Argentina declared war on the Axis and signed the Chapultepec Act, the U.S. sent a high-level diplomatic mission to Buenos Aires, led by Avra Warren, head of the Latin American Section of the Department of State and a close associate of NAR.⁸ Warren had a long interview with Vice President Perón. The powerful Argentina politician told him the day of his departure: “We are now convinced that the men who come to us from the United States are of two different types: those who are our friends and win our hearts and those who are not our friends. The Warren Mission has shown itself to belong to the first type.”⁹ While there are no known specific aspects of the agreement with him, one of the objectives of the mission was to convince the *Casa Rosada* to begin talks to establish diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union, bearing in mind that Stalin's government would surely try to hinder the entry of Argentina to the United Nations.

For certain sectors of the Department of State, including NAR, it was more important to secure Argentina's entry, which after all was a Latin American country that the United States sought to list in the column of "their" Western Hemisphere, than the diplomatic, political and ideological differences that had separated both countries in the two previous years. The bipolar world of the Cold War was beginning to be established, so that "spheres of influence" were essential. Perón personally said goodbye to the members of the Warren delegation at the airport, which was quite unusual. Months later, he complained that the new changes in the orientation of the Department of State, with the departure of Stettinius and NAR, would have prevented implementing what had been settled there. Leaving Buenos Aires, Warren went directly to San Francisco on April 23, to convey to the American delegation the results of his mission in Buenos Aires.¹⁰

The U.S. delegation's conciliatory attitude towards Argentina, especially that of NAR, generated much criticism and Stettinius and NAR had to resign shortly after the San Francisco Conference, transforming this into a "Pyrrhic" victory.¹¹ The reasons presented by those who struggled to invite Argentina had to do with avoiding a possible boycott of Latin American nations if Argentina was not accepted, which would have implied a denial of them to vote on the incorporation of Belarus and Ukraine, which could have led the Soviet Union not to meet their commitments in Eastern Europe and expand its dominance in Poland and the Balkans, advancing U.S.-Soviet tension which finally increased between 1946 and 1947.

While in San Francisco, Truman supported NAR's position – which had the support of several senators, including Arthur S. Vanderberg, – after the conference sectors opposed to the settlement with Argentina became dominant again at the Department of State. These people, including Leo Pasvolsky, Dean Acheson and Archibald MacLeish, were known as the

“internationalists.”¹² For NAR and those who supported the agreement with Argentina, the main enemy was no longer the Axis, but the Soviet Union. The “internationalists,” however, argued that it would be possible to maintain the agreements between the Big Three.

In conclusion, NAR’s appointment to the Department of State in December 1944 was crucial to achieve an approach to Argentina and the normalization of bilateral ties. The relentless action of the young NAR was able to convince President Roosevelt of the need for understanding with Farrell and Perón, and to overcome the resistance within the Department of State, at least until the San Francisco Conference.

To deepen the knowledge of this period, and confirm hypotheses developed in the research for my Ph.D. dissertation, I consulted, among others, the following documents:

- **RG 4, RG: III 4 0, Box 2, Folder 14:** Summary report of Mission to Argentina (04/26/1945), by Avra Warren; Memorandum by Harry Frantz to NAR about Argentina’s situation before the San Francisco Conference, 06/18/1945; “Argentine attitudes toward U.S. – Argentine relations, Feb.-June, 1945, 07/07/1945; Recommendations for a speech by NAR on situation in Argentina 5 months before Chapultepec. Braden and Argentina. Frantz Memorandum on U.S. policy toward Argentina. Draft of political situation in Argentina in 1945.

- **RG 4, RG: III 4 0, Box 2, Folder 15:** Long text in response to the Blue Book, from the Argentine government (03/29/1946). Letter from the President of the Motion Picture Association, congratulating NAR for its policy toward Argentina, 06/11/1946, very clear about the debate between Bob Wells and NAR on situation in Argentina. NAR, letter to Welles 08/16/1944.

- **Family RG 4 (NAR). O Series, Subseries 2 (Assistant Secretary of State for American Republics), Box 19, F 136:** Important Documents by NAR, December 1944 and January 1945 on what to do with Argentina. NAR important letter to Stettinius, 12/27/1944: “Suggested Policy Regarding Argentina.” Letter from María Rosa Oliver: Debates between Tornquist and Oliver on the recognition or not of Farrell government. Braden Text of 01/24/1945. Oliver’s letter to NAR, 03/06/1945, in an attempt to avoid recognizing the government of Farrell-Perón.

- **RG III 4 O, Box 20:** Personal Files NAR. Folders 137-144, Dept. of State. Argentina. General, April to August 1945. Mexico City conference – General:

- **Folder 137:** Measures taken by Argentina after Chapultepec and manuscript to participate in the San Francisco Conference. An economic policy towards Argentina. Wells letter to NAR saying that Truman/Braden policy to Argentina was a kind of intervention in domestic politics, and should not be made public (05/10/1945). Oliver's letter on Argentine political situation (04/28/1945). Key: Rafael Oreamuno, report of his conversations with Perón (04/24/1945).
- **Folder 138:** Braden arrival to Buenos Aires and presentation of credentials as ambassador (06/06/1945). Policy Report. Interesting anti-Braden flyers. Newspaper articles on Argentina's admission to the UN (critical about NAR and his policy). Shaw's letter to NAR, 1942. Important letter from NAR to Stettinius pushing for approach policy to Argentina (06/21/1945). Reports on Braden's acts against Farrell-Perón. A memorandum of Alexander Shaw to NAR on Argentina – U.S. relations.
- **Folder 139:** NAR text of "The Mexico City Conference". Address by NAR in UP, especially Argentina (08/24/1945).

- RG III 4 O, Box 22. NAR Personal Files. Folders 152-156. San Francisco conference, Clippings, U.N. Conference:

- **Folder 153:** Documents about Argentina and Chapultepec. There is a transcript of conversation between NAR and Braden, and speech drafts.
- **Folder 154:** U.S. press clippings, February and March 1945, several about Argentina.
- **Folder 155:** As above, April 1945.
- **Folder 156:** As above, 1945.

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The ideas and opinions expressed in this report are those of the author and are not intended to represent the Rockefeller Archive Center.

ENDNOTES:

¹ Former director of General Motors and vice president of United Steel Corporation, tied to the Morgan Bank, the new Secretary of State was a member of the industrial and financial establishment, who wanted to change the "hard line" policy against Argentina. During this period, several representatives of business, including Nelson A. Rockefeller - who was in charge of U.S. Latin America policy (and from the Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs - OCIA - had had contacts with Argentina, despite the restrictive policy of the Department of State in the previous stage), - joined the Department of State. These new officials wanted a greater understanding with Argentina, a country considered as a desirable market that had been neglected by Hull's ideological and ineffective policy. See Rapoport and Spiguel, 2009, p. 101.

² In this issue there is a lot of bibliography. See Rapoport, 1980; 1988; Escudé, 1983; 1991; Tulchin, 1990; Woods, 1979; May, 1974; and Reich, 1996. A controversy over the interpretation of the conflict between Argentina and the United States can be found in Rapoport, 1984 and Escudé, 1984. A summary of the discussions can be found in Rapoport and Spiguel, 2009, pp. 51-72.

³ Roosevelt's death, in April 1945, weakened the "pragmatic" sectors, who have been pushing for an approach to the Buenos Aires government, and returned the supremacy to those who promoted a "hard line", reluctant to step up bilateral relations. The first event in this direction, even before the replacement of Stettinius and NAR, was Braden's appointment as U.S. Ambassador in Buenos Aires.

⁴ See the documents cited in Rapoport, 1988, pp. 245-259. An analysis of changes in the Department of State since December 1944 can be found in Rapoport, 1980, pp. 267-270; Rapoport and Spiguel, 2009, pp. 51-62; Reich, 1996; Woods, 1979, pp. 169-176, and Smith, 1965, pp. 139-165.

⁵ Secret memorandum to Nelson A. Rockefeller, by Bob Wells, December 21, 1944, Rockefeller Archive Center.

⁶ Rafael Oreamuno to NAR, about his interview with Perón, Secret Report, February 18, 1945, NAR, DOS, Box 19, Rockefeller Archive Center.

⁷ See Memorandum of March 15, 1945 (AMREC – Archivo del Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores y Culto de la República Argentina, War between the U.S. and the Axis countries. Background to the war, File 26, Volume II, 1945).

⁸ See "The Mission of Warren and the Death of Roosevelt." in Rapoport and Spiguel (2009), pp. 112-116. Escudé explains how the Warren mission worked independently from the U.S. embassy in Buenos Aires, and was a source of direct information for NAR, Escudé, 1983, p. 177. The mission reports expressed the necessity of continuing the rapprochement with Argentina.

⁹ "Summary of Conversations with Vice President Perón." Warren Report, April 24, 1945, NAR Department of State 20, Rockefeller Archive Center.

¹⁰ One of the most critical of the mission was the newly appointed ambassador, Braden, who would become the fiercest enemy of Farrell and Perón. Braden judged that the mission was nothing more than Stettinius and NAR opened support of the Argentine military government.

¹¹ On June 27, 1945, Stettinius resigned, and five days later, was replaced by James F. Byrnes.

¹² In fact, with the two lines marked inside the U.S. delegation, there was also a third, the left-wing liberals, led by MacLeish, who was near Henry Wallace, who supported the "internationalists" and its policy of opposition to Argentina. See Rapoport and Spiguel, 2009, pp. 119. These authors review why the criticism of much of U.S. media to the U.S. delegation "agreement" with Argentina anticipated the new direction of the Department of State's policy, which became hegemonic shortly thereafter.