

Of Personalities and Democratization in U.S. Public Diplomacy: The Case of the Blue Book on Argentina ^[1]

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[View PDF]  ^[2]

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Abstract

The present work seeks to analyze the negative impact that personalities and the quest for democracy can have on a country's image and foreign relations abroad. During WWII, the United States sought to end fascism in the world, and thus saw countries in a binary way: democratic or undemocratic. It was in this light that certain American figures of the period, namely Cordell Hull and Spruille Braden, interpreted the situation in Argentina; all they could see was the undemocratic nature of the country's government and its neutrality. Hard power measures, such as an economic boycott and the prohibition of armament sales, were followed by a very peculiar propaganda policy. In 1946, the U.S. government published *The Blue Book on Argentina*, a 130-page publication that allegedly exposed the military government's connections to Nazis and the Axis powers, as well the country's hidden plan to subvert other Latin American nations and bring about the third world war (Hull) or the Fourth Reich (Braden). More importantly, the book made several harsh accusations against Juan Domingo Perón, who in 1946 was running for the presidency. The rationale for the *Blue Book's* publication was that once the Argentine public knew about these spurious activities and connections, it would repudiate so nefarious a leader and, consequently, elect his democratic opponent. However, this policy not only had a negative impact that would prove to be long-lasting, but had just the opposite effect: Perón cleverly presented the issue through the slogan "Braden or Perón" and achieved an overwhelming and resounding victory in the elections.

This paper begins with a careful examination of the content of *The Blue Book on Argentina*, including the context and the way in which it was released, as well as the Argentinean situation and the response and effects it triggered. It then extracts a few public diplomacy lessons highlighted by this particular case. The first lesson is the tremendous damage that a lack of listening, or worse, an unwillingness to listen, can have. The second lesson is that a lack of a clear policy or structure towards a country or a region can open the door for dangerous leadership, meaning that personalities are empowered and can thus conduct a country's propaganda or public diplomacy efforts as they see fit. The third lesson is that, as is well known, when a country's efforts to engage with a foreign audience are subject to foreign policy objectives, it can lead to problematic situations not only with said audience, but also with that of third parties.

Finally, the last lesson is not to underestimate the negative effect a poorly conducted PD policy or propagandistic campaign can have on a foreign audience, especially when that audience already has negative feelings towards the engaging country.

U.S. Fights for Freedom: Democratization in Propaganda

By 1940, the notion that the United States should assume a global leadership role and “serve as the powerhouse of the ideals of Freedom and Justice” was very much present throughout the nation.^[1] In fact, interventionists at this time were eager to persuade the public and the government that the destiny of the U.S. lay precisely in joining the fight against fascism. Within the group that wanted to enter the war, we find two salient figures that presented **WWII as a fight for freedom and democracy against totalitarianism** (that is, an ideological war), and became involved in the propaganda program: Archibald MacLeish and Robert Sherwood. MacLeish is important because his “intense faith in man’s reason convinced him that informed men would make what he considered to be appropriate decisions;”^[2] this logic was present in most U.S. propaganda efforts of the time, and is of significant relevance in the case that will be discussed later in this paper. Sherwood is another key figure because his writing described the menace of fascism while glorifying the democratic way. These two men together “helped set the tone and define the aims of the propaganda program as it started to get off the ground.”^[3]

Even though propaganda would change over time, the leaders of the OWI (Office of War Information, created in June 1942) overseas program “continued to see the war as a struggle in which freedom and democracy could triumph everywhere, a struggle that could bring a positive upheaval in the world at large.”^[4] The idea of democracy as the equivalent of freedom and peace^[5] became the flag the U.S. would wave throughout this conflict and into the Cold-War era. With one difference: during the Cold War the U.S. policy towards Latin America would involve supporting the party that would ensure that the region did not fall in the hands of Communism, regardless of their respect for freedom or political rights. However, in this earlier period of time, the motive that guided U.S. policies was to get rid of fascism, and that included expressions of it in Latin America.

After the U.S. entered the war, the other concept that was seen in a negative light was that of neutrality. Soft power measures and propaganda efforts coupled with hard power policies to bring the hemisphere in line with the U.S. position and consequently achieve the “Pan-American Union.”

Argentina during WWII: Understanding Neutrality

By 1940, Argentina was already facing problems with its democracy. The democratically elected president, Roberto Ortiz, fell ill and had to turn over his presidency to the vice president, Ramon Castillo, who represented one of the most traditional conservative sectors. After he came into power, Castillo started undoing most of the democratizing reforms achieved under Ortiz. This was inherently related to the changes seen on the international stage: popular fronts had been defeated in Spain and France, Nazism was accumulating military triumphs, the Soviet Union deserted the anti-Nazi camp, and the war in general was generating different alignments.

Even though we can find evidence of an active citizenry (which was also a very unequal one), and a certain democratic mobilization after 1936, it is also true that the appointed

representatives who had to represent the citizens and stand up to the fraudulent government opted for compromise, which in turn contributed to a progressive disbelief among citizens in democratic institutions. The state contributed to that disqualification of the political parties and of the representative system itself, since it operated through direct negotiations with the different actors in society, namely the unions, businessmen, the armed forces, the church and some civil organizations, completely ignoring congress and the political parties.

In diplomatic terms, the country **still aspired to an independent, even hegemonic position** in the Southern Cone and kept opposing “Pan-Americanism,” mainly because it was already a traditional position for Argentina, who countered Monroe's “America for the Americans” with “America for Humanity” (that is, tightly linked to Europe). All those who governed throughout the 1930s continued this trend and did the best they could to put obstacles against alignment during the Pan-American conferences. Another tradition for Argentina was neutrality: **its adoption in 1939 was a logical stance**, since it allowed the country to continue trading with its preferred customers and was not objected to by the U.S. This completely changed in 1941 after the Pearl Harbor attack. In spite of U.S. efforts to get the countries in the southern hemisphere to join the battle, it was because of Argentina's pressure that Americans had to settle for a mere “recommendation” of action. The U.S. responded to this by excluding Argentina from its rearmament program and by supporting the democratic groups that opposed the government.

Another important factor was the **nationalist conscience** that began to grow among the ranks of the military forces, and the interpretation of the hemispheric context brought on by the war. This was a traditional, anti-liberal, xenophobic and hierarchical nationalism,^[6] which asserted that the traditional regional balance was being altered by U.S. support of Brazil and the exclusion of Argentina from rearmament. In order to alter this unfavorable balance, the solution needed to come from within, and that is why the military began articulating strategic concerns with institutional and political ones: the war demanded an increase of industrial activity and that in turn needed a strong, efficient and active state, able to unify the national will. However, this desired state was far from the one Castillo was conducting, which is why as early as 1941 military conspiracies began to spread. Before the elections, every political alternative was openly discussed and it is here that we find a very important player: the G.O.U. (*Grupo de Oficiales Unidos* or Group of United Officers), a secret lodge comprised of junior officers who, together with some other social sectors, favored a coup. The rupture of the institutional order finally came to a head on June 4, 1943, when Castillo asked Pedro Pablo Ramirez, his minister of war, to resign.

The government that took place was headed by Ramirez and Edelmiro Julián Farrell, and after a failed negotiation with the U.S. government that ended in an unfortunate humiliation, there was no other alternative for the military government but to declare war on Germany and Japan in January 1944. After the break in relations with the Axis powers, the situation became intolerable for Ramirez, who was forced to retire by the nationalists, who in turn installed Farrell as president. Juan Domingo Perón, his aide, was made vice president and minister of labor. From this position, Perón started to gain **immense support from the working class**, which had been on the outskirts of the political game and to whom the Colonel's figure (as Peron was commonly referred to) represented a patron that fought for their rights in the context of a political project that promised social justice, political representation and income redistribution.

U.S. Policy Towards Argentina: The Role of Individualism

What we find in these years is a process of confrontation and antagonism between the United States and Argentina, one that proved severely detrimental to the national interests of both nations as well as to long-term relations between them. It was a process **“marked by irrational behavior by several senior figures in both governments**, it ruined the diplomatic and political careers of not a few participants on both sides, and it caused serious irritation in the wartime relationship between the United States and Great Britain.”^[7]

To begin with, it is necessary to explain the differences between Under Secretary of State Welles and Secretary of State Hull. Welles led a group within the state department that wanted to preserve hemispheric unity, which was believed to be a direct result of the “Good Neighbor” policy and the reciprocity it had earned from the Latin American countries. Hull, on the other hand, was supported by a group of internationalists who saw Latin America as part of something bigger and thought that it should follow the U.S.’ lead because of the important principles at stake and the economic benefits that all would accrue if they did. Even though Welles led the policy towards Argentina for a while, which consisted of propaganda and economic pressure, by mid-1930 this policy of selective coercion was considered a failure.

As mentioned before, the U.S. government saw the war as a struggle of democracy against fascism, and believed that anyone who refused to support the Allied cause was probably sympathetic to the Axis powers, and thus Argentines were seen in this light. As was also stated earlier, the situation was more complex in Argentina since **the central (and traditional) objective of Argentine foreign policy was to avoid domination by the U.S.** pressure from this country was considered unacceptable. In this context, after Pearl Harbor, U.S. rhetoric began to overflow with references to the “Fascist Threat” that Argentina represented. Now, these points of view did not coincide with those of the British, the Germans or the Italians. The British in particular were convinced that it was not necessary for Argentina to declare war, since the movement of foodstuffs could be maintained as easily or more easily as long as this country remained neutral. Nevertheless, it was the U.S.’ binary perspective on democracy that led the country to embark on an inflexible and energetic political harassment, both private and public, of Argentina’s constitutional government.

It is important to stress that the U.S. believed that its definition of good and bad during the war was appropriate to all right-minded people and nations, which is why Hull could not understand why Argentina did not fall automatically behind his country and join the war effort; independence of action simply was not considered a legitimate option.^[8] But to this general notion we need to add **Hull’s personality and his rancor with Argentina**, to the extent that Welles wrote in his memoirs that Hull had “an anti-Argentine bias that was almost psychopathic,” a country that, if left alone, “would produce the Third World War.”^[9]

The junta that ousted Castillo gave indications that they would be more cooperative with the Allies because their primary goal was the reassertion of Argentine military preeminence in the region, and for that they needed modern weapons that could only be obtained via a rapprochement with the U.S. However, due to the internal context, this needed to be done without the loss of face. This new attempt at cooperation was met with scorn by Hull who wanted a quick decision by the Argentine government to break relations with the Axis powers, no strings attached. His criticisms became public through a note published in the Argentine newspapers, which inflamed nationalistic sentiments across a broad political spectrum. Later, when Ramirez finally broke relations with the Axis powers, Hull pushed for further

concessions (forgetting that this president was besieged by neutralists), which in turn precipitated the fall of the government by strengthening the hand of the more nationalistic faction. Hull was also determined to cause the fall of the subsequent government (Farrell-Perón) and thus followed a non-recognition policy.

However, Secretary Hull eventually stepped down and, with that, the U.S.' aggressive policy calmed down. It was then the moment for Nelson Rockefeller to step in and take care of Latin American issues, and he was very much opposed to Hull's anti-Argentinean policies. Just like Welles, Rockefeller believed that the best way to exert influence was through accommodation and not pressure. Consequently, the policy toward Argentina was abruptly reversed and the country was admitted into the San Francisco Conference and the United Nations. After this, however, a wave of anti-Argentine sentiment followed, which heavily damaged Rockefeller's power, making his time a short "honeymoon" in U.S.-Argentina relations; especially because after this, the figure of Spruille Braden comes to the fore.

The appointment of Braden to the U.S. Embassy in Argentina can be explained mainly because, in spite of the improvement in policies, there still was widespread hostility towards Argentina in the press as well as some residual elements of support for Hull's position within the government. Braden arrived in May 1945 and it immediately became **his mission to undermine Farrell and Perón**. In fact, he *rallied the civilian opposition* to the military and strongly demanded that the Argentine government both expel the Nazi agents alleged to be in the country and confiscate their property. This sort of behavior appalled Rockefeller and made the British furious but, with the death of Roosevelt, Rockefeller and Edward Stettinius (Secretary of State) lost support, and Braden continued to be backed by State Department veterans who had once been subordinates of Hull.

These activities in Argentina pushed Braden's career forward and, after only three months, he replaced Rockefeller in Washington. It is important to note that even though Braden's policy ran counter to that of Secretary of State James Byrnes, whose central concern with the Soviet threat, his appointment can be explained as an anomaly created by the **lack of attention paid to Latin America** in the months following Roosevelt's death.^[10] Before leaving, Braden **made a promise to the Argentine people that he would not cease his efforts to bring the military government down**. In fact, once in Washington, he intensified his efforts to oust Perón and used his new influence to stop all British efforts to strengthen their economic links with Argentina, and to push for the reclassification of Argentina as an ex-enemy country (which meant that it was not eligible for aid of any kind, especially arms shipments).

"Braden's obsession with Perón was nothing short of pathological," and seeing that all his efforts did not have the desired effect (because, in spite of everything, Perón emerged from his internal exile in a dramatic public uprising and promised – from the famous balcony of the Casa Rosada to the multitude gathered there – that he would start his campaign for the presidency), Braden decided that the only way to utilize the Nazi menace was to reveal Perón's links with the Germans and the Nazi's during the war. ^[11]

Dropping the "Bomb": the Release of the Blue Book

In order to expose Perón, Braden ordered his staff to collect all evidence they could find on Argentina's links with the Nazis. **Just as Hull had stated that Argentina would bring about the third world war, Braden claimed that the Fourth Reich was in preparation in said country.** To more than a few, "Braden's public statements about Perón and other leaders were the **rantings of a madman.**"^[12] However, what he expected was that once this

evidence and knowledge were spread, *the Argentine public would repudiate so nefarious a leader and, consequently, elect his democratic opponent*. This seems to be MacLeish's reasoning all over again. All this information was then compiled in a single publication, a book that was titled *The Blue Book on Argentina*. Even though this book was supposed to be a multilateral effort in collaboration with the other nations of the hemisphere, in fact none of them would become involved (in spite of the book stating otherwise). It was finally published on February 12, 1946, just a few days before the Argentinian elections. The U.S. gave the text exclusively to United Press so that this agency would spread it around the world and the peculiar thing was that it was sent to the embassies of all the Latin American countries, except for Argentina. While Latin American diplomats received a bound copy of 130 pages with blue covers, in Argentina it became known through a translation from English to Spanish that the newspaper *La Prensa* offered the following day. That is how the government learned of its content too.

So What Exactly Did the Blue Book State?

In its first part, the book made two clarifying remarks. First, the fact that the Department of State consulted with the American republics in respect to the Argentine situation, and that all these American republics *agreed to participate* in such consultation. And second, it purposely distinguished the people of Argentina from the ruling regime, claiming that its people are inherently democratic, whereas those who had the reins of power were not (this idea was iterated throughout the text in several ways). After that, it clearly stated that the information in this book being transmitted to the governments of these countries "makes abundantly clear a pattern which includes aid to the enemy, deliberate misrepresentation and deception in promises of Hemisphere cooperation, subversive activity against neighboring republics and a vicious partnership of Nazi and native totalitarian forces."^[13]

There were three main accusations in the second part of the book, called "*Argentine-Nazi Complicity*." The first one is related to the negotiations for military assistance to Argentina, and it firmly states that under the leadership of Castillo, Argentina effectively negotiated with Nazi Germany for military equipment, such as weapons, technicians and like assistance, which would in turn be used against other American republics. These negotiations were immediately resumed in 1943 under the Ramirez regime. It is in the explanation of the details behind this collaboration that Perón is first named, who is said to have assumed personal responsibility for the special arrangements necessary to secure delivery of the weapons dossier.

The second accusation refers to the goal of the Argentine scheme, which was supposed to be "the undermining and subversion of pro-Allied Governments in neighboring countries and to drag them into a pro-Axis 'bloc' headed by Argentina... [which] fitted perfectly with Nazi ambitions to disrupt American solidarity against the Axis."^[14] Here again, Perón was mentioned as a principal leader of the Argentine conspirators, since he dominated the G.O.U., and this pro-Axis clique was portrayed as the driving force behind the formulation and execution of this plot. Descriptions of the contacts and collaboration between Argentine conspirators and their fellow counterparts in Bolivia, Chile, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay can also be found in this part of the document.

The third main point concerns the political and social collaboration between Argentina and the enemy, which includes aid and protection of Axis espionage; failure to repatriate Nazi agents; protection and assistance to pro-Axis press and manipulation of public opinion; protection of Nazi schools and organizations; failure to control Axis firms; and preservation of Nazi

economic power. Before moving on to the description of the last part of this book, it is important to go into more detail about one of the aforementioned points since it reinforces one of the main ideas behind this work. In regards to pro-Axis press and public opinion, the text clearly states Axis agents and native pro-Fascist elements shared a common hostility against the pro-democratic and pro-Allied sentiments of the majority of the people: “The *unmistakable preference* of the Argentine *public* for freedom and democracy was equally irksome to pro-totalitarians in Argentine domestic politics.”[15] From this follows that the pro-Fascist elements wanted to prevent any resurgence of democracy in the country, since they had no chance of achieving office or power through democratic processes. Again, it is the G.O.U. together with certain high officers of the army who constituted the “backbone” of the pro-German element and who stood to gain from entering into a partnership with the Axis *against* the Argentine people. Therefore, the *Blue Book* asserted that, in order to manipulate public opinion, a major instrument was the body of pro-Axis newspapers in Argentina, which were Argentinean in appearance but created by the joint efforts of Axis and Argentine partners, subsidized by the Axis and dedicated to furthering its aims. When it came to Argentina’s domestic policies, these aims included the suppression of pro-democratic institutions such as Congress, elections, and free political parties, most of which “were achieved by the installation of the present military dictatorship in June 1943.”[16]

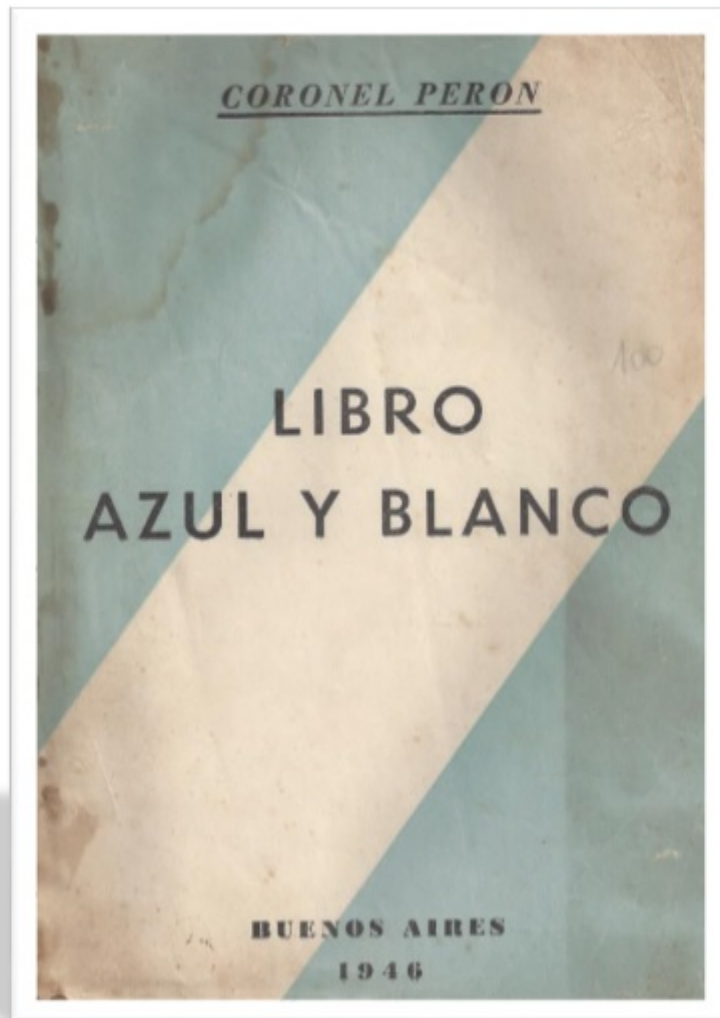
This leads to the final part of the document, called “*Nazi-fascist character of the Argentine Regime*,” which contains a general analysis of the internal administration of the military regime. This was depicted again as having a Fascist-totalitarian mentality, and as a regime that set out to create a Fascist state in the western hemisphere, openly anti-democratic and authoritarian, both in its ideology and operation. The partnership with Nazi interests is mentioned one more time, but it is more precise in its mention of the German fascist presence, which could be found in the economy (German-controlled firms in the construction industry, electric industry, heavy industry, armaments, and certain chemicals), in the military field (German training and indoctrination of certain high ranking officers of the army, and much of the equipment of the armed forces and the police), and in politics (where funds of the aforementioned companies plus secret funds coming directly from the Nazi Government were expended to create and support an ostensibly native nationalistic press, which is said to have served to prepare the seize of power by the junta in 1943).

After that, the document concentrates on the repression and terrorism inflicted by the government, and the totalitarian control of labor. It is important to mention that this part is more directly linked to Perón, who was the head of the Labor Secretariat, which in turn was the instrument through which the government began controlling unions. The aims of the government’s labor program allegedly included controlling labor unions, expelling former leaders, creating a single labor syndicate, eliminating all political activities, and organizing “spontaneous” demonstrations in favor of Perón. It is in this light that the famous march of October 16th is presented: as the most spectacular example of the strong-arm methods the government resorted to, and one in which a nationwide strike in support of Perón was staged. [17]

Finally, the last points mentioned were the perversion of the educational system, the control of the press and the military program. The final sentence clearly states that Argentina’s participation in the war was merely symbolic, whereas the concluding statement in the fourth and final part of this document determines that:

“In October 1945, when consultation concerning the Argentine situation was requested by the United States, it had substantial reason to believe from the evidence then at its disposal that the present Argentine Government and many of its high officials were so seriously compromised in their relations with the enemy that trust and confidence could

not be reposed in that government. **Now the Government of the United States possess a wealth of incontrovertible evidence. This document, based on that evidence, speaks for itself.** The Government of the United States looks forward to receiving from the governments of the other American republics the benefit of their views in the premises.”**[18]**



The Reaction: the Blue and White Book

A few hours before the *Book* actually became available in Argentina, Perón declared that with this publication, Braden had interfered in the internal affairs of the country to intolerable extremes. After that, the Colonel published another 130-page book, called the *Blue and White Book*, which contained strong replies to the accusations made in Braden's book. This book was also made available to Latin American publics, especially since the Latin American response to the *Blue Book* had been uniformly hostile.

In the opening paragraph of this document we find the main idea of the counter strategy the government used to defend itself: that the *Blue Book* was an electoral maneuver that wanted to save the Argentine oligarchy, which was now under threat because of the “first free elections” to take place in the Republic since 1928. The other important point that is established right from the beginning is that the *Blue Book* was authored by Mr. Braden, who filled it with inaccuracies and malicious interpretations. The following quote from Perón's counter-book summarizes the goals and main ideas it contained, and depicts the strategy the

government used:

*"We will demonstrate here that the aforementioned official has **failed in its duty of fair reporting**, deceiving the Government that deposited its trust in him, and incurred a diplomatic stumble that will discredit him before America; **has betrayed the "good neighbor" policy** and the spirit and letter of the inter-American treaties (...); **has abusively intervened in our domestic policy** and that such intervention has tended to **favor the forces that implanted in our country a regime analogous to totalitarianism in Europe, while slandering the authentic democrats (...).**"[19]*

After this strong and defining introductory text, the *Blue and White Book* addresses the main accusations presented in the *Blue Book*. The first part stresses the fundamental falsehood of the propositions exposed and explains other concepts, such as the oligarchy and Nazism relation; the "live forces"[20] and the revolution; Braden's actions; and the "true understanding" of the Argentine problem. It is important to mention that Perón made an effort to differentiate the contemporary government from the Castillo government, clearly stating that Braden intentionally forgot to mention that on June 4th a corrupt political clique was removed from office, the one that truly had abolished democracy, together with the fact that *his* revolution, which was greeted with joy throughout the country, had always had as its main objective the restoration of free elections and the return to the people of their usurped rights. In other words, Castillo is presented as the last representative of the fraudulent oligarchy, whereas the revolution meant the total contradiction of the ousted regime and the coming of new social forces. Since Braden did not understand the Argentine collective psychology, he thought that the best alternative would be to oust this revolutionary government only to implant a puppet government that would unconditionally answer to American interests. However, in doing so, Braden "compromised all the power and prestige of the great nation he represented, and sent false reports to its authorities about our social and political reality, now reissued in the *Blue Book*." [21]

In this first part, the demonstration and strike of October 17th is presented as an unprecedented event in the history of the country, where the working people of the Republic demanded the liberation and the return of Perón, as well as the continuation of his revolutionary work.

The second part evaluates more directly the value of the evidence presented, and it is here that the *Blue Book* is pejoratively depicted as a *novelon* (or large novel), based on the false testimony of a chargé d'affaires that was clearly interested in impressing his government with promising news of his own actions and the extent of his influence and connections. That is why it was argued that that mass of facts, dates and names hastily assembled did not aim to "clarify the alleged situation in Argentina, but to confirm a prefixed, self-served scheme with which to discredit the men of the Revolution." [22] Another claim to diminish the credibility of *The Blue Book* is that it was merely a re-edit of the articles, campaigns, proclamations and denunciations that had been present in the Communist press since June 1941.

The third part addresses the American expansion of the Argentine revolution, and the fourth part, the freedom of press and who really restricts it: Braden had "black lists," which allowed him to control the availability of paper for printers, and gave him control over the news agencies. All this meant that the U.S. Embassy interfered in the newswire business in such a way that allowed it to spread every unfavorable opinion to the interests of the country to the whole continent in a matter of hours. The fifth part talks about the organization of labor, the

role of the C.G.T., the formation of two labor federations, the legal validity of the work done, and “the first Argentine worker.”[23] The last part of the book refers to Braden and the conduct of the Communist Party, and one of the main conclusions is that this Party, which had previously fought against capitalist imperialism, especially the *yanqui* one, “committed to the plan of national subjugation ” had become “its best interpreter, of total surrender of Argentina’s economy and of moral, economic and political pauperization of the workers and farmers which Mr. Spruille Braden is conducting in the Continent and especially in Argentina.”[24] The reason for this Communist “deviation” was, in this explanation, the figure of Mr. Gustavo Duran, who was an attaché in the embassy and Braden’s private secretary. Here, he was accused of having written the *Blue Book* and was said to have a Communist past in the Spanish civil war, as well as a close relation with Vittorio Codovilla, key leader in the Communist Party, who he met in Spain. Furthermore, Perón revealed that Duran collected money from American companies for the electoral campaign of the anti-Peronist coalition.

Finally, the *Blue and White Book* ends with a documentary appendix that consist of 100 pages of further proof and evidence of Braden’s illicit acts and inventions.

The Dénouement: How U.S. Policy Backfired

The *Blue and White Book* was a tool that the Argentine government used both for international and domestic audiences. Let us remember that in Argentina, a major part of its foreign policy activities are designed for a domestic audience. This was even mentioned in a *New York Times* piece that reads: “Colonel Perón was, of course, speaking largely for Argentine consumption in his interview with *El Laborista* in which he repeats the charges against Mr. Braden.”[25] Such charges are that this is a one-man plot by Assistant Secretary of State Braden, against whom he also made a charge of extortion. The other important aspect of this article is that it clearly recognizes that this was an attempt to engage the Argentine public: “what an impression Mr. Braden made in Argentina when as our Ambassador he talked over the heads of the Argentine Government to the Argentine people.”

Another article reported on Perón’s reaction and stated that he declared that the *Blue Book* “is another part of the well-known Braden plan, which disturbs not only the good relations between the two countries but the tranquility of American republics and peoples which see their dignity and sovereignty threatened by untimely interference.”[26]



Nevertheless, the *Blue Book* had an even bigger effect than the promotion of the publication of the *Blue and White Book*. It actually helped Perón win the elections! And that is because Perón, in a fit of rhetorical creativity (something the Colonel was no stranger to), seized upon the book and hinged the remainder of his campaign around the slogan “**Braden or Perón.**” It is fair to say that this won him the elections: “Without question, the maladroit actions of the U.S. government and of Braden especially had contributed to Perón’s electoral victory.”[27]

The worst part is that this could have gone down in history as the exaggerated actions of a man who had a particular reading of Argentina’s situation and a pseudo-religious mission to take the country into “democracy land,” especially seeing the reactions that the publication provoked both in Argentina and in Latin America, and would have helped save the face of the U.S. government. However, what the U.S. government did was stand behind the publication. Two days after it became public, “President Truman and James F. Byrnes, Secretary of State, declared at their press conference today that *they were responsible* for the issuance of the State Department’s *Blue Book* describing the spread of Nazism in Argentina,”[28] thereby disposing of the argument that it had been the responsibility of Braden. That is, the *President of the United States himself was behind a publication* that made hard accusations without consistent evidence and that, twisted by Perón’s rhetoric, was then construed as a direct act of interference to support the oligarchic, reactionary sectors of the country’s domestic political scenario against the will of the Argentinean people. And to make matters worse, the president stated that he knew the content of the *Blue Book* because he had personally read it: “Mr. Truman said he had received the *Blue Book* from the State Department, had read it from cover to cover, had discussed it with Mr. Byrnes and with Dean Acheson, Under-Secretary of State, and that it had been released for publication with his full approval.”



And more importantly, as mentioned before, this not only had terrible effects in Argentina, but was very badly received in Latin America: “Many South Americans are openly attacking the apparent United States decision to keep Argentina isolated despite the free elections that Juan D. Perón is winning. We are openly accused of being ‘bad losers’ and there are growing indications that the policy may drive part of Latin America into the Perón camp.”^[30]

This detrimental episode of U.S.-Argentina relations began to reach an end with the appointment of George Messersmith as new Ambassador to Argentina, sent as a concession to Perón who was now the democratically elected leader. During the next year, one of the strangest episodes in U.S. diplomatic history occurred: “Messersmith fell under Perón’s spell almost as soon as he had landed in Buenos Aires. Within a month, he was sending lengthy memoranda to Washington justifying Perón’s slow compliance with the Chapultepec undertakings and explaining the new government’s policies.”^[31] It became Messersmith’s main task to reassess the scope of the Nazi connection in Argentina and, within six months, he discovered that the “Axis threat” had been largely imaginary. Unsurprisingly, Braden was appalled. The battle that followed between these two men was resolved in favor of Messersmith and, after Braden’s resignation, the “Messersmith mission” was declared successfully completed. Finally, George Marshall, who replaced Byrnes in January 1947, decided that it was time to normalize relations with Argentina. However, the economic boycott continued and, although it might seem incredible, it did so “without the authorization or knowledge of the State Department.”^[32]

What Can We Learn From This and Why Is This Case Important?

The first thing that we can learn from this case is the damage that a **lack of listening** can do to the image and the foreign relations of a country. In the light of WWII, the U.S. vision of the world became binary because only two elements were present: democracy and fascism. It was through this lens that they interpreted everything that happened in the world and how they would judge other countries' decisions or policies. The position of power the U.S. achieved after the war only meant that the material structure caught up with the concept that was already there: the U.S. had a mission in the world, and that was to bring democracy and freedom to people around the globe. These were the terms that the USIA would continue to use during the Cold War era.[33]

However, at this point in time, this interpretation of the international context meant that a proper reading of Argentina's situation was impossible, since the U.S. did not want to listen; it wanted to act to bring about a certain reality. Consequently, it was not just a lack of knowledge, but that U.S. officials *seemed unwilling to understand what was really happening in Argentina*. All they could see was the undemocratic nature of the government and its neutrality. These two characteristics taken together were enough to condemn anything the government did.

This in turn led to the *misjudgment of Perón and his popular support*. He proved not to be just a military figure that could be easily brought down and replaced, but a leader that would change Argentine history forever, and whose legacy (although somewhat twisted), is still present in the political landscape of the country. Argentina's relationship with democracy is not one that follows a straight line and, at that time, military coups were beginning to be considered another mechanism of the political game (sometimes even civil society groups would go knocking at military headquarters). Regardless of the accuracy of Perón's rhetoric around this time, it is true that he represented the door through which "the masses" entered the political arena. This is a fact that could have been appreciated by U.S. officials at this time if they had only listened.

Also, the lack of listening can be seen in the misjudgment of the Argentine people. It is true that the civil society was fighting for democracy, but it is also true that *the nationalist sentiment was widespread* (and especially present in those with access to power). So, on balance, anti-U.S. sentiment proved to be stronger than the aversion towards potentially/factually non-democratic leaders. The slogan "Braden o Perón" simply capitalized on the feeling that was already present, and it was right then and there that the outcome of the elections became apparent, even before they actually happened.[34]

Lack of attention is another element that stands out from this period. As was mentioned before, some aspects of U.S. policy towards Argentina contradicted each other or showed inconsistency. While Rockefeller was Assistant Secretary of State, Braden was appointed Ambassador to Argentina, and while Braden was Assistant Secretary of State, the appointed Ambassador was Messersmith, whose work blatantly contradicted the content and spirit of the *Blue Book*.

All of that allowed or empowered the role of **personalities** in the conducting of U.S. policy and propaganda towards Argentina. As was mentioned throughout this paper, both Hull and Braden seemed to be on a crusade against the country. Although Truman and Byrnes publicly supported the publication (which only added fuel to the fire), the literature on the topic is

consistent in assessing that it was mostly the work of Braden. Even the British (and other Americans too), were very much against his appreciations and the consequent policies both figures would enact, but were powerless to act against it. The rest of Latin America was also against the isolation the U.S. was bringing upon Argentina and manifested that on several occasions. Inconsistency is also evident in comparing the treatment accorded to Perón to that given to Getulio Vargas, whose flirtation with the Axis powers was negatively interpreted in Great Britain but largely tolerated by the U.S.

Not only was it a matter of lack of listening, but the policies towards Argentina at this time, especially those conducted by Braden, show **the subordinate relation of public diplomacy to foreign policy objectives**. As the head of the British South American Department, J.V. Perowne, put it:

*“The fascism of Colonel Perón is only a pretext for the policies of Mr. Braden and his supporters in the State Department; their real aim is to humiliate the one Latin American country which has dared to brave the lightning. If Argentina can be cowed and brought into patent submission, State Department control over the Western Hemisphere will be established beyond peradventure. This will contribute at one and the same time to mitigate the possible dangers of Russia and European influence in Latin America and remove Argentina from what is considered our orbit.”***[35]**

This case also posits a very important final lesson: a poorly conducted public diplomacy policy or propagandistic strategy, or one that completely disregards or purposely misinterprets the context and the characteristics of the public it is seeking to engage, can have a **very long-lasting negative effect**. The Braden incident in the quest for democracy is something that is still taught in Argentine schools and that will never cease to be seen as yet another example of U.S. interference in Latin America.

Appendix

In case it was not clear before that the impact this *Blue Book* and Braden had on Argentina proved to be long-lasting, especially in Peronist rhetoric and in the Argentinean popular imaginary, here is an image seen on the streets of Buenos Aires in **2014**.



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[1] Words of Henry Luce. See Cull, Nicholas J. *The Cold War and the United States Information Agency: American Propaganda and Public Diplomacy, 1945-1989*. Cambridge University Press, 2008. Page 13

[2] Winkler, Allan M. *The Politics of Propaganda: The Office of War Information, 1942-1945*. Yale University Press, 1978. Page 13

[3] *Idem*, page 18.

[4] *Idem*, page 73

[5] In fact, “freedom” and “peace” are two words that appear on the cover of *The Blue Book*, the case that will be considered in this paper.

[6] The roots of this nationalistic sentiment were old, but they were reinforced by European anti-liberal trends from Maurras to Mussolini, and with them, a strengthened Catholic Church. Now, the enemies of nationalism were not immigrants or communists, but Great Britain and the traitorous oligarchy.

[7] Tulchin, Joseph S. *Argentina and the United States: a conflicted relationship*. Twayne Publishers, Boston. 1990. Page 82

[8] See Tulchin, *Ob. Cit.*, pages 84-85

[9] Welles, Sumner. *Where are we heading?* New York, 1946. Page 186

[10] Tulchin, *Ob. Cit.*, page 92

[11] *Idem*, page 93

[12] *Ibidem*.

[13] *Blue Book on Argentina*: page 3

[14] *Blue Book*: page 12

[15] *Blue Book*: 24 (The italics are mine).

[16] *Blue Book*: 25

[17] This march actually occurred on October 17, 1945, and will be further discussed in this paper.

[18] *Blue Book*: page 58. The sentences have been put in bold by me.

[19] *Libro Azul y Blanco*. Page 1. (The words have been bolded by me).

[20] “Live forces” or “*Fuerzas vivas*” was the name that employers’ associations, members of the Chamber of Commerce and the UIA – Industrial Union of Argentina – gave themselves in a manifesto released in June 1945 in which they condemned the Labor Secretariat for its social policies. These “forces” also include those grouped under the historic *Sociedad Rural* or Rural Society, which has traditionally represented the most conservative, rural forces. All are accused in the *Blue and White Book* of having approached the new government and offered their collaboration, because they thought the new regime would also stand to defend their

interests. They (who in this interpretation embody social and economic privilege and constitute the very core of Argentine oligarchy) soon realized that Peron's government stood to represent the middle and working class.

[21] *Libro Azul y Blanco*. Page 7.

[22] *Libro Azul y Blanco*. Page 10

[23] The first Argentine worker, or "el primer trabajador argentino," is a nickname for Perón. It was one of the ways used to refer to him and it is still popular to this day.

[24] *Libro Azul y Blanco*. Page 22

[25] "Perón or Braden". *New York Times*, February 15, 1946. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: *The New York Times* (1851-2010). Page 20

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[27] Tulchin, *Ob. Cit.*, page 93

[28] "Truman Approved 'Blue Book'; Issued by US, Not by Braden". *The Washington Post*, February 16, 1946. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: *The Washington Post* (1877-1997). Page 5

[29] *Idem*

[30] "US Accused as 'Bad Looser' in Perón Vote." *Los Angeles Times*, March 22, 1946. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: *Los Angeles Times* (1881-1990). Page 5

[31] Tulchin *Ob. Cit.*, page 94

[32] Escude, Carlos. *El boicot norteamericano a la Argentina en la década del '40.* . Page 9

[33] In Edward Murrow's words: "It is not Capitalism versus Communism. It is at base the right of man to make his own choices, free of the strictures of the State; and not the right of the State to predetermine those choices for him. It is simply freedom versus coercion." Edward R Murrow's 1962 Commencement Speech. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TvHeYxy2s8w> ^[9]

[34] This same logic would be used by Peron to support the "Third Position": "Ni Yankees, ni

Marxistas; Peronistas” (Neither Yankees, nor Marxists; Peronists”).

[35] See May, E. R. *The Bureaucratic Politics Approach: US – Argentine Relations 1942-47*. In Latin America and the United States. Stanford University Press, 1974. Also, GREENBERG, Daniel J. *From Confrontation to Alliance: Peronist Argentina’s Diplomacy with the United States, 1945-1951*. Canadian Journal of Latin American studies 7, no. 24, 1987.

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