

**Of personalities and democratization in US Public Diplomacy:
The case of the Blue Book on Argentina**



Abstract

The present work seeks to analyze the negative impact personalities and the quest for democracy can have in a country's image abroad and foreign relations. During WWII, the US was settled on ending fascism in the world and thus saw countries in a binary way: democratic or undemocratic. It is in this light that certain 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 US government published *The Blue Book on Argentina*, a 130-page publication that allegedly exposed the military government's connections to Nazis and the Axis, as well the country's hidden plan to subvert other Latin American nations and bring about the 3rd world war (Hull) or the Fourth Reich (Braden). More importantly, the book pointed several harsh accusations towards Perón, who at the time was running for the presidential elections of 1946. The idea behind the 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 o Perón" and achieved an overwhelming and resounding victory in the elections. After a careful examination of the content of the publication, the context and the way in which it was released, as well as the Argentinian situation and the response and effects it triggered, this paper extracts a few lessons that this particular case highlights. The first one is the tremendous damage that lack of listening or worse the unwillingness to listen can have. The second one is that it appears that the lack of a clear policy or structure towards a country or a region can open the door for dangerous leaderships, meaning that personalities are empowered and can thus conduct the country's propaganda or public diplomacy efforts as they see fit. The third one is that, as it is well known, when a country's efforts to engage with a foreign audience are subjected to foreign policy objectives, it can lead to problematic situations not only with said audience but with that of third parties. Finally, the last lesson we can absorb from this is not to underestimate the negative effect a poorly conducted PD policy or propaganda can have in a foreign audience, especially when that audience already has negative feelings towards the engaging country.

US' fight for freedom: democratization in propaganda

By 1940, the notion that the United States (US) should assume the leadership of the world and “serve as the powerhouse of the ideals of Freedom and Justice” was very much present.¹ In fact, interventionists at this time were eager to persuade the public and the government that the destiny of the US 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. The first one 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 and this logic has been present in most US’ propaganda efforts of this time, and is of significant relevance in the case that will be discussed later in this paper. The second one, because through his works he continued to describe 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 then change in 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 upheave in the world at large.”⁴ This idea of democracy as the equivalent of freedom and peace⁵ became the flag the US would wave throughout this conflict and into the Cold-War era. The difference is that, in such era, the US policy towards Latin America would involve supporting the party that would ensue that such region didn’t 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 US policies was to get rid of fascism, and that included expressions of it in Latin America.

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 discussed later on in this paper.

After the US 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 US position and consequently achieve the “Pan-American Union.”

Argentina during the IIWW: understanding neutrality

By 1940, Argentina was already facing problems with its democracy. The democratically elected president of that time, Roberto Ortiz, fell ill and had to turn over his presidency to its Vice President, Ramon Castillo, who represented one of the most traditional conservative sectors. After he came into power, Castillo started undoing most of what had been achieved in favor of democratization. This is inherently related to the change in the international situation: 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 citizenship (which was also a very unequal one) and a certain democratic mobilization after 1936, it is also true that those who had to represent the citizens and stand up to the fraudulent government opted for compromise and thus contributed to a progressive disbelief among citizens. 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 to 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 wasn’t objected by the US. This completely changed in 1941 after the Pearl Harbor attack. In spite of US’ efforts to get the countries in the Hemisphere to join the battle, it was because of Argentina’s pressure that Americans had to settle for a mere “recommendation” of action. The US responded to this by excluding Argentina of the rearmament program for its allies and by supporting the democratic groups that opposed the government.

Another important factor is the **nationalist conscience** that begun to grow among the ranks of the military forces, and the interpretation of the hemispheric context brought upon by the war. This was a traditional, anti-liberal, xenophobic and hierarchical nationalism,⁶ which understood that the traditional regional balance was being altered by the US support to Brazil and the exclusion of Argentina from the aforementioned program. The solution needed to come from within and that is how the military begun articulating strategic concerns with institutional and political ones: the war demanded an increase of the 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 begun. Before the elections, every political alternative was being openly discussed and it is here where we find a very important player: the G.O.U. (*Grupo de Oficiales Unidos* or Group of United Officers), a secret lodge where a group of junior officers had banded together and that, along with some other social sectors, favored of a coup. The rupture of the institutional order finally had place on June 4, 1943, when Castillo asked Ramirez, his minister of war, to resign.

The government that took place was headed by Ramirez and Farrell, and after a failed negotiation with the US government that ended in an unfortunate humiliation, there was no other alternative but to declare war to Germany and Japan in January 1944. After the break of the relations with the Axis, 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, he started to grow **an immense support from the working class**, which had been in the outskirts of the political game and to whom the Colonel's figure represented a patron that fought for their rights in the context of a political project that promised social justice, political representation and income redistribution.

US policy towards Argentina: the role of individualisms

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**

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

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 state the differences between Under Secretary of State Welles and Secretary of State Hull. The first one led a group within the department that wanted to preserve hemispheric unity, which was believed to be a direct result from 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 US’ lead because of the important principles at stake and because of the economic benefits that would accrue to all 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 was mentioned before, the US government saw the war as a struggle of democracy against fascism, which is why anyone who refused to support the Allies was probably sympathetic to the Axis cause, 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 the Argentine policy was to avoid domination by the US**: pressure from this country was considered unacceptable. In this context, after Pearl Harbor the US’ rhetoric began to overflow with references to the “Fascist Threat” that Argentina represented. Now, these points of view do 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 binary perspective what molded the harsh policy of the US, which embarked on an inflexible and energetic political harassment, both private and public, against Argentina’s constitutional government.

It is important to stress that the US believed that its definition of good and bad during the wartime was appropriate to all rightminded people and nations, which is why Hull couldn’t understand why Argentina didn’t 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**

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

rancor with Argentina, to the extent that Welles wrote in his memoirs that Hull had “an almost psychopathic prejudice to Argentina,” a country that, if left alone, “would bring upon 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 US. 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 and 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 on, when Ramirez finally broke relations with the Axis, Hull pushed for further concessions (forgetting that this president was besieged by neutralists), which in turn, as mentioned before, precipitated the fall of the government by strengthening the hand of the more nationalist faction. Hull was also determined to cause the fall of the subsequent government (Farrell-Perón) and thus followed a non-recognition policy.

However, this Secretary eventually stepped down and with that the US' 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-Argentinian 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 in the San Francisco Conference and into 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 the US-Argentina relations. Especially because after this the figure of Spruille Braden comes to the fore.

The appointment of Braden to the Embassy in Argentina can be explained mainly because, in spite of the improvement in policies, there still was a widespread hostile feeling 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 demanded with very strong language that the Argentine government expel the Nazi agents alleged to be in the country, and confiscate their property belongings. This sort of

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

behavior appalled Rockefeller and made the British furious but, with the death of Roosevelt, Rockefeller and Settinius (Secretary of State) lost support and Braden continued to be backed by State Department veterans that had once been subordinates of Hull.

These activities in Argentina pushed Braden's career forward and after only 3 months he returned to replace Rockefeller in Washington. It is important to note that even though his policy ran counter to that of Secretary of State James Byrnes, whose central concern with the Soviet threat, Braden's 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 in 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, as well as pushed the for the reclassification of Argentina as an enemy country (which meant that it was not eligible for aid on any kind, especially arms shipments).

"Braden's obsession with Perón was nothing short of pathological" and, seeing that all his efforts didn't 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 there gathered - that he would start his campaign for the presidency), Braden decided that the only way to keep 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 set his staff to work in a frenzy collecting all the 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 *with this, 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.

¹⁰ Tulchin, *Ob. Cit.*, page 92

¹¹ *Idem*, page 93

¹² *Ibidem.*

Also, this book was supposed to be a multilateral effort in consultation with the other nations of the hemisphere, but in fact none of them would become involved (although the text of the book says otherwise, as will be explained below).

The US gave the text exclusively to United Press so that this agency would spread it around the world. The *Blue Book on Argentina* was published on February the 12, 1946, just a few days before the elections. 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 with blue covers with a total of 130 pages, in Argentina it became known through a translation that the newspaper *La Prensa* offered the following day. That is how the government learned of its content too.

So what exactly does the Blue Book state?

In its first part, the book makes two clarifying remarks. First, the aforementioned 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 distinguishes the people of Argentina from the ruling regime, meaning that its people are inherently democratic, whereas those who now have the reins of power are not (this idea is iterated throughout the text in several ways). After that, it clearly states that the information in this book now 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

It can be concluded that there are 3 main accusations behind the second part of this 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.

¹³ Blue Book on Argentina: page 3

The second accusation refers to the goal behind the Argentine scheme, which is 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 is 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; and 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 that, that which is shared by Axis agents and native pro-Fascists elements is their 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 cited pro-Fascists elements want to prevent any resurgence of democracy in the country since they have 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 constitute the “backbone” of the pro-German element and who stand to gain from entering into a partnership with the Axis *against* the Argentine people. Therefore, the *Blue Book* asserts that, in order to manipulate the public opinion, a major instrument was the body of pro-Axis newspapers in Argentina, which were Argentinian 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 comes to Argentina’s domestic policies, these aims include 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

¹⁴ Blue Book: page 12

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

¹⁶ Blue Book: 25

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 is depicted again as having a Fascist-totalitarian mentality and as a regime that has 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 can 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 the field of politics (where funds of the aforementioned companies plus secret funds coming directly from the Nazi Government have been expended to create and support an ostensibly native nationalistic press, which is said to have served to prepare the seizure 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 include 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 are 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 symbolical, 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***

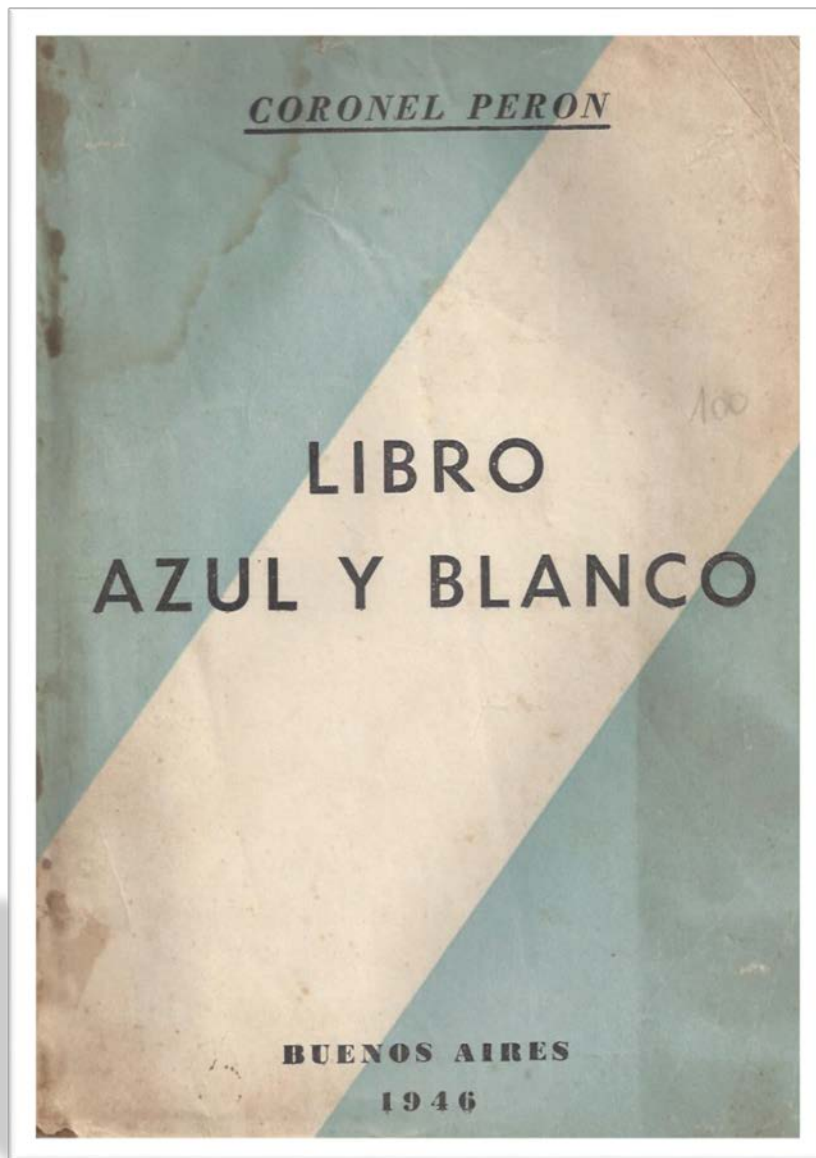
¹⁷ This march actually occurred on October 17th, 1945, and it will be further discussed in this paper.

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 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 also became available to Latin American publics, especially since the Latin American response to the *Blue Book* had been uniformly hostile.

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



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” ever to take place in the Republic since 1928. The other important point that is established right from the beginning is that such a Book was authored by Mr. Braden, and that he plagued it with inaccurate facts and malicious interpretations. The following quote from this 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**, thus deceiving the Government that deposited its trust in him, and making him incur in 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 slandered the authentic democrats (...).***¹⁹

After this introductory yet strong and defining text, the Book starts addressing the main accusations present in the *Blue Book*. This first part stresses the fundamental falsehood of the set of 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. What is important to mention here is that Perón makes an effort to differentiate the current government from that of Castillo, 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 saluted 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 means the total contradiction of the ousted regime and the coming of new social forces. Since Braden didn’t 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, he “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.

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

²⁰ Live forces or “*Fuerzas vivas*” refers to the name that employers’ associations, members of the Chamber of Commerce and the UIA – Industrial Union of Argentina –, gave to 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 of them are accused in the *Blue and White Book* of having approached the new government and offered all 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 this government, Peron’s government, stood to represent the middle and working class.

²¹ Libro Azul y Blanco. Page 7.

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 Charge d'affaires that acted uncontrollably and was clearly interested in impressing his government with promising news about his own acting and the extent of his influence and connections. That is why it is argued that that mass of facts, dates and names hastily assembled doesn't 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 fact that diminishes the credibility of *The Blue Book* is that it is merely a reedit 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 announcers and news agencies. All this meant that the US 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 this 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 the capitalist imperialism, especially the *yanqui* one, is now "its best interpreter and it's dedicated to the plan of national subjugation, of total surrender of Argentina's economy and of moral, economic and political pauperization of the workers and farmers that Mr. Spruille Braden is conducting in the Continent and especially in Argentina."²⁴ The reason for this Communist "deviation" is, in this explanation, the figure of Mr. Gustavo Duran, who was an attaché in the Embassy and Braden's private secretary. Here, he is accused of having written the Book and is 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 reveals that Duran collected money from American companies for the electoral campaign of the anti-Peronist coalition.

²² Libro Azul y Blanco. Page 10

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

²⁴ Libro Azul y Blanco. Page 22

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: of how US 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, as usual in Argentina, an important part of its foreign policy activities are destined towards a domestic audience. This is 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 makes charges 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 reports on Perón's reaction and informs 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 rhetoric creativity (something the Colonel was no stranger to), seized upon the book and hinged the remainder of his campaign around the slogan "**Braden o Perón.**" It is fair to say that this won him the elections: "without question, the maladroit actions of the US government and of Braden especially had contributed to Perón's electoral victory."²⁷

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

²⁶ "Perón Calls US Blue Book 'Interference.'" *The Christian Science Monitor*, February 14, 1946. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Christian Science Monitor (1908-2000). Page 3

²⁷ Tulchin, *Ob. Cit*, page 93



The worst part is that this could have gone 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 US government. However, what said 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 Argentinian people. And to make matters worse, the president stated that he knew the content of the 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."²⁹

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*



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

³⁰ “US Accused as ‘Bad Loser’ in Perón Vote”. Los Angeles Times, March 22, 1946. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Los Angeles Times (1881-1990). Page 5

This detrimental episode of the US-Argentina relations begun 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 US 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 his main task to reassess the scope of the Nazi connection in Argentina and, within 6 months, he discovered that the “Axis threat” had been largely imaginary. As is to be expected, 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 for the relations with Argentina to be placed on a normal footing.

Here is where we can say that the relations between the countries officially became “more normal.” 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 **lack of listening** can do to the image of a country and to the foreign relations of that country. In the light of WWII, the US vision of the world became binary because only two elements were present: democracy and fascism. It is through this lenses that they interpreted everything that happened in the world and how they would judge other countries’ decisions or policies. The position of power the US achieved after the war only meant that the material structure caught up with the concept that was already there: the US had a mission in this world, and that was to bring democracy and freedom to people around the globe. These are the terms that the USIA would continue to use during the Cold War era.³³

³¹ Tulchin *Ob. Cit.*, page 94

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

https://www.academia.edu/6322369/Boicot_de_Estados_Unidos_contra_la_Argentina_durante_los_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”

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 US didn't want to listen; it wanted to act to bring about a certain reality. Consequently, it's not just lack of knowledge, but that US 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. The relation of Argentina with democracy is not one that follows a straight line and, at that time, military coups were beginning to be considered as another mechanism of the political game (sometimes, even the civil society would go knocking on military's 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 US 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 patent in those with access to power). So, when balanced, the anti-US sentiment proved to be stronger than the aversion towards potentially/factually non-democratic leaders. The slogan "Braden o Perón" simply capitalized 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 the US 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 Messersmith's work blatantly contradicted the content and spirit behind the Blue Book.

All of that allowed or empowered the role of **personalities** in the conducting of US policy and propaganda towards Argentina. As was mentioned throughout the paper, both Hull and Braden seemed to be on a

³⁴ This same logic would be used by Peron to support the "Third Position": "Ni Yankees, ni Marxistas; Peronistas" (Neither Yankees, nor Marxists; Peronists").

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 US was bringing upon Argentina and manifested that on several occasions. Inconsistency is also found when we compare the treatment accorded to Perón to that given to Getulio Vargas, whose flirtation with the Axis was negatively interpreted in Great Britain but hugely tolerated by the US.

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 PD 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 a 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 propaganda, 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 being taught at school and that will never cease to be seen as yet another example of US interference in Latin America.

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.

Annex

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



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