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GEORGE STRAUSSER MESSERSMITH:
ARMS, ARGENTINA, AND THE RIO PACT

by
Wayne David Rodan

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of the
University of Delaware in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts
in History.

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PREFACE

In June of 1961, Mrs. George S. Messersmith presented the private papers of her late husband to the University of Delaware. The Papers of George Strausser Messersmith are largely drawn from his activities as both career diplomat and private citizen from 1928 to 1957. They include personal letters to Foreign Service colleagues, official correspondence with the Department of State and uncompleted memoirs which he was preparing for publication at the time of his death in January of 1960. It was Mr. Messersmith's hope in endowing this collection that an institute for the study of international relations be established at this university. Hopefully, this analysis of the mission to Argentina, only one aspect of his remarkable career, will rekindle interest in this venture.

The assessment of the Messersmith mission to Argentina, as that of any study of recent history, is subject to limitations of documentation and must be evaluated in this light. Although the policy of the United States Government in making public official records is exemplary among modern nations, many government documents remain inaccessible to nonofficial researchers. Among these are the personnel files and records of diplomatic missions of the Department of State which are closed after 1944. Since the span of the present study falls wholly into the closed period, it has not been possible to correlate Messersmith's private observations with the official transcription of the mission. It appears at this time, however, that when

the official record is published in the series entitled Foreign Relations of the United States, necessary re-evaluations will be minimized to detail rather than interpretation.

INTRODUCTION

A prime requisite of successful foreign policy is a nation's ability to redefine its objectives in the light of changing international conditions and to redirect its power to problems that impose greater dangers to the national security. Such flexibility is more easily achieved by totalitarian states where decision making is concentrated in a few hands than in democracies where constitutional procedures, special interests, tradition and moral considerations always exert a profound influence on policy determination. These forces are especially apparent in the United States where broadly diffused democratic attitudes and accessibility to news media encourage debate on crucial international issues in, quite literally, the nation at large. However vital this may be to the democratic process, it often does not lend to quick and decisive reassessments of American foreign policy. Yet a policy adopted without an open debate of the issues is, in the long term, often vitiated by a popular reaction of bewilderment and mistrust.

At no time has this dilemma been more apparent than in the American adjustment to the Cold War. At the conclusion of the Second World War in 1945, Soviet intentions in the post war were unclear to American observers. Even after Russian hostility to the West was revealed in Berlin, Eastern Europe and the Middle East, however, American officials hesitated to accept a permanent polarization of power between the two wartime allies. Not

until the Truman Doctrine in March, 1947 did the United States make a firm commitment to resist Soviet expansionism.

War fatigue, the novel character of the Cold War, and, most important for this study, disillusionment with the outcome of the war, blurred American vision of the post-war era. For some Americans, particularly those of minority groups deeply shocked by the senseless Nazi brutality, fascism had not died with the capitulation of the Axis. In Argentina they saw a Nazi-fascist state thriving under the leadership of a prototype Fuehrer, Juan Peron. Convinced that Argentina was preparing aggression in South America, American labor leaders, government officials and political leftists called for American intervention in Argentina to preserve the tenuous peace which had been won with unprecedented sacrifice.

Opposed to the policy of intervention was George S. Messersmith, American Ambassador to Buenos Aires from 1946 to 1947. The Ambassador believed that any attempt to coerce the Peron regime would be futile and that Argentine-American relations must be viewed within the broader context of international affairs. This essay traces the development of United States policy toward Argentina during the critical period 1945-1947 and offers an assessment of Messersmith's efforts to direct American attentions to the Cold War.

CHAPTER I

The Argentine Question

It is a truism that in the decade from 1937 to 1947 American foreign policy underwent a revolution unparalleled in its history. The nation which in the pre-war years had attempted to shield itself behind neutrality acts and other isolationist legislation, emerged in 1947 as the guardian of the free world with an ongoing military and economic commitment in Europe, Asia, and Latin America. For the first time on a global scale the United States acknowledged that the maintenance of its political and diplomatic influence was inseparable from its military capability. Even as late as 1945, however, this development was either imperceptible or unacceptable to most Americans, and it was the source of prolonged and often bitter debate through the early stages of the Cold War. To a considerable extent this debate focused on the Truman administration's policy toward Argentina and the proposals for the Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance, the first of the regional defense agreements.

United States' interest in defending the Western Hemisphere through multilateral security arrangements has been a comparatively recent development, dating from the late 1930's when the Roosevelt administration attempted to unite the American republics against the threat of European and Asian fascism. Because most Latin American

states tended to minimize these dangers, they balked at any formal mutual defense agreement, but they welcomed United States' initiative in collective defense as another demonstration of Washington's adherence to the Good Neighbor Policy. Successive inter-American conferences at Lima (1938), Panama (1939), and Havana (1940) produced several highly important agreements defining the appropriate responses to extra-hemispheric attacks, including the "all for one, one for all" principle that an attack on any one American nation constituted an attack on all the republics.¹ In addition, the United States concluded bilateral agreements with most Latin American states, governing the establishment of military and naval facilities, joint training of military personnel, and arms shipments.² By 1941 it seemed that the United States had made notable progress in strengthening hemispheric defense which President Roosevelt had declared was

An expression of the very principles on which our United States national defense was based.³

The test of American solidarity came at the Rio Conference shortly after the Japanese attack of Pearl Harbor. The United States did not insist that the other republics declare war on the Axis, but it did expect that they would sever diplomatic and commercial ties with the enemy to fulfill their pledges of unity.⁴ When the Conference adjourned in late January, nine American nations had exceeded this expectation by declaring war on Germany, Italy, and Japan and all the remaining, except Argentina and Chile, severed relations. Chile, at first hesitant to take this step because of the vulnerability of her extensive coastline, broke relations in early 1943.

The Castillo government, however, refused to commit Argentina to the common struggle and declared that Chile's decision would not alter her neutrality.⁵

This response was at once a manifestation of Argentina's opposition to United States leadership in the hemisphere and an expression of her traditional neutrality. In the 1930's Argentina's political ascendancy in Latin America had been sapped by the achievements of the Good Neighbor Policy which had turned Latin American attention from "americanismo" to "Pan Americanism."⁶ The loss of prestige, coupled with short-sighted and discriminatory U. S. economic practices, engendered considerable antipathy toward the United States from the highly sensitive and nationalistic Argentines.⁷ Moreover, Washington's mutual defense objectives conflicted with Argentina's traditional avoidance of entangling alliances which might compromise neutrality, and, hence threaten her extensive overseas trade. At the pre-war conferences, Argentina displayed her antagonism to Washington's policies by ratifying but two of fifty-two inter-American agreements and she was the only American nation that refused to sign a bilateral defense agreement with the United States.⁸ Consistently, imperious Argentine statesmen forced the State Department to modify strong declarations of hemispheric unity which they contended infringed upon her sovereignty.

The State Department probably anticipated Argentine recalcitrance in the initial stages of the war, but in 1943 with the assumption to power of General Pedro Ramirez, it appeared that Argentina had shifted from neutrality to a pro-Axis orientation. In Secretary of State Cordell Hull's opinion, Argentina had not only reneged a moral obligation

to sever relations, but the activities of Axis agents in the republic had resulted in "grave losses of life and property to the Allies." Ramirez severed relations with the Axis in January, 1944, only after Hull threatened to publish evidence of Argentine-Nazi complicity in the Bolivian revolution. This development raised fears in Buenos Aires that Ramirez would soon declare war, and prompted a junta of Army officers to oust him from office. To Secretary Hull the new regime, headed by General Edelmiro Farrell and Colonel Juan Domingo Peron, seemed even more totalitarian than its predecessor. Hull, at first, withheld recognition of the new regime, and when that failed to produce a war declaration and action against Axis influences, he resorted to more coercive action. He recalled Ambassador Norman Armour, froze \$400,000,000 of Argentine gold reserves, restricted exports to Argentina, and forbade American ships to call at Argentine ports. Until his retirement in late 1944, Hull refused any further discussion of the issue, preferring to isolate the regime until after the United Nations Conference.⁹

These sanctions had little effect on Argentina because Hull was unable to gain either economic cooperation from Britain, which was heavily dependent upon Argentine food supplies, and more importantly, because he failed to get political support from Latin America. Most Latin American governments shared Hull's distaste of Argentina's policies but they felt that her anti-democratic tendencies would pass with the war. Moreover, they were now anxious to proceed with a hemispheric defense agreement from which Argentina could hardly be excluded.¹⁰

This argument, put forth ably by Mexican Foreign Minister Ezequiel Padilla, met a cool but positive reception from the new State Department team of Secretary Edward Stettinius and his Assistant Secretary for American Affairs, Nelson Rockefeller. An inter-American conference was scheduled to convene in Mexico City to discuss a mutual defense pact and provide a solution to the Argentine "Question". Vice-President Peron, who had emerged as the power behind the Farrell government, gave secret assurance that Argentina would abide by the decisions of the conference.¹¹

The American nations deliberated these two problems in the Mexican capitol city. In the Acts of Chapultepec, the conferees agreed to intensify their efforts to root out Axis influences and to conclude a formal military alliance at the end of the war. It was hoped that the Argentine "nation" would bind itself to the Acts and bring its policies into harmony with the common aims of the American republics.¹² In addition the United States agreed to support Argentina's bid for membership in the United Nations. Shortly thereafter Argentina declared war on Germany and Japan, signed the Acts, and announced that it would take measures to eliminate Axis activities. Assistant Secretary Rockefeller announced that Argentina had expropriated all Axis firms and blocked Axis funds. The State Department lifted the economic embargoes and recognized the Farrell regime.¹³ A new American ambassador, Spruille Braden, mediator of the Chaco War and former Ambassador to Columbia and Cuba, was ordered to Buenos Aires. With some degree of unity, then, the American nations prepared for the United Nations conference.

The question of Argentina's admission to the world organization was the most hotly debated topic on the agenda at San Francisco due in part to a pre-conference compromise between Washington and Moscow. At Yalta, the Soviet Union insisted that Byelorussia and the Ukraine each receive seats in the General Assembly to offset the plural membership of the British commonwealth. President Roosevelt acceded to this demand, and subsequently, Moscow agreed not to block Argentine membership. When the issue arose in San Francisco, however, Ambassador Molotov raised the price of Argentine admission to include the seating of the Communist Polish Lublin government. When this proposal was rejected, as Molotov certainly knew it would be, he thoroughly reprimanded the United States for supporting the admission of the totalitarian Argentine regime. As a fitting climax to his propaganda play, the Soviet Ambassador quoted recent statements by Roosevelt and Hull which described Argentina as the "New world headquarters of the fascist movement."¹⁴

For many Americans Argentina's presence in the United Nations and her possible inclusion in a hemisphere defense program made a mockery of American sacrifices in the war. Indeed, it seemed that President Truman was compromising Franklin Roosevelt's unequivocal stand against the Axis menace. Particularly disillusioned with the "appeasement" policy were a number of Americans of leftist persuasion who would soon lead the third party movement against Truman. These "progressives" were led by Vice-President Henry A. Wallace, Sidney Hillman and Jacob Potofsky of the Congress of Industrial Organizations, Secretary of the Treasury Henry Morgenthau, Jr., Senator Claud Pepper and Congressman Vito Marcantonio. In their

view, the existence of Nazi-fascism in Argentina and the development of the defense plans would weaken the peace-keeping efforts of the U. N. and doubtless provoke the Soviet Union into war. As Hillman expressed it

We either have United Nations or divided nations. United Nations spell peace and plenty; divided nations mean war and fascism and nazism and bigotry.¹⁵

The moral issue could not be rationalized in terms of expediency; rather it was a clear cut choice between fascism and democracy.¹⁶ From San Francisco on, the progressives bent their collective will to prevent Argentina, as Potofsky declared, "from continuing as a source of fascist infection in the Western Hemisphere."¹⁷

This outcry struck a respondent chord with Ambassador Spruille Braden, outspoken political anti-fascist and political liberal who had arrived in Buenos Aires during the U. N. debates.¹⁸ Son of a Montana copper magnate and himself a Yale educated mining engineer, Braden had served as a mediator in the Chaco War and as Ambassador to Colombia and Cuba. Following the Chapultepec Conference, Assistant Secretary Rockefeller despatched him to Argentina to insure that the Farrell-Peron regime carried out its pledge to eliminate Axis influences.

Everywhere about him Braden saw portents of resurgent Nazi-fascism which he did not hesitate to denounce.

With the defeat of Germany, Argentina remains under the bare dictatorship of men who drink at the same fountain where drank Hitler, Mussolini and Franco. As long as the people of Argentina live under the heel of this dictatorship . . . none of us can sleep soundly nights. Either the rights of men triumphed or it was defeated. There is no room for middle ground.¹⁹

Holding to Secretary Hull's view, Braden believed that except for the military clique, the majority of Argentines yearned for a return to democracy. With the firm backing of the Progressives,²⁰ Braden established himself as the bitter foe of Colonel Peron who shortly announced for the Argentine presidency. In an extraordinary trip through the provinces the Ambassador openly denounced Peron and encouraged his opponents to revolution.

The reverberations of Braden's activities struck most immediately in Washington. Secretary Byrnes, who had succeeded Stettinius at the close of the San Francisco Conference, yielded to the public demand for a return to the hard line policy. He accepted Rockefeller's resignation and recalled Braden to become Assistant Secretary for American Affairs. Shortly before leaving for Washington, Braden declared

Let no one imagine that my being transferred . . . means the abandonment of the task I have undertaken. The voice of freedom makes itself heard in the land, and . . . I know it is the voice of the Argentine people--their authentic voice.²¹

Almost at the same time that Braden had taken his place in the State Department, there seemed to be cause for optimism. On October 9, 1945, after a month of public unrest, Peron was forced to resign under military duress and was banished to Martin Garcia Island in the River Plate. Hopes that his elimination would be permanent, however, were quickly dispelled. Tens of thousands of descamisados ("shirtless ones") stormed through Buenos Aires demanding his return, precipitating a crucial development in Argentine history. Peron returned to power with the masses firmly behind his plans for social revolution.²² Stacked up against the relatively unknown Jose' Tamborini, the candi-

date of the Democratic Union, a loosely organized coalition of opposition parties--Radical, Socialist, Progressive Democrat and Communist--Peron seemed a solid choice in the presidential election, scheduled for February, 1946.

With the horrors of Nazi brutality now more fully revealed, Braden and his supporters were determined that "history must not be allowed to repeat itself . . ." ²³ At his suggestion the Rio defense meeting, scheduled for October 20, was postponed indefinitely. In late November, Uruguay, probably at Washington's initiative, proposed collective intervention by the American republics to democratize Argentina. When the other American nations refused to sanction this violation of non-intervention, the State Department became more desperate to prevent Peron's election. Throughout January and early February a flood of speeches and publications poured from the State Department and the progressives, but with little effect on Peron's growing support. ²⁴ Finally, in mid-February, two weeks before the election, the State Department issued the famous "Blue Book" on Argentina which purported to document Peron's connection with the Axis. It was hoped that this evidence would swing the election to the Democratic Union. ²⁵

The aftermath of the "Blue Book" was catastrophic. Peron reminded the Argentines of Braden's previous intervention, linked him with imperialism and reinforced his appeals for social revolution with the defense of national sovereignty. The final tabulation revealed that Peronista candidates had won a sweeping victory, capturing all Senate seats, all provincial governorships, and a two to one majority in the Chamber of Deputies. Peron himself

garnered 56% of the popular vote and 306 of 374 electoral votes.²⁶ The election, which Tamborini and the Democratic Union admitted was free and honest, bluntly expressed the will of the Argentine people. That the United States had suffered its worst diplomatic defeat in the Western Hemisphere was undeniable.

The Latin American reaction to the "Blue Book" was one of disbelief and consternation. Although seldom mentioned in the United States, most of the republics had not fully complied with the Acts of Chapultepec and they were wary lest they become a target of Braden's scrutiny and intervention. In March, 1946, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, alarmed by Braden's "bull in a china shop" approach to Latin American relations and by the further postponement of the Rio defense meeting, forced a change in policy.²⁷ On April 1, Secretary Byrnes ordered Ambassador to Mexico George S. Messersmith, a veteran career diplomat with extensive service in Latin America and Europe, to return to Washington in preparation for assignment to Buenos Aires.

Chapter I Footnotes

¹Lloyd Mechem, The United States and Inter-American Security 1889-1960, (Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 1961), 133.

²For a complete analysis of the consolidation of hemisphere defenses see Stetson Cohn and Byron Fairchild, The United States Army and World War II: The Framework of Hemispheric Defense, (Washington: Department of the Army, Office of the Chief of Military History, 1960), 156-264.

³Samuel I. Rosenman (ed.), The Public Papers and Addresses of Franklin D. Roosevelt, Vol. V, (New York: Random House, 1958), 175.

⁴Sumner Welles, Seven Decisions That Shaped History, (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1951), 106.

⁵Cordell Hull, The Memoirs of Cordell Hull, Vol. II, (New York: Macmillan Company, 1948), 1383.

⁶George I. Blanksten, Peron's Argentina, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953), 4-9; Arthur P. Whitaker, The United States and Argentina, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1954), 35-41, 86-89.

⁷Detailed discussions of Argentine-United States economic relations are presented in Eliot Janeway's The Struggle for Survival, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1951); Seymour Harris, Economic Problems of Latin America, (New York: McGraw Hill Book Company, 1944); Simon G. Hanson, Argentine Beef and the British Market, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1938).

⁸Harold Peterson, Argentina and the United States, 1810-1960, (New York: State University of New York, 1964), 399; Cohn and Fairchild, op. cit., 191.

⁹Hull, op. cit., 1381-1384.

¹⁰Peterson, op. cit., 437-441.

¹¹Sumner Welles, Where Are We Heading?, (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1946), 206.

¹²Pan-American Union, Inter-American Conference on War and Peace, February 21-March 8, 1945. Report submitted to the Governing Board of the Pan-American Union by the Director General, (Washington, 1945).

¹³Peterson, op. cit., 444-445.

¹⁴United Nations Conference on International Organization, Documents, Vol. I, (New York, 1945), 343-345. O. E. Smith, Jr., Yankee Diplomacy, (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1953), 138-139.

¹⁵Curtis A. MacDougall, Gideon's Army, (New York: Maizani and Mansell, 1965), 55.

¹⁶Welles, Where Are We Heading?, 212-213.

¹⁷Letter to the Editor, New York Times, June 28, 1945.

¹⁸Blanksten, op. cit., 410. See also Robert Bendiner, "Spruille Braden," The Nation, 156 (February 23, 1946) 215-219. Bendiner notes that Attorney General Homer Cummings commented that Braden "Just couldn't help convincing himself that he was a progressive. It was in him all the time and had to come out."

¹⁹Smith, op. cit., 146.

²⁰Welles, Where Are We Heading?, 219-220. The former Under-Secretary of State quotes a letter from the CIO's Latin American Affairs Committee, headed by Jacob Potofsky, which declared that the Committee had waged "a vigorous campaign in defense of Spruille Braden's admirable efforts for democracy in South America."

²¹Smith, op. cit., 145.

²²Arthur P. Whitaker, The United States and Argentina, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1954), 134-138.

²³U. S. Department of State, Bulletin, 13 (October 28, 1945), 658.

²⁴For examples, see Department of State, Bulletin, XIV (January 6, 13, 1946), 26-33; New York Times, January 6, 1946; New York Herald Tribune, January 10, 1946; Congress of Industrial Organizations, The Argentine Regime: Facts and Recommendations to the United Nations Organization, (New York: 1946); MacDougall, op. cit., 33, 55.

²⁵Department of State, Bulletin, 14 (February 24, 1946), 285-287.

²⁶Smith, op. cit., 161.

²⁷Welles, Where Are We Heading?, 233.

CHAPTER II

The Career Diplomat

George Strausser Messersmith (1883-1960) was born near Reading, Pennsylvania, the only son of a Pennsylvania German family whose ancestors had pioneered the area in the early eighteenth century. At age seventeen he completed a teacher preparatory course at a nearby normal school, taught briefly in a rural schoolhouse and then moved to Delaware where he established himself as an able public school supervisor and educational reformer.¹ The blending of Pennsylvania "Dutch" heritage and practical administrative experience developed many of the characteristics his diplomatic career would vividly reflect; authoritarian and somewhat secretive manner, stubbornness and strong will mixed with an appreciation of compromise, often disarming frankness and honesty. What academic training Messersmith lacked he compensated for with an unusual capacity for work, unshakeable composure, and the ability to define the limits of action in difficult situations.²

Never a theorist, Messersmith viewed nations as living organisms whose responses to international life were products of the workings of the cultural process on the individual, often understandable but seldom controllable by the foreign observer. In his opinion, therefore, diplomacy was "an art not a science. Fixed rules and techniques do not apply." The diplomat, he believed, operated under the assumption that change was the only constant and it was his

task to prevent foreign policy from stagnating under the forces of social progress. He is the warrior on the front line of national defense who operates in the thin margin between war and peace. He is first equitable and understanding where possible, at last cold, combative and unsentimental with obstacles or individuals who obstruct his work. He is anonymous but forceful, a guide and innovator as well as civil servant.³

Messersmith's conception of the diplomat with its emphasis on assertiveness would hardly endear him to nuclear age statesmen. It was, however, the result of more than thirty years of Foreign Service experience which spanned both world wars and reflects the forcefulness of the era.

Messersmith entered the consular service as a class nine officer in 1914. In the following fifteen years he served capably but without distinction in consuls at Fort Erie, Canada, Curacao, Antwerp and Buenos Aires. The turning point in his career coincided with the rise of Hitler. As Consul General at Berlin (1930-1934), Minister to Austria (1934-1937) and Assistant Secretary of State for Administration and advisor on European affairs (1937-1940) he earned a reputation as an authority on Nazism and an opponent of appeasement and isolationism. His perceptive analyses of Nazi psychology and military aspirations, later praised as "telling . . . everything anybody could ask about the subject" gave Washington early warning of the "menace of Hitlerism."⁴ As Ambassador to Cuba (1940-1941) and Mexico (1941-1946) he proved a firm advocate of the "Good Neighbor" policy, rooting out unscrupulous American war profiteers and taking an active interest in

Latin American economic development.⁵ Broad in experience, with knowledge particularly relevant to his assignment in Buenos Aires, Messersmith's appointment was well received. "His selection," the New York Times editorialized, "means that our Embassy will be in seasoned and skillful hands."⁶

History for Messersmith, as for Braden, had a profound impact on his world outlook and his mission to Argentina. But while Braden believed that Nazi-fascism in Argentina would generate new conflict, Messersmith saw a striking parallel between Soviet expansionism and the events of the late 1930's. In the Ambassador's opinion, the Soviet Union had replaced "Hitlerism" as the exponent of deception, subversion and aggression. Where there was strong sentiment in the United States that tensions with the Soviet Union could be resolved through reason and compromise, he was convinced that the world once more stood on the brink of war. In his last public statements in Mexico, he summed up the state of international affairs as "nothing better than an armed truce."⁷ And, he described Argentina as the "exposed flank" in hemisphere defenses leaving no doubt that the ultimate purpose of his mission was to open the way for an anti-Soviet military alliance.⁸ Although the frankness of these comments aroused concern in Washington and brought charges of war-mongering from Moscow, Messersmith was determined that the blunders of appeasement and unpreparedness would not be repeated.⁹ If diplomacy failed when negotiation yielded to war, it was an equally bankrupt method of maintaining peace if diplomats could never raise the threat of reprisal.

In the final analysis, Messersmith observed, United States security in the hemisphere was dependent on the

economic development of the Inter-American system.¹⁰ For this reason he had vigorously criticized the decision to bill the Latin Americans for Lend-Lease aid and he had supported the Mexican refusal to purchase costly American surplus aircraft.¹¹ But the very conditions necessary for economic progress were threatened most by the deep-seated national rivalries and military traditions of Latin America itself. These forces, Messersmith concluded, would eventually force most of the republics to seek out European arms and equipment, precipitating a burdensome arms race with its resulting instability and conflict. The only alternative lay in the defense pact, through which the United States would establish itself as the only supplier of arms to Latin America. This conception of the defense agreement would figure prominently in Messersmith's diplomacy in Buenos Aires.

The twin aims of the defense pact hinged most immediately on Argentina. Whether Messersmith judged Peron a fascist is difficult to ascertain but he certainly was convinced that Peron was a treacherous opportunist with aspirations to control the River Plate region. There could, of course, be no hemisphere agreement without Argentina. But it was equally apparent to Messersmith that if Peron opted for a "Southern Bloc" Argentina would scarcely be an asset to a mutual assistance treaty. In Messersmith's opinion, there could be no drastic change in American policy until Peron gave definite assurance that Argentina would respect the territorial integrity of her neighbors. On balance then, the Ambassador's assessments of Argentina clearly indicate that he was neither as "conciliatory" or as much "out of sympathy" with the

Braden policy as several historians of the period have inferred.¹²

The formula evolved by Truman and the Ambassador to settle the five year impasse hardly substantiates one observer's contention that Messersmith carried a "completely new policy" to Buenos Aires.¹³ According to Messersmith there was not the slightest suggestion that the United States would accept wholesale compromise or useless hand-to-mouth agreements merely for the appearance of American solidarity. The Peron Government would first have to ratify the Acts of Chapultepec and show a real willingness to cooperate with Washington in hemisphere affairs.¹⁴ As his activities would reveal, Messersmith would realize these goals through the subtle and unobtrusive diplomacy at which he was adept. Initially, then, methods not basic objectives marked the significant departure from the Braden approach. Within weeks of his arrival in Buenos Aires, however, Messersmith would call the basic premises of American policy into question, involving himself in one of the most bitter personal disputes in American diplomatic history.

Chapter II Footnotes

¹ Although Messersmith's Foreign Service transcript indicates he attended Delaware College, the records of the University of Delaware reveal no evidence to support this. In his public school experience he authored several articles on curriculum and administrative reform as well as a basic text on state government.

² References to Messersmith's personal traits may be found in George Kennan, Memoirs: 1925-1950, (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1967), 66; Adolf A. Berle, Letter to the Author, January 13, 1967; Joe Alex Morris, Nelson Rockefeller: A Biography, (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1960), 159-160; Time Magazine, "Messersmith's Nose," 47, (April 15, 1946), 21. As a word of caution to Peron, Time referred to the comment of one colleague that Messersmith had "an uncanny nose that can smell an s.o.b. as far as the wind can carry the scent."; Hubert Herring, "Can We Run Argentina?", Harper's Magazine, 193 (July-December, 1946), 298-305. Herring describes Messersmith as lacking "words, humor and grace."

³ George S. Messersmith, "Diplomacy as a Weapon of Modern Warfare," speech prepared for the Air War College, Maxwell Field, October 8, 1948, in the Papers of George S. Messersmith deposited in the Special Collections of the Hugh Morris Library at the University of Delaware. The Messersmith Papers include a collection of his diplomatic correspondence from 1932 to 1947, and a half-million word memoir spanning his entire career as educator and diplomat.

⁴ Robert F. Dallek, "Beyond Tradition: The Diplomatic careers of William E. Dodd and George S. Messersmith, 1933-1938," South Atlantic Quarterly, LXVI (Spring, 1967), 233-234. Franklin F. Ford, "Three Observers in Berlin: Rumbold, Dodd and Poncet," in The Diplomats, 1919-1939, Gordon Craig and Felix Gilbert (eds.), (New York), II, 455-460. Professor David Adams, University of Kiel, is preparing a volume of Messersmith's memoirs and correspondence for the period 1930-1940.

⁵ Cosme de la Torriente, "Messersmith y la Unidad de America," Revista De La Habana, 55 (March, 1947), 33-47; Elizabeth Flagg, "Busiest Spot in Mexico," Christian Science Monitor, February 20, 1943; Harry Sylvester, "Mexico and the War," Commonweal 40 (June 30, 1944), 246-250; In the New York Times, June 3, 1943, Mexican officials described his work as "deeply impressive toward the Good Neighbor Policy."

⁶New York Times, April 3, 1946.

⁷Ibid., May 11, 1946.

⁸Ibid., May 14, 1946.

⁹Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., "Good Fences Make Good Neighbors," Fortune, 34 (August, 1946), 131-135, 161-171. Schlesinger notes that Messersmith's statements evoked frantic cabling from Washington because no other American ambassador had publicly assessed Soviet-American relations with such frank pessimism.

¹⁰Messersmith to George C. Marshall, May 8, 1947.

¹¹Messersmith to James F. Byrnes, May 2, 1946; to Spruille Braden, January 16, 1946.

¹²For example, consult his despatches to Braden on February 28, March 14, 16, 1946. Quotations are from Arthur P. Whitaker, The United States and Argentina, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1954), 241; and O. Edward Smith, Jr., Yankee Diplomacy: Intervention in Argentina, (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1953), 154.

¹³Robert J. Alexander, The Peron Era, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1951), 207. It is important to note that Messersmith's appointment came only after Peron made the initial conciliatory gesture of suggesting that an Anglo-American commission investigate Axis influences in Argentina, and not immediately after Peron's election as Whitaker and Alexander state. This supports the view that Washington was unwilling to compromise its stand against the military regime.

¹⁴The Papers of George S. Messersmith, Memoirs, II, No. 20, hereafter cited as Memoirs.

CHAPTER III

Messersmith in Buenos Aires

In the weeks that followed Peron's election Buenos Aires and Washington gave positive, if begrudging, indications that they were willing to resolve their long standing grievances. President-elect Peron, anxious to improve his international standing and cultivate the support of his Army with promises of participation in the Rio defense meeting, refused to flaunt his diplomatic victory over Braden. And, in March, he suggested that the United States and Great Britain send representatives "to investigate at first hand the Government's actions against German influences in Argentina."¹ The disintegration of the "Grand Alliance", Congressional criticism of Braden, as well as the continuing clamor for the eradication of Nazism in the hemisphere, prompted President Truman to respond favorably to this overture. He appointed his representative, Ambassador Messersmith, ordered stopped all official criticism of Argentina and removed the ineffectual but irritating wartime economic embargoes.² A mutual desire for the Rio meeting, along with divergent secondary aims, demanded some degree of cooperation and compromise.

Despite the "Braden o Peron" debacle, then, the new American ambassador went to Argentina with diplomatic cards equal to those of his adversary, Juan Peron. On the one hand he could hold out the possibility of American arms

for the Argentine military, and, on the other, the threat of a return to the policy of Assistant Secretary Braden, still in the State Department. As any able diplomat, Messersmith emphasized the strengths of his position, and the attractiveness of his offering as a bargainer with the upper hand.

In his initial interview with Peron on May 28, a week before Peron's inauguration, the Ambassador placed complete responsibility for the breakdown of relations squarely on Argentina. He indicated that he had come to Argentina not to sacrifice "certain basic principles" but to insure that Argentina fulfill the obligations adhered to at Mexico City. When Peron declared that the meeting must be held to combat communist influence in Latin America, Messersmith replied that Argentina must first enact the Acts of Chapultepec and enforce its provisions against Axis elements.³ In effect, the Ambassador underlined Secretary Byrnes' April 8 demand for "deeds, not merely words."

The first order of business, as Messersmith indicated to Peron, was that the Argentine Congress ratify the Acts of Chapultepec so that the republic would be bound by treaty obligation to eliminate Axis influences, uphold civil liberties and participate in the defense meeting. Although the onus for their enactment was on Argentina, the Ambassador took an active interest in the ratification proceedings from the outset. To encourage a favorable response from Peron and Congress, he secured in mid-June the release of \$400,000,000 in Argentine gold reserves frozen by Secretary Hull in 1944, and informed Peron of this decision shortly before Congress convened.⁴ While Peron

remained ostensibly neutral in presenting the Acts to Congress, he gave private assurance to Messersmith that he was throwing his full weight to their enactment. When Messersmith inquired as to the attitude of the powerful chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Diego Luis Molinari, Peron replied confidently that Molinari, a 'buen muchacho y intelegente,' would pose no problem.⁵

For almost two months, however, the Acts languished in Molinari's committee, not yet appearing even as a subject of discussion. While Congress was overwhelmingly peronista, it was not, in Messersmith's opinion, a "rubber stamp" and he attributed its inaction to Molinari who apparently was attempting to wring political concessions from President Peron.⁶ A private meeting with the Senator in early August made little headway. As consul general in Buenos Aires almost twenty years before, Messersmith had known the wily Molinari well and he again found him to be

the most friendly and amicable and responsive man one could imagine. He was his usual insincere self.⁷

The turning point in these deliberations was reached during the course of a dinner at the American Embassy attended by Peron, Foreign Minister Bramuglia, and an unsuspecting Molinari. As Messersmith recalls, he agreed at Peron's request to put the Senator "on the spot." Directing his comments to Peron and Bramuglia, the Ambassador inquired nonchalantly as to the individual who might be obstructing ratification and outlined the possible consequences if there were any further delay. Squirming uncomfortably, Messersmith recalled, the Senator "realized that unless he moved, his position in the Senate and the Peronista party was in danger."⁸

Several days later, after a single speech by Molinari, and no debate, the Senate gave unanimous approval to the Acts. Except for a handful of ultra-nationalists and Radicals abstainers who contended that no provisions had been made to safeguard Argentine sovereignty, the Acts were accepted by the Chamber of Deputies with equal unanimity and speed.⁹ Paradoxically, as Messersmith noted, the abstainers and the rioters who fulminated against the Congress' action were the very same "good democrats and friends of ours" who the State Department had hoped would defeat Peron in the presidential election.¹⁰

This caustic remark reflected Messersmith's growing skepticism of the Braden policy and, in particular, the relevance of the Blue Book's charge that Axis elements in post-war Argentina posed a threat to the Hemisphere. In collaboration with the British embassy he undertook an intensive investigation of Nazi-fascist aliens and suspected agents, subversive influences in business and industrial concerns and in schools and social institutions. The preliminary results of this study were revealing enough even by mid-June, for him to inform the Department that "in the matter of Argentine compliance . . . we shall have to revise our position."¹¹ After sifting evidence for almost six months there was a general consensus in the Embassy that the Axis menace was now, and probably had been, more imagined than real.¹²

The statistical data on these three areas of focus, while sketchy, substantiate this opinion. For example, it was concluded that only fifteen small businesses and sixty nine corporate firms required complete liquidation by the Argentine Government.¹³ With respect to Axis aliens, the

Ambassador and the British embassy concurred that there was sufficient evidence to warrant the deportation of only fifty two of six hundred individuals investigated.¹⁴ Probably most revealing was the fact that Argentina had made substantial progress in denazification before his arrival. This was particularly evident in the action on school and institutions, which he noted in June already satisfied Article VIII of the Mexico City agreement.¹⁵ It is of interest, in this connection, to note an embassy despatch of October, 1945 which stated that Argentina at that time had made "a technical and fairly substantial compliance in regard to Axis firms." This despatch had been forwarded only several weeks after Ambassador Braden had returned to Washington to resume his campaign against Peron.¹⁶

Messersmith did not believe, however, that the anti-Axis measures signaled a radical change in Argentina's relations with the United States. He had little expectation that Argentina would ever be a "gracious neighbor" or assume an attitude of "sweetness and light" in inter-American conferences. This, he noted, "would be too much to expect or hope for."¹⁷ Indeed, the ardent nationalism ("the ridiculous references to sovereignty"), the Southern Bloc vision and the exaggerated notions of importance in world affairs remained firmly implanted in Argentina's political outlook.¹⁸ Nevertheless, Messersmith opined, Peron recognized that his economic and military obligations as well as his call for action against communism were best served by cooperating with Washington. During Messersmith's first six months in Buenos Aires, Peron lent substance to this opinion. He quieted demands for sweeping nationalization of American utilities and industries, relaxed

press restrictions, and discouraged trade overtures from Moscow as he had hinted he would.¹⁹ Moreover, he had refused tempting European offers of military equipment, the purchase of which would have destroyed the arms control aims of the defense pact, perhaps setting off an arms scramble throughout Latin America.²⁰ Fundamental to Messersmith's prognostication of Argentine-American relations was his repeated observation that Peron was solidly entrenched for at least six years and there was little hope that he could be dislodged. Even Peron's bitter opponents in Argentina, the Ambassador noted, accepted his regime in preference to the only other alternative, a more anti-democratic and Yankee-phobic military dictatorship.²¹ However unpalatable the choice might be, Messersmith urged the State Department to reconcile itself to these realities.

In his meetings with Peron and other Argentine officials, Messersmith was firm in his insistence that they intensify the denazification program. Though sympathetic to Peron's complaint that legal difficulties were hampering action against enemy aliens, the Ambassador declared that "solutions could be found."²² When the Supreme Court exonerated Ludwig Freude of complicity with the Axis, he dutifully carried Braden's protest of the decision to Peron, though he personally believed the evidence against Freude and other German emigres was simply too inadequate to substantiate the Blue Book charges against them.²³ While recognizing the urgency of socio-economic reform in Argentina, Messersmith cautioned Peron to use prudence in his domestic policies in order to prevent further hostile criticism of his regime.²⁴

The first open reaction to his suggestions came,

not unexpectedly, from Braden in a letter which reached Buenos Aires in late July. The Assistant Secretary took issue with Messersmith at every turn. The hard line policy must remain in force, he said, to insure that Peron be restrained from threatening neighboring states or proceeding with his "National Socialist" programs. He rejected the Ambassador's claim that legal obstacles prevented speedier compliance, charged that Peron had willingly freed Axis agents and doubted whether the Government was at all interested in their prosecution. He denied that the Rio Meeting hinged on Argentina's compliance with the Acts and declared that he seriously questioned the wisdom of the whole "arms-military" policy. Argentina would be welcomed back into the inter-American system when democracy and international responsibility replaced excessive nationalism and recalcitrance, but, he added pessimistically, "history has a way of repeating itself." There could be no quick and easy solution to the impasse, said Braden, and in the final analysis compliance rested solely with Peron.²⁵

The observations of Dr. Carl Spaeth, a close advisor to Braden and reputed author of the "Blue Book", indicated that the impact of Messersmith's views had been even greater than Braden's response had suggested. An embassy aide who had conferred with Spaeth in mid-June relayed the following comments at Spaeth's instruction.

Mr. Spaeth expressed some concern that Mr. Braden might be forced into a position where he would have to resign . . . and stated . . . this would be a grievous error and a tragedy. He suggested that Ambassador Messersmith is unquestionably in a position to force this resignation but he trusts the Ambassador will realize some of the tragic consequences of such a move on his part and will guide his policies and actions accordingly.

He said that Mr. Braden . . . will never resign quietly but that he will carry the fight to the press and the radio. Spaeth believes that the effect of such a resignation and of such a public airing of opposing ideological positions would be unfortunate not only for the personal position of certain individuals but also for the prestige of the State Department . . . and he hopes that such a development will not occur.

Mr. Spaeth said he does not definitely know what ambitions Ambassador Messersmith has, but he believes that the Ambassador would like to be "Civil Governor" of Germany. In this connection, he stated his opinion to the effect that it would be very unfortunate if the Ambassador, unjustly or not, should become labelled in the public eye as an "appeaser." So endeth the message.²⁶

The implication of the closing paragraph is self-evident.

Mention of another example of Braden's opposition is pertinent at this point. A frequent complaint of American labor organizations was that the Argentina labor movement was increasingly coming under the control of the Peron regime. In mid-January, at the invitation of Peron, a delegation of the American Federation of Labor arrived in Buenos Aires to determine whether the Confederacion General del Trabajo (CGT) was representative of free trade unionism. From the outset, Messersmith reported, the visit went awry. Most Latin American governments held some influence over their unions, but the itinerary structured by Argentine authorities quite understandably gave the delegates the impression that they were being given a "Cook's tour."²⁷ More important, there were definite

indications that one delegate, Serafino Romauldi of New York, had no intention of letting the visit run smoothly. According to Charge d'Affaires Sidney O'Donoghue, Romauldi used provocative language with Peron who then "hit the roof." Romauldi then claimed the delegation had been insulted and attempted to convince the delegates to terminate their visit. O'Donoghue was convinced that Romauldi was attempting to provoke an incident " . . . for what reason and at whose instigation I leave you to draw your own conclusions."²⁸

To regress briefly, these responses were not altogether unexpected by the Ambassador. In his Memoirs, he relates an incident which substantiates the link between Braden and the progressives. Shortly before leaving for Buenos Aires, he recalls, he was repeatedly urged by a Braden aide to confer with "George Potowsky" of the CIO, doubtless Jacob Potofsky, Chairman of the CIO's Committee on Latin American affairs. The Ambassador refused, but when he paid his farewell call on Braden he was immediately confronted by Potofsky who attempted to "dictate the policies I should follow in Buenos Aires." When Messersmith rebuked Potofsky and ordered him from Braden's office, Potofsky shot back

you will be sorry for this . . . we
could have made your task in the Argentine
very easy. Now we can make it very hard.²⁹

Indeed, it seemed to Messersmith that this threat was being carried out.

With almost nine thousand miles separating him from Washington, Messersmith judged his position as a defensive one, as his correspondence from August to December reveals. Routine reports to the Department in this period

are generally more descriptive than analytic and, with few exceptions, they focus on matters of secondary importance--trade relations, distorted press despatches of American correspondents in Buenos Aires and comments on certain Axis industries and aliens. They contain no criticism of American policy and were clearly designed to avoid accentuating the cleavage with Braden. But in personal letters to leading publishers, Congressmen and State Department officials, including Secretary Byrnes, the Ambassador pointed out the contradictions between the United States' global and Argentine policies and registered his concern for Braden, "who seems to be completely lacking of the real major factors involved in the problem."³⁰

Messersmith's attempt to minimize his differences with Braden and simultaneously present to the Department his pleas for a revision of policy was almost inevitably doomed to failure. On the eve of the crucial 1946 Congressional elections, President Truman assured Braden's liberal supporters that the Assistant Secretary had the firm backing of the administration. Byrnes and Under Secretary Acheson reportedly "took the hide off" Messersmith for bypassing normal State Department channels of authority.³¹ More consternating was the continual liberal criticism of his "honeyed indulgence" and "appeasement." A Washington Post editorial, in effect, portrayed him as a backstage intriguer who was obstructing Braden's efforts to carry out the hard line policy, presumably still in force. It was not unreasonable that Messersmith should hold Braden responsible for these attacks. The Associated Press representative, after checking with his New York office, confided to him that these reports had originated with "so high an officer or officers in the Department of State that the AP could not ignore them . . ."³²

By the beginning of December, Messersmith's position in Buenos Aires had become almost untenable. Thus far, Argentina had ratified the Acts of Chapultepec and taken effective action against Axis elements in schools and property which, in his estimation, equalled or exceeded the denazification efforts of the other Latin American republics. The State Department, however, had yet to comment favorably on these accomplishments or give any indication if or when it would consent to the Rio meeting. Presumably this mute silence stemmed from Braden's opposition to Peron and the plans for hemisphere defense. Having exploited the limited diplomatic tools at his disposal, Messersmith requested recall to Washington. His greatest task, one aide commented, was not in winning Peron's cooperation but in securing Washington's recognition that it was valid evidence of Argentina's willingness to collaborate.³³

Chapter III Footnotes

¹New York Times, March 10, 1946.

²Harold F. Peterson, Argentina and the United States, 1910-1960, (New York: University Publishers, 1964), 456.

³Messersmith to Byrnes, May 29, 1946.

⁴Messersmith to Byrnes, June 24, 1946; New York Times, June 25, 1946. Though the evidence is not conclusive, the timing of the request suggests that Messersmith used the gold release to strike a warning blow at the British whose coddling of Peron and attempts to disrupt the Inter-American system he had long criticized. In his despatch of June 15 he observed, "I think it is the time to let our British friends know that they must work with us most whole-heartedly . . ." The release of the funds weakened the position of a British trade mission which was conducting crucial trade talks with Peron but which discussions had become stalled on the British refusal to free Argentine sterling blocked during the war.

⁵Messersmith to Byrnes, June 24, 1946.

⁶Messersmith to William D. Pawley, Ambassador to Brazil, August 6, 1946.

⁷Memoirs, II, No. 20.

⁸Ibid.

⁹Whitaker, op. cit., 219.

¹⁰Messersmith to Sulzberger, September 25, 1946; to Byrnes, October 30, 1946.

¹¹Messersmith to Byrnes, June 15, 1946.

¹²Consult the surveys prepared by Embassy aides Riley, Towson, Davis and Smith, December, 1946.

¹³Messersmith to Byrnes, July 27, October 30, 1946; Howard Tewksbury to Marshall, January 31, 1947.

¹⁴Messersmith to Byrnes, "Memorandum to Secretary Byrnes," December 10, 1946.

¹⁵Messersmith to Byrnes, June 15, 24, 1946.

¹⁶Norman Towson to Messersmith, December 10, 1946.

¹⁷Messersmith to Pawley, August 6; to Sulzberger, September 25, 1946.

¹⁸Messersmith to Byrnes, May 29, June 15, 24; to Joseph Flack, American Ambassador to Bolivia, August 5, 1946.

¹⁹Messersmith to Byrnes, October 30, 1946; Memoirs I, No. 12; New York Times, June 24, November 1, 1946. Peron stated in their first meeting that the Soviet trade mission would receive no encouragement.

²⁰Messersmith to Sulzberger, September 25, 1946.

²¹Messersmith to Byrnes, June 15, 1946; to Arthur Sulzberger, April 3, 1947; to George C. Marshall, May 8, 1947.

²²Messersmith to Byrnes, June 24, 1946.

²³Messersmith to Sulzberger, September 25; to Under-Secretary Will Clayton, October 31; to Byrnes, December 2, 1946.

²⁴Messersmith to Byrnes, May 29, 1946; Carlton Beals, Latin America: World in Revolution, (New York: Abelard-Schuman, 1963), 194-195. "This is a real revolution," he told Beals, "it is long overdue."

²⁵Spruille Braden to Messersmith, July 22, 1946. Also see Memoirs, I, No. 13, for the visit of a Braden aide whose purpose, Messersmith believed, was to gather evidence against him.

²⁶C. R. Burrows to Messersmith, August 12, 1946. "Memorandum of Conversation," on or about June 24.

²⁷See Messersmith's letters to Norman Littell and Sumner Welles, for his comments on the visit, March 12, 1947.

²⁸Sidney O'Donoghue to Messersmith, January 24, 1947.

²⁹Memoirs, II, No. 20.

³⁰Messersmith to Clayton, October 30, 1946.

³¹New York Times, October 23, November 1, 30, 1946. Graham Hovey, "Getting Tough With Peron," New Republic, 115 (November 25, 1946), 68. In a memo for the record of December 10, Messersmith notes that other letters went to Senators Austin and Connally as well as to Jeffrey Elliston, editor of the Washington Post.

³²Washington Post, December 9, 1946; Messersmith, memo for the record, December 10, 1946.

³³Towson to Messersmith, December 10, 1946.

CHAPTER IV

Messersmith or Braden

When Messersmith arrived in Washington in late December, the political atmosphere was rife with rumors that he was forcing a showdown with Braden.¹ The Ambassador, however, refused to substantiate these reports, noting curtly "Well, that's what I read in the newspapers."² While this response reflected State's sensitivity to publicization of internal squabbles, it also underscored the irony of his diplomatic situation. Up to this point, Messersmith had avoided an open confrontation that might result in the Assistant Secretary's resignation first, as he confided to Arthur Sulzberger, because it would "appear that we were giving way to outside pressures . . ."³ And, second, because Braden's presence in the Department was a constant reminder to Peron that if the Mexico City commitments were disregarded the coercive policy might be reimposed at a moment's notice. The Ambassador had in fact used the Braden threat to promote the Argentine actions which would eventually render Braden's opposition meaningless. Now, however, when the denazification efforts were nearing completion, an aroused public opinion and the fear of a Congressional investigation prevented him from taking public issue with Braden, the symbol turned open antagonist.

The Ambassador did not, therefore, call for Braden's resignation or even ask for an explanation of

the Assistant Secretary's conduct. Neither, it seems, did he expect that the State Department would call an immediate end to the impasse before Argentina officially announced the completion of its efforts against enemy property and aliens. Rather, he asked that Argentine compliance be judged in relation to that of other Latin American republics. In this perspective, the facts would speak for themselves. Most important, he asked that the United States move quickly to clear away growing suspicions in Latin America and Britain that it had no intention of normalizing relations. Within the Inter-American system, he noted, this intransigent attitude "was the most dangerous factor on the horizon . . ."⁴

In meetings with Secretary Byrnes through the first week of January, Messersmith outlined the consequences if Washington refused to move from the hard line policy.

We are drifting into a situation both in the press and so far as action of government is concerned which will definitely alienate the two countries and force the Argentine into all the positions which in the past we have hoped to avert. Without a composition of the situation we will definitely destroy inter-American collaboration and will open the way for all sorts of foreign influence in this hemisphere. We will destroy the stability of our interests in the Argentine and gradually close this important world market for our goods. We will destroy any hope of a defense pact which would be effective and weaken our own security and that of every country in this hemisphere and through that destroy what can be one of the principal bulwarks to any world organization for peace and security.⁵

Messersmith left the State Department on January 7

believing that he could return to Buenos Aires with complete agreement on policy recommendations and that no further discussions of Argentina would be required. Byrnes, he recalled, "realized that the Department had gone back on me."⁶

The Secretary's sympathies, however, had little effect on future policy decisions. On January 8, one of the best kept secrets of the cold war was disclosed with the announcement that George C. Marshall was returning from the Far East to succeed Byrnes as head of the Department. Rumours mounted that Messersmith, as well as Braden, would be forced to resign.⁷ Messersmith again called on Byrnes, but the retiring Secretary would make no comment on Argentine policy and ordered Messersmith to wait for Marshall.⁸ Byrnes, however, did show concern for the mounting rumours that Messersmith might be forced to resign. He reminded President Truman that Messersmith had accepted the mission only with the greatest reluctance and had been assured that

when there had been a settlement of the differences then existing between the two governments he should be assigned to some other post.⁹

Several days later it was reported that Byrnes had suggested to Marshall that there be no changes in personnel until the policy conflict could be viewed objectively.¹⁰

Messersmith's activities in the days preceeding Marshall's inauguration on January 22 are not easily pinpointed but it is certain that he continued to seek support for his policies. On two occasions he called on Admiral Leahy in the White House to vent his complaints of Braden and Acheson and to express his hopes for better results under Marshall.¹¹ At luncheon with Arthur Sulzberger and

others of the New York Times, he reviewed the status of Argentine-American relations in an attempt to lessen the Times' hostility to Peron. Certainly he registered his criticism of Frank Kluckhohn's distorted reporting and erratic behavior. Messersmith's policy arguments had little effect on Sulzberger but whatever the connection, Kluckhohn disappeared from the Times staff in Buenos Aires shortly thereafter.¹² Though still critical of Peron, Times appraisals now assumed a more measured and less sensationalistic tone. Messersmith also appears to have met with leading businessmen whose interest in Peron's Five Year Plan might lead them to call for closer ties with Argentina.

Messersmith conferred with Secretary Marshall in late January and reiterated his argument that when Argentina met her commitments, the United States must acknowledge this fact and consent to the Rio meeting. The dangers were growing, he noted that the Argentine Army, which had been without modern equipment since the beginning of the war, would soon force the purchase of arms and supplies from abroad. Czechoslovakia, he emphasized, had issued a standing offer for unlimited purchases and Sweden and Britain were about to follow.¹³ Though a known supporter of the defense plans, Marshall refused to discuss the situation until he returned from the upcoming foreign ministers' conference to Moscow.¹⁴ Braden would remain in office and Messersmith would return to Buenos Aires.

While there had been no definite commitment on the defense meeting, there were, however, several indications that Washington might soon end the deadlock. The

State Department had acknowledged Argentina's action against schools and property, terming the latter an "important step' forward.¹⁵ It also agreed that the Mexico City obligations would be met when Argentina deported the remaining enemy aliens.¹⁶ When Messersmith called on Truman, the President "used some very strong language with regard to Braden" and it was certainly with Truman's approval that the Ambassador was able to announce that relations with Buenos Aires were "practically normal." This statement was generally thought to mark an end to the hard line policy and the feud between Braden and Messersmith.¹⁷ It did not, however, signify an end to the long seething controversy over the question of arms in the hemisphere which would erupt in the coming months.

Chapter IV Footnotes

- ¹New York Times, January 2, 1947.
- ²Ibid.
- ³Messersmith to Sulzberger, September 25, 1946.
- ⁴Messersmith to Byrnes, "Memorandum to Secretary Byrnes," December 10, 1946. It is probable that Messersmith personally delivered the memo to Byrnes.
- ⁵Ibid.
- ⁶Memoirs, II, No. 20.
- ⁷New York Times, January 14, 1947.
- ⁸Memoirs, II, No. 20.
- ⁹James F. Byrnes, "Memorandum for the President," January 9, 1947, Harry S. Truman MSS., Truman Library, Independence, Missouri.
- ¹⁰New York Times, January 14, 1947.
- ¹¹Diary of Fleet Admiral William D. Leahy, deposited in the Manuscripts Division of the Library of Congress, entries for January 10, 23, 1947.
- ¹²Messersmith to Sulzberger, March 28, April 3, 1947. In 1938, Kluckhohn had been expelled from Mexico by the Cardenas Government for the anti-Mexican bias of his reporting, cf. David E. Cronon, Josephus Daniels in Mexico, (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1960,) ff. 294. Messersmith complained repeatedly about the distorted reporting of Kluckhohn and Virginia Prewett, writing for the Chicago Tribune and the Washington Post. After a vicious personal attack by Miss Prewett, Messersmith described her as a "very active but malicious little lady . . . who would be better off in a sanatorium than writing news stories about me."
- ¹³Messersmith to George C. Marshall, "Memorandum to Secretary Marshall," January 24, 1947.

¹⁴Memoirs, II, No. 20. Messersmith recalled that Marshall "took this position in spite of my strong statements to him as to why the matter should be clarified."

¹⁵New York Times, January 26, 1947. This statement came only one day after Marshall met Braden and only several hours after his meeting with Messersmith. Details of Argentina's action against Axis properties may be found in the despatch of Economic Counselor Howard F. Tewksbury to Marshall, January 31, 1947.

¹⁶Messersmith to Marshall, February 21, 1947.

¹⁷Memoirs, II, No. 20; New York Times, January 28, 1947.

CHAPTER V

Arms and Argentina

The issue of arms and Argentina reached a climax in the first months of 1947 as Washington and Buenos Aires moved ploddingly toward an accommodation and as the Inter-American Defense Board completed its plans for hemisphere military cooperation. Only the elimination of Axis aliens from Argentina stood in the way of the oft-postponed Rio meeting.

For advocates of the hard line policy, however, it mattered little what superficial actions Argentina had taken against Axis influences. Peron had merely "shuffled papers" as Braden declared, and Argentina remained a thriving fascist stronghold. To include Argentina in a defense pact and supply her with arms, they argued, would only strengthen Peronist fascism. And in their ideological lexicon, fascism was synonymous with militarism; warfare and aggression its only logical conclusion. Peron's only interest in the defense pact, they argued, was to secure arms for an invasion of the River Plate region.

This concern had been a recurrent theme for American correspondents and journalists. Shortly before his recall, Frank Kluckhohn of the New York Times declared that Argentina was spending almost half her annual budget on military preparations, and he described an Argentine-Chilean trade agreement as more vital to Peron than "the taking of Austria and Czechoslovakia was for Hitler."¹ In late 1946,

Joseph Newman, former New York Herald Tribune correspondent with Braden in Buenos Aires, called on Admiral Leahy to warn that Peron was already setting up fascist governments in South America.² Even the usually objective U. S. News commented in early 1947, that Argentina "is converting Chile, Bolivia, and Paraguay into satellite states . . ."³ Popular literature bristled with such bold titles as "Peron on the March", "Argentina has its Fuehrer", "Peron's Expanding Empire", "Argentina: New World Super-State", and others too numerous for mention.⁴ Robert Bendiner, writing in The Nation, coupled a scathing personal attack on Messersmith with the declaration that

only the Argentines really want arms. They find themselves for the first time a creditor nation, they have expansionist dreams, and they are ready to pay in hard cash.⁵

Pushing to the height of absurdity, Henry A. Wallace, leader of the progressives, vigorously defended charges in his New Republic that Argentina might soon have fissionable materials for the production of nuclear weapons.⁶

Of all the allegations levied at the Peron regime, those focusing on its aggressive intentions were the most difficult for Messersmith to disprove, basically because his rebuttal proceeded from a differing premise. Although, like historians since, he was unable to precisely define the nature of Peron's political "philosophy", its orientation was more to the left than to fascism. He never denied that "expansionist dreams" (an aspiration stretching back to Argentina's colonial period) appealed to Peron, but he was convinced that Peron was exerting a restraining influence on the ultra-nationalist's "Southern Bloc" ambitions. The Ambassador constantly probed Peron on this matter and the President confided at one point that

hegemony over the River Plate region would only be a military and economic burden.⁷

Indeed, Argentina's military weakness alone precluded any expansionist thrusts. Army equipment was obsolete, Messersmith declared, and the scarcity of serviceable aircraft made it impossible for pilots to maintain monthly flight quotas.⁸ Referring implicitly to the condition of the armed forces, he commented to Arthur Sulzberger

If I were to give you the real facts
in this connection they would be so
astounding you would hardly believe me.⁹

Most significant in Messersmith's analysis, was the Government's decision in March, 1947, to reduce defense spending by fifty percent and pare down Army manpower from 100,000 to 70,000 in order to lessen the Army's political influence.¹⁰ Professor Robert Alexander, a fierce critic of Peron, has unwittingly confirmed that the manpower reductions were, in fact, completed by 1949.¹¹

The basic weakness of the argument that Peron sought to join the defense pact to strengthen Argentina's military capacity lay not in what the critics attempted to prove or to disprove, as Messersmith saw it, but in what they consistently ignored. For several months, he had reported that French, Belgian, Soviet and Czech representatives had been holding attractive arms purchases to Peron and the Army.¹² In early February, Great Britain terminated its "Gentlemen's Agreement" arms embargo and there were indications that Sweden would soon join the list of competitors. Obviously, Argentina was not lacking in sources of military equipment. In Messersmith's logic, an arms race was inevitable if Peron yielded to

the Europeans. At least, the defense pact would allow the United States to regulate the flow of arms throughout the hemisphere. The question then resolved itself into a choice of lesser evils. "There will be many difficulties with a defense pact," he told Marshall, "but many more difficulties if we do not have one."¹³

The net effect of the rising opposition to the defense agreement was to evoke equally strenuous resistance from its proponents. Congressional impatience over further delay of the Rio meeting was voiced by Chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, Senator Arthur Vandenberg and by Representative Alvin O'Konski of Wisconsin, who in late February launched a campaign in the House to oust the "muddling jughead" Braden.¹⁴ Most forceful and articulate was former Under Secretary of State Sumner Welles who, in late 1946, had defended Messersmith against charges of "appeasement" in his Where Are We Heading?.¹⁵ With the Ambassador's firm support, Welles now took the offensive against those who had "deliberately sabotaged" Messersmith's work in Buenos Aires. In identical articles in three influential dailies, the Congressional Record, and the Revista de La Habana, all published on February 12, Welles declared

Those members of Congress who see the need for the prompt restoration of hemispheric unity, and for the conclusion without further delay of the hemispheric treaty of defense . . . would perform a national service if they investigated every aspect of this situation to determine with entire precision who the individuals and influence may be that are responsible for a campaign which jeopardizes the highest interests of this country and all the Americas.¹⁶

When Acting Secretary Acheson, Braden's chief supporter in the State Department, made known his opposition to Truman's Inter-American Military Co-operation Bill claiming it would burden the Latin American economies and promote instability,¹⁷ Welles again took up the challenge. He reiterated Messersmith's argument that most Latin American governments were determined to improve their armed forces and, if the United States refused them co-operation toward this end, they would turn to Europe as they had in the past. The State Department's argument against the arms bill might merit consideration, he observed

If the America republics were today living in a peaceful and prosperous world, within which the United Nations was able to carry out its responsibilities . . . but the present state of world affairs affords no reason for such ostrich-like complacency.¹⁸

The thrust of international developments confirmed Welles' arguments and imposed a new sense of urgency on the normalization of Argentine-American relations.

On February 21, 1947, the State Department was notified that Great Britain would no longer be able to support its commitments in the Mediterranean. Clearly the United States would have to fill the vacuum created by the British withdrawal. Speaking before Congress in early March, President Truman spelled out his plans to lend military assistance to Turkey and Greece. Reports from the Moscow Conference at the end of March dispelled any illusions that Soviet-American tensions might soon be alleviated, forcing Truman to bring the Argentine "Question" to an end. On March 31, Truman instructed Argentine Ambassador Oscar Ivanessivich to carry a personal message to

Peron, asking that Argentina deport the remaining "20 to 30 dangerous aliens" in order that relations be normalized and the Rio meeting convened.¹⁹

For almost two months, however, Messersmith and the State Department haggled over the thoroughness of Argentina's action against the remaining Axis agents and collaborators. In Messersmith's view, Truman's quota of "20 to 30" was an unnecessary and irritating demand. As of March 31, 157 aliens had been deported since 1945, and eight more were in custody.²⁰ In mid-April he informed the Department that as far as he was concerned Argentina had effectively complied with her Mexico City commitments. "Of those suspects still at large," he noted caustically to Acheson, "it can hardly be said that they are 'dangerous'."²¹ Acheson and Marshall questioned his evaluation, but by late May only two additional aliens (plus those already in detention) had been deported.²² The Department yielded. Secretary Marshall overruled Braden's vigorous opposition to the defense program and the military cooperation bill was resubmitted to Congress.²³ On June 3 President Truman received Ambassador Ivanessivich at the White House and declared that "no obstacles remained looking toward the treaty of mutual assistance contemplated by the Act of Chapultepec."²⁴

This announcement signaled the end of Messersmith's mission and his diplomatic career. Since early April, rumours had reached Buenos Aires that he would be succeeded by James Bruce, head of National Dairy Products and political supporter of Truman.²⁵ Although prepared for recall, he was stunned by Secretary Marshall's cable of June 4. It read in part:

The President instructs me to inform you that your mission having been completed as announced in the press yesterday, your resignation has been accepted . . . In reaching this decision the President has been moved by the over-riding interests of the country . . .²⁶

Hardly one to bow out meekly, Messersmith shot back immediately with a barbed reference to the 'over-riding' interests and asking "As I have not submitted any resignation to the President, has my 'resignation' been accepted by him?"²⁷ In press conference the next morning Truman denied knowledge of a resignation and noted briefly that Messersmith had successfully completed his mission and would return to Washington.²⁸ Later the same day, however, the State Department announced that Messersmith had resigned, prompting the Ambassador to declare "I am completely in the dark as to what has been happening and the reasons therefor . . ."²⁹ On June 6 Spruille Braden's resignation was made public.³⁰ Truman had cleared the slate.

The President's decision was a wise one. With both antagonists removed and the Argentine Question resolved, he could now focus American attentions on the pressing problems of Soviet-American relation. Despite Messersmith's understandable bitterness over the "unnecessary difficulties" of his mission and the peremptory handling of his resignation, American foreign policy was now following the course which he had long urged.

Messersmith retired from the Foreign Service in August, 1947, shortly before the opening of the Rio de Janeiro Conference. On September 2, the Inter-American Mutual Assistance Treaty, the Rio Pact, was approved

by the American republics. Shortly thereafter, columnist David Lawrence commented:

Somehow or other they don't pin medals on men who achieve for their country some of its most substantial successes. Everybody, for example, is happy in Washington nowadays over the new Inter-American treaty . . . yet this magnificent result could not have been attained if good relations had not been restored with Argentina . . . Had it not been for the indefatigable work of Nelson Rockefeller when he was Assistant Secretary of State, and George Messersmith, when he became American Ambassador to Argentina, today's applause for the Rio Treaty would never have been heard because there would have been no such agreement . . .³¹

Chapter V Footnotes

¹New York Times, November 7, 1946. Any reading of Kluckhohn's despatches would substantiate Messersmith's numerous complaints. Few of Kluckhohn's reports avoid some veiled or direct reference to Argentine militarism-expansionism. His observations, like those of other American commentators, became more frantic and absurd as Argentine-American relations improved. See, for instance, his despatches of November 10, 17, 24, 29, December 15, 1946. Fortunately the editorial policy of the Times was considerably more moderate. The Washington Post, on the other hand, was consistently critical of Peron and Messersmith, particularly from late 1946 through the Spring, 1947, and echoed the progressive fear of aggression by Argentina.

²Leahy Diary, entry for October 15, 1946.

³Anonymous, U. S. News, 22, (April-June, 1947), 16.

⁴The popular literature on Peron during this period is voluminous. Titles quoted are from Alvarez Del Vayo, "Peron on the March," The Nation, 164 (May 21, 1947), 657; Artucio Hugo Fernandez, "Argentina Has Its Fuehrer," Free World, 11 (May, 1946), 58-60; Albert C. Hicks, "Peron's Expanding Empire," The Nation, 164 (June 28, 1947), 765-766; Frank Kluckhohn, "Argentina: New World Superstate," Saturday Evening Post, 219 (April 19, 1947), 28, 106-113.

⁵Robert Bendiner, "Braden or Messersmith," The Nation, 164 (February 1, 1947), 116-117.

⁶Wallace's assertions appeared with William R. Mizelle's "More About Peron's Atomic Plans," New Republic, 116 (March 31, 1947), 20-21; which followed on the heels of Mizelle's "Peron's Atomic Plans," New Republic, 116 (February 24, 1947), 22-23.

⁷Messersmith to Byrnes, November 28, 1946. One of Messersmith's key arguments for the defense pact was that its provisions prohibiting aggression within the hemisphere would prevent Argentine expansion into the River Plate region.

⁸Messersmith to Arthur Sulzberger, September 25, 1946.

⁹Ibid., April 3, 1947.

¹⁰Messersmith to Marshall, March 12, 1947.

¹¹Robert J. Alexander, The Peron Era, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1951), 118-119. Alexander alleged that "a large increase in the manpower of the army undoubtedly occurred between 1943 and 1949" and then contradicts this argument by noting that "the army had been cut from a high of 105,000 in 1945 to 70,000 four years later."

¹²Messersmith to Byrnes, November 22, December 10, 1946; to Marshall, January 24, February 21, 1947.

¹³Messersmith to Marshall, February 7, 1947.

¹⁴Vandenberg, a former isolationist, had been a consistent critic of Braden and a prime mover behind Messersmith's appointment. For O'Konski's speeches, see Congressional Record, 93, part 1, 80th Congress, 1st session (February 24, 1947), 1401-1408; 93, part 2, (March 13, 1947), 2045-2047; 93, part 10, Appendix (March 13, 1947), A1010-1014; 93, part 2, 1st session Appendix, (April 3, 1947), A1486-1487.

¹⁵Welles, Where Are We Heading?, 234-236.

¹⁶Several letters passed between Messersmith and Welles in February and March, but only that of 12 March is in Messersmith's papers. In this letter, the Ambassador thanked Welles for "what you are doing in this matter," but he cautioned Welles to temper his demand for a Congressional investigation, noting that such action should be undertaken only if Marshall was unable or unwilling to investigate the matter personally. Welles' argument appeared in the Washington Post, New York Herald Tribune, Diario De La Marina (Havana), February 12, 1947; Congressional Record, 93, 80th Congress, 1st session, Appendix A, (February 12, 1947), A518. The same article was reprinted under the title "El Embajador Messersmith," Revista De La Habana, 55 (March, 1947), 25-27. In the same issue, Cosme de la Torriente, prominent Cuban politician and mutual friend to Welles and Messersmith, contributed "Messersmith y la Unidad de America." Emphasizing the Welles argument was Richard Pattee's "Restoring the Good Neighbor Policy,"

Human Events, 8 (November, 1946). This followed Pattee's recent criticism of the Hull policy, "The Argentine Question: The War Stages," Review of Politics, VIII (November, 1946, 457-500.

¹⁷Acheson registered his opposition to the bill in a letter to Secretary of War Patterson within days of the announcement of the Truman Doctrine, which set a precedent for the Rio pact. It was reprinted in part by editor Frank C. Hanighen, "Not Merely Gossip," Human Events, 4 (April 9, 1947), n.p. The letter was not reported by the New York Times until June 24, 1947.

¹⁸New York Herald Tribune, April 9, 1947.

¹⁹Messersmith to Acheson, April 3, 1947; New York Times, April 15, 1947.

²⁰Messersmith to Marshall, February 13, March 31, 1947. Also deported were 887 German Naval officers and crewmen of the battleship Graf Spee and two submarines.

²¹Messersmith to Acheson, April 18, 25, 1947.

²²Messersmith to Marshall, May 8, 12, 1947.

²³New York Times, May 23, 28, 1947.

²⁴Ibid., June 4, 1947.

²⁵Memoirs, 1, No. 13.

²⁶Marshall to Messersmith, June 4, 1947.

²⁷Messersmith to Marshall, June 6, 1947.

²⁸New York Times, June 6, 1947.

²⁹Ibid., June 6, 1947.

³⁰Ibid., June 7, 1947.

³¹Joe Alex Morris, Nelson Rockefeller: A Biography, (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1960), 231.

CHAPTER VI

Analysis and Conclusions

Many of the perplexing issues which have loomed large in American foreign policy in the Cold War were debated in the Argentine Question--intervention or non-intervention, disarmament or rearmament, the United Nations or regional defense blocs. At the extremes of the controversy stood Braden and Messersmith. Both drew their arguments from a shared experience of the 1930's and a common concern for peace, but both interpreted the "lessons" of history distinctly. The Braden-progressive view was appealing if only because of its simplicity. Eliminate fascism, they argued, reason with the Soviet Union, secure peace through the United Nations. Messersmith's case was less easily comprehended because it was predicated upon the belief that conflict was a constant of foreign affairs. His argument to prevent warfare through a military pact directed against the Soviet Union and minimize an arms race by distributing arms to Latin America seemed paradoxical to a war weary nation.

By the early 1950's, developments in Argentina seemed to justify Braden's charges that Peron had undermined Argentina's democratic traditions. Press censorship was widespread, the economy was highly centralized, Peron had embarked on his "Third Position" between Washington and Moscow. Professors Robert Alexander and George I. Blanksten, writing at that time, were severely critical

of Messersmith, claiming that he had failed to speak out against the regime and ignored the anti-Peronistas, presumably Argentina's democratic elements.¹ Implicit in their charges was the belief that, if given the opportunity, viable democracy would return to Argentina.

Indeed, Messersmith did not speak out publicly against the regime even though he clearly appreciated the consequences of many of the peronista policies and attitudes. To have taken a stand against Peron would have been to repeat Braden's blunder and jeopardize the defense pact, the primary objective of his mission. He did not expect that Peron would ever be a "gracious neighbor" but Messersmith was willing to deal with Peron to achieve limited objectives as long as relations with the Soviet Union absorbed American attentions. Moreover, he did not view Argentina's domestic strife as a struggle between fascism and democracy, but rather as a conflict between the unenlightened "distinguidos" and the frustrated masses. While the Peron regime was demagogic, inefficient and arbitrary (as were most other Latin American states) it was at least attacking the socio-economic evils that had long been ignored. Messersmith's view of Argentina has been sustained in the post-Peron era. Since 1955, constitutionally elected presidents have held power for a total of only four years, press censorship and centralized economic controls have been reimposed.

Messersmith's pragmatism contrasts sharply with the constricted vision of Braden and the progressives. Their ideology of fascism - the military-industrial combination which deceives labor and the masses and leads the nation to war - allowed no exceptions to the model.² When

the Buenos Aires meatpackers led Peron's return from exile in 1945, Jacob Potofsky vigorously denied that Peron had the support of the Argentine labor movement. And, only weeks before the 1946 elections, Henry Morganthau repeated the charges of Peron's links with Argentine capitalists despite the fact that, months before, big business had come out against his candidacy. A further contradiction appears in their outcries against Argentine militarism. Argentina was at one and the same time well equipped with the instruments of war and yet eager to join the defense pact in order to secure arms. There is, of course, no evidence that Peron was preparing for aggression at that time, allegations to which effect Professor Whitaker has correctly described as mere "loose talk."

Similarly, the progressive longing for peace and, in some cases, their sympathies for the Soviet system led them to exaggerate the Soviet Union's peaceful intentions, playing directly into Soviet attempts to prolong the Washington-Buenos Aires deadlock and block the defense pact.³ Adolf Berle, former Assistant Secretary of State and delegate to the Chapultepec Conference recalls that at Mexico City debates over the defense pact

. . . were not altogether harmonious. The principal opponent was Alger Hiss . . . /who/ took the position that the proposed United Nations Organization Security Council should be the only judge of operations for defense anywhere . . . /and where/ the Soviet Union would have a veto.⁴

At the same time that Molotov was condemning Argentine fascism at San Francisco (the progressives viewed the

treachery at the U. N. much as conservatives declared Yalta a sellout to Moscow) Soviet and Argentine representatives were secretly discussing the opening of diplomatic and commercial relations.⁵ And, when Peron recognized the Soviet Union in June, 1946, Soviet propaganda quickly recast him as a courageous opponent of U. S. intervention and imperialism. Clearly Braden and the progressives were cleverly exploited.

Their opposition to Peron and the defense plans was no doubt sincere, but speculation naturally arises as to whether there was direct Soviet-communist influence on their idealism. Allegations were made at the time that Braden's aide in Havana, Buenos Aires and Washington, one Gustavo Duran, was a communist agent, but the sources of this charge - the conservative mid-Western Senator Wherry, the rabid anti-communist O'Konski and an apostate Spanish communist writing from Madrid - are hardly objective.⁶ Yet many questions remain unanswered. Was it true, as an Embassy aide declared, that Duran had urged Braden "to make no peace with Peron"? And were a number of Argentines given study grants by the Braden Embassy "on the side of international communism"? Was the report circulated at Chapultepec which placed Argentina's arms production at major power capacity the result of misinformation or, as one aide inferred, deliberate distortion? Did the Mexican fellow traveler, Lombardo Toledano, Latin America's most outspoken opponent of the defense pact, exert his influence on Potofsky's Latin American Affairs Committee through what Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. described as the "strange alliance" between Lombardo's CTAL and the CIO? Did the same sources who conceived Morgenthau's "pastoralization plan" also feed his psychopathic anti-fascism against Peron? Why, shortly

after his retirement, did Spruille Braden go full cycle from a progressive anti-fascist to an ultra conservative anti-communist? Was he merely getting in step with the times, or was this reversal a recognition that he had been duped?

One final question strikes at the heart of the American dilemma of decision making. Viewed as a microcosm of the basic problems confronting the United States in the Cold War, the Argentine "Question" suggests that American policy debates are often irreconcilable. How then is policy best formulated and carried through in the Democracy? Messersmith would suggest that men dedicate themselves to the conviction that the world is imperfect and that they must always choose between lesser evils - the ideal of realism. In a remarkable tribute to Messersmith, George Kennan recalls

Tough he was, and strong-willed indeed When I asked him, on one occasion, whence he had acquired this quality, he told me of an experience he had had in his early life as principal of a public high school. Political pressure had been brought to bear upon him to desist from the expulsion of a student who was a troublemaker and had defied his authority. Two of the political bigwigs of the state had descended on him in person and showered him with threats of the loss of his own position, and reprisals against the school, if he stuck to his guns. He stuck to his guns, but the strain was so great that when they left, he put his head down on his desk and wept. Nevertheless, his battle had been won and since that moment he had never again let himself be influenced by fear of a scene or of personal unpleasantness Looking back on it today, I am aware that this dry drawling, peppery man, his eyes always glinting with the readiness to accept combat, capable of being wrong

like the rest of us but stern and incorruptible in his fight for what he considered right and decent, was one of those chiefs who left an indelible mark on my own concept of what American diplomacy could and should be.¹²

In some measure, at least, this indomitable spirit helped focus United States' attentions on the new international responsibilities which many Americans neither understood nor desired.

Chapter VI Footnotes

¹Alexander, op. cit., 207-208; Blanksten, op. cit., 437-438.

²This interpretation was generally Marxian. For further discussion of the leftist misinterpretation of Peron, see the two articles by Christopher Emmett.

³Sidney Hillman and Jacob Potofsky were anti-communist leftists who undoubtedly held sympathy for their homeland. Both had emigrated from Czarist Russia shortly before World War I. Leftist sentiment for the Soviet Union, as judged by The Nation and New Republic, remained strong until the Korean War.

⁴Adolf Berle, Jr. to the Author, April 25, 1967. Underlining supplied by Dr. Berle.

⁵Welles, Where Are We Heading?, 212.

⁶The charge against Duran was first levied by Senator Owen Brewster in the Congressional Record in mid-1946, and repeated by O'Konski in his insertion of March 13, 1947. Karl Reinffer elaborated on the charge several years later in his Comunistas espanoles en America, (Madrid: Editora Nacional, 1953), 52, 90-93. For Braden's rebuttal, see his letter in Alexis Oyaneder's "La verdad sobre Gustavo Duran y de la actuacion del Hon. Spruille Braden frente a la penetracion comunista en las America's," Estudios sobre el Comunismo, 2 (April-June, 1954), 102-108. Duran was cleared of any wrongdoing by the State Department in 1946 but resigned shortly thereafter to accept a position with the United Nations.

⁷Nelson Riley to Messersmith, December, 1946. Riley was assigned to Buenos Aires during Braden's tour.

⁸Sherlock Davis to Messersmith, December 12, 1946. Davis was Military Attache to the Embassy. The report he quotes was reputedly circulated by Dr. Carl B. Spaeth, noted in Chapter III. One example of the distorted data cited by Davis placed Argentine weapons capacity at 1,150 75 mm. guns and five tanks a day. "This information resembles the false and misleading reports fabricated in Montivideo by Communist and German Black Front sources for the purpose of embarrassing the present Argentine regime."

⁹Schlesinger, op. cit., 37.

¹⁰The Morgenthau Diaries will eventually be published in their entirety by the Senate Internal Security Sub-committee. According to the analysis of Professor Anthony Kubek of Dallas University, the "pastoralization plan" was conceived by Harry Dexter White, Morgenthau's chief assistant in the Treasury. White was allegedly connected with the communist espionage network, though not himself a party member. He died under mysterious circumstances in 1948 after testifying in the trial of Alger Hiss. The hidden motive of the plan was to weaken Germany in preparation for a communist takeover.

¹¹In 1949, Braden attempted to identify the Peron regime with international communism but apparently convinced no one. As legal counsel to the United Fruit Company in 1953, he sounded the alarm of communist influence in Guatemala.

¹²Kennan, op. cit., 66.

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