

Beyond bipolarity?

The rise and fall of the Argentine Third Position (1947–1950)

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Introduction—The Latin American challenge to global Cold War studies

The classical account of the Cold War highlights the contest between the two superpowers, the United States and the Soviet Union, often with Europe as the center of attention. What representatives of the field of so-called Global Cold War Studies propose is to leave this at times Eurocentric (or Western-centric) perspective behind and to understand the Cold War as a truly global phenomenon (for explicit pleadings of this kind, see Westad 2005, 396; McMahon 2010, 30; McMahon 2013, 3; Pieper Mooney and Lanza 2013, 6). It is certainly true that the United States and the Soviet Union dominated international politics after World War II. Nonetheless, as historian Prasenjit Duara (2011, 458) points out, »we need to attend to the emergent differences, counter-movements, and resistances that crack, weaken, or sometimes strengthen the hegemonic order« of the Cold War. In order to detect these aspects at the global scale, it is not enough to simply analyze the expansion of the superpower conflict to all parts of the world.¹ Instead, scholars should take local and regional dynamics seriously.

While many scholars have contributed to the rethinking of Eurocentric Cold War narratives, the global entanglements in this time period have not been studied for every world region in the same way. In comparison to other world regions of the so-called Third World that are included in

1 If so, this would amount to ignoring Dipesh Chakrabarty's warning about the construction of global historical time following a »first in Europe, then elsewhere« structure« (Chakrabarty 2008, 7).

the global approach to Cold War Studies, especially Asia and Africa, Latin America seems to be an anomalous case. The doubts about the impact of the Cold War in Latin America can be observed in a statement by historian Odd Arne Westad in his famous book »The Global Cold War« (2005, 3): »Without the Cold War, Africa, Asia, and *possibly also Latin America* would have been very different regions today« [emphasis added]. So, while the impact on Asia and Africa seems to be evident, the author is not entirely sure about Latin America.

Why is that? I interpret Westad's uncertainty with regard to Latin America as a result of the minor influence of the USSR in this region. Asia and Africa witnessed a battle of influence between the Soviet Union and the United States, but Latin America was only a »minor theatre« (Zanatta 2013, 426) of the Cold War because of its dependence on the United States. Historian Greg Grandin (2003, 38) states: »An honest assessment would admit that there was only one superpower involved in the Latin American Cold War: the United States.«

Despite this geopolitical constellation, »Latin America became one of the most militaristic and »dirty« battlegrounds of the Cold War« (Duara 2011, 471) when left-wing revolutionaries faced right-wing militaries in various parts of the region. Recent scholarship (among others, Joseph and Spenser 2008; Brands 2010; Garrard-Burnett, Lawrence, and Moreno 2013a; Iber 2015; Pettinà and Sánchez Román 2015; Rupprecht 2015; Manke and Březinová 2016) has gone beyond the few well-known events² and has shed more light on the Cold War in Latin America.³ The focus of the majority

2 Those well-known events are especially the coup d'état against the government of Jacobo Arbenz in Guatemala in 1954, the Cuban Revolution in 1959, the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962, the coup against the government of Salvador Allende in Chile in 1973, and the Nicaraguan Revolution in 1979.

3 For detailed discussions of the literature on the Cold War in Latin America, see Joseph (2008, 8–29); Garrard-Burnett, Lawrence and Moreno (2013b, 7–13); Manke, Březinová, and Blecha (2017).

of these studies⁴ is on the time after the Cuban Revolution in 1959. In this paper, I would like to address the often-overlooked early phase of the Latin American Cold War, a phase during which important developments took place which pointed the way ahead.

First, I provide a brief overview of the early phase of the Cold War in Latin America, especially by looking at the three Inter-American Conferences that took place between 1945 and 1948. Afterward, I focus on the case of Argentina under the regime of Juan Domingo Perón. His declaration of a Third Position between capitalism and communism attracts attention in a world that seemed to be caught between two poles. In my elaboration on this Third Position, I discuss to what extent it subverts the hegemonic order of the Cold War, especially in Latin America. Accentuating Latin American agency in Global Cold War Studies should not lead to underestimating US influence.⁵ The rise and especially the fall of the Argentine Third Position cannot be understood without taking Washington's attitude toward this position into consideration, which I do in the penultimate part of this paper, followed by a few brief concluding thoughts.

Latin America in the early phase of the Cold War

During the Second World War, the United States strengthened its hold on the Western Hemisphere and European powers lost most of their influence in the Americas (Rapoport and Spiguel 2009, 183; Westad 2005, 144). The US was now one of the two global superpowers and its main

4 The special issue of the *Culture & History Journal* edited by Pettinà and Sánchez Román (2015) concentrates on the early phase of the Cold War in Latin America. Iber (2015) as well as Manke and Březinová (2016) also offer numerous insights with regard to this time period, although these works do not focus exclusively on it.

5 A warning against writing »Washington [...] out of the picture« is issued by historians Virginia Garrard-Burnett, Mark Atwood Lawrence, and Julio Moreno (2013b, 4): »The differential in power between the United States and Latin American governments, as well as the obvious intentions among U.S. officials to exploit that differential at many points during the Cold War, are simply too obvious to justify pushing Washington too far into the background.«

focus lay on the reconstruction of Europe in order to prevent the other superpower, the USSR, from gaining influence there. The famous Long Telegram by US diplomat George F. Kennan of February 1946, the Truman Doctrine of March 1947, the Marshall Plan, which was announced in June 1947, and the foundation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in April 1949 are the well-known steps from the US side which initiated the era we call the Cold War.

Latin American countries did not play a role or were even mentioned in any of these four steps. The US administration considered it the region least threatened by an alleged Soviet will to expand (Bethell and Roxborough 1988, 181–82). »So,« historian Tanya Harmer (2014, 136) rightfully asks, »does the concept of the Cold War have any meaning for the region at all?« Her answer is yes, and I agree. Although the direct influence of the Soviet Union in this part of the world was small, the developments in Latin America were closely connected to ideological struggles elsewhere.⁶

In its early phase, the Cold War's relevance for Latin America was especially visible in the inter-American integration policies of the postwar era. The starting point for these policies was the Inter-American Conference in Chapultepec, Mexico, which took place during the last months of World War II. During this conference, it became visible that the United States wanted to strengthen regional organization under its guidance. Although the fight against the common fascist enemy still made Washington and Moscow collaborate, the former wanted to make sure that it had a Pan-American bloc in the newly formed United Nations Organization behind it in order to outplay the USSR there if necessary (Rapoport and Spiguel 2009, 97; Vacs 1984, 11). At the Chapultepec conference, even Argentina, which remained neutral during the war⁷ and did not completely follow the US

6 This is in line with the more general statement by Westad (2005, 3) that »the argument that the Cold War conceptually and analytically does not belong in the south is wrong.«

7 Only after external pressure did Argentina break off relations with the Axis on January 26, 1944 and, in the final phase of the war, on March 27, 1945, declare war on the Axis.

line of conduct in the region, was invited to the next Inter-American Conference, and the US negotiated with the Soviet Union to let Argentina join the United Nations.⁸

The USSR had gained certain prestige in Latin America during the war and many communist parties could establish themselves as part of the political systems of their countries (Bethell and Roxborough 1988, 173–74). During the time of the Chapultepec conference, when the alliance between the United States and the USSR was still more or less intact, especially the extremely anti-communist Latin American militaries feared a widespread recognition of the Soviet Union in the postwar era (López-Maya 1995, 138). This fear was shared by the traditional »bastion of anti-communism« (Bethell and Roxborough 1988, 179) in the region, the Catholic Church. This also shows that the Cold War discourse in Latin America was not simply something implemented from outside, but rather had local origins which existed before and in the postwar era entered into dialogue with the US line of conduct (for a similar argumentation, see Brands 2010, 15; Harmer 2014, 134).

The next important step after Chapultepec in terms of inter-American integration in the field of defense policies was the Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance, the so-called Rio Treaty named after the city of Rio de Janeiro where it was signed in August 1947, even before the creation of a Euro-Atlantic security association. The Rio Treaty was a forerunner of NATO for the American continent. It was a contract for reciprocal assistance by the American states in case of »an extra-continental or intra-continental conflict.«⁹ The expression »extra-continental conflict« was already an indirect reference to the Cold War, but the anti-communist character of inter-American integration became even more obvious when the Organization of American States (OAS) was founded at the

8 In exchange, the Soviet republics of Ukraine and Belarus were counted as individual members of the UN (Vacs 1984, 11).

9 Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance, Department of International Law—OAS, Multilateral Treaties, accessed May 1, 2017, <http://www.oas.org/juridico/english/treaties/b-29.html>.

Inter-American Conference in Bogota in April 1948. There, the communist parties of the hemisphere were openly named as a security threat (Bethell and Roxborough 1988, 182–83). The anti-communist hysteria was fostered when the murder of Jorge Eliécer Gaitán, the leader of the Colombian Liberal Party, during the conference in Bogota, was blamed on »international communism« by US Secretary of State George Marshall, although he was unable to provide any evidence for this allegation (Grandin 2013, 34). The backlash against democracy gained momentum after Bogota: communist parties were outlawed in different parts of the continent, and militaries started to overthrow elected governments (in Peru in October and in Venezuela in November 1948).

So, while the militaries were able to take advantage of the Cold War discourse, Latin American governments interested in economic development were not. Besides the formation of an inter-American geopolitical bloc, the US government tried to promote a system of market liberalism and to erase economic nationalisms while many Latin American governments were hoping in vain for a development plan for the region similar to the Marshall Plan for Europe. However, the US focused solely on Europe and left Latin America to private investments only (Grandin 2013, 32–33; López-Maya 1995, 140–41; Morgenfeld 2010, 40; Rinke 2012, 102–04). As much as the Latin American governments showed their backing for the Cold War policies of the United States, it did not pay off in the form of a Latin American Marshall Plan.¹⁰ Between 1946 and 1977, not a single Latin American country was among the top ten receivers of US development aid (Conteh-Morgan 2010, 72–73). Between 1945 and

10 Historian Vanni Pettinà (2015) demonstrates that during the presidency of Miguel Alemán, Mexico was an exception in the regional context. In contrast to other Latin American countries, the Alemán government was able to obtain US public funds for its industrialization project. The reasons for this success were the special internal political situation of Mexico and the Alemán administration's skillful foreign policy.

1950, Belgium and Luxemburg alone received more US development aid than the whole of Latin America (Bethell and Roxborough 1988, 186).¹¹

The Argentine Third Position

Following the description of US domination in Latin America after World War II, it now almost seems contradictory to introduce a Latin American government which in 1947 proclaimed a Third Position between capitalism and communism. How does this Third Position fit into the picture of the early phase of the Cold War in Latin America which I have drawn so far? I start by briefly describing the origins and characteristics of the government behind this position, that of Juan Domingo Perón in Argentina, in order to answer this question in a more comprehensive way.

On June 4, 1943, the Argentine military overthrew the government of conservative President Ramón Castillo and took over state control for three years. The political views within the military were heterogeneous, but the armed forces were united by the will to end the pseudo-democratic practices, initiated in the early 1930s, that were characterized by falsified electoral results (Potash 1969, 183). Colonel Juan Domingo Perón became the most important political protagonist within the military. In November 1943, Perón took over the National Labor Department and in a radio speech announced the beginning «of the era of Argentine social policy.»¹² He established personal contacts with blue-collar workers and trade unions and helped them strike new agreements. As historian Mariano Plotkin (1994, 49) points out, Perón was successful in binding the working class

11 The US view of Latin America's role was also visible in the scientific priorities of the postwar era. The new approach of «area studies» was determined by geopolitical strategy, mainly the containment of communism. Most of the money was invested to study the Soviet Union and China, while Japan and Latin America enjoyed the lowest priorities (Wallerstein 1997, 200–201).

12 Juan D. Perón, radio speech, December 2, 1943 [Translation: MP], Biblioteca Peronista del Congreso Argentino, Discursos de Gral. Juan D. Perón, Carpeta 1.

and the trade unions to his political project, but had trouble convincing the economic elites and parts of the military to support him.

On October 9, 1945, the opposition to Perón within the military forced him to resign from all his political appointments, and he was even imprisoned on October 12. This move was not just a move against Perón by his military foes, but could also be seen as a tactic to calm anti-government protests. The (mostly middle- and upper-class) protesters identified Perón as the leading figure of the junta which they denounced as an ideological holdover of German and Italian fascism.¹³ What happened next opened a new chapter in Argentine politics: October 17, 1945, went down in history as the hour of the birth of Peronism, as a huge mass of workers from the Buenos Aires outskirts entered the city center to demand Perón's release. The military forces in charge complied and later announced that democratic elections were to take place in February 1946. In these elections, Perón was elected president.

Especially the first years of the new government were very successful. During wartime, Argentina had accumulated gold reserves worth 1.6 billion dollars (Page 1983, 168). In addition, Argentina profited from the European demand for its agricultural products after the destruction the war had caused (Rein 2006, 159). This postwar bonanza was used for a program of industrialization, promoted in the government's Five-Year Plan which started in 1947, as well as for numerous social improvements for the working class. The impressive first year of his government made Perón declare in August 1947: »Never has our country achieved such a situation of brilliance like the current one«. ¹⁴ According to Perón, officials from other countries could not even find Argentina on the world map in earlier years, but now »they call us one of the three greats« ¹⁵ in the international

13 One of the main reasons for this denunciation was the decision of the military regime to remain neutral until the final phase of World War II.

14 Perón, speech at the University of La Plata, August 16, 1947 [Translation: MP], Biblioteca Peronista del Congreso Argentino, Discursos de Gral. Juan D. Perón, Carpeta 11.

15 Ibid.

field. This feeling of self-confidence was reflected especially by the declaration of a Third Position between capitalism and communism, more human than both the exploitation by big capital and the exploitation by an all-powerful state apparatus. A radio speech by Perón on July 6, 1947, which was broadcast not only in Argentina, but worldwide, is usually considered the official starting point of the Third Position (Galasso 2005, 472; Morgenfeld 2010, 20). In this speech, Perón talked about the necessity to abandon antagonistic ideologies to avoid another war.¹⁶

The Third Position had different ideological dimensions. One inspiration for the Peronist Third Position certainly was the fascist attempt to create an alternative to liberalism and communism (Page 1983, 89). Perón, who visited Italy in the early phase of the Second World War, was especially inspired by the political organization of Benito Mussolini's regime (Plotkin 1994, 44), and Catholic-nationalist circles in Argentina were expressing views which were similar to those of Spanish dictator Francisco Franco. Following the Catholic-nationalist worldview, the Third Position could be understood as the expression of a Hispanic-Catholic civilization, superior to both the Slavic and Anglo-Saxon civilization represented by the two Cold War superpowers (Zanatta 2013, 25–26). It is important to consider fascism and Catholic nationalism as sources of inspiration for Peronism—especially concerning political organization and iconography. However, this dimension of the Third Position can easily mislead us to simply interpret Peronism in a Eurocentric fashion and label it as a South American version of European totalitarian and authoritarian experiences.

To avoid this pitfall, two other, more important, dimensions of the Third Position should be considered as well. First, it must be mentioned that Argentina stayed neutral in both World Wars I and II, and there existed something like a tradition of Argentine neutrality and non-interference in international warfare. This is a position that went far beyond Peronism and was also the consensus among many conservatives and liberals (Rein 2006, 155). This tendency toward neutrality also had to do with the difficult

16 Perón, appeal for peace (radio speech), Juli 6, 1947, Biblioteca Peronista del Congreso Argentino, Discursos de Gral. Juan D. Perón, Carpeta 9.

relations Argentina had with the United States. Argentine elites saw the increasing influence of the US in South America, especially since the 1930s, as problematic because the US economic structures were not complementary to the Argentine ones (both were exporters of agricultural goods). This is why Argentina preferred trade with Great Britain and other European countries. The United States were never able to establish the same kind of relations with the Argentine elites as the ones Great Britain had (Rapoport 1997, 92–93). The US initiative to make the entire American continent abandon neutrality in World War II (following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor) was interpreted by many Argentine politicians and militaries as an attempt by Washington to expand its influence in the continent even further.

Besides this tradition of neutrality, the Third Position also implied the aspiration to tame predatory capitalism and to create a socially more just society in a non-communist way. The constant use of the symbol of Lady Justice in Peronist iconography fit well for the Third Position, which was presented as a weighing up of the two systems, capitalism and communism (Prutsch 2001, 32). As already indicated above, in the first years of the Peronist regime, workers benefited substantially from the government's social policies—wages increased, trade union organization rose, and a social security system was established (James 1990, 11). Perón presented his social policy as a measure to prevent a more radical political project. He portrayed pre-1943 Argentina as a time of social inequality which had made the rise of socialist and capitalist tendencies in the sphere of politics and trade unionism possible. In his view, »these formations which call themselves socialism and communism [do not] react to a different cause than that of the so-called capitalist regime of exploitation.«¹⁷

After this brief description of the Perón regime and the different dimensions of the Third Position, I return to the question of the connection between the Argentine position and the Latin American Cold War. It

17 Perón, speech at a conference of the League of Workers, November 20, 1947 [Translation: MP], Biblioteca Peronista del Congreso Argentino, Discursos de Gral. Juan D. Perón, Carpeta 12.

should be highlighted that, although Peronist rhetoric sometimes seemed to suggest this, the Third Position should not be seen as a symmetrical geopolitical position between the two poles of the Cold War (Paradiso 2008, 544). Although the Argentine government established bilateral relations with the Soviet Union in June 1946, Perón declared as early as December 1945 (even before becoming president), in a statement to United Press journalists, that in case of a future conflict between the United States and the Soviet Union, Argentina would support the former.¹⁸ He maintained this position during the entire duration of his government. Part of the idea behind this declaration was an economic calculation. While the Argentine and the US economies were not compatible during times of peace, Argentina could have become one the most important exporters to the US market if Washington had switched to a wartime economy (Horowicz 2005, 125).

As we have seen, the Argentine Third Position was not symmetrical in terms of geopolitics. Nor was it symmetrical in terms of economics either because the economic relations with the USSR could not counterbalance the US influence. After the establishment of diplomatic relations, the negotiations for a trade agreement between Argentina and the Soviet Union were not successful, partly because of the USSR's weak postwar economic situation and partly because the Argentine government did not want to risk too close an alliance with the communist superpower in times of increasing Cold War tensions (Rapoport 1987, 33–34).¹⁹ Until 1953, when a modest trade agreement between the two countries was signed, Soviet economic relations with Argentina were almost non-existent.

18 Published in the newspaper *Democracia*, February 11, 1946. Even before that, in April 1945, Perón announced Argentine support for the United States in a possible future war to a secretary of the US embassy in Buenos Aires (Rapoport and Spiguel 2009, 198). This shows that the Argentine Third Position should not be interpreted as a position of non-alignment like, for example, India's foreign policy at that time.

19 Although no trade agreement between Argentina and the USSR was signed at that time, the former signed small agreements with other countries from the socialist bloc between 1947 and 1949: Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland, and Romania (Llairo, Siepe, and Gale 1997, 33–39).

Recapitulating the facts mentioned above, we should not think of the Third Position as a symmetrical positioning between the Cold War superpowers, but rather as an attempt to loosen the fetters of the Latin American Cold War. While other countries were unconditionally supporting the US line of conduct in the region, Argentina showed more signs of resistance. Buenos Aires did not break off diplomatic relations with the USSR as other Latin American countries did (for example, Brazil and Chile in 1947), and it dared to question at least some of the US proposals at the Inter-American Conferences.

The cautious Argentine rebellion could be exemplified by the way Perón's government dealt with the Rio Treaty. Although Argentina presented itself as quite cooperative toward the United States at the conference in Rio de Janeiro (Morgenfeld 2010, 46), the treaty was later submitted for ratification to just one of the two chambers of the Argentine congress. Perón did not want to have it discussed in the Chamber of Deputies, knowing very well that the opposition party as well as parts of his own party would not welcome signs of compliance with the United States. So, until 1950 when pressure was heightened, Argentina remained outside of the inter-American security system.

This did not mean that Perón's government completely questioned the Latin American Cold War. On the one hand, Perón, as mentioned above, expressed his doubts about the repressive approach toward communism and stressed the socioeconomic reasons for the attractiveness of this ideology to the working class. On the other hand, the Argentine government even tried to exaggerate the alleged Soviet threat for its own benefits. Let us briefly look at two examples of this.

The first one was a diplomatic episode around the inter-American Conference in Rio de Janeiro in August 1947. Two weeks before the conference started, Argentine vice foreign minister Enrique Corominas tried to convince secretary of the US embassy in Argentina Guy Ray of the importance of a pact between the United States and Argentina »against extra-hemispheric aggression, particularly against Russia« and he mentioned Soviet attempts to play off Argentina against the United States. At the same time, he urged for an extension of the Marshall Plan to Latin

America, especially Argentina.²⁰ Guy Ray also informed the State Department about other high-ranking Argentine officials, including Perón himself and foreign minister Juan Atilio Bramuglia, who stressed the importance of Argentine-US cooperation in the run-up to the conference in Rio de Janeiro (Rapoport and Spiguel 2009, 246). During the Rio Conference, Bramuglia had a conversation with US Secretary of State Marshall and proposed to him a secret anti-communist pact between Argentina and the United States which would include repressive measures against communism in the hemisphere (Rapoport and Spiguel 2009, 247–48). These attempts remained fruitless. The Soviet threat to the hemisphere was not considered serious enough to make concessions to Argentina. Washington understood very well which game Buenos Aires was trying to play.

Another episode of Argentina exaggerating the Soviet threat took place in the context of the European Recovery Program, the Marshall Plan. It is also with regard to this aspect of the early phase of the Cold War that we have to broaden the Europe-centered perspective and look at the global economic entanglements connected to this plan. First, it seemed that Argentina was to be invited to contribute to the Marshall Plan with agricultural exports. This would have meant important income in US dollars for the South American country. But when the United States, Canada, and Australia were able to increase their agricultural productivity in 1948, Argentina's exports were no longer desperately needed for European reconstruction (Rapoport and Spiguel 2009, 269–75). Nonetheless, Perón kept trying to push for Argentine participation by pointing to Europe potentially becoming dependent on the USSR. In a newspaper commentary in June 1948, the Argentine president pointed at the possibility of a poor harvest in the United States or Canada and warned, »Inevitably the European states in need of grain would be dependent on the supply which Russia could undertake to provide [...]. There is no doubt that [...] Russia would of course set conditions for satisfying hunger in Europe.«²¹

20 Guy Ray to George C. Marshall, Buenos Aires, August 1, 1947, Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS) Online Archive, 1947, Vol. VIII, The American Republics, Document 31.

21 *Democracia*, June 15, 1948 [Translation: MP].

This argumentation did not convince the US administration, and Argentina was not included in the exports to Europe in the context of the Recovery Program. Additionally, Argentina lost European clients due to their supply through the Marshall Plan. The above-mentioned increase in productivity in the United States and elsewhere helped the US government isolate Argentina and keep it more dependent on US loans, as we will see in more detail in the following subchapter.

The United States and the Third Position

As described above, the Argentine government, and especially Perón, repeatedly made clear to US officials that in case of a war, Argentina would support the United States. In a conversation in April 1948 with US ambassador to Argentina James Bruce Perón explicitly called the Third Position a policy for times of peace which was simply more attractive to workers than straightforward capitalism.²²

Nonetheless, Washington was not willing to accept such a Third Position, even if it was only designed for peacetime and only for the Argentine population.²³ In a State Department memorandum from December 1948, the Argentine Third Position was described as a serious obstacle to the unity of the hemisphere and the common struggle against communism. Even if the policy was only meant for the Argentine population, it had repercussions beyond Argentina's borders.²⁴ And, when the two countries converged in 1950, the State Department was still complaining about the

22 James Bruce to George C. Marshall, Buenos Aires, April 28, 1948, FRUS, Vol. IX, The Western Hemisphere, Document 205.

23 Political scientist Mary Kaldor (1990, 105) points out that the Cold War discourse »stimulated and justified the process of compromise and, at the same time, marginalized and discredited those who could not accept its terms.« The Third Position could not be included in an anti-communist compromise between the US government and the Perón administration and constituted a reason to marginalize and discredit the latter.

24 Memorandum by the Chief of the State Department's Division for River Plate Affairs, Howard H. Tewksbury, December 9, 1948; documented in van der Karr (1990, 206–7).

damage which the Third Position caused to Argentine-US relations and hemispheric relations in general, and which Moscow could profit from (Escudé 1988, 10).

The United States not only blamed Argentina for supposedly weakening the anti-communist hemispheric policies, but the Third Position was seen as a case of economic nationalism which was supposed to be replaced by a more liberal approach. The US steadily tried to push the Argentine government toward a more investor-friendly economic policy and a retreat of the state from economic affairs. While the Perón government was able to defend its approach during the first postwar years, this changed after 1949. When Argentina's gold reserves were exhausted, its important economic partner Great Britain declared Argentine reserves in sterling unconvertible because of economic problems, and Argentina was excluded from participating in the Marshall Plan, the country was increasingly dependent on loans from the United States.

In 1950, the geopolitical and economic dimensions of the relationship between the United States and Argentina converged. As mentioned above, the Argentine Chamber of Deputies had still not ratified the Rio Treaty, which had been signed in August 1947. When the tensions between the US and the Soviet Union heightened in the context of the Korean War, the State Department pushed Argentina to finally sign the Rio Treaty to demonstrate hemispheric unity. The Argentine desire for a loan from the United States and the will to purchase US arms, which would only be sold to Rio-Treaty countries, served as additional pressure for Argentina to ratify. But it was also Perón who considered it necessary to sign the Rio Treaty because he thought of the Korean War as the possible start of a war between the United States and the USSR (Rapoport and Spiguel 2009, 327–29). In this situation, as already mentioned, he was hoping for profitable access to the US-market for Argentine agricultural products. On June 28, 1950, the treaty was finally ratified by the Argentine Chamber of Deputies.²⁵ After the ratification, there were even rumors about

25 Only a part of the political opposition voted against the ratification of the treaty.

Argentine troops participating in the Korean War. When protests against this were launched in different parts of the country by pro-Perón as well as oppositional groups, Perón announced he would follow the popular will and refrain from sending troops to Korea (Rapoport and Spiguel 2009, 331–32).

Although the conflict between the United States and the USSR did not turn into a direct military confrontation, the changes in the US economy in the context of the Korean War made the export of certain materials (wool, canned meat, leather, quebracho extract) from Argentina to the United States necessary and made the United States the number one importer of Argentine goods until 1953. These increased relations did not have predominantly positive effects. The terms of trade in the exchange between the two countries were not favorable for Argentina and could not solve its economic crises, especially between 1951 and 1953 (Rapoport and Spiguel 2009, 349). The whole episode around Argentina ratifying the Rio Treaty, the rumors about it participating in the Korean War, and the new economic relations between Argentina and the United States constitutes a telling example of the interconnectedness of geopolitical and economic developments in different parts of the world in this phase of the Cold War.

During a short period before and after the ratification of the Rio Treaty, the Argentine government kept the Third Position at a low profile on the national and international level. But after the protests against Argentine participation in the Korean War, Perón and other members of his government returned to a more aggressive proclamation of this position (Zanatta 2013, 254–55). Too close an affiliation with the United States would not have been compatible with Peronist ideology at that point. However, the circumstances had changed, and the window of opportunity for the Third Position was much narrower after 1950 when the US-Argentine relations changed. This development was summarized very well by historian Mario Rapoport (1997, 118–19):

The election of Perón in 1946 had been a defeat for the United States. As the other countries of Latin America consolidated their Second World War alignment with the United States in the new

conditions of the Cold War and adjusted their domestic and international policies accordingly, Perón's Argentina, though never denying its affiliation with the West in international politics and remaining strongly anti-Communist at home, continued to represent a challenge to U.S. hegemony in the hemisphere.

The period from 1950, however, witnessed a growing rapprochement between Perón and Washington, so that even before the fall of Peron in 1955 Argentina was much less out of line with the rest of Latin America. In this respect, [...] Argentina's exceptionalism was short-lived.

Conclusions

The case of the Argentine Third Position presented in this paper was at the same time atypical and typical of the Latin American Cold War. On the one hand, the more or less open confrontation between the Perón regime and the United States and the demonstration of an independent domestic and foreign policy in form of the so-called Third Position was rather atypical. On the other hand, the often fruitless attempts to capitalize on the new global bloc confrontation, especially in form of financial concessions by the United States, were typical. The »power of the weak« (McMahon 2010) in the Cold War, that is to say the capacity of so-called developing countries to play one superpower off against the other for their own benefit, was limited in Latin America because of the lack of influence of the Soviet Union in the region.²⁶ The attempts by the Argentine

26 It is no coincidence that historian Robert J. McMahon (2010) names only Asian and African examples to demonstrate the »the power of the weak« in the Cold War. »Latin America,« as Vanni Petinà (2015, 13) explains, »because of its geographical position and increasing American pressures determined by geopolitical calculation, but also as a consequence of the acceleration of economic and political integration experienced during the 1930s and the 1940s, was forced to seek accommodation almost exclusively with the United States.« Nonetheless, as mentioned in this paper, there were actors in Latin America (such as the militaries and the Catholic Church) that benefitted from the geopolitical constellation of the Cold War.

government to exaggerate the Soviet threat for the hemisphere could not make an impression in Washington, either.

The Argentine Third Position is just one object of study from the early phase of Latin America's Cold War which might contribute to a history beyond the more high-profile events in the region, sometimes beginning with the coup d'état against the Guatemalan president Jacobo Arbenz in 1954 or, much more often, with the Cuban Revolution of 1959. Studies on the Latin American Cold War should take regional and local dynamics of day-to-day politics seriously without neglecting the important influence of the conflict between the superpowers. The United States played an important role in imposing the Cold War on Latin America. At the same time, the expansion of Cold War ideology in the region was based on local attitudes that had been present before and then entered into dialogue or conflict—or both at the same time—with the new form of US leadership.

As mentioned at the beginning of the article, scholars in the field of Global Cold War Studies have contributed to rethinking Eurocentric Cold War narratives, but have not sufficiently taken Latin America into account, especially in the early phase of the bloc confrontation. I have focused on these early years of the Cold War in Latin America because they were important for the development of the region.

Historian Loris Zanatta (2013, 7) claims that for Latin America, the Cold War meant a continuation of old conflicts and that the only change was the adaptation of a »new vocabulary« related to the contest between the two superpowers—new wine in old bottles. I cannot disagree completely with this statement, but my evaluation of this finding differs from his. This »new vocabulary« was not just the background music to what really happened on the ground. It was powerful, and it shaped geopolitical and societal relations in Latin America.

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