

Democracy and Foreign Policy in the Southern Cone of Latin America

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Introduction

What was the impact of the redemocratization of the Southern Cone of Latin America in the foreign policies of the major countries of the region, Argentina, Brazil and Chile? The decades of 1980-2000 saw remarkable achievements in the consolidation of the rule of law and the respect for human rights, giving birth to a comprehensive academic literature on political transition and the nature of the authoritarian regimes (Linz 1996, O'Donnell et alii 1986, Stepan 1988). But there has been a gap in the study of the role of democracy in the international relations of the Southern Cone. Nevertheless important changes have been made, such as the creation of the Common Market of the South (Mercosur) and the peaceful resolution of the border conflict between Argentina and Chile.

The major trend in international relations' theory, realism, is concerned with the powers and capabilities of the States vis à vis each other, and not with their domestic political regimes. However, there are other theoretical approaches which highlight their importance to diplomacy, such as the school of neoclassical realism (Schweller 1998) and especially the new wave of research on foreign policy analysis (Hill 2005; Pinheiro and Milani 2012). They study the consequences of the political institutions and of the State-civil society relations to the construction of the diplomatic agenda. As Robert Putnam puts, it is a "two level game" where domestic and foreign policy mutually influence themselves (Putnam 1988).

Argentina, Brazil and Chile share a history of military dictatorships and mass human rights violations from 1960 to the 1980s, followed by the transition to democracy in a context of economic hardship. They have a long record of diplomatic agreements, wars and military alliances, trade, and investment. But democracy is a new part of the relationship. In the 20th century, the countries of the Southern Cone experienced a difficult process of political liberation, expanding the electoral franchise but facing civil and military coups, fraud and authoritarian backlashes. For example:

The political history of Argentina therefore reveals an extraordinary pattern where democracy was created in 1912, undermined in 1930, re-created in 1946, undermined in 1955, fully re-created in 1973, undermined in 1976, and finally reestablished in 1983. In between were various shades of nondemocratic governments ranging from restricted democracies to full military regimes. (Acemoglu and Robinson 2006: 7)

In Brazil, there was the civilian dictatorship of Getúlio Vargas, the New State, of 1937-1945 and the military regime of 1964-1985, with an oligarchic republic in 1889-1930 and limited democracies in between. Chile has a longer history of democracy (however restricted), since the 1930s but also suffered the personal rule of general Augusto Pinochet in 1973-1990.

The paths to democracy were also different. In Brazil and Chile the Armed Forces enjoyed a strong political position, and were able to negotiate transition to civilian rule, in which the military remained with several privileges – such as an amnesty of prosecutions for human rights’ violations. In Argentina, the authoritarian regime collapsed after the defeat in the war against the United Kingdom for the Malvinas Islands and the new civilian government jailed the former military dictators and hundreds of officers who were engaged in political repression. However, it stopped the process after facing military armed rebellions, and the next president pardoned them. In the three countries, the issue of transitional justice came back in the 2000’s, with the electoral victories of the Left (section 3 of this paper).

Democracy changes diplomacy because it allows the diverse interest groups in the society to mobilize for their political preferences. In the more open and globally integrated economies of the 1990s, that led to a rapprochement between foreign policy and other public policies (Hirst 2005; Pinheiro and Milani 2012). More social and political actors are engaged in international networks and diplomacy is becoming decentralized, with more government organs taking responsibility for foreign affairs. In Latin America, this was particularly marked by the rise of “presidential diplomacy”, in which heads of State began to have a very active role in the craft of diplomacy. (Carson and Power 2006; Danese 1999; França and Sanchez 2009).

The goal of this paper is to analyze the impacts of redemocratization on the foreign policies of Argentina, Brazil and Chile, pointing to advances, obstacles and contradictions, with

emphasis in Latin American integration. The essay is divided into three sections. The first deals with the issue of “democratic peace”, the debate regarding whether democracy made the relationships between the three countries more stable and less prone to conflict.

The second section is dedicated to regional integration. Latin America has a dense web of agreements, treaties and regional organizations. Some of them were created before mass democracy, but they flourished after the collapse of the dictatorships. What was the role of the political regime and what was the consequence of the new economic models, more open to international trade?

The final section discusses the interaction of human rights and foreign policy, in a two-level game in which the transformations in Argentina, Brazil and Chile were influenced, as well as influence, the international networks dedicated to the issue. The focus is how these countries present themselves in global forums, how they deal with difficult issues such as humanitarian interventions and the different paths they assumed in the subject of immigration. I argue that how each country became a democracy is very important to understand its human rights foreign policy. In Argentina and Chile, the greater role of international networks led to a stronger diplomatic commitment than we see in Brazil, which prefers to highlight socio-economic development as a major human rights achievement.

1) Democratic Peace

There is a strong tradition in liberal thinking that peace can be achieved, or at least made easier, by some kinds of political institutions, such as an Executive power accountable to its citizens. As the philosopher Immanuel Kant wrote in his “Perpetual Peace” (1795), if people have a voice in public affairs, they will not send their children to battle. Kenneth Waltz listed these views in what he called “the second image of international relations” (Waltz 2001: chapter 4), and added the liberal’s confidence to the positive role of public opinion and rising economic interdependence as pillars of peace.

Nationalism and democracy proved to be a powerful combination in the 20th century, and the open societies in the United States, France and the United Kingdom fought many wars,

against other great powers or against rebel movements committed to self-determination in colonies such as Philippines, Indochina, Malaysia or Kenya. And in many cases, democratization meant the liberation of violent ethnic hate, such as in the Balkans in the 1990s (Mann 2005).

There are also some cases of wars between relatively democratic countries, such as the United States and the United Kingdom in 1812 and among the Western European nations in the First World War. However, the idea of a democratic peace remained strong – democracies would fight, but usually not against other democracies. The experience of the European integration and other developed nations was an example that could be replicated elsewhere (Pinker 2012).

South America is a region of violent societies, but with few international wars – sometimes considered an anomaly in the world securities systems (Buzan and Weaver 2003, Centeno 2002). In the 19th century, Argentina, Brazil and Chile fought major wars between 1810-1880, to assure their independence and settle their borders with neighbors and the control of major rivers and natural resources (Mitre 2010). In the 20th century, Argentina fought in the Malvinas, Brazil had a minor role in both world wars, and Chile was not engaged in any military conflict.

However, the dictatorships were a break with this quite peaceful history, as their foreign policies were marked by tensions and arms races. Argentina and Chile were on the verge of war in 1979, for the control of the Beagle straits and border disputes in Patagonia. Argentina and Brazil had strong disputes for the rights to use international rivers in hydropower dams, and a nuclear program race which was aimed at the production of atomic bombs. Chile's long-standing border conflict with Peru also almost led to a war in 1975, and in 1982 Argentina tried to recover the Malvinas Islands from the United Kingdom by force. As a Brazilian diplomat noted many years after these events, the era suffered from an "overdose of geopolitics" (Ricipero 1995: 342), an excessive concern with territorial domination.

The democratization of the Southern Cone is a powerful case in the theory of the democratic peace. In Latin America, the change of the domestic political regime had very positive consequences for the international disputes in the region. This was the development of

initiatives which began in the final years of the military governments in Brazil and Argentina. In 1979, both governments signed with the Paraguayan dictatorship an agreement on how to share the international rivers for the generation of electricity. In the following year, Brasília and Buenos Aires signed another treaty, establishing a small exchange of information about their nuclear programs.

Both agreements were motivated by the desire to build coalitions against other foreign pressures. Argentina was very close to waging war on Chile, and Brazil and Argentina were facing strong criticisms from the United States because of their nuclear program and human rights violations. They understood that it was important to scale down the conflict with the largest neighbor, so they could focus on other political disputes. (Patti 2012). The Brazilian government was also concerned with its long and negotiated transition to democracy, with the proclamation of a political amnesty and the return of free party competition, and did not want to be disturbed by regional struggles, which would have strengthened the far right, opposed to the political reforms. It was a temporary truce, not a permanent alliance.

This marriage of convenience was tested with success during the Malvinas War. Brazil remained officially neutral in the conflict, but helped Argentina in several ways. Documents recently opened to the public show that the Brazilian government was part of a network which supplied arms to the generals in Buenos Aires, in spite of the international embargo. The Brazilian Foreign Minister, veteran diplomat Ramiro Saraiva Guerreiro, sensed the historical importance of the war and told Congress that Brazil had to be careful, for its actions would be remembered for a long time by its neighbor.¹

Argentina lost the war, but it was the beginning of the confidence-building process with Brazil. In the 1980's, the new civilian presidents Raúl Alfonsín and José Sarney established a partnership for peace – now, with a long run view. They faced severe economic crisis and feared the possibility of coups by the military far right, a very real concern in Argentina, with the *carapintadas* rebellions of 1987-1990. The result was a large program of economic integration and political cooperation (Section 2).

¹ I thank Rodrigo Mallea for sharing with me his research on the Brazilian response to the Malvinas War.

The history of Argentina and Chile was more tense. War over the Beagle Straits was avoided by a last-minute intervention by Pope John Paul II, and the Vatican presented a partition plan largely unfavorable to Argentine demands, rejected by the dictatorship. Chile helped the United Kingdom during the Malvinas War, ceding territory to military operations and sending troops to the disputed border, pressuring Buenos Aires to be concerned with combats in two fronts. Chile also had a serious border dispute with Peru – at the time, also under a military dictatorship, but one that had left-wing views and social reforms, at least between 1968-1975. The Peruvian generals helped their far right colleagues in Argentina with weapons and information.

The return of democracy in Argentina led to a fast solution to the Beagle Straits conflict. President Alfonsín presented the Vatican proposal to a plebiscite and the majority of the population approved it. This was remarkable, because at the time (1984) Chile was still a dictatorship under general Pinochet, but the public opinion wanted peace and stability – exactly as Kant forecasted two hundred years before in his seminal book.

After the new border treaty, groups of scholars and journalists of both countries began to meet to discuss other ways to dialogue and cooperate. In the 1990s, many of them were in government in Buenos Aires and Santiago, and they negotiated together other peaceful resolutions to the territorial disputes in Patagonia.²

Why did democratic regimes easily solve problems that the dictatorships considered to be top national security threats? During the authoritarian governments of the region, the Armed Forces were in several key decision-making positions in the Presidency of the Republic and in the ministries of War, Foreign Relations and Energy. Congress and the press were under severe limitations and censorship. There was a “securitization” (Buzan 1997) process, i.e., many issues in the international affairs agenda were framed as menaces to the State, in a bipolar logic of friend-enemy, winner-takes-all quite different from the usual logrolling and negotiation practices of politicians in a democracy.

² Historian Carlos Escudé, former advisor to the Foreign Minister of Argentina, told me this story in a interview in Buenos Aires in November, 2006.

When the military returned to the barracks in the 1980-1990s, they were replaced by civilian leaders with a strong desire to keep the Armed Forces out of politics. That implied the need to defuse international crises which could lead to instability at home. This goal was shared by politicians in Latin America, who tended to view coup d'états – and not war or border disputes – as the major threats to national security. (Pion-Berlin and Tikunas 2006).

One could argue that the conflicts for the islands in the Beagle Straits or the concerns related to the Southern Cone's rivers were indeed minor issues, but it is impressive that the change to the democratic regime also ended the nuclear arms race between Argentina and Brazil. Both dictatorships invested heavily in their atomic programs and despite strong American pressure, refused to sign the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).

Along the 1980s and 1990s the new democracies outlawed the building of an atomic bomb, signed the NPT and similar agreements, such as the Tlatelolco³, and created several confidence-building measures. The most important was the Argentine-Brazilian Agency for the Accountability and Control of Nuclear Materials (ABACC), a bilateral organization with full access to atomic facilities in both countries. Argentina, Brazil, ABACC and the International Agency for Atomic Energy signed a diplomatic agreement to enforce the compliance to multilateral norms.

There are many common points with the nuclear policy of post-apartheid South Africa. With Nelson Mandela as president, the country also outlawed atomic bombs and even dismantled the artifacts made during the authoritarian period. South Africa joined Argentina and Brazil in the Zone of Peace and Cooperation in the South Atlantic, an initiative launched in 1986 by the Brazilian civilian government to assure a nuclear-free area.

It was a sharp contrast to the South African proposal during apartheid to create a military alliance in that oceanic region, analogous to NATO in the North. The idea was rejected by the Brazilian dictatorship, which had an ambitious foreign policy in sub-Saharan Africa and did not want to be seen as an ally to the racist regime (Penna Filho 2008: 213-253).

³ Tlatelolco Treaty (1968) forbades the possession or stockpiling of nuclear weapons in Latin America and the Caribbean. It was drafted in reaction to the Cuban Missile Crisis, as a complement to the NPT.

However, it is important to consider the crucial importance of the regional context in the decision to not go nuclear. Argentina and Brazil were rivals during the dictatorship, but they never were enemies (Russell and Tokatlian 2003). It is a very different situation than the relationship between India and Pakistan, for example, or than in the Middle East. Democratic governments in Buenos Aires, Brasilia or Pretoria could choose not to develop atomic bombs because they did not face the prospect of a foreign invasion or regional wars.

The economic scenario was also decisive. The severe crisis of the “lost decade” of the 1980s forced Latin American countries to cut public budgets, and defense policy was not the priority of anyone. Signing arms-control treaties were a way to create a “lock in” mechanism against pressures from the Armed Forces – it would be difficult for any government to denounce the diplomatic agreements and recreate the atomic programs.

The treaties were also a way to show to foreign investors the commitment to peace and stability – something especially important in Argentina, because of the international reactions and embargoes due to the Malvinas war. Playing by the international rules, Buenos Aires and Brasilia expected to enhance their credibility as emerging markets, part of the multilateral regimes sponsored by the great powers (Cardoso, 2006: 604-5, 612-17).

It is interesting to note that in the 2000’s there were some meaningful changes in the regional defense policies. The achievement of macroeconomic stability, good levels of GDP growth, and a commodities boom led to more investments in the Armed Forces. Regional integration left behind the liberal model of “open regionalism” and embraced a new version more committed to issues such as territory, security, energy and infrastructure (Lima and Coutinho 2006). Brazil and Chile launched major procurement programs to renew their navies and air forces, and the 1970s Brazilian project of building a nuclear-propulsion submarine was again a priority, with top officials such as the minister of Science and the vice-minister of External Relations saying that it was a mistake to sign the NPT. (Santoro 2011).

There is growing concern in the region with the more assertive role played by Brazil in military affairs and some tensions between Chile and Peru regarding their long-disputed border. Democracy did not solve all the territorial conflicts – they came back in the 2000s

motivated by the increased economic importance of natural resources in contested areas (Pieri 2011). This was particularly visible in the environment disputes between Argentina and Uruguay regarding the use of the river that is the border between them and in the constant Bolivian claim for an access to the sea, lost to Chile in the 19th century Pacific War.

But democracy framed these disputes in political negotiations, not military battles. The only war that happened in Latin America since the redemocratization was the Cenepa conflict between Peru and Ecuador in 1996, when Peru still under the dictatorship of Alberto Fujimori.

2) Regional Integration

In the second half of the 20th century there were several efforts of regional integration in the Southern Cone of Latin America. Inspired by the European regionalism of the 1950s, afraid to lose their markets, and guided by the developmentalist doctrine of the United Nations' Economic Commission for Latin American and the Caribbean (ECLAC), Argentina, Brazil and Chile were among the countries which signed the Montevideo Treaty (1960) with the aim to create a free trade zone in the region.

That process failed, for many reasons. There was an economic conflict between the nationalistic development models of Latin America and the need for liberalization of regional integration - businessmen were reluctant to agree with diplomats to lower trade barriers. The biggest countries were more concerned with the expansion of their export markets, the smaller ones wanted joint efforts on infrastructure. Democracy – or the lack of it – also played a major role. In the 1960s and 1970s there were plenty of coups in the Southern Cone (Brazil and Bolivia, 1964; Argentina, 1962, 1966 and 1976; Chile, 1973; Uruguay, 1974). The region became divided into military dictatorships and fragile democracies, which were afraid of their authoritarian neighbors. (Barbosa 1996; Santoro 2007a; Prazeres 2007).

They had reason to fear. Brazil's foreign policy was very active in the repression to dissidents exiled in the region, and in aiding the fall of democratic governments in Chile and Uruguay. Journalist Claudio Dantas Sequeira, from newspaper *Correio Braziliense*, published in

2007 a series of articles with the release of documents on that subject from the Ministry of External Relations. The issue has also been a theme of scholar research (Almeida 2008; Bandeira 2008, Penna Filho 2009) and semi-autobiographic historical fiction written by diplomats (Ribeiro, 2010).

The Andean countries, including Chile, created their own sub-regional integration process in 1969: the Andean Pact. But after the coup, general Pinochet left the organization – he and his economic advisors considered it hostile to foreign investment and in conflict with the neoliberal model they wanted to implement.

By the mid-1970s Argentina, Brazil and Chile were ruled by military dictatorships with different economic doctrines and engaged in border disputes, territorial conflicts and a nuclear race. This was, of course, a very bad environment to negotiate economic cooperation, and it is no surprise that the project of a Latin American free trade agreement was abandoned in everything but name. There was even a campaign in the 1970s in Brazilian TV advising consumers not to buy Argentine products!

However, Argentina, Brazil and Chile were able to cooperate in transnational political repression. The Operation Condor was a successful attempt of the military governments to hunt dissidents in the region. The political police, secret service and Armed Forces exchanged information, investigated together and made collective actions (Dinges 2004).

The mood started to change in the 1980s, with the crisis of the national-developmental models and the beginning of the political reforms in countries such as Brazil, Peru and Bolivia. The Latin American nations signed a new Montevideo Treaty with more modest – or realistic – goals. Instead of a continental free trade area, States would negotiate sub-regional pacts, granting economic preferences to their neighbors.

In 1983-1985, when democracy returned to Argentina and Brazil, this model became the pillar of the Program of Integration and Economic Cooperation (PICE, in the Spanish acronym), a group of more than 20 agreements in strategic fields such as the automobile industry, telecommunications and energy. These agreements were more about bilateral planning and

coordination than trade liberalization, in what political scientist Monica Hirst called “the last breath of the national-developmental model” (Santoro 2008: 65-67).

Although launched in the middle of a serious regional economic crisis, the PICE achieved a significant amount. By the end of the decade, Brazil was Argentina’s main trade partner, and Argentina was Brazil’s second largest market, behind only the United States. It was the first time in their history that they were so economically important to each other, and the relations between both governments were so good that the former rivals talked about a “strategic alliance” (Gonçalves and Lyrio 2003). It is questionable that such a strong bond was ever consolidated, nevertheless it was a true that Buenos Aires and Brasilia tried to see each other as friends and would remain that way (Russell and Tokatlian 2003).

In the 1990s, Uruguay and Paraguay joined Argentina and Brazil to form a customs union, the Common Market of the South (Mercosur). The four countries were new democracies going on through a difficult process of economic reform, and generally facing very high inflation. The smaller partners, Uruguay and Paraguay, feared being left out of the trade arrangements between their two most important neighbors. With Mercosur, about 90% of the economic exchange inside the bloc was made with no barriers, although there were important exceptions such as automobiles (regulated by separated bilateral treaties) and sugar (protected from foreign competition). The four nations shared a common tariff applied to products outside the bloc.

Mercosur was both an economic and a political project. Trade inside the bloc boomed 400% during its first decade and the lower tariffs meant an important message to business, with cheaper imports helping to curb inflation, even at expense of local industry. But it was also a strategic goal for Brazil – an environment in South America, with political safety nets, to stimulate its companies to internationalize and reach global markets. Regionalization was the first step to globalization (Florêncio and Araújo 1998). Argentina lacked a coherent vision, with a group considering Mercosur the beginning of a hemispheric free trade area, and others wanting to focus on the relationship with Brazil (Ablin and Bouzas 2004; Seixas-Corrêa 1999).

Democracy was important to create the confident mood that enabled PICE and Mercosur to bloom, and it became part of the concerns of the bloc during the military crisis in Paraguay, in the mid-1990s, which almost led to a coup. Argentina and Brazil inserted a “democratic clause” (the Protocol of Ushuaia) stipulating that authoritarian governments could not be members of Mercosur. Later, it was complemented by the Protocol of Assunción, listing human rights which must be respected inside the bloc.

In the 2000s, the democratic issues of Mercosur were expanded with the rapprochement of social policy. This was an important element in Lula’s and Kirchners’ decision to “relaunch” the bloc after the economic crisis of 1998-2002. Several forums (“Special Meetings”, in the bloc’s jargon) were created dedicated to women rights, youth policy, small farms, and so on. The international relations of cities and provinces were also incentivized. They include officials and civil society representatives and are helping in the formation of regional networks linking social policy and diplomacy (Santoro 2007b; Pinheiro and Milani 2012). Mercosur also created a Parliament in 2005, although one with very limited powers: basically, it can only invite officials to speak about regional integration, as it does not have the authorization to legislate or to settle the bloc’s budget. (Erthal 2006)

Mercosur was also important in bringing Chile closer to Argentina and Brazil. Chilean economy is much more open than any other Latin American country, with lower tariffs and it was not interesting for the country leaders – democratically elected since 1990 – to change that and adjust to the bloc’s norms. However, Chile became an “associated member” of Mercosur, in 1996. That is, it signed a free trade agreement and earned the right to take part in several regional political forums, especially in human rights and social policy.

Chile’s commitment to regional integration became stronger in 1999, when the Socialist Party returned to the Presidency, for the first time since Salvador Allende’s government in the 1970s. Under the leadership of Ricardo Lagos, and after him Michelle Bachelet, Chile engaged in several diplomatic initiatives with other Latin American countries, such as the political command of the United Nations’ peace mission in Haiti (the military command was with Brazil) and even returned to the Andean Community of Nations, the new name of the Andean Pact,

although only as an observer, for the same economic reasons it did not join Mercosur as a full member.

For Brazil, Mercosur was only the beginning of a very active South American foreign policy. In the 1990s and 2000s, under presidents Fernando Henrique Cardoso and Luís Inácio Lula da Silva, the country launched several integration processes in the region. There was an initiative to build infrastructure (IIRSA, 2000), free trade agreements between Mercosur and the Andean countries (1996-2003), the creation of a sub-regional organization in the Amazon river basin (OTCA, 2002) and, finally, the Union of South American Nations (Unasur, 2004), an umbrella institution to provide “integral integration” (Paredes 2010), coordinating all the other efforts.

Unasur, as Mercosur, has a democratic clause, known as the Georgetown Declaration. Its focus was in coup prevention, a concern highlighted after the attempts in Venezuela (2002), the successful coup in Honduras (2009) and several crises and rebellions in Bolivia, Ecuador and Paraguay. Both institutions have been criticized for the lack of commitment to scrutinize human rights violations, especially of civil and political liberties, by the governments of South America.

3) Human Rights and Foreign Policy

During the dictatorship, human rights were a major foreign policy problem for the governments of the Southern Cone. They faced strong criticism from NGOs such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, investigations from the Inter-American Human Rights Commissions, criticism in the press and occasionally pressure from Western leaders – American president Jimmy Carter or Pope Paul VI, for example. The Nobel Peace Prize was granted to Argentine activist Adolfo Pérez Esquivel in 1980. Therefore, it is no surprise that the military administrations adopted a defensive policy regarding the issue and the democracies changed it in a decisive way. But the transformation was not as big in Brazil as one could imagine, especially when compared to Argentina and Chile.

The three countries signed almost all the relevant international human rights treaties after redemocratization – in fact, they are the developing nations that most adopted them

(Milani 2012: 45), but in Argentina and Chile they have constitutional status. In Brazil they were ordinary laws until the Judiciary reform of 2004, which established a very confuse change, stipulating that from there on, new treaties would be like amendments to the Constitution, but it kept silent about the older ones. Brazilian Supreme Court decided that they would be in an intermediate position, above common laws but still below constitutional status.

Argentina and Chile have very strong human rights pressure groups, well-connected in international networks. Indeed, widespread foreign rejection to repression in both countries in the 1970s was very important in consolidating the issue as the “last utopia” of the 20th century, after the crisis of communism and of the post-colonial autonomist projects (Moyn 2010). Social movements were able to link with organizations in the United States and Europe, creating a “boomerang effect” in which their struggle against the dictatorship was magnified by foreign allies (Keck and Sikkink 1998).

Brazil also had these pressure – but at a lower level. Foreigners often comment with surprise about the relative weakness of Brazilian presence in international human rights networks.⁴ One hypothesis is path-dependence concerning the dictatorship period: “In path dependence processes, however, positive feedback means that history is ‘remembered’. These processes can be highly influenced by relatively modest perturbations at early stages.” (Pierson 2004: 45).

In the late 1970s, when activists were losing their borders in South America, Brazilian social movements were more concerned about other needs – testing and enjoying the political opening of the authoritarian regime. Torture and political killings fell to low levels after 1974, political amnesty was granted in 1979, exiled people returned, the harsher laws were suspended and multi-party competition was restored. These were very important

⁴ In almost all the interviews that I did in the United States, at universities and international organizations, this point was highlighted, often in the comparison with Argentina and Chile.

transformations, but they were less urgent to foreign eyes than the mass murders going on in Argentina and Chile.⁵

The more violent period of the military regime in Brazil was between 1969 and 1974. Most of the political diaspora was in Uruguay or in Chile, with little access to the international networks of Europe and United States – which were still being created. The major foreign link was with the Catholic Church. In the words of São Paulo’s Cardinal Don Paulo Evaristo Arns, the Church became “the voice of the voiceless”. It compiled and denounced human rights violations and tried to mediate with the military leaders of the country. (Arns 2001, Serbin 2001).

This difference can be seen in how human rights became a much more important issue in Argentina’s and Chile’s foreign policy after redemocratization, often due to international networks. During the 1980s the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo were part of the Argentine diplomatic delegation that negotiated the International Convention on Children’s Rights. They helped to draft the articles that assure to a child the right to know his parent’s names, and to have an identity. This was, of course, a consequence of the traumatic experiences of the repression, such as the abduction of babies from political prisoners, in order to be adopted by families connected to the dictatorship.

Another example was the appointment of Julio Cesar Strassera by President Raúl Alfonsín to be Argentina’s Ambassador to the United Nations’ human rights body in Geneva. Strassera was the chief prosecutor in the trials of the military junta. His deputy, Luis Ocampo Moreno, also went to work in international organizations, and years later became the top official at the International Criminal Court, responsible to bring justice to war criminals and people who committed crimes against humanity. (Eliashev 2011)

The junta’s trial was a watershed for judicial processes against human rights violations, and it started a “justice cascade” that reached high levels in the 2000s. (Sikkink 2011). The activists engaged in the task were conscious of the global reach of their actions, and tried to

⁵ American journalist Larry Rother and Cuban scholar Mauricio Font, both living in Brazil at the time, told me in the interviews that the news about the country were the political and cultural mobilization of the final years of the dictatorship and the expectations with the return of democracy.

learn the lessons of the Nuremberg Trials, using explicit comparisons of the military dictatorship with the Nazi regime. The characterization of the political violence of the period as genocide would be a strong mark of the human right discourse in Argentina, by activists, scholars and in the arts.⁶

In Chile, the political transition was a long and difficult negotiation with general Pinochet. He left power in 1990 after losing a plebiscite about his permanence in power – a vote that he clearly saw as a formality, and that he expected to win easily (Lagos et alli 2012). However, he managed to assure several privileges, such as being senator for life and commander of the Army until the end of the decade. He passed a political amnesty that protected him and his allies. But that changed when he was arrested in England, in 1998, by order of Spanish judge Baltazar Garzón, under the International Convention on Torture.

The trial of Argentina's junta was a breaking point which proved that massive human rights violators – even chiefs of State – could be judged for their crimes. Pinochet's arrest was another defining moment, which showed that they were not safe from prison even in foreign countries that had once supported their regimes. It was a long history which began with Joan Garcés, a Spanish Lawyer who was an advisor to socialist president Salvador Allende. Garcés ran away from Chile after the 1973 coup and became a human rights activist in Spain, and later a congressman in the Socialist Party. He was important in making the country sign many humanitarian diplomatic treaties, and helped judge Garzón to mount the case against Pinochet. (Dorfman 2002: 28-32). The arrest in London was the consequence of an impressive network of organizations and common citizens:

Joan Garcés finally had a strong ally in the Spanish judiciary. (...) While dining at the restaurant Fortnum and Mason, Pinochet was recognized by one the waiters, a son of former Chilean exiles, who notified Amnesty International that the ex-dictator was in London. The wheels of the human rights machinery began to turn. Amnesty International lawyers in London called their colleagues in Madrid, who notified Joan Garcés. (Muñoz 2008: 245, 247)

⁶ For the artistic expression of the genocide definition in Argentina, the best example is the movie "Garage Olimpo", directed by Marco Bechis (1999) and songs such as "La Memoria", by León Gieco.

The arrest was controversial in Chile, where Pinochet still had many supporters. Some of the democrats were also divided on the situation, thinking that the former dictator should be tried in his country, and not by a foreign court. The Senate passed a resolution condemning the prison – but just by one vote. There was a long political and legal battle, and Pinochet was eventually returned to Chile, where he was sued. In the meantime, his image was further deteriorated by another international investigation, where American authorities, acting under the new anti-terrorism laws, discovered his secret bank accounts, fueled by corruption money. (Lagos et alli 2012: chapter 5). He died before the trial.

In comparison with Argentina and Chile, Brazil did not have any human rights case with such international repercussions. The amnesty law of the dictatorship is still in place and the Supreme Court ruled it as valid, although it contradicts the democratic Constitution and the international treaties signed by the country, which name torture and political murder as crimes against humanity.

But democracy has been important in the making of and implementation of more effective social policies. The successful initiatives became a tool for expanding the prestige of the country, by international cooperation agreements. Health and food security are the richest examples. Brazil became an important global benchmark in income-transfer programs (Bolsa Família), anti-AIDS initiatives and poverty reduction. It is the only BRIC power where inequality is decreasing (Neri 2012: 25), which is also in contrast with the rising rates in Argentina and Chile.

Thus, Brazilian human rights foreign policy is centered on the country's social achievements and not in its (very low) capacity to deal with the crimes of the past. In 2010, a former guerrilla and political prisoner, Dilma Rousseff was elected president. She created a Truth Commission to investigate the dictatorship, but without powers to arrest anyone. Although she talks with pride about her resistance to the authoritarian regime, she also made controversial statements, such as claiming her inability to stop torture in Brazil, which is still often used by the police against common criminals.

Another issue where we can see a different human rights pattern is immigration policy. In the Southern Cone redemocratization occurred under very stressful economic conditions, especially in Argentina and Brazil, and many of its citizens migrated to Europe or the United States, reversing the historical trend which made these countries havens for poor people searching better lives.

However, in the 2000s economies began to grow again and the Southern Cone became, yet again, a beacon for job opportunities. Most of the newcomers were from other Latin American and Caribbean countries, such as Bolivia, Paraguay, Peru and Haiti. Later, with the crisis in the European Union, migrants from the former colonial powers in Spain and Portugal also chose the region. But the new prosperity was sometimes accompanied by a surge in xenophobia and racism against the immigrants, echoing similar reactions in the rich nations.

In Brazil, the immigration law is the same from the period of the dictatorship, and it establishes in its first article that its main purpose is the defense of “national security”.⁷ It is concerned with “subversive activities” of foreign citizens, and during the authoritarian regime it was often used to expel priests engaged in human rights networks. Since the mid-2000s an alternative law is being discussed in the Congress, but it is not a priority on anyone’s agenda. Brazil has been criticized for not have signed the International Convention on Migrants Rights, even if the Ministry of External Relations is becoming quite active in the defense of the 3 million Brazilians living abroad.

These contradictions were highlighted in 2012 with a political crisis involving immigrants from Haiti – a nation with a United Nations Peacekeeping Mission commanded by Brazil. A surge in new arrivals in the Amazon region – around 4,000 people – led to a strong reaction in the press, claiming that Brazil was being “invaded” by Haitians. The Brazilian government responded with controversial acts, such as limiting visas to Haiti’s citizens to a maximum of 100 per month and announcing a “selective immigration policy” for “qualified candidates” from developed countries:

⁷ The text of the law is available at: http://www.planalto.gov.br/ccivil_03/leis/L6815.htm. Access in May 2012.

... it is a surprise to hear about 'selective immigration' in a country that would have left behind long ago the ideas such as replacement of slave labor and 'whitening' of the population, which inspired highly selective immigration policies in other moments of our history. Nowadays we are an emigration country. The estimate is that some 3 million Brazilians live overseas, and the official data states, until June 2011, the presence of 1.5 million foreigners in Brazil, most of them of Portuguese, Bolivian, Chinese and Paraguayan origins.

Considering that it is about a few thousand Haitians in some cities of the North, running away from a huge natural and humanitarian catastrophe – by the way, one that happened in a country where Brazil assumed special commitments, including a new role as a protagonist in a peace mission (the controversial Minustah) – and arrived in a region that has giant public works in need of labor, there can only be the impression that the big publicity of the case worked as an embarrassing but effective motive. The occasion allowed to weaken the vision of the migrant as a human being in search of a better life, entitled to rights and duties, such as the one held by the National Immigration Council. (Ventura and Illes 2012)

Chile faces a similar situation, with immigrants from Peru suffering discrimination (Ghiardo et alli 2008). But Argentina passed Law Patria Grande in 2006, after a fire destroyed a sweatshop in Buenos Aires where Bolivian migrants worked in unsafe conditions in the textile industry, killing six people. The tragedy launched a national debate on immigration and one month later Congress approved the new act. It is a very open and progressive law considering migration a human right and even granting foreign citizens political participation and the right to vote. With 5% of its population composed of immigrants (mostly from Bolivia and Paraguay) these are not just symbolic gestures, but a strong commitment to regional integration.

Patria Grande has been criticized for demanding too many documents from the immigrants, and for not being able to stop severe labor exploitation. Also, it is limited to citizens from South American countries and does not include people from China, a major source of recent immigrants to Argentina. Nonetheless, it became an important reference in the region, together with Uruguayan legislation, on how to deal with human rights of foreign residents.

The last issue in this section is how Argentina, Brazil and Chile act internationally concerning massive human rights violations, particularly on the theme of defending democracy. The three countries share a tradition of suspicion of interventions in other nations' internal affairs, even for humanitarian issues. But foreign policy ambitions sometime led them to change these positions. For example, Argentina during Carlos Menem's presidency searched for a political alliance with the United States, and supported the first Gulf War, which was opposed by the other countries. Similar thing happened when Menem engaged in the peace enforcing-mission in Haiti in the 1990s, and in its criticism of human rights abuses in Cuba.

However, the divergence was the exception, not the rule. Argentina, Brazil and Chile are democracies in developing countries, in a region where foreign intervention has been part of the problem, not of the solution. So, they are not very interested by the prospect of imposing democracy and human rights from the outside, and they are usually against the use of force to achieve that – as happened in the Balkans during the Kosovo War, in the Middle East during the Iraq War and the Arab Spring etc. But they created mechanisms in South America and supported institutions in the United Nations system that focus on political tools and international law, such as the Human Rights Council and the International Criminal Court.

In Latin America there is the combination of this new judicial framework with political instability - which remains intense. The three countries have acted out many times to preserve democracy. Argentina and Brazil put pressure on Armed Forces and politician in other countries to prevent or reverse coups in Paraguay (1996, 1999), Venezuela (1992, 2002) and Honduras (2009), coordinating actions with other nations and international organizations. The fall of democracy was perceived as a threat to the regional stability and as a crisis that brought back the risk of the return of the military interventions against popular will, as expressed in electoral results (Santiso, 2002; Cardoso, 2006: chapter 10).

However, the three countries recognized the authoritarian regime of Alberto Fujimori in Peru (1992-2000), considering it as a minor evil to the activities of Shining Path and Revolutionary Movement Tupac Amaru and by the economic chaos in that country. When Peru and Equador fought a war by border disputes (1995), Brazil negotiated peace successfully and

was part of OAS' efforts to settle an agreement for the Peruvian political crisis. Years later, Chile extradited then former President Fujimori back to Peru, where he was jailed for corruption and murder.

In other occasions, the Brazilian government defended authoritarian regimes, criticizing democratic dissidents, similar to what happened in Iran during the Green Revolution in 2009, and with Cuba in the condemnation to the athletes that applied for asylum in Brazil during the Panamerican Games (2007) and to the political prisoners that went on a hunger strike (2010). Argentine and Brazilian officials have also been constant supporters of the accusations made against Venezuela's President Hugo Chávez of illegal and authoritarian actions, in his country and in foreign countries.

In Haiti, the three countries joined the new United Nations peace-enforcing mission to stabilize the country after the fall of President Jean-Bertrand Aristide (2004). Brazil led its military wing, in the major foreign operation of Brazilian Armed Forces since the Second World War, and Chile commanded the political side. The change is explained by the rising interest of Brazil in a permanent seat in the Security Council, but it was justified by the Ministry of External Relations with the adoption of the principle of "non-indifference" in the face of severe human rights violations. Chile saw it as an opportunity to show its commitment to Latin America, even if its main economic partners are in Asia and Europe. Argentina could not be out of a project in which the other major Southern Cone nations took part. (Hirst, 2007).

In all the cases, it was the acceptance of a very interventionist mission, with UN peacekeepers acting as police in Haitian slums. It signals a disposition to a more active role in democracy promotion, with some important pre-conditions: multilateral support, strong Latin American engagement, and regional crisis. There is no indication of change concerning a similar pattern in the Arab Spring or Afro-Asian nations.

Conclusion

Democracy matters to foreign policy in the Southern Cone of Latin America. The fall of the authoritarian regimes helped to create conditions to solve many (not all) of the

international border disputes in the region peacefully and also allowed for increased confidence among governments, crucial to economic integration and political cooperation. Argentina, Brazil and Chile also became more committed to human rights in global forums, although each country has its own traditions and interests in this field with strong contradictions in themes such as immigration and democracy promotion.

Democracy matters to foreign policy because it changed the policy-making process, making it more open to several social groups, increasing links to international networks and to the global economy. They provided their governments with alternative visions, frameworks and interests to look at foreign affairs, creating a diplomatic agenda much more diversified and in many ways better connected with other public policies, particularly in social areas.

Today, it is a very different situation from the one which existed during the dictatorships, when many international relations issues were “securitized” and seen as national security threats, in a zero-sum game perspective. The return of the Armed Forces to the barracks and the rise of a new generation of civilian politicians changed the framework to the diplomatic negotiations. The transformation was even deeper in the 2000’s, when social activists arrived in positions of power in the three countries (Dagnino et alii 2006) with a broader view on human rights.

Democracy is not a magic pill that will solve all the problems in Latin America. In the beginning of the 2010s, the Southern Cone achieved many victories in reducing poverty and fomenting economic growth. However, it also faces several challenges such as the rising inequality in Argentina and Chile, the huge violence rate in Brazil, the risks of xenophobia – even against other peoples in the region (Bolivians, Paraguayans, Peruvians) – and the persistence of long territorial conflicts between Chile, Peru and Bolivia, and Argentina and the United Kingdom.

Democracy is always under construction. The young Southern Cone regimes are already in the longest period of civil and political freedom in the region’s history, but they still have a long way to go in the transformation Argentina, Brazil and Chile. International Relations will be an even more important battlefield in this struggle.

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