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PERON AND THE NAZI WAR CRIMINALS

Tomás Eloy Martínez
Fellow
Woodrow Wilson Center

Tomás Eloy Martínez is a writer and a journalist. Currently, he is a Fellow of the Latin American Program (1983-1984).

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In May 1965, while on a holiday in the mountains of Cordoba, Argentina, actress Norma Aleandro met and befriended an old German couple who loved books and flowers. In the afternoons, the three took long strolls through a vine-shaded park, where they spoke of politics and world affairs. In the evenings, they dined together on borsch, after which the husband would enthusiastically recite poems by Schiller, or his wife would play Schubert pieces on the violin. One day, the couple showed Norma Aleandro one of their most prized possessions: a rare edition of Goethe's Faust, published in Munich around 1850, and bound in a soft shiny leather which the actress was unable to identify. Curious, she asked the couple what type of binding it was. The old woman lowered her soft gaze and murmured, "It's Jewish skin. My husband was once an official at a concentration camp in Poland."

The furor created in Argentina by the kidnapping of Adolf Eichmann--one of those responsible for the "final solution"--from a Buenos Aires suburb in late 1960 had not yet died when Norma Aleandro went public with this story. As usual, the country found itself divided between those who were indignant over the violation of national sovereignty (Eichmann was kidnapped by an Israeli commando and taken to Jerusalem without the knowledge or permission of the Argentine government), and, on the other hand, those who had been surprised by the degree of hospitality that the country had apparently offered Nazi war criminals under the Juan Perón government in the immediate postwar era.

The migration of Nazis to Argentina was only a rumour when Norma Aleandro related her conversation with the old couple. Years later, between 1968 and 1970, Perón confirmed the fact that he had given refuge to several thousand Nazis for, he said, "humanitarian reasons,"¹ and that he had allowed the immigration of "five thousand Croats whom Tito had threatened with death."²

Disputes over the numbers of emigrants would begin much later: in 1982 Simon Wiesenthal, director of the Center of Jewish Documentation in Vienna, said that Perón had provided 7,500 blank Argentine passports to Nazi fugitives. The first Israeli ambassador to Buenos Aires, Jacob Tsur, maintained that Wiesenthal's calculations were too high, and added that Perón's alleged Nazism was but a North American prejudice. "In Washington's simplistic perspective," he wrote, "Perón had to be either a Nazi or a communist."³

Today few deny that Argentina was one of the principal places of refuge in South America for German and Croat war criminals. This paper

seeks to explain how these fugitives entered the country and why this migration opened and was officially administered by the Argentine government.

My remarks today are not taken from the book I have been writing on Perón during my fellowship here at the Wilson Center. In the book, which I have not yet finished, I attempt to examine the complex personality of a military caudillo who in turn became the caudillo of the worker masses, and who dedicated the better part of his life towards consolidating the military classes' hold over the whole of Argentine society. It is, of course, important both to know who Perón was and to appreciate his political style in order to understand why he opened the country to the Nazis, and why, in his later years in exile in Santo Domingo and Madrid, he cultivated friendships with Germans like Otto Skorzeny, the flying ace from the Luftwaffe who rescued Mussolini from Mt. Great Sasso in 1943, and Hans-Ulrich Rudel, one of Hermann Goering's trusted pilots.⁴

There are several reasons why telling this tale is difficult. First, there are so many contradictory and opposing alignments among the Argentine armed forces in 1945, that often a pro-German officer could also be a liberal democrat,⁵ while another who publicly favored an allied victory might be writing anti-British treatises decrying that country's economic voraciousness.⁶ Matters are also complicated by Perón himself, who seeded his trail with half-truths and false leads. Language--which in itself is already a form of concealment--served Perón almost unfailingly as a means to misguide and mislead; it seems as if his words were chosen only to disorient and move us in almost any direction except towards the truth. Joseph Page, in his biography of Perón, has captured the essence of this phenomenon in these words: "He would never sacrifice practicality on the altar of ideological coherence."⁷

Prelude: Perón and the Army

In order to pick up the thread of this story, it is helpful to review certain aspects of Perón's military background. First, it is necessary to emphasize that Perón, like most of his classmates at the army academy, was schooled in Prussian military doctrine. By 1910, one third of the professors teaching at the Superior War College were or had been members of the Army High Command of the German Empire. The Argentines studied the strategies of Moltke, Hindenberg, Ludendorff, and other Prussian marshals of the Great War in minute detail, seemingly forgetting that the Germans had been defeated. In his class notes, Perón struggled to rationalize these defeats, attributing them to lack of materiel and equipment, or to the late arrival of reinforcements.

The German influence was so pervasive that in order to appreciate its magnitude, one need only examine the "Official Library" catalogue--a collection of texts studied by the majority of Argentine captains. Between 1919, the year of its inception, and 1929, the library issued a total of 126 publications. Of those, 60 were works translated from the German.

Among the authors included in the library was the young Perón. There, in 1931, he published the book that contains, in embryonic form, the foundations for all of his later speeches and studies: World War, 1914. Operations in Eastern Prussia and Galitzia. There is hardly a page in this

work where Perón does not express his admiration for the Prussian Army's strategic and organizational talent, or where he does not quote exhaustively from General Alfred von Schlieffen, whose comments Perón later appropriated as his own.⁸

Shortly before the Second World War exploded in Europe, Perón was sent to observe Italy's northern alpine battalions in order to complete his military education. While in Europe, he was also able at that time to make a clandestine visit to Wehrmacht outposts near Tannenberg, a battle camp he had described in his first book.⁹ He returned to Argentina from Europe intent on spreading among his peers the idea of "a new socialism, of a nationalist bent," solidly opposed to communism and colored by his admiration for the fascist ability to mobilize the masses.¹⁰

The Argentine army proved fertile ground in which to sow such ideas. During the previous decade, the younger officials had become increasingly resentful towards the traditional politicians, whom they blamed for the corruption and electoral fraud prevalent in the country.¹¹ Questionable government practices had accorded the British with valuable railroad and utility concessions, and this, along with the presence of pro-British lawyers in executive ministries, irritated the country's captains, majors, and lieutenant colonels to no end. Alain Rouquie emphasizes the fact that "for the defenders of territorial integrity, the United Kingdom"... was still "the illegal occupier of the Malvinas Islands; that is to say, a hereditary enemy."¹²

In June 1943 these officers rose up against that past. A military coup engineered by the GOU (Group of United Officers or Group Working for Unification), a secret military lodge whose membership included over one thousand staunchly committed army leaders,¹³ overthrew the conservative President Ramon S. Castillo as he lay plans for a new electoral scam. The day after the coup, the GOU installed General Pedro Pablo Ramirez as president of the republic and General Edelmiro J. Farrell as the Minister of War. Perón, one of the more active leaders of the lodge, assumed a less important position, Director of Labor, in an obscure administrative dependence that had, until that point, seemed all but useless.

Nevertheless, by the end of 1943 Perón was the only member of the ruling group who seemed to have a clear idea of how to use and how to keep power. From his base at the National Labor Department, he began to establish a reputation as a miracle worker. He resolved strikes, met daily with dozens of labor delegations, and promulgated laws which favored peasants and the industrial proletariat. Soon the Department commanded a near ministerial rank, and became known as the Secretariat of Labor and Social Welfare. When businessmen began to express unease over Perón's activities, he mollified them with an extensive and intelligent speech, delivered at the Buenos Aires Stock Exchange. Perón told the assembled group that his Secretariat "had, from the earliest stages, pacified union syndicalists. It is a grave mistake to think that labor syndicalism prejudices the employer. (...) To the contrary, it is a way for the employer to avoid having to do battle against his workers."¹⁴ In this fashion, Perón inaugurated his plan for an alliance of classes--the social pact--while at the same time increasing his prestige within army circles, even while under the shadow of the minister of war, General Farrell.

In January 1944, Secretary of State Cordell Hull announced that the United States would provide arms and war materiel to Brazil, to assist that country's expedition to the front. Because she was neutral, Argentina was excluded from all such armament programs. The Buenos Aires military government reacted with alarm to the fact that the United States assisted modernization of the Brazilian army would tip the Latin American balance of power in its favor. The equilibrium of force was about to be shattered.

Convinced that the fact that Argentina was not in favor of the allied cause meant she was against it, Washington began to step up its pressure on the country. In response, positions among the ruling group split. Both Perón and Farrell understood that it was necessary to change their positions so that Argentina's isolationism would not prejudice it after the war. But neither official wished to risk creating enemies among their numerous counterparts who were still insistent on remaining neutral.

In the third week of 1944, a trivial incident, the alleged involvement in a German spy ring of an Argentine consul, served as a pretext for President Ramirez to declare martial law and break relations with the Axis. But Washington was not placated with the rupture, having preferred a formal declaration of war. Within the Argentine army circles, however, it triggered the outcry which Perón had foreseen. One month later, after being taken hostage by the commanders of the most important Buenos Aires garrisons, Ramirez was forced to resign. A very reliable source has confirmed that it was Perón who installed General Farrell as the new president, while managing to have himself named as the Minister of War.¹⁵

The new war minister, who also retained his post at the Secretariat of Labor, and who was also soon named vice president, dedicated the following months, April 1944 to September 1945, to gaining control over the army's organizational structure and to fulfilling the individual and professional desires of his fellow officers. Perón established a fund for mortgage loans for housing, personally dictated promotions and retirements, increased the total number of officers, and demonstrated that he, more than any of his predecessors, was committed to augmenting and modernizing the nation's arms.¹⁶

But it was not easy for the country, mired in its isolationism, to obtain new military equipment. Between March and September of 1944, the Argentine military attache in Madrid, acting under instructions from his government, conducted a series of negotiations with the representative of Skoda and Brunner, the German munitions firm.¹⁷ The fact that Buenos Aires would attempt such negotiations after its rupture with the Axis, at a time when the Reich's industries could not even satisfy its own needs at the front, illustrates just how desperate the Argentine military was to escape the United States' pressure.

In February 1945, Perón conducted secret discussions with a special mission from the United States Department of State in Buenos Aires. Again the objective was to convince the United States to lend military assistance to Argentina, in return for which Buenos Aires would carry out its Pan-American commitments and declare war on the Axis, "as soon as its

dignity permitted it to do so." At a continental conference, held at Chapultepec Palace in Mexico City during the last week of February and first week of March 1945, the Argentine government was pressed to decide once and for all whether it would declare war on Germany and its allies. Farrell and Perón saw no alternative but to cave in. On March 27, when they finally declared war, they astutely invoked the covenant signed in Mexico as the sole reason for their action.

In late 1945, Perón, who by then had resigned from all government posts and had announced his candidacy for the presidency of the republic, attended a conference where he told his audience that even after Argentina had complied with its Pan-American commitments, the United States government had continued to treat the country as it did the defeated nations; thereby classifying the Farrell administration as a "Nazi regime" and meddling in Argentina's domestic politics to promote Perón's presidential adversary.¹⁸

It is true that the most serious attacks made against Perón during this period emanated from the American press, which repeatedly labelled the candidate and his new wife former Nazi agents.¹⁹ These charges were never substantiated.

At this point the ex-ambassador to Argentina, Spruille Braden, who was serving as assistant secretary of state for inter-American affairs, and who found it difficult to hide his intense dislike for Perón, committed a crucial mistake. Two weeks before the Argentine presidential elections of 1946, he recommended that the State Department publish what quickly became known as the Blue Book,²⁰ a pamphlet which purported to document the infiltration of Nazis into the executive chambers of the Argentine military government, with the obvious intention of prejudicing the candidacy of "the colonel of the people." Perón immediately took advantage of the faux pas. He went public with the evidence of American meddling in a domestic political matter and revealed the State Department's partiality toward his opponent--who, paradoxically, was a member of the communist party. Finally, he told his countrymen that the electoral contest was not between Perón and Jose P. Tamborini, but rather between Braden and Perón. The surge of national pride which followed helped Perón carry the election by a much greater margin than even he had hoped for.

Perón has been classified alternately as a fascist, a Bonapartist, a populist, and a demagogue. The reality is more complex. From Bonapartism Perón derived (perhaps unconsciously) the notion of assimilating the masses into the established order; from fascism the concept that the masses should be mobilized, and that they could be stirred to action by the intelligent use of propaganda. He never showed himself to be anti-Semitic, and, as Page suggests, one of the fundamental differences between Perón's ideology and the fascist was "his visceral distaste for violence," at least while in exile during his latter years. Because of his training at the Superior War College, as well as his authoritarian conception of politics, Perón undoubtedly sympathized with the Axis. He cultivated pro-Axis friends quite openly. Even so, he always maintained (as Page says) "an appearance of impartiality."²¹

It would seem then that Perón did not arrange the immigration of thousands of Nazis to Argentina--under the auspices of the Argentine government--for purely ideological reasons. That would have been ingenious. Perón would never have consented to an alliance with the outcasts unless he were certain to gain something from it. Most often, the explanation offered is that he did it for money, although there has never been any proof of this. It is clear that many of the Nazi high command succeeded in depositing funds in Buenos Aires at least six months before the close of the war.²² But no one has been able to ascertain what became of these deposits. For many years, especially after 1955, Perón was also accused of having accepted commissions on the concession of false passports and asylum to Nazi fugitives. Another well-known story says that Evita had a secret Swiss bank account in which such funds were deposited, and that once she died, Perón was unable to withdraw any of the money. It appears that these allegations, to the extent to which they have been investigated, are mere fabrications, the products of fertile imaginations.

Perhaps Perón's motives were simpler than this, as well as more professional. As a key military figure in Argentina, and as the embodiment of the army's vision for society, Perón appears to have reasoned that a contingent of Nazis would be well qualified in the technical realm to contribute to the country's industrialization policy, initiated in 1944. Perón envisioned a self-sufficient Argentina, a country that would be able to negotiate with the great world powers from a position of strength, and not be humiliated. The war, which weakened Great Britain while also allowing Argentina to accumulate large reserves of gold, signalled the end of a long history of Argentine economic subservience to London, which the latter had imposed in the mid-nineteenth century. Perón was a virulent anti-communist, but Braden had inspired within him deep resentment of the United States. Perón's logical response was thus the "third position," a declaration of economic independence, as well as a play to national pride. But to Perón's way of thinking, in order to establish real independence, Argentina needed its own merchant fleet, an industrial infrastructure, sufficient technical expertise to mount its own arms and airplane factories, and if at all possible, its own nuclear energy program. At the Superior War College he had embraced as dogma the intellectual superiority of the Germans, and had come to admire the technological brilliance which unleashed the Blitzkrieg and had imposed German hegemony on Europe for almost four years. Perón needed German technicians, and he did not mind the moral price he would have to pay to obtain them.

How he did so is another story.

The Three Tapes

Perón alluded to this topic for the first time in the spring of 1967, when he lived in exile in Madrid. There he received a casual visitor, Eugenio P. Rom, who recorded his long talk with the former president and in 1980 published it in book form, Thus Spoke Juan Perón.

Perón told Rom that even after the break in relations, Argentina maintained contact with the Germans. He added that Argentina did not declare war on the Axis in 1945 because of pressure from other Latin American

countries, but because "it suited" the Germans.

"Were Argentina to become a 'belligerent,' it would have the right to enter Germany at the time of the final denouement; this would mean that our planes could be of invaluable assistance."

"At that time we had FAMA planes (Argentine Aereal Merchant Fleet) and the boats purchased from Italy available to us. We did as requested. After a cabinet discussion of the matter, President Farrell declared war."

"That is how a large number of persons were able to come to Argentina."

"Every type of technician and other specialist which Argentina lacked came to incorporate himself into the national project."

"People who quickly became very useful in their respective fields of specialty and who saved us years of training."

"...later, after we had appropriated the English railroads, more than 700 of those boys who had come from Germany began to work for us."

"This is not to mention those in the military and civilian plane factories and the other specialties. It was a great contribution to our nascent industries. Few people know this, because we told very few."

"At that time we preferred to let the imperialists think that we had finally ceded to their belligerent demands. For the time it suited us to appear accommodating, most importantly to gain time."²³

Cynicism? A mocking of history, which Perón had always wished to domesticate, to write in his own fashion, "creating step by step a memory that would finally displace the memories of others," as he told me in 1972?²⁴ Or was it rather a dark wish, so characteristic of Perón, that his acts be apart from history, as far removed from any judgment as possible, in a sphere which transcended morality and hatred, where not even the counter-history written by his adversaries could touch him?

The ex-president alluded again to the matter in his autobiography, Yo, Juan Domingo Perón, based on recordings made and entrusted to a "woman intimate to the family," and edited in Spain by a trio of journalists.²⁵ It is difficult to distinguish in the text between Perón's comments and those of the editors, because both are interwoven, and often long paragraphs which are undoubtedly those of Perón are not set off in quotes. Even so, it is evident that the material is authentic. Many portions of the book were taken from the memoirs on which Perón was working between 1969 and 1971 with his private secretary José López Rega, especially the chapters which deal with his years in exile.

The beginning of the narration seems to be what in Argentina is known as a "guitarreo," an invention or aside meant to distract the listener. Perón claims that many of the German refugees made their way to the Argentine coasts by way of "the U-530 and U-532 submarines," which surfaced in the Mar del Plata in July and August 1945, respectively. These two German submarines gave themselves up to the Argentine naval

authorities. One was the U-530; the other was actually the U-977. Neither carried the fabled technicians or any war criminals. The crew members were scrutinized very carefully by the United States Naval Intelligence Service, which found no evidence which would give any foundation to the stories then circulating, including the most extravagant of the tales: that Adolf Hitler and Eva Braun had travelled aboard. The U-530 carried 54 men, whose ages averaged 23 years; the captain was 25 years old. The U-977's crew was slightly smaller, 48 men, none of whom were any older.²⁶

After his "guitarreo," Perón gets to the heart of the matter. He maintains that he received the fugitives "for humanitarian reasons," and speculates that their numbers totalled several thousand. He also refers to the entry of "five thousand Croats threatened with death by Tito," and bitterly condemns the Nuremberg trials, which he calls "an infamy...", "the enormousness of which history will not forgive."²⁷

One appendix to the now famous report by the United States military attache in Rome, Vincent La Vista, dated May 1947, reveals the names and credentials of some of the Croats given refuge by Perón: Drago Krenzir, "formerly Commander of a Concentration Camp near Yugoslavia, held responsible for numerous deaths"; Juan Percevic, "formerly member of the Ustaschi Police, entered Argentina as a 'gardener,' etc." Milo Bogetich, another ex-member of the Ustaschi Police, also appeared on the list. For several years now, Bogetich has served as Isabel Perón's bodyguard in Spain. According to La Vista, Ustaschi was the name of the Croat terrorist organization founded by Ante Pavelic in 1923, and the false passports under which the members of this group travelled were provided by the Instituto San Jeronimus in Rome, the visas issued by the Argentine consul in Trieste.²⁸

In the same appendix, La Vista maintains that the Argentine government guaranteed the entry of a quota of 500 ustaschis each month, and that the embarkations to Buenos Aires were managed through the Societa di Navigazione Italia & Fratelli Kosulich, from the port of Genoa.²⁹

In Yo, Juan Domingo Perón, the ex-president discusses only the migration of "useful Germans," arranged by Argentine functionaries assigned to Sweden and Switzerland for that purpose. Perón insists that the migrations constituted a sort of competition with the Soviet Union and the United States to recruit brains. Obviously, he prides himself on the fact that the Germans always preferred the Argentine alternative.³⁰

Who were the "useful Germans" Perón spoke of? The only scientist of any reasonable standing he was able to bring to Argentina appears to have been Kurt Tank, one of the Luftwaffe's experts on aerodynamics, who went on to build a military airplane factory in Cordoba, with the help of 12 or 15 disciples.³¹ Tank later suggested that Perón allow Ronald Richter, a nuclear physicist, to enter Argentina. With Perón's aid, Richter set himself up at the Huemul Island research center, near Bariloche, where he enjoyed plentiful supplies and equipment. In February 1951 Richter announced that "he had produced and controlled nuclear energy through a process of fusion." In what proved a great blunder, Perón heralded the "discovery" with much fanfare, assuring the public that Argentina would

soon sell "nuclear energy for domestic use in litre and half-litre bottles."³² Obviously, he ended up with mud on his face, in an incident that the Argentines came to call a "papelón histórico," an enormous embarrassment.

Aside from Tank and his disciples, no other Nazi scientists who might have justified this mass migration organized by Perón entered Argentina. On the other hand, the list of notorious war criminals is impressive: Adolf Eichmann, Edward Roschmann--known as "the butcher of Riga," Jan Durcansky, the former SS officer accused of killing 50,000 Czech resistance fighters, and, within the realm of conjecture, Martin Bormann, head of the Chancellery of the Nazi Party, and Heinrich Muller, the Gestapo chief. An article published by Le Monde Diplomatique in July 1983 offers some informed speculation on the latter two.³³

It is also difficult to imagine with whom Perón might have arranged to declare war on Germany on March 26, 1945, if his comments on the matter are to be believed. Did he contact Germans living in Argentina, some of whom had been his professors at the Superior War College? Or was he in touch with representatives of Joachim von Ribbentrop, the foreign minister of the Third Reich, through Argentine diplomats assigned to Spain and Portugal?

The first hypothesis seems the more likely of the two. In 1969, the former president told historian Felix Luna that in February of 1945, when the outcome of the war was obvious, he met with "some old German friends, who also happened to speak for their community," and informed them that "Please understand, we have no choice but to go to war, for if we do not, you will go to Nuremberg."³⁴ The mention of Nuremberg was, of course, an anachronism, but Perón did not mind taking such liberties with history.

The second hypothesis should not be completely discarded. In September of 1970 in Madrid, Perón, in a taped interview, told me,

Quite some time before the end of the war, we had prepared ourselves for its aftermath. Germany had been defeated, that we were sure of. The victors hoped to take advantage of the great technological advances that country had made over the course of ten years. It was impossible to obtain their hardware; it had been destroyed. What remained were the men. We were also interested in this. We let the Germans know that we were going to declare war on them so as to save thousands of lives. We exchanged messages with them through Switzerland and Spain. Franco quickly understood our intentions and helped us. The Germans were in accordance. When the war ended, those useful Germans helped us build new factories and improve the old. In the process, they helped themselves.³⁵

No Spanish source has confirmed this statement. And one of the few functionaries with access to Francisco Franco's personal papers--the lieutenant general who shared Franco's name and was his first cousin--vehemently denied Perón's allegations.³⁶ It would have seemed that Perón's remarks amounted only to another false lead, a new "guitarreo," were it not for certain United States military intelligence documents which corroborate, if only partially, the ex-president's story.

The following excerpt is taken from an August 30, 1944 secret report by the naval attache stationed at the United States Embassy in Madrid. The information is attributed to "usually reliable sources":

Through connivance of the Argentine Embassy, Germans are obtaining passports and visas to go to Argentina. (...) The Argentine passport is issued by the Argentine consulate in Lisbon in the name of the fleeing German but with the place of birth listed as a town in Argentina (frequently Buenos Aires). The story is then that the subject was born of parents with German ancestry in Argentina and had retained his citizenship though having lived in Germany most of the following years (if the German name is too well-known another German name is substituted as the subject rarely speaks Spanish). The passport is then received by the subject in Madrid. The operation is done with the full knowledge of the German Embassy in Madrid but is permitted only if subject signs a paper swearing that he will continue to work for the Fatherland if necessary and admits liability for military service in Germany at some possible time in the future. (...) It is further stated that the Spanish Foreign Office and the Seguridad are cognizant of the maneuver and giving the utmost facilities.³⁷

Fourteen months later, in October of 1945, another report from the United States military attache in Madrid, Colonel Wendell G. Johnson, paints a more colorful and pathetic picture. The protagonist of this story is the Argentine consul in Barcelona, a certain Mr. Molina.

According to the document, Molina had started a business selling Argentine passports to Nazis and German agents, with the knowledge and complicity of Dr. Samuel Sequerra, chief of the Joint Welfare Organization for Portugal and Spain. The price of the passports is said to have varied between U.S. \$5,000 and \$7,000.

Molina was a Rumanian Jew whose father emigrated to Argentina when he was a boy of nine years. His father made money in Argentina and got his son into the diplomatic service. The son came to Spain during the days of the Monarchy but was declared 'persona non grata' (...) During the Spanish Republic, Molina returned and he stayed on as Consul. He has recently (...) arranged to give Argentine visas to Jewish refugee girls (...) recruited by Dr. Sequerra. (...) They were being permitted to go legitimately and freely to Argentina but found themselves locked up in public houses when they arrived there.³⁸

About this time, Madrid began to fill up with notorious Nazis and collaborationists, some of whom worked for Franco's police as trainers and technical advisers.³⁹ One of the better known Nazis in Madrid at this time was Otto Skorzeny, the pilot who had rescued Mussolini, who proposed to set up an engineering center on Montera Street in the Spanish capital city. (Perón and Skorzeny were later to become great friends.) Meanwhile, former ministers of the Vichy government, the chief of Perpignan's anti-Jewish militia and, according to a variety of sources, Ante

Pavelic, the chief of the collaborationist Croats, would gather at the Cafe Gijon in Madrid to chat and pass the time.⁴⁰ Within this context, Consul Molina's sinister activities do not seem all that surprising.

Of all of the reports which we have examined concerning the migration of Nazis to Argentina, perhaps the most telling is that authored by B. R. Legge, Military Attache at the United States Embassy in Berne, Switzerland. The report is dated March 28, 1945; that is to say, two days after Buenos Aires declared war on the Axis. Unfortunately it lacks, as do most of the other documents, precise names and geographic locations. Nonetheless, the source listed is classified as "very reliable" and the information it contains seems credible, as one can see from the following, where I quote the report almost in its entirety.

Fairly regular plane traffic is reported between Germany and Spain; the planes do not fly over France, but over Northern Italy and the Mediterranean. These planes are four or six-motored planes which were built some time ago for the purpose of assuring the departure of Nazi German big-wigs for Japan or Argentina at the desired time; they make up a special squadron of planes called 'Fuhrerstaffel,' and the flight personnel have been carefully selected.

This traffic with Spain has for its object not only the transfer of funds or the sending of agents to Spain, but also the training of personnel in case, on account of a miscarriage of the negotiations which have been begun in regard to the right of asylum, the great project of flight would have to be put into execution.

Spain was chosen for the test flights because the Germans find in that country many aids (landing fields, refueling facilities, etc.).

During the month of February two of these planes are reported to have secured connections to Argentina.

The Nazis are now sending funds and mail to Argentina by Argentine diplomatic pouch.

The S.D. places these envelopes going to this destination into planes having a clandestine connection with Spain via Italy. In Spain these envelopes are sent to two convents which have the opportunity of putting them in the diplomatic pouch of the Argentine Legation in Spain; these convents belong to orders which maintain similar establishments in Argentina.

In these convents there are several religious Germans who still have families in the Reich; the Nazi authorities note this from postal censorship. Pressure was brought to bear on these religious people under the threat of execution of members of their family still in Germany, in order to bring them to lend themselves to this illegal traffic.⁴¹

Thus General Legge's report confirms various points that until now seemed unrelated: a) that Spanish airports were for stopover points for operations between Germany and Argentina; b) that these activities were known to and supported by the Franco government; c) that the air traffic continued even after the rupture of relations between Argentina and Germany, and did not appear to have been interrupted by the Argentine declaration of war; and d) that the religious individuals involved were German and may have had family in Germany. It is not inconceivable that other convents might have given refuge or lent assistance to the Nazis for ideological or humanitarian reasons, as--according to La Vista--occurred in Italy. Remember that around this time, the Spanish Catholic Church had undertaken a religious crusade, collaborating with almost any opponent of the "reds." In the churches, which Franco had saved from destruction, the words of the Gospel railed against communist demons.

General Legge alludes to money transfers. We have found only three documents which touch on this theme, but as before, they omit names and bank account numbers, as if this aspect of the investigation had been done negligently, or as if all clues had vanished from the archives.

The first bit of information comes from a United States agent identified as "Z," and whose report, transmitted from some unknown location in Spain on January 27, 1944--the day after the break in relations between Argentina and the Reich--contains certain items of interest. "Z" describes the precautions taken by certain German banks and businesses in Buenos Aires to impede the blockage of their funds. The informant closes with this phrase, "Individuals in Germany were notified by friends in Argentina that ... (the diplomatic rupture with the Axis) was no cause for worry."⁴²

Another report, dated September 8, 1944, came from Colonel Wendell G. Johnson, the Military Attache at the United States Embassy in Chile. Based on information garnered from a communist confidant, who claimed to be an employee of the Argentine National Bank, Johnson notes that "large dollar deposits are being made in Argentine banks. These funds are coming from Stockholm, Sweden and Switzerland" (remember that Perón had sent diplomatic representatives to each of these countries to aid the movement of Nazi refugees to Argentina). Johnson says that the deposits supposedly total anywhere from U.S. \$100 to \$200 million. But again there is no mention of names or the specifics of the operation.⁴³

The third document is addressed to the Secretary of State, and is dated March 10, 1945, two weeks before the Argentine declaration of war. Its author, the First Secretary of the United States Embassy in Buenos Aires, alludes to the mission's continuing efforts to verify whether or not the Argentine banks are indeed opening new numbered accounts, possibly even by way of transmissions from the United States. He also describes the embassy's unsuccessful attempts to discover how and when the newly arrived German funds are invested in industry or farming. The only financial institution mentioned is the Tornquist Bank, which "had approximately 8 million pesos (U.S. \$2 million) belonging to persons or firms in enemy territory and over 50 million pesos (approximately 12.5 million dollars) of assets of persons and firms in Switzerland, the beneficial ownership of which is unknown."⁴⁴

Not even the slightest reference is made to any funds which might have been channelled to Perón or Evita. It seems as difficult to substantiate the stories about the couple's secret accounts or the fortune Perón is said to have taken into exile as it would be to verify the legend of the treasure of Atahualpa in Cuzco, Peru. Jose Manuel Algarbe, Perón's secretary during the former president's final stage of exile in Caracas and his first four years in Madrid, has said there is no reason to believe that Perón was in any way rich. Algarbe, one of the few men Perón trusted who can now discuss his former boss rationally, maintains that the ex-president lived off of the interest on his Barcelona and Madrid bank accounts--a sum which seldom exceeded U.S. \$150,000--and from donations made by friends, especially those of Jorge Antonio, an auto importer and racehorse owner.⁴⁵ Algarbe speaks quite knowledgeably; it was he who managed the Perón family accounts between 1961 and 1963, including the funds used to construct the villa "17th of October" in Puerta de Hierro, Madrid.

It is incredible to think that ten thousand Germans and Yugoslavs could have left so few traces of their movements. One cannot ascribe such a phenomenon solely to the chaos and turbulence prevalent in Europe in the immediate postwar period, or to efforts to erase the evidence of such a migration, no matter how ambitious.

Neither can one assume that Perón organized this migration merely because of his admiration of and belief in Prussian technical and military prowess. Perón, as we have seen, was much more a pragmatist than an ideologue. Thus, one must look elsewhere for his motivations.

The Holy Alliance

Let us return to the immediate postwar period. During the presidential campaign, Perón refused to hide his staunch anti-communism--as he continued to do while in exile. He had more than one reason for this hostility. The Argentine Communist Party was fairly well entrenched in the unions in 1946, and Perón, as he himself would say, was interested in attracting "that clientele" to his cause. Also, the communists had allied themselves with the liberals and the conservatives to form the so-called Democratic Union, whose presidential candidate, José Tamorini, was Perón's strongest opponent.

After assuming the presidency, Perón used his anti-communism as a trump card when negotiating with the United States and Great Britain. In 1950, this ideological credential helped Argentina secure a \$125 million loan from the Import-Export Bank.

In a well-documented article published in Le Monde Diplomatique, Ignacio Klich maintains that, after the war, the search made by the United States and Great Britain for war criminals was undertaken "without qualified personnel, plans or any priorities."⁴⁶ In other words, the search, to the extent that it was made, was half-hearted.

In May 1945, General Dwight D. Eisenhower ordered the creation of 17 investigatory commissions on war criminals. According to Klich, by the time the war was over, "only half of the 17 groups were still functioning, and none of these accompanied the troops which liberated the

concentration camps. As well, very few of the staff were trained interrogators; even fewer spoke German."⁴⁷ These were not the least of the errors and oversights committed by the allies, according to Klich. In November 1947, for example, the United States discontinued all extraditions of suspected war criminals from the German zone it controlled. As a result, seven Wehrmacht generals responsible for the destruction of Warsaw, including the SS officers Heinz Reinefath and Ernst Rode, were able to escape being tried.⁴⁸

By happenstance, with the coming of the Cold War, the United States, Great Britain, and the Vatican, came to share Argentina's belief that the triumphant communists were more dangerous than the defeated Nazis. As well, the Nazis might be useful in a variety of ways. The fact that the mass of Nazi emigrants were, for the most part, Catholic, was important to Argentina and the Vatican. The United States and Great Britain, on the other hand, wished to capture those well-trained in intelligence work. Paths that had seemed so opposite only two years earlier (pro- and anti-Nazi; totalitarian and democratic) now tended to come together.

One of the documents discussed today demonstrates that, up until 1944, the Vatican owned assets in Argentine banks which protected or held Nazi capital. On February 9, 1945, R. C. Fenton, an employee of the British Embassy in Buenos Aires, in a letter to the English Ministry of Economic Welfare, claimed that he could prove that the French and Italian Bank (Banco Frances e Italiano), controlled by the Holy See, "has certainly worked for the enemy during the war, perhaps more than any other bank in South America."⁴⁹ At the time he wrote the letter, Fenton had the bank under strict supervision, to establish whether or not it was making suspicious transfers of funds. However, the bank management soon realized this and immediately took steps to have its transactions excluded from the black lists.

The Catholic Church was charitably imprudent in the face of cases such as that of the supposed Argentine citizen Ricardo Clement, abducted by an Israeli commander from the outskirts of Buenos Aires in late 1960. Primate Antonio Cardinal Caggiano declared that the man had come "to our country in search of forgiveness and oblivion, and it does not matter what his name is, Ricardo Clement or Adolf Eichmann; our obligation as Christians is to forgive what he has done."⁵⁰ Weeks later, when Argentina protested the violation of its sovereignty before the United Nations Security Council, Mario Amadeo, a former foreign minister and a fervent Catholic, served as the country's spokesman. "Argentina," said Amadeo, "was always generous in opening its doors to refugees from all over the world: this policy permitted Adolf Eichmann to enter the country fraudulently, in the same way that many Jews did."⁵¹ Obviously, comparing the executioner to his victim, and judging each to have committed the same original sin, is the perfect formula for concealment: it is the irony which denies any possibility of punishing the crime.

The Perón government enjoyed the support of the Catholic Church at least until the end of 1953. And during its first seven years, the administration's relationship with the United States improved as well. These two facts have nothing to do with the protection each government offered war criminals, but rather with the anti-communism ideal which

prompted the three to close ranks with the coming of the Cold War. However, both Ignacio Klich and Tuvia Friedman, director of the Institute for Investigation of the Holocaust in Haifa, Israel, assert that the basic reason for the tolerance shown towards the Nazis by the allies was anti-communism. They say Perón was also motivated by this sentiment; or rather, by this need.⁵²

Clearly each of these factors was contributory. But for the Argentine president, the most important element--according to the statements which we have seen--was his desire to have a group of trusted policemen and technicians on hand to help with Argentina's industrialization, as well as to monitor and control the opposition, especially among the unions.

Perón's plan was an ambitious one. He was able to repay the foreign debt and indemnify those companies which had been nationalized, although he paid a heavy price: by 1949 Argentina's foreign reserves were almost completely depleted. Between August 1948 and August 1950, the Argentine peso depreciated in value by 500 percent.

In terms of energy production, the output of gas doubled between 1945 and 1955. Significant progress was made in light industry, where the government only intervened indirectly: the manufacturing index, listed at 114 in 1945, increased to 150 in 1948. Four years of stagnation followed, but in 1955 the index had increased to 163. The new industries grew rapidly: petrochemicals, metallurgy, domestic appliance plants. Heavy industry, however, remained dependent on foreign markets, and agriculture, the most lucrative export sector, suffered a great setback.

The old war criminals settled mostly in communities in the mountains of Cordoba and near the Patagonian Andean lakes. They tended to congregate in small tourist towns: San Martin de los Andes, Jumin de los Andes, Bariloche, and La Angostura--near the border with Chile--and Cura Brochero and La Cumbrecita, in Cordoba. Settlers of German, Austrian, and Yugoslav origin comprised only 5 percent of these town's population in 1943; statistics in 1961 showed an increase to approximately 23 percent.⁵³

There is no evidence of war criminal immigrants having served as advisers to the Argentine police or any other security forces, except in the case of Milo Bogetich, Isabel's bodyguard. But these men and their pasts went on to shape the present reality in Argentina through a variety of ways: by way of their relations with nationalist leaders such as Guillermo Patricio Kelly; through the ties between certain other nationalist leaders (Marcelo Sanchez Sorondo, Mario Amadeo) and members of the Army High Command; through the contacts these war criminals maintained with anti-communist priests such as Father Julio Meinvielle; through the friendly ties they cultivated with Perón in Santo Domingo and Madrid, etc. Therefore, they infiltrated various sectors of the Argentine society and extended themselves much like an oil stain to the middle classes and trade unions, transforming the Argentine society into a repressive and authoritarian country.⁵⁴ No country can open its doors to this class of criminal and still sleep soundly. No nation crosses these dark boundaries of history with impunity.

It would be an exaggeration to say that the Argentine excesses of the past eight years can be attributed to so remote a cause as the immigration of Nazis between 1947 and 1950, but surely there is some connection. Similarities are seldom coincidental. After we learn more about Argentina's recent history, it would be useful to ask whether it is only a coincidence that the use of torture attained such heights of cruelty and sophistication. We should continue to ask ourselves whether or not the appearance of concentration camps, mass graves, and hundreds of bodies floating in Argentine rivers after 1974 is merely coincidental; what is the significance of the fact that these ceremonies of multiple deaths reached their climax during the military regime of Videla, Viola, Massera, and Galtieri.

There is an abundance of testimony about the Nazi symbols which adorned Argentine torture chambers during the last eight years. There too, swastikas and pictures of Hitler helped set the stage for death. History is always a game of relationships and associations. In the mid-nineteenth century, Juan Bautista Alberdi proclaimed that "to rule is to populate"; to conquer the Argentine desert, it was necessary to populate it. However, it could not be settled by just any type of people; it was important that they be skilled and white in order to improve the race and impose limits on brutality. The cultured Europeans which Alberdi foresaw are the same German technicians Perón wanted a century later to industrialize Argentina. The future, as Borges says, is another name for the past.

As a key figure in the militarization of Argentine society, Perón, while in power, enthroned many of the concepts that he had learned and taught at the Superior War College. One of his principal ideas was, as we have seen, "The Nation in Arms," that is preparation for war even in times of peace, placing all the country's resources and riches under the control of a leader who, obviously, should rise from among the ranks of the armed forces.⁵⁵ Perón's deep anti-communism and obsession about creating a self-sufficient army--one which could build its own arms--were factors which helped lead to the opening of Argentina's doors to the servants of the Reich which Perón had admired so ambiguously.

Among the books in Perón's Madrid library, none was bound in Jewish skin. Nonetheless, he had no lack of friends who might have once been tempted to present him with some such gift.

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²See *ibid.*, p. 86.

³Jacob Tsur, Cartas credenciales. Jerusalem: La Semana Publicaciones, 1983, pp. 154-161, 227-228.

⁴Interview with Jose Manuel Algarbe, Perón's former secretary, Caracas, February 19, 1977.

⁵Alain Rouquie, Poder militar y sociedad política en la Argentina. Buenos Aires: Emecé Editores, 1981, p. 295.

⁶See *ibid.*, p. 294.

⁷Joseph Page, Perón, A Biography. New York: Random House, 1983, p. 89.

⁸Samples: "Todo ejército decae, envejece y muere con su conductor" (p. 217). "El conductor no solo debe saber conducir un ejército a la victoria; también debe saberlo crear, armarlo, equiparlo, instruirlo, vestirlo, alimentarlo." (p. 216) "Un conductor de ejército no se hace por decreto, sino que nace y es destinado con anterioridad" (p. 215). "Un conductor debe nacer con el suficiente óleo de Samuel" (p. 216). "El conductor debe sentirse apoyado y protegido por un poder superior" (p. 225).

⁹Interview with Perón, Madrid, March 26-30, 1970. See Panorama, Buenos Aires, No. 155, p. 23.

¹⁰See *ibid.*

¹¹Uno de los políticos conservadores más conspicuos, el vicepresidente Julio A. Roca, había declarado en Londres, en un discurso oficial: "La Argentina es, por su independencia recíproca, desde el punto de vista económico, una parte integrante del Reino Unido." Y uno de sus colaboradores, Guillermo Leguizamón, agregó: "La Argentina es una de las joyas mas preciadas de la corona de Su Graciosa Majestad." Quoted in Rouquie, see *supra* note 5, p. 257.

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²⁰ Memorandum of the State Department, "Consultation Among the American Republics with Respect to the Argentine Situation," known as the Blue Book, pp. 131, made public on February 11, 1946.

²¹ See *supra* note 7, p. 88.

²² U.S. Military Attache, Chile, to Military Intelligence Division, I.G. No. 5940/94-57, September 8, 1944. "Z" to OSS, OSS File No. A-20235/10452-128, January 27, 1944.

²³ Eugenio P. Rom, Así hablaba Juan Perón. Buenos Aires: Peña Lillo, 1980, pp. 121-122.

²⁴ Taped interview, June 18, 1972.

²⁵ See *supra*, note 1, p. 11.

²⁶ See M. Moyano, "Submarinos alemanes en Mar del Plata," Todo es historia, No. 72, April 1973, pp. 37-47.

²⁷ See *supra* note 1, pp. 85-86. In extenso:

En Nuremberg se estaba realizando entonces algo que yo, a título personal juzgaba como una infamia y como una funesta lección para el futuro de la Humanidad. Y no solo yo, sino el pueblo argentino. Adquirí la certeza de que los argentinos también considerabam el proceso de Nuremberg como una infamia, indigna de los vencedores, que se comportaban como si no lo fueran. Ahora entonces dandonos cuenta de que merecían haber perdido la guerra. Cuantes veces durante mi gobierno pronuncié discursos a cargo de Nuremberg, que es la enormidad mas grande que no perdonará la historia!

²⁸ From W. N. Walmsley, Jr., Counselor for Economic Affairs at U.S. Embassy, Rome, to Secretary of State, 800.142/9-547, September 5, 1947. Enclosed with La Vista Report.

²⁹ See *ibid.*

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- ³¹ Interview with Mgr. Juan Busolini, from Comisión Verificadora de la Dirección Nacional de Energía Atómica (1952), Buenos Aires, July 6, 1967. Sefun Le Monde Diplomatique, July 1983, p. 4, "Le scandale de la dispersion nazie dans le Tiers-Monde," Tank,
- "autrefois ingénieur chez Focke Wulfe," dirigio a "plusieurs douzaines de scientifiques, de techniciens et d'ingénieurs nazis" en la construcción de "l'avion de chasse argentin Pulqui a l'Institut Aéronautique de Córdoba. Après la chute de Perón, Tank et une douzaine de ses collaborateurs s'installèrent en Inde, où ils contribuèrent a la mise au point du HF-24 et coopérèrent également avec des experts allemands en Egypte."
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- ³⁹ Max Gallo, Histoire de l'Espagne Franquiste. De la prise du pouvoir a 1950. Paris: Marabout Universite, 1975, p. 191.
- ⁴⁰ See ibid. En Julio de 1949, la Cámara de Diputados argentina aprobó un pedido de informes al gobierno de Perón sobre la presunta entrada a Buenos Aires de Ante Pavelic. La versión--que el gobierno negó--indicaba que Pavelic había llegado a bordo de un barco italiano, disfrazado de sacerdote.

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⁴⁵See supra note 4.

⁴⁶See supra note 31, Le Monde Diplomatique, p. 1.

⁴⁷See ibid., p. 22.

⁴⁸See ibid.

⁴⁹R. C. Fenton, Buenos Aires, to Ministry of Economic Warfare, London. Enclosure No. 1 to dispatch No. 21.010 of February 14, 1945 from U.S. Embassy at London, England.

⁵⁰See La Razon, Buenos Aires, 23 de Diciembre 1960, p. 1.

⁵¹See Le Monde Diplomatique, Aout 1983: "Israel: pragmatisme oblige" par Ignacio Klich, p. 22.

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