

## German Influence in the Argentine Army (1900 – 1945)

by  
*Elizabeth B. White\**

Since the days of the *Conquistadores*, the military has played a vital role in the political life of Latin America. During the independence period, it was the local militias that wrested freedom from the Spanish and then battled each other over the shape of their political future. Many national heroes and many presidents have begun their roads to destiny with a commission in the army. The prominence of the military in Latin America is exemplified in Argentina, where the army possesses a tradition of championing the national ideal that looks back to General San Martín.”

An army must be concerned with more than cherishing tradition; however. The preservation of national sovereignty and interest is its chief aim, and to achieve this, an army must be strong by contemporary standards. In the twentieth century, this requires that a nation have both the industrial capacity to equip an armed force with the weapons of modern warfare and a political system that inspires the willingness to sacrifice in those who may be called upon to defend it. During the past one hundred years, the Argentine army has sought to reconcile its loyalty to tradition with its need to meet the demands of modernity. At times, its concern over the internal and external strength of Argentina has caused the army to intervene directly in political affairs and to take up the reins of government itself, as in 1930, 1943, 1955, 1966, and, most recently, in 1976.

Germany played an important role in the modernization of the Argentine army during the first half of this century. In 1899, a German military mission came to Argentina to set up the educational institutions of the newly reformed army and to train its officer corps, resulting in a friendly relationship that culminated in the Argentine military coup of 1943, which made Argentina the

*\*Elizabeth B. White received her B.A. in history from Vassar in 1975 and her M.A. from the University of Virginia in 1977. Awarded the Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst Fellowship for the academic year 1980-81, Ms. White studied in Germany for a year and is due to complete her Ph.D. at the University of Virginia in 1982.*

center of Nazi espionage and propaganda activities in South America. This article examines the development of German-Argentine military relations during this period and considers how they may have influenced the way the Argentine army has dealt with the political and social problems confronting its country during the twentieth century.

During the 1890s, Argentina's exports of agricultural products were transforming it into one of the wealthiest nations in the world, whose markets had become the focus of eager competition among the European powers. Great Britain, thanks to its sea-power, had long dominated the foreign trade of Argentina, which attracted more British investments than any other country in the world outside the Empire, while the French, using to advantage the cultural prestige they enjoyed with the Argentine landed elite, had also become a major supplier of Argentina's markets.<sup>1</sup> The Germans, on the other hand, lacked a foothold from which they could influence Argentine trade.

In 1899, however, Argentina asked the German government for military instructors to aid in the reorganization of the Argentine army. An increasingly bitter border dispute with Chile, whose German-trained army was considered the best in South America, had led Argentine leaders to take a close look at their own army, which they found woefully unprepared for war, not simply in equipment, but in training, organization, and discipline as well. The common soldiers were pressed into service from the lowest orders of society, while the officer corps was riven with conflict, its members often receiving promotions solely on the basis of personal or political contacts.<sup>2</sup> Germany's army, after the Franco-Prussian War, appeared to have no equal in the world, and many developing nations looked to German models and German instructors when organizing their own armed forces. Thus, when the Argentine government decided to undertake the modernization of its army, it seemed a normal and sensible step to request German help.

While the German government did not relish offending Chile, the opportunity to help out the Argentine government and perhaps thereby gain access to Argentina's markets appeared too good to neglect. Germany's military tutorship of Chile had resulted in sizeable contracts for German arms firms, and Argentina's modernization program for its army included extensive rearming with the most up-to-date military equipment, thus offering a bonanza to the nation that could win such contracts for its industries. Krupp could hardly find better sales representatives than German officers serving as advisers to the Argentine army.<sup>3</sup>

1. James R. Scobie, *Argentina: A City and a Nation* (New York, 1964), 4-7, 112-121; Ricardo Zinn, *Argentina: A Nation at the Crossroads of Myth and Reality* (New York, 1979), 17.

2. Jürgen Schaeffer, *Deutsche Militärhilfe an Südamerika: Militär- und Rüstungsinteressen in Argentinien, Bolivien und Chile vor 1914* (Dusseldorf, 1974), 19-20, 65-66.

3. *Ibid.*, 76-78.

The first German instructors in Argentina organized the War Academy, which opened in 1900 with a German director and German teaching staff. Attendance at this academy became a prerequisite for officers aspiring to the rank of major or higher. German instructors went on to design the program for universal military service, write new Argentine army regulations, organize the Ballistics and Non-Commissioned Officers' Schools, and advise the General Staff. After 1905, thirty to sixty Argentine officers were sent annually to Germany to serve in a German regiment, attend military school, or observe maneuvers, and in 1909 a Purchasing Commission was established in Berlin to study European weapons and advise the Argentine government on its military purchases. Argentina bought its rifles, machine guns, artillery, and even some of its ships from Germany, while its army adopted the Prussian helmet and goosetep.<sup>4</sup>

There was opposition to the Germanization of the Argentine army, not only among anglophile Argentine politicians and French and British commercial interests, but also in the army, whose older officers tended to be francophile and resented the Germans' emphasis on practical experience over theoretical training. Younger Argentine officers scoffed at this "old guard," which they held responsible for Argentina's military backwardness, while the German government tried to stem the opposition by singling out influential officers for honors and decorations.<sup>5</sup> The Argentine officers who served in the German army or on the Purchasing Commission in Berlin received kid-glove treatment, which left them full of admiration for the Empire and especially for its military-industrial might. Upon returning to Argentina, many of them received training posts in military schools and then rose to prominent positions in the army in the 1920s and 1930s. During World War One, when the Argentine Congress recommended breaking relations with Germany, it was largely the army's opposition to such a measure that led the President to maintain strict neutrality. The Germans long remembered this act of loyalty on the part of their Argentine comrades.<sup>6</sup>

4. Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes (Bonn), Abteilung A, Argentinien 9: *Akten betreffend Militär und Marine* (hereafter cited as AA, Ab. A, Arg. 9: *AbMM*), 2:No. 6575 (Buenos Aires, 3/31/02) Envoy Walter Freiherr von Wangenheim to Chancellor Bernhard von Bülow; 6:No. 15714 (Buenos Aires, 9/4/08) Envoy Julius von Waldthausen to Bülow; 9:No. 506 (Buenos Aires, 12/13/09) Lt. Col. Fritz von der Goltz to Waldthausen; 8:No. 15437 (Berlin, 9/18/09) article from *Deutsche Zeitung*; 5:No. 10516 (Buenos Aires, 6/12/07) Waldthausen to Bülow; 7:No. 5773 (Berlin, 3/30/09) Argentine Legation to German Foreign Office (hereafter AA); 7:No. 2034 (Buenos Aires, 1/1/09) Chargé d'Affaires Hatzfeldt to Bülow; 8:No. 19238 (Buenos Aires, 11/23/09) Waldthausen to Chancellor Theobald Bethmann-Hollweg.

5. Schaeffer, *Deutsche Militärhilfe*, 87-88; AA, Ab. A, Arg. 9: *AbMM*, 10:No. 60 (Buenos Aires, 12/3/10) Envoy Hilmar Freiherr von dem Busche-Haddenhausen to Bethmann-Hollweg; 13:No. 144 (Buenos Aires, 12/11/13) Bussche to Bethmann-Hollweg.

6. Schaeffer, *Deutsche Militärhilfe*, 188; Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv (Freiburg), Reichsheer I (hereafter MA, RH I), v. 79: *Beziehungen zu Frankreich und andere ausländischen Staaten*, pp. 97-98, "Abschiedsrede für den scheidenden argentinischen Militärattaché Herrn Oberstleutnant von der Becke (Berlin, 12/18/32)."

Germany was unable to continue its military missions to Argentina after World War One, however, for Article 179 of the Treaty of Versailles prohibited its appointment of military instructors abroad. That German-Argentine military relations did not end at that time was due largely to the efforts of General José F. Uriburu, one of the leading proponents of Argentine neutrality during the war. General Uriburu had served in Germany before 1914, and his experience as a young officer in the second regiment of the Ulan Guards so impressed him that he had an Argentine regiment clothed in the same uniform. Even after Germany's defeat in 1918, Uriburu called the German army "the most perfect military organization the world has ever seen."<sup>7</sup>

As General Uriburu made no secret of his admiration for Germany, the Allies were able to prevent his appointment as minister of war,<sup>8</sup> but in 1923, his considerable abilities and the respect he enjoyed in the army won him the post of General Inspector, the highest in the military hierarchy. Uriburu began a reorganization of the army intended to incorporate new military techniques and technology developed during and after the war. For assistance, he turned to General Wilhelm Faupel, a German instruction officer in Argentina before the war and Uriburu's adviser since 1921, and asked him to recruit other German officers for service in Argentina.<sup>9</sup> The members of this new German mission received positions as "information officers" (*informantes*) on private, oral contracts with the Argentine army, in effect serving as non-uniformed military advisors. The German government avoided any official connection with this arrangement or with the officers involved, lest it be accused of contravening the Treaty of Versailles, although it is evident from German Foreign Office reports that some unofficial contact was maintained. Even so, the French strongly objected to Argentina's employment of former German officers, but General Uriburu decisively rebuffed any attempts at intervention, asserting that this was an internal affair of Argentina, which in any case had not signed the Treaty of Versailles.<sup>10</sup>

7. AA, Ab. A, Arg. 9: *AbMM*, 4:No. 12197 (Buenos Aires, 6/21/05) Waldthausen to Bülow; Fritz Epstein, "European Military Influence in Latin America," unpublished manuscript (Washington: Library of Congress Photoduplication Service, 25 August 1961), 67-99.

8. Robert A. Potash, *The Army and Politics in Argentina, 1928-1945: Yrigoyen to Perón* (Stanford, 1969), 1-5.

9. AA, Ab. II, Politik 13: *Akten betreffend Militärangelegenheiten Argentinien* (hereafter Po. 13: *AbMA*), 1:No. 287 (Buenos Aires, 2/9/23) Envoy von Pauli to AA; 1:No. 1464 (Buenos Aires, n.d.) Rittmeister von Issendorff "Überblick über die derzeitige Lage der 'Informantes' in Argentinien;" MA, III 1002/1: *Deutsche Mission (DM)*, 1: (Berlin, 2/14/32) "Streitfall Gen. Maj. a.D. Kretschmar - Major a.D. Schneider."

10. U.S. National Archives Microfilm Publications, Microcopy T-120, K397/K122435-122456: AA, Ab. III, Po. 13: *AbMA*, 2: (Buenos Aires, 11/9/31) Envoy von Keller to Chancellor Heinrich von Brüning; AA, Ab. III, Po. 13: *AbMA*, 1:No. 939 (Buenos Aires, 3/16/27) Envoy Gneist to AA.

By 1924, the new German military mission consisted of six officers — one general, two colonels and three majors — who drew up plans for the reorganization of the Argentine army, wrote its new regulations, trained its officers and planned its maneuvers. The influence that General Faupel enjoyed as Uriburu's closest advisor earned him some resentment in the army, however, and after Uriburu resigned from the post of General Inspector in 1926, Faupel left Argentina for service in Peru, taking two *informantes* with him. Though the number of information officers shrank to three, their leader, General Wilhelm Johannes Kretzschmar, who had served in Argentina for four years before the war, soon established close relations with the most influential Argentine officers and won important advantages for the mission, such as written contracts and better salaries. Moreover, the German Army, mindful of the economic and political benefits the military mission to Argentina had produced before and during the war, did not share the Foreign Office's scruples about contacts with the information officers but regularly supplied them with the newest Reichswehr regulations and military journals, allowed them to attend German army training courses on their visits to Germany, and even recruited new officers for the mission as needed.<sup>11</sup>

In return, the mission supplied reports on developments in the Argentine army and, more importantly, plans for weapons purchases, over which the *informantes* had some influence.<sup>12</sup> Although Germany was prohibited from exporting arms, the Argentines did purchase important technical equipment from German firms, and bought weapons from German-controlled firms in neutral countries as well.<sup>13</sup> Trips to Germany by members of Argentina's new Purchasing Commission provided an opportunity for establishing closer relations between the German and Argentine armies, as did the attendance of Argentine officers at German maneuvers in 1928.<sup>14</sup> The following year, General Wilhelm Heye, Chief of the German Army Administration, met with a warm welcome from Argentine officers during his tour of their country, and when General Inspector Severo Toranzo returned this visit, he was fêted by Germany's

11. MA, IHH 1002/1: *DM*, 1: (Buenos Aires, 11/21/32) Gen. W.H. Kretzschmar to Col. Kühlenthal of German Defense Ministry (RWM); AA, Ab. III, Po. 13: *AbMA*, 1:No. 939 (Buenos Aires, 3/16/27) Gneist to AA, and No. 1464 (Buenos Aires, n.d.) Issendorff "Überblick," and 2:No. 676 (1/23/34) Bussche to Foreign Minister Konstantin von Nerath.

12. MA, IHH 1002/1: *DM*, 1: (Buenos Aires, 5/14/30) Kretzschmar "Bericht über Beschaffung von Rustungsmaterial," et al.

13. *Ibid.*, (Buenos Aires), 12/16/29 Kretzschmar to Gen. Wilhelm Heye, Chief of Army Administration.

14. AA, Ab. III, Po. 13: *AbMA*, 1:No. 581 (Paris, 2/9/28), No. 815 (Paris, 2/24/28), No. 958 (Paris, 3/9/28) et al., German Embassy to AA; MA, RH I, v.9: Chef der Heeresleitung, *Geheime Akten*, 2:No. 247 (Berlin, 8/22-25/28).

highest-ranking officers and politicians and allowed to tour numerous military institutions, fortifications, and factories.<sup>15</sup>

By the late 1920s, many of the Argentine officers who had trained in Germany before the war had reached the rank of colonel, thus holding positions that would be decisive for the success or failure of a coup. And coups were being seriously considered in the army, where dissatisfaction with the Argentine political system and particularly with the Radical Party (which came to dominate the government after the introduction of universal suffrage in 1912) had been steadily increasing. The first Radical president, Hipólito Yrigoyen (1916-1922), was especially disliked. His policies, in many officers' eyes, had undermined the prestige and professionalism achieved by the Argentine army as a result of its modernization under German tutelage. The officer corps shared its German mentors' disdain for party politics and so strongly objected to Yrigoyen's frequent use of the army for police actions and intervention in provincial governments, thereby degrading its role as the guarantor of national security. Even more objectionable was the favoritism Yrigoyen exhibited toward former officers who had participated in the Radicals' struggle for universal suffrage by reinstating them in the army, promoting them over officers who had been loyal to their military duty, and granting them pensions, all without regard for existing regulations. Most distressing of all was the President's frugality with respect to military expenditures, which seemed to endanger Argentina's security. Thus Yrigoyen's reelection in 1928 met with a less than enthusiastic reception in the army.<sup>16</sup>

The resurgence of Yrigoyenism also excited opposition among nationalist writers and intellectuals. Influenced by Mussolini and Action Française, they rejected liberal parliamentarianism and advocated an authoritarian, collectivist state that would vigorously enforce the principles of "social order, hierarchy and discipline" and represent the "true forces" of the nation rather than the professional politicians. They blamed World War One and Yrigoyenism upon "individualist demo-liberalism," which was leading the world directly and precipitously to Communism.<sup>17</sup> Their "integral nationalism" held that the nation is an organic unit superior to the sum of the individuals who comprise it and to the rights and interests of individuals, parties, and classes.<sup>18</sup>

To the integral nationalists, authoritarianism seemed a political form natural to Argentina, and they looked to the army, the last well-organized force in the country based upon hierarchy and patriotism, to impose discipline upon

15. MA, RH I, v. 7: *Allgemeine Angelegenheiten des Chefs der Heeresleitung*, 2: (Berlin, 2/20/29) Heye to President Paul von Hindenburg; AA, Ab. III, Po. 13: *AbMA*, 1:No. 3447 (Berlin, 10/1/29) Col. Freiherr von Hammerstein Equord, RWM, to AA.

16. Potash, *Army and Politics*, 1-5.

17. Carlos Ibarguren, *La historia que he vivido* (Buenos Aires, 1969), 369-415.

18. Marvin Goldwert, *Democracy, Militarism and Nationalism in Argentina, 1930-1966: An Interpretation* (Austin, 1972), 18-25.

the nation. The integral nationalists sought for their leader a military man with considerable prestige and a talent for statesmanship, and General Uriburu seemed the logical choice. Such leading integral nationalists as the poet Leopoldo Lugones, Carlos Ibarguren, and Juan E. Carulla became close friends and advisors to the general.<sup>19</sup> In September 1928, the staff of the nationalist newspaper *Nueva República* celebrated its first anniversary in the Munich Restaurant in Buenos Aires with General Uriburu as the guest of honor. In his after-dinner speech, General Uriburu urged the formation of a civic force that would bring about the total regeneration of the republic and promised that he would not hesitate to put himself at the head of such a movement, whatever the dangers or consequences.<sup>20</sup>

A number of army officers supported Uriburu in his advocacy of integral nationalism and of the institutional reforms needed to achieve it. From the German *informantes*, they heard bitter criticisms of the Weimar Republic, which represented for them the anarchy to which universal suffrage and democratic liberalism could lead,<sup>21</sup> and they saw in Spain's Primo de Rivera an example of a military leader who had brought order and peace to his country. There was another group in the officer corps, however, led by General Agustín Justo, that, while perceiving a need for change, favored gradual reform under the existing system, a reform that was to be carried out from above rather than achieved by a mass movement. It was not long before Yrigoyen's military policies, his senility, and the economic crises of the incipient Depression set both these groups to plotting coups, but their plans were very different. Justo's plan was for a coup executed with the help of the opposition parties and resulting in a brief provisional government under civilian leadership that would soon return the country to elections and normalcy under the existing constitution. General Uriburu, on the other hand, envisioned a "true revolution" carried out by the military alone and resulting in a military government under his own leadership that would replace Argentina's inorganic representational system with a corporatist state, ending the "reign of demagoguery" and establishing the power of the "most qualified elements."<sup>22</sup>

Although General Justo commanded the support of a larger number of officers, it was General Uriburu who carried out the Revolution of 6 September 1930, after assuring General Justo's followers that he would respect the constitution and return the country to normalcy through free elections "as soon as

19. *Ibid.*; Juan E. Carulla, *Al filo del medio siglo* (Parana, 1951), 174-82; Mark Falcoff, "Intellectual Currents," Mark Falcoff and Ronald K. Dolkart, *Prologue to Perón: Argentina in Depression and War, 1930-1943* (Berkeley, 1975), 110-135.

20. Carulla, *Al filo*, 174-82; Ibarguren, *Historia*, 369-415.

21. AA, Ab. III, Po. 13: *AbMA*, 1:No. 940 (Buenos Aires, n.d.), memo from Envoy von Reisswitz; MA, IIIH 1002/1: *DM*, 1: (Buenos Aires, 11/7/31), p. 3, Kretschmar to Capt. Bamler, RWM.

22. Potash, *Army & Politics*, 24-50; Ibarguren, *Historia*, 366-71.

possible." The revolution met with little opposition, for while few officers actively supported Uriburu, even fewer supported the government. The majority of the cabinet ministers in the new regime were civilians associated with Argentina's traditional conservative liberalism, but Uriburu's chief aides and advisors, who exercised considerable power, were military men who shared his political views, especially his war minister, General Francisco Medina, his chief of police, Colonel Enrique Pilotto, and Lieutenant Colonels Juan Bautista Molina and Emilio Kinkelín, all of whom had trained in Germany before the war.<sup>23</sup>

Uriburu's regime gave fresh impetus to the expansion of German-Argentine military relations. When Lieutenant Colonel Carlos von der Becke, who had also served in Germany before the war and was brother-in-law to Colonel Molina, arrived in Germany as the new military attaché, he informed the Chief of the Germany Army Administration of Uriburu's desire that the old relationship between the Argentine and German armies, "which indeed was like that of a daughter to her mother," be reestablished through closer personal and material cooperation. Colonel von der Becke promised that both he and the Argentine Purchasing Commission would work toward this end, and even spoke of a plan to send commandos of Argentine officers to train in Germany again, as before the war.<sup>24</sup> Germany's military leaders welcomed this overture and gave von der Becke a much closer look at the inner workings of their army than was normally vouchsafed to military attachés, even allowing him to attend officers' training courses. The appointment of another officer who had served in Germany, Colonel Rodolfo Martínez Pita, as head of the Purchasing Commission facilitated the development of a close working relationship between the commission and both the German army and German firms. In Argentina, the government hired more German officers for the military mission, whose responsibilities increased.<sup>25</sup>

Although Uriburu's revolution was popular at first, his regime soon alienated much of its civilian support through arbitrary use of power, strict censorship, and persecution of suspected opponents. Operating under martial law and a state of siege, the government required the support of the army to survive. Colonel Molina kept files on all officers, rewarding those who supported the regime with promotions, raises, cars, and travel, while punishing those who did not with threats, demotion, arrest, and torture. The government even arranged to pay officers' debts. Uriburu also gave legal status to the Legión Cívica Argentina, a paramilitary force created by Colonel Molina and Juan E. Carulla that became a reserve of the army and received military training from regular

23. Potash, *Army & Politics*, 47-57; Carulla, *Al filo*, 202-03.

24. MA, IHH 1001: *Personalien ausländischer Militärattachés in Deutschland, 1927-1933*, Aktennotizien (Berlin, 2/16/31).

25. *Ibid.*, (Berlin, 7/11/31); MA, IHH 1002/1: *DM*, 1: (Berlin, 12/18/31) Capt. Bamler to Kretzschmar.



army officers on army bases. Uriburu hoped to use the Legión Cívica, which already had 10,000 members, to pressure the Congress into approving his reforms. Uriburu's support continued to decline nevertheless, not only among civilians, but within the army as well, and this, along with rapidly failing health, forced him to relinquish the reins of power and hold presidential elections in November, 1931.<sup>26</sup>

Uriburu's failure to maintain power benefitted General Justo, whose traditional liberal nationalism was supported by the majority of army officers. With the Radicals excluded from nominating a candidate, General Justo won the November presidential elections through a variety of fraudulent methods in keeping with traditional nineteenth-century Argentine politics, thus giving a foretaste of what the next ten years, called the Infamous Decade, would offer. Despite its identification with the traditional elite, the Justo government was forced by economic necessity to exchange *laissez-faire* for a directed economy, although in a manner agreeable to the oligarchy. Prices of important products like grain were fixed, foreign trade came under government control, and a Central Bank was established with considerable power over credit operations. At the same time, however, the Justo government made economic pacts, like the Roca-Runciman Treaty with Great Britain, that gave important concessions to foreign interests. This gave rise to charges of "selling out the country," a phrase also applicable to the government's intervention in the economy, which served to increase the opportunities for corruption. Within the army, several coup attempts led to a purge of pro-Radical officers, leaving the officer corps with a choice between the liberal nationalism of the Justista brand or integral nationalism. During the Infamous Decade, Argentine army officers opted for proto-fascist ideology as the only way to combat corruption, sterility and submission to foreign interests from above and radicalism, anarchy and demagoguery from below.<sup>27</sup>

Since General Uriburu died soon after leaving office, the integral nationalist movement lacked a leader. A number of army officers vied for this position, including Generals Francisco Medina, Nicolás Accame and Francisco Fasola Castaño, all of whom had trained in Germany before the war. The most persistent and popular claimant to Uriburu's inheritance, however, was his former aide and henchman, Colonel Juan Bautista Molina. Under the Justo government, Molina was sent as military attaché to Germany, where his esteem for that country turned to open admiration for its new regime and a desire to implement some of Hitler's policies in his native land. In 1936, after his return to Argentina, Molina began planning a coup. Its manifesto of "national liberation," drawn up by the later Peronist Diego Luis Molinari, opened with the oath of San Martín and his officers before the 1812 revolution and called for the

26. Goldwert, *Democracy, Militarism, Nationalism*, 32-49; Potash, *Army & Politics*, 55-78.

27. Goldwert, *Democracy, Militarism, Nationalism*, 43-49.

creation of a new order based on "the principle of the supremacy of the STATE in the national or international community, and that of SOCIETY over the individuals who comprise it." It advocated government intervention in all major economic activities, the institution of corporatism in professions and unions, nationalization of the Banco Central and transport services, and the introduction of the family wage and social security. Informed of the coup by his efficient spy organization, President Justo was able to thwart it, but instead of being punished, Molina was simply transferred to another post and later even promoted to brigadier general. Such leniency may be attributable to Molina's popularity in the officer corps, which elected him president of its club, the *Circulo Militar*, the following year.<sup>28</sup>

Molina was not the only Argentine integral nationalist to be strongly influenced by Nazi example during the 1930s. According to Juan E. Carulla, after Uriburu's death, the nationalists lost sight of the general's "clear and simple" ideas and began to praise foreign systems and identify their traditional, Catholic principles with the directed economy and centralized state.<sup>29</sup> Depressed by the dismal reality of Argentina's political and economic life, many Argentines turned to integral nationalism and admired the apparent success of Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy.<sup>30</sup> There were a number of nationalist organizations in this period, but the largest of these remained Molina's *Legión Cívica Argentina*, which changed its name to the *Alianza de la Juventud Nacionalista*. The nationalists blamed capitalism, liberalism and universal suffrage for subverting the true interests of the nation and turning the state into the patrimony of professional politicians and financial consortiums. The problems of the 1920s and 1930s were the result of the Treaty of Versailles, which was unjust to Germany and betrayed Italy, and of the League of Nations, that center of French and British intrigue that was opening the floodgates to Communism. To these nationalists, the Spanish Civil War proved that France and Great Britain were in league with the Russian Bolsheviks and Spanish reds, while Italy and Germany selflessly aided the heroic Spanish nationalists. They even approved of Germany's annexation of Austria in 1938 and saw in it a demonstration of their maxim that force is sometimes necessary to achieve what is right.<sup>31</sup>

Though heavily influenced by foreign examples, the Argentine integral nationalists were not simply imitators but saw Argentina as a unique nation requiring uniquely Argentine solutions to its problems. They did not seek a civilian politician for their Führer or Duce, but looked to the army for leadership. The leading integral nationalist intellectual, Carlos Ibarguren, maintained

28. Potash, *Army & Politics*, 96-98.

29. Carulla, *Al filo*, 227-28.

30. Falcoff, "Intellectual Currents," 110-35.

31. Marysa Navarro Gerassi, "Argentine Nationalism of the Right," *Studies in Comparative International Development*, v. 1, no. 12 (1965), 181-82; Ibarguren, *Historia*, 446-54; Gustavo Martínez Zuviria, "Prólogo," Colonel Juan Lucio Cernadas, *Estrategía Nacional y Política del Estado* (Buenos Aires, 1938).

that in Argentina only a government run by the army, the "last aristocracy," could preserve "social order, hierarchy and discipline" and avert the onslaught of Communism.<sup>32</sup> In the Prologue to a military treatise, Gustavo Martínez Zuviría, author of two highly popular anti-Semitic novels, wrote that "the world has placed itself on the road to losing the notion of hierarchy, the indispensable condition of order in society and of discipline in spirit. . . . In the disorder of fundamental ideas that we are witnessing, one sole human institution. . . . . . . conserves the reality of hierarchy: the army." According to Zuviría, force is necessary to sustain order in society, and a military dictatorship "is an intelligent force, directed by a man who, because of his profession, possesses the habit of governing, love for his country, a concept of justice, and the spirit of sacrifice."<sup>33</sup>

Aware of the growth of integral nationalism in the Argentine army, the Germans tried to support and influence its development. This was facilitated by the rise to the highest positions in the army of German-trained and Germanophile officers, who, in 1933, included the Minister of War, the General Inspector, the Chief of the General Staff, at least three of the five Division Commanders, and the president of the Purchasing Commission. These officers welcomed the Nazi government's suggestions for closer cooperation between the two armies. In the spring of 1933, the Argentine army sent an officer to attend a special Reichswehr training course, and others soon followed, numbering at least ten per year by 1936, most of whom stayed for two years.<sup>34</sup> President Justo explained to the German ambassador, Edmund Freiherr von Thermann, that it was a principle of the Argentine army to send its best officers to train in Germany and that the highest command posts were reserved for them.<sup>35</sup>

The German army saw to it that the Argentine officers serving in its ranks received excellent training and observed those aspects of the New Germany most likely to make a favorable impression upon military men: an orderly society, booming industries, and a powerful war machine. At the end of their German tours, many of these men moved to posts on the Purchasing Commission or in the General Directorate of Arsenals, where they influenced arms purchases, or in training institutions, particularly the War Academy, where they worked with the German *informantes* to educate Argentina's most promising officers.<sup>36</sup>

32. Falcoff, "Intellectual Currents," 110-35.

33. Zuviría, "Prólogo."

34. United States National Archives (NA), RG 165, War Department, Military Intelligence Division (MID) No. 2257-L-39/1 (Buenos Aires, 4/9/36) Military Attaché Capt. F.D. Sharp; AA, Ab. III, Po. 13: *AbMA*, 2:No. 1529 (Berlin, 5/10/33) Argentine Legation to AA.

35. USNA Microfilm Pubs., T-120, 2084/451162-451169: AA, Ab. IX: *Akten betreffend politische Beziehungen Argentiniens zu Deutschland (AbpBAD)*, 2:(Buenos Aires, 2/24/39) Thermann's political report.

36. *Annexo al Boletín Militar*, Nos. 10640, 11228, 11506 (Buenos Aires, 9/27/37, 10/2/39, 9/17/40).

The effect of German training upon Argentine officers therefore caused some concern among English and American observers. Great Britain's ambassador to Buenos Aires, Sir David Kelly, remarked that the Germans showed "noteworthy intelligence" in their treatment of these men, for they "accepted hundreds of officers into training courses and showered them with social honors and privileges, so that when the officers returned to Argentina they became very sensitive to their social standing in their own land, which practically amounted to a condemnation of the ruling class."<sup>37</sup> An American officer visiting Argentina warned the War Department that Argentine officers came away from Germany impressed with its new political system and so formed "a vital influence in fostering and spreading Fascism" in Argentina. Moreover, they became advocates of German arms and industrial products, so that "as time goes on and they increase in numbers and reach important positions within the Argentine Government they will exert a considerable influence in the trade relations of their country."<sup>38</sup>

The economic benefits that could accrue from closer relations with the Argentine army particularly attracted the Nazis, who sought every opportunity for increasing the production capacity of German arms industries. Believing that General Kretzschmar was not sufficiently encouraging the Argentine government to purchase German arms, the Nazi government, which cared little for the stipulations of the Treaty of Versailles, took official control of the mission, replacing Kretzschmar with General Günther Niedenführ and expanding the mission's membership to six.<sup>39</sup> It also sent to Argentina Germany's first post-war military attaché to Latin America, with instructions to drum up business.<sup>40</sup> In achieving this aim, the Nazis found a valuable ally in the President of the Argentine Purchasing Commission, General Basilio Pertiné, who had served as military attaché to Germany for eight years before and during the war and made no secret of his preference for Germany and German products. When General Pertiné became Argentina's minister of war in 1936, he appointed another German-trained officer, General Mones Ruiz, to head the commission, and continued to assist German industries, for example by awarding a valuable contract to build an ammunition factory to an I.G. Farben firm, although the Swedish bid was considerably lower.<sup>41</sup>

37. Arnold Ebel, *Das Dritte Reich und Argentinien. Die diplomatische Beziehungen unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Handelspolitik (1933-1939)* (Cologne, 1971), 159.

38. NA, RG 165, MID No. 2257-L-16/116 (Buenos Aires, 11/9/38) Military Attaché Maj. John K. Cannon to Colonel E.R.W. McCabe, Assistant Chief of Staff, G-2.

39. AA, Ab. III, Po. 13: *AbMA*, 3:No. 2814 (Berlin, 9/5/34) Dieckhoff, AA, to Thermann, and No. 1056 (Berlin, 4/4/36) German War Ministry (RKM) to AA; NA, RG 165, MID No. 2257-L-16/116 (Buenos Aires, 11/9/38) Cannon to McCabe.

40. Ebel, *Dritte Reich und Argentinien*, 155-58.

41. *Ibid.*; AA, Ab. III, Po. 13: *AbMA*, 2:No. 2134 (Paris, 7/7/33) Forster, German Embassy, to AA.

Nazi interest in strengthening military relations with Argentina was not merely economic, however. Ambassador von Thermann, who formed close contacts with a number of high-ranking Argentine officers — among them General Molina — took particular interest in furthering the cause of integral nationalism and provided a number of nationalist newspapers with substantial funds, often in the form of paid-up subscriptions to be sent to members of the military.<sup>42</sup> Apparently some Argentine officers knew of and cooperated in this scheme, for Juan E. Carulla reports that a certain general, claiming to represent several nationalist groups, offered to finance his paper on condition that it “preach a nationalism of the German National Socialist type” and consistently attack President Justo’s government and all the other Argentine political parties. Carulla declined this offer but claims that other newspapers did not share his scruples.<sup>43</sup>

The Nazi government also tried to use the *informantes*’ connections with Argentine officers. For example, General Faupel became president of the Ibero-American Institute in Berlin, whose propaganda was printed in Argentine nationalist newspapers. In addition, he published *Ejército, Marina y Aviación* (*Army, Navy and Aviation*), advocating German arms and military methods.<sup>44</sup> From 1936 to 1937, while Faupel was serving as Germany’s first diplomatic representative to the Franco forces in Spain, his post was taken over by Major General Albrecht Reinecke, who had taught at the Argentine War Academy for five years. Faupel later returned to the Institute and in his speeches and publications emphasized anti-“Yankeeism,” denouncing Pan-Americanism as a U.S. invention and urging instead the strengthening of the Pan-Hispanic movement.<sup>45</sup>

Such rantings against North American imperialism were well designed to strike a sympathetic chord in Argentina, where an increasing feeling of rivalry with the United States evinced itself in the 1930s, particularly after U.S. attempts to mediate in the Chaco War between Bolivia and Paraguay.<sup>46</sup> Thanks to the German influence on their education, Argentine officers were well acquainted with Karl Haushofer’s theories of geopolitics. Haushofer’s phrase, “the Monroe Doctrine is an impertinence,” found especial favor in the Argentine army, and it was assumed that the smaller countries surrounding Argentina

42. USNA Microfilm Pubs., T-120 2423/512049: AA, Ab. IX: *AbpBAD*, 2:(Buenos Aires, 5/23/40) Thermann to AA, and 30/26765 (Buenos Aires, 3/10/42) Chargé d’Affaires E.O. Meynen to AA; NA, State Department Decimal File 862.20235/383 (Buenos Aires, 1/29/41) Ambassador Norman Armour to Secretary of State Cordell Hull.

43. Carulla, *Al filo*, 228-29.

44. *Ibid.*; AA, Ab. II, Po. 26 *Südamerika: Akten betreffend politische und kulturelle Propaganda*, 1 “Ibero-Amerikanisches Institut,” *passim*; interview with Dr. Karl Panhorst, Secretary General of the Ibero-American Institute from 1930 to 1938 (Bonn, 7/24/81).

45. Epstein, “European Influence,” 100-13.

46. Bryce Wood, *The United States and Latin American Wars, 1932-1942* (New York, 1966), 54-55; Navarro Gerassi, “Argentine Nationalism,” 186.

comprised the natural area for Argentine industrial expansion and political influence.<sup>47</sup>

In the late 1930s, articles published in official and semi-official military journals like the *Revista de Informaciones* and *Revista Militar* maintained that Argentina was destined to become a world power because of the natural advantages that favored its struggle for existence. While such expansion was justified by the civilizing mission that supposedly would accompany it, war was seen as the key to progress, and there were complaints over past naiveté in acceding to the loss of natural boundaries. Some specific reforms deemed necessary for Argentina's rise were nationalization of foreign investment, encouragement of self-sufficiency in industry, espousal of patriotic fervor over "utopian, internationalist, pacifist, and exotic ideas" and, naturally, strengthening of the army, which was extolled as being above party politics and therefore the true representative of the national interest.<sup>48</sup>

After the outbreak of World War Two, Germany's relations with the Argentine army began to play an important role in Argentine politics, both foreign and domestic. Despite their misgivings about Germany's alliance with the Soviet Union, Argentine integral nationalists insisted that no favoritism be shown toward the Western Allies and that Argentina take an independent stand in international politics by maintaining strict neutrality.<sup>49</sup> This did not preclude strengthening Argentina militarily, however. Indeed, the integral nationalists believed the maxim that war is a legitimate and inevitable aspect of international relations, and their cries for freeing Argentina from dependence upon foreign markets and for a modern, centralized economy were predicated upon the principle that national preparedness requires governmental coordination of all the nation's resources. The greatest enemies of this program were felt to be Great Britain and, increasingly, the United States, who were blamed for corrupting the nation's traditional elite. Germany was not only not an enemy, but in some respects it was even a hero, for despite the Western democracies' efforts to keep them weak and in political turmoil, the Germans had created a highly industrialized yet orderly society with what appeared to be the most powerful war machine in the world.<sup>50</sup> Although Germany's aggression against comparatively defenseless countries like Norway and the Netherlands was not exactly approved, it did seem understandable from the point of view of geopolitics, and Argentine integral nationalists could not but feel some satisfaction at such British setbacks.<sup>51</sup> For Argentine officers, the repeated and

47. Enrique Díaz Araujo, *La Conspiración del '43. El GOU: una experiencia militarista en la Argentina* (Buenos Aires, 1971), 53-57.

48. Potash, *Army & Politics*, 101-02.

49. USNA Microfilm Pubs., T-120, 2423/512020-512026: AA, Ab. IX: *AbpBAD*, 3: (Buenos Aires, 11/2/39) Thermann to AA, and (Buenos Aires, 12/10/39) Thermann to AA.

50. Goldwert, *Democracy, Militarism, Nationalism*, 64-69.

51. USNA Microfilm Pubs., T-120, 2423/512036: AA, Ab. IX: *AbpBAD*, 3:(Buenos Aires, 5/7/40), Thermann to AA.

stunning victories of the army that had so greatly influenced their own organization were doubtless gratifying.

Not all Argentines shared the integral nationalists' view of Germany, however. President Roberto Ortiz, who, though elected by fraud, was determined to return the country to truly democratic practices, favored the Western Allies, as did Foreign Minister Cantilo. Several statements made by Cantilo in May 1940 that seemed to throw into doubt whether Argentina would remain neutral evoked an outcry in the nationalist press. About this time, President Ortiz received a report that ninety per cent of the army officer corps was pro-German, which seemed to be confirmed on May 17 when the *Circulo Militar*, then headed by General Pertiné, fêted the German ambassador von Thermann. There are also indications that nationalist officers were planning a coup at this time. On May 18, President Ortiz assured the country of the government's determination to maintain "strictest equidistance" from the belligerents.<sup>52</sup>

Despite this success, the German government did not wish to push its luck. When a congressional resolution in June of 1940 objected to the continued presence of the German military mission as contrary to Argentina's policy of neutrality, the instruction officers immediately offered their resignations to avoid creating an awkward situation for the government. Many Argentine officers regretted the end of the mission and expressed this personally to the mission's chief, General Niedenführ. The General continued to maintain contact with Argentine officers from Rio de Janeiro, where he acted as military attaché for both Brazil and Argentina.<sup>53</sup>

Political intrigues abounded in Argentina during the summer of 1940. In June, failing health forced Ortiz to make Vice President Ramón Castillo the Acting President. The War Minister, General Carlos Márquez, was the major advocate of Ortiz's policy of cleaning up elections, and his supporters urged him to stage a coup against Castillo, a traditional Conservative connected with past corrupt practices. At the same time, General Molina and his followers in the army were considering their own coup, about which the German ambassador was surprisingly well informed. Implicated by his opponents in a scandal involving government land purchases, General Márquez proceeded to plan a coup in August. General Justo, however, whose efficient spy network was still in operation, saw in this an opportunity to increase his influence in the government and pave the way for his reelection in 1943, and so warned Castillo in time. As repayment, Castillo, his position still weak even with Márquez out of the way, appointed Justo's followers to important positions in both the cabinet and the army.<sup>54</sup>

52. *Ibid.*, 2423/512054-512056 and /512049: AA, Ab. IX: *AbpBAD*, 4:(Buenos Aires, 5/3/40) and 3:(Buenos Aires, 5/23/40), Thermann to AA; Potash, *Army & Politics*, 120.

53. Potash, *Army & Politics*, 124.

54. USNA Microfilm Pubs., T-120, 2423/512104-512105: AA, Ab. IX: *AbpBAD*, 4:(Buenos Aires, 7/20/40) Thermann to AA; Potash, *Army & Politics*, 126-42.

Nevertheless, Castillo had no intention of remaining under Justo's thumb, and he realized that the integral nationalists in the army could be important allies in his struggle for supremacy, since they opposed Justo for both his past policies and his pro-Ally sympathies. The discovery of two nationalist plots against the government in the spring of 1941 led to investigations of their leaders, Generals Molina and Menéndez, but Castillo suspended the punitive actions taken against them. Moreover, his passivity in the face of another coup the following summer indicates that he knew of its aim to strengthen his position.<sup>55</sup> Once again, however, Justo learned of the plot and had it stopped by his supporters in the government. In October 1941, a group of colonels came to Castillo and promised him their support on condition that he maintain strictest neutrality in international relations, refuse to let the United Nations use any Argentine bases, and dissolve the Congress and the Deliberating Council of Buenos Aires. Castillo maintained that dissolving the Congress would be too dangerous but agreed to the remaining stipulations, which the officers accepted.<sup>56</sup>

Castillo's promise regarding Argentine neutrality was soon put to the test, for the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor evoked widespread sympathy for the United States in Argentina. Despite American pressure at the Pan-American Conference in Rio de Janeiro, Castillo firmly refused to break relations with the Axis powers. The United States hoped to force Argentina's cooperation by refusing to sell it arms while arming Brazil and Uruguay.<sup>57</sup> This did lead Argentines to fear military reprisals, but rather than give in to such intimidation, the Argentine government turned to Germany for help. Secret negotiations for arms sales were already under way in March 1942 between people close to the government and the German embassy.<sup>58</sup> After Brazil declared war on the Axis in August, Argentine government officials became directly involved in these discussions, and arrangements were made for arms shipments to pass through Spain.<sup>59</sup> The German ambassador received assurances from Castillo that, rather than give in to the United Nations' threats, Argentina would join the Axis and make its bases available to German U-boats.<sup>60</sup>

Germany was badly in need of all the armaments it could produce at this time and could ill afford to sell many to Argentina. German officials were quite receptive to the Argentine proposals nevertheless, and continued to carry on

55. Potash, *Army & Politics*, 143-57.

56. Díaz Araujo, *La Conspiración del '43*, 23-31.

57. USNA Microfilm Pubs., T-120, 30/26700: AA, Büro des Staatssekretärs, *Akten betreffend Argentinien* (Büro, *AbA*), 3:(Buenos Aires, 1/29/42) Meynen to AA; Potash, *Army & Politics*, 162-70.

58. USNA Microfilm Pubs., T-120, 30/26700: AA, Büro, *AbA*, 3: (Buenos Aires, 3/24/42) Meynen to AA.

59. *Ibid.*, 39/27242-27247: (Buenos Aires, 8/24/42) and 39/27170-27172: (Buenos Aires, 7/27/42) Meynen to AA.

60. *Ibid.*, 39/27310: (Buenos Aires, 9/21/42) Meynen to AA.



negotiations in order to encourage Argentina in its policy of neutrality.<sup>61</sup> Also to this end, German officials did whatever they could to strengthen Castillo's government.<sup>62</sup> In February 1942, the German embassy was granted 150,000 pesos by the Foreign Office to influence upcoming elections for the Chamber of Deputies in Castillo's favor.<sup>63</sup> In September, nationalist groups favoring Castillo's foreign policy presented a petition of support containing one million signatures, a significant number considering that Argentina's voting population then amounted to little more than three million. The German chargé d'affaires, E.O. Meynen, reported that this had been initiated and financed by the German embassy in its greatest propaganda action up to that time.<sup>64</sup> Meanwhile, Argentine nationalist newspapers continued to receive the embassy's subsidies in return for publishing German propaganda.<sup>65</sup>

By the end of 1942, Castillo had freed his government from Justista influence, and he repaid his allies in this struggle by appointing integral nationalist officers to the top army posts, with General Pedro P. Ramírez, a former military attaché to Germany, becoming Minister of War.<sup>66</sup> The integral nationalist officers had only supported Castillo in order to get rid of their common enemy, however, and they felt little love for the conservative oligarchy whose interests Castillo represented. True to Argentine political tradition, Castillo surrounded himself with a camarilla of venal cronies who made personal material gain the highest goal of government policy. The army had no desire to be implicated in the regime's corruption.<sup>67</sup> Integral nationalist officers formed a secret lodge called the GOU with the aim of spreading their ideas throughout the officer corps, overcoming the disunity that had plagued them in the past, and gaining control of the government, either legally or by means of a coup.<sup>68</sup>

It is difficult to determine the precise origins of the GOU, or even what its initials stand for (they are variously interpreted as Grupo Obra de Unificación,<sup>69</sup> Grupo de Oficiales Unidos, or Gobierno, Orden, Unión). Real control of the organization was held by a group of colonels (particularly Juan D. Perón and Enrique P. González, both of whom had trained in Germany during the 1930s) who had received revolutionary training in General Uriburu's coup of 1930 and in later conspiracies. A few generals were enlisted, largely as window dressing, especially Minister of War Ramírez and the head of the important Campo de Mayo garrison, Arturo Rawson. By playing up such themes as solidarity in the

61. *Ibid.*, 39/27246-27247: (Buenos Aires, 8/24/42) Meynen to AA.

62. *Ibid.*, 30/26700: (Buenos Aires, 1/29/42) Meynen to AA.

63. *Ibid.*, 30/26705-26708: (Buenos Aires, 1/31-2/1/42) Meynen to AA.

64. Potash, *Army & Politics*, 175-76.

65. USNA Microfilm Pubs., T-120, 30/26765: AA, Büro, *AbA*, 3: (Buenos Aires, 3/10/42) Meynen to AA.

66. Goldwert, *Democracy, Militarism, Nationalism*, 57.

67. Ibarguren, *Historia*, 479-81; Potash, *Army & Politics*, 182-83.

68. Goldwert, *Democracy, Militarism, Nationalism*, 56-57, 76-77.

69. Ibarguren, *Historia*, 478-81.

officer corps and the threat of communism and of involvement in the war through U.S. pressure tactics, the GOU obtained the allegiance of sixty per cent of the officers by the middle of 1943.<sup>70</sup>

Presidential elections were to be held late that year, and Castillo was forbidden by law to succeed himself. The GOU's plan was to have General Ramírez elected with the Radical Party's support, and Colonel González arranged a meeting late in May between Radical leaders and General Ramírez at which the Radicals invited the General to stand as their candidate. When he learned of this development, Castillo, who had no wish to see Ramírez become his successor, fired the Minister of War and, on 4 June 1943, announced his support for the pro-Ally Conservative, Robustiano Patrón Costas. The army replied immediately by overthrowing the government.<sup>71</sup>

At first, everything did not go according to the GOU's expectations. General Rawson broke a previous agreement to install a military triumvirate when he claimed full power for himself, and, worse yet, he sent word to the U.S. embassy that Argentina would abandon neutrality to join the United Nations. The GOU colonels broke into the presidential palace and threatened to throw Rawson out of the window unless he resigned. On 6 June 1943, he was replaced by General Ramírez as President of Argentina.<sup>72</sup>

The new president appointed German-trained or strongly Germanophile officers to the posts of Foreign Minister, Minister of War, Labor Minister, Agriculture Minister, Minister of the Interior, and Minister of Public Works. The major bureaucratic positions came to be dominated by GOU members, who were largely pro-Axis. These included Colonel Perón in the Secretariat of the War Ministry, Colonel González as head of the Presidential Secretariat, and Colonel Emilio Ramírez as Chief of Police.<sup>73</sup> As might be expected, the new government was particularly interested in strengthening Argentina militarily, and it turned to Germany for help. Two days after coming to power, President Ramírez sent word to the German embassy that Argentina would continue to maintain friendly relations with Germany.<sup>74</sup> and soon afterward secret arms negotiations recommenced. Colonel González, who had served on the German General Staff in the 1930s, contacted Hans Harnisch, an agent of the German Sicherheitsdienst (SD), the secret intelligence service run by Heinrich Himmler. A meeting was arranged between Harnisch and President Ramírez in mid-July at which the President expressed anxiety that the United Nations might resort to military

70. Goldwert, *Democracy, Militarism, Nationalism*, 77-78, 68; Potash, *Army & Politics*, 185-88.

71. Goldwert, *Democracy, Militarism, Nationalism*, 81; Potash, *Army & Politics*, 190-93.

72. Goldwert, *Democracy, Militarism, Nationalism*, 81.

73. USNA Microfilm Pubs., T-120, 39/27729: AA, Büro, *AbA*, 4: (Buenos Aires, 6/8/43) Transocean Europapress bulletin; Potash, *Army & Politics*, 209.

74. USNA Microfilm Pubs., T-120, 39/27727: AA, Büro, *AbA*, 4: (Buenos Aires, 6/9/43) Meynen to AA.

measures in order to force Argentina to abandon its policy of neutrality, in which case Argentina would be badly in need of armaments, for naturally it would fight back. As a sign of his good will, Ramírez promised that the Argentine law forbidding the activities of foreign agents and organizations would be applied only to those working for the United Nations. In fact, after the Foreign Minister banned the sending of coded messages by the German embassy, Colonel González arranged for Harnisch to keep the German government informed of events in Argentina through coded messages to the Argentine embassy in Berlin. It was finally agreed in October that an Argentine naval reserve officer, Oscar Hellmuth, would go to Germany via Spain in order to arrange for the shipment of German arms and armament technicians to Argentina with the help of the SD.<sup>75</sup>

Concern that its insistence on neutrality might result in military conflict also led the new government to seek an end to Argentina's diplomatic isolation. Just how this was to be achieved is indicated in a secret circular printed by the government at this time:

Argentina is surrounded by hostile governments, which are inspired by ideals different from ours. We must not give in to this Bloc of the United Nations, but on the contrary oppose them with all our force.

... The anti-Argentine circle will be broken by defeating the present Spanish-speaking governments surrounding us, replacing them by governments supporting our own purposes.

All of these governments will be united in a regional league of La Plata, which will demand the adhesion of all Hispanic-America, beginning with Peru. Brazil will be induced to join the Eastern Bloc. . . . The Eastern Bloc will be connected with Spain, and through Spain with the Axis.<sup>76</sup>

With the help of SD agents, the Argentine military government established contacts with integral nationalist groups in neighboring countries and encouraged them to overthrow their governments and form a South American neutral bloc. An integral nationalist coup did succeed in Bolivia, in December 1943, but the ensuing government was too weak to risk a radical change in foreign policy. After this failure, the Argentine government lost interest in this plan.<sup>77</sup>

In fact, such intrigues soon put an end to Argentina's own ability to maintain strict neutrality. In November 1943, Oscar Hellmuth was arrested by the British in Trinidad on his way to Germany, apparently with letters of introduction from President Ramírez and Foreign Minister Alberto Gilbert on his

75. Postash, *Army & Politics*, 219-23; United States Government, *Blue Book on Argentina. Consultation among the American Republics with Respect to the Argentine Situation* (New York, 1946), 5-10.

76. Quoted in Goldwert, *Democracy, Militarism, Nationalism*, 84-85.

77. U.S. Government, *Blue Book*, 12-16.

person.<sup>78</sup> The Allies also received documentary proof of Argentina's plots against neighboring governments and threatened to publish both this and the Hellmuth evidence. On 26 January 1944, President Ramírez announced the severing of relations between Argentina and the Axis.<sup>79</sup>

The GOU officers reacted to this betrayal of one of their founding principles – the maintenance of Argentina's independence in foreign relations – with angry indignation, which Perón deftly directed against his rivals in the growing struggle for control of the government. Less than a month later, President Ramírez was removed from office, and with him went Colonels González and Emilio Ramírez. The new government consisted of pro-Axis officers,<sup>80</sup> with Perón soon becoming both Minister of War and Vice President, as well as remaining head of the Ministry of Labor, which he was using to build mass support for himself among the workers. Moreover, the new president, General Edelmiro Farrell, was Perón's puppet, while the chief of police was his trusted aide,<sup>81</sup> Colonel Filomeno Velazco, whose indulgent treatment of arrested SD agents caused the Germans to dub their jail the "Hotel Velazco."<sup>82</sup>

Although the new government did not renew ties with Germany, Perón did continue secret arms negotiations with the Germans through most of 1944, and few measures were taken to restrict the activities of German individuals, organizations or businesses. Finally, with Germany's defeat imminent, the Argentine government did agree to declare war on the Axis powers on 27 March 1945 in return for the United States' ending its ban on the sale of war material to Argentina.<sup>83</sup> Even then, however, all contacts with Germany may not have ceased, for two submarines that, according to a French spy, left Marseilles in the last days of the war loaded with gold were later captured in Buenos Aires minus their cargo. Some of the gold is said to have been deposited in the bank account of Eva Duarte, Perón's mistress and later wife, and it supposedly was used to buy 10,000 blank passports and 11,000 blank identification cards for fleeing Nazi officials.<sup>84</sup>

Argentina's persistence in remaining neutral during the second world war despite the opposition of all the American nations, its secret negotiations with the Germans and promises to join the Axis if forced to take a stand indicate there was significant German influence in the country. This was especially true of the army, which overthrew two governments for threatening to abandon

78. USNA Microfilm Pubs., T-120, 1364/356240-356241: AA, Nachlass Botschafters Karl Ritters, Packet 101, *Argentinien*, Heft 2:(Buenos Aires, 1/31/44) Meynen to AA.

79. Potash, *Army & Politics*, 229-31.

80. *Ibid.*, 232-35.

81. Goldwert, *Democracy, Militarism, Nationalism*, 87-89.

82. U.S. Government, *Blue Book*, 18.

83. Potash, *Army & Politics*, 252-55.

84. "La Fortuna de Perón," *Somos* (Buenos Aires, 9/23/77), 8-12; Dr. Panhorst, under American interrogation at the end of the war, was questioned concerning a shipment of gold to South America via submarine: interview (Bonn, 7/24/81).

neutrality in favor of the United Nations and whose leaders protected and cooperated with German intelligence agents. It should not be concluded, however, that Argentine officers favored the Axis in the war because they approved of the Nazi regime and its totalitarian tactics. The integral nationalists did admire the Nazis for transforming a nation that had been in the throes of political anarchy and economic collapse into a military and industrial giant, and increasingly in the 1930s their own programs called for a directed economy, forced industrialization and autarchy. Indeed, the military government that came to power in 1943 concentrated on developing heavy industry in order to create a powerful war machine. It established the Council of National Defense "with the end of assuring in time of peace the strictest cooperation of the distinct organs of State in activities related to defense," and ordered all factories to engage only in defense-related work. Despite their debt to foreign nationalist ideologies, however, the Argentine integral nationalists always maintained that indigenous solutions must be found to Argentina's problems. "Order, Hierarchy and Discipline" constituted the political slogan of this authoritarian and elitist movement, which developed in reaction to the middle-class democracy of the 1920s but also rejected the traditional elite for its corruption and foreign ties. Thus the military regime abolished all political parties, severely repressed labor unions, and terminated the free trade with Europe upon which the landed oligarchy depended. In its social policies, the strengthening of Church, Family and Morality seem to have been the regime's major goals. Endless decrees governed everything from the length of women's skirts to the prohibition of slang, divorce announcements were censored from the press as a threat to family unity and traditional values, and compulsory religious education was instituted in the schools.<sup>85</sup>

The officers who ran the military government apparently did not desire to remake Argentine society but to preserve those institutions and principles that they held to be traditional and essential while creating a modern, industrialized economy. They set themselves up as the ruling elite that would whip the flabby, ignorant and undisciplined masses into shape for the good of God and Country. Thus, they had no use for a mass civilian organization like the Nazi Party or for the rabble-rousing politics of a Hitler, and although they might approve of Germany's fight against liberalism and communism, they could never condone the secular materialism of the Nazi state.

This does not belie the fact of German influence, however, for in their attitude toward the Nazi regime the Argentine army officers were quite similar to those Germans they knew best, the Reichswehr instructors. German officers were traditionally scornful of politics and especially of politicians and their parties. Monarchists at heart, they felt little love for the Weimar Republic with its political turmoil and moral decadence, but took the position that their

85. Navarro Gerassi, "Argentine Nationalism," 191-93; Goldwert, *Democracy, Militarism, Nationalism*, 81-86.

loyalty was to the German fatherland rather than to any particular system of government. As the chief of the army in the 1920s, General Hans von Seeckt, remarked, "The army serves the state, and only the state, for it *is* the state." German officers pointed with pride to the army's role in unifying the nation and believed it best qualified to determine the nation's true interests, but they were also concerned about the Reichswehr's isolation within Germany, its lack of identification with the masses and of popular support. To break out of this isolation would require an alliance with one of the major parties, and the Nazis seemed a lesser evil than the Socialists or Communists. In fact, German officers could identify with the Nazis' anti-parliamentarianism and their demands for revision of the Treaty of Versailles and for Germany's rearmament, while generals influential in the formation of policy under President Hindenburg believed that Hitler could be tamed and made to serve their interests. As a result, the German army agreed to Hitler's appointment as Chancellor of Germany in 1933. Under the Nazi regime, however, the officers' support was far from whole-hearted, and deep mistrust characterized their relationship with Hitler. That they followed him nonetheless had a great deal to do with the German army's firm tradition of unswerving loyalty to whomever it had sworn allegiance.<sup>86</sup>

There was no counter-part to this tradition in Latin America, where the modern armed forces developed from the private armies of *caudillos* who governed as long as their military might prevailed. Even in Argentina, however, although the army might seize power successfully, it could not wield it effectively in the face of massive and united opposition. Argentine officers for the most part did not seek to build broad civilian support, for they mistrusted the "illiterate masses." Perón was the exception. Only he succeeded in creating a mass movement, a movement that brought him to power despite the efforts of fellow officers to keep him out. His ability to maintain control of that movement forced the army to allow his return to power almost twenty years after it had overthrown him.

German influence in the Argentine army was not expressed so much in conscious political imitation as in the Argentine officers' attitudes about themselves and their place in society. This influence resulted from the role Germany played in the modernization of Argentina's army. Poorly trained, disorganized and plagued with dissension and low morale in the late nineteenth century, the Argentine army changed, with German help, into a disciplined, efficient, and professional body that could with some justification claim to be the best of Latin America's armed forces. The officers in particular received at German hands both excellent technical education and physical disciplining that an

86. F.L. Carsten, *The Reichswehr and Politics, 1918-1933* (Berkeley, 1973), 309-401; Joachim C. Fest, "General X: The Behavior and Role of the Officer Corps in the Third Reich," *The Face of the Third Reich. Portraits of the Nazi Leadership* (New York, 1970), 235-49.

American observer termed "arduous in the extreme." Such training was well designed to instill faith in "order, hierarchy, and discipline," as well as disregard for individualism and a belief in obedience to authority that might lead to impatience with democratic processes. Considering the political fragmentation that Argentina suffered in the inter-war period, there was some truth to the army's claim that it was the only organized and united force within the country. Moreover, the twentieth-century Argentine officer did not share the interests of the traditional elite, especially since those interests favored preserving Argentina's agriculturally-based economy. During the war, officers believed that Germany's victory would spell defeat for the oligarchy with its dependence upon Great Britain. The opportunity to see other lands that training in Germany offered and the excellent treatment that Argentine officers received there tended to confirm their belief that as the defenders of the nation they deserved a more important role in society. In Germany, they could see the importance of industrialization to military power, and, having studied Karl Haushofer's peculiar blend of military and economic strategy, they insisted that military preparedness must be the decisive factor in and highest goal of the nation's political and economic policies. Along with their desire for industrialization, however, Argentina's military leaders shared the German officer's love of elitism, order and traditional values. The conflict between the Argentine army's goal of economic modernization and its insistence upon maintaining the status quo in all other areas of the nation's life, combined with its belief that the military is the best arbiter of national interest, resulted in a cycle of military interventions in the government in which Argentina still finds itself caught.

German involvement in training the Argentine army had significant consequences for Germany as well as for Argentina. By 1914, Germany had become one of Argentina's most important trading partners, and in the field of army equipment enjoyed a monopoly. Despite the setbacks following World War One, Germany again achieved this position by 1940. Politically, the German-Argentine military friendship led to Argentina's neutrality during both world wars, and during World War Two provided a congenial atmosphere for the Third Reich's propaganda and espionage activities in South America. Admittedly, German-Argentine trade never became vital to either nation, nor did South America play more than a very minor role in the world wars. The results of the German-Argentine military relationship are nonetheless significant, particularly since Argentina was not the only country where Germany played the role of military mentor to its advantage.<sup>87</sup> Perhaps the best testimony to the effectiveness with which Germany developed military aid as a means of exerting economic and political influence is the adoption of the same practice by the two great powers of the world today.

87. Germany also, at various times, trained the armies of Bolivia, Chile, China, Japan, Peru, Rumania, and Turkey, among others.