



The Future of Argentina's Defense

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Abstract: El 25 de octubre tendrán lugar en la Argentina elecciones presidenciales. El siguiente artículo analiza los posibles lineamientos en materia de política exterior a ser implementados por el próximo gobierno y su repercusión en la Defensa.

On October 25th presidential elections will take place in Argentina. The following article describes different approaches to foreign policy from contending parties and their probable effects on Defense.

Palabras Clave: Elecciones, Política Exterior, Política de Defensa, Geopolítica, Relaciones Hemisféricas.

Key Words: Elections, Foreign Policy, Defense Policy, Geopolitics, Hemispheric relations.

Presidential elections are set to take place on October 25th in Argentina, and the race is led by three main coalitions; Frente Para la Victoria (FPV), PRO, and Frente Renovador. FPV, which is currently commanded by the President, Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner, is widely regarded for its national and popular movements, grassroots organizations, syndicates and unions, political parties and sectors of the Peronist Movement. The party has expressed its support for Daniel Scioli^[1], who is currently ahead in the polls^[2]. Scioli has been the Governor of the Province of Buenos Aires for the past eight years.

Second in the race is Propuesta Republicana, commonly known as PRO, with Mauricio Macri as its front man. Recognized as a political party since 2010, the group emerged as an electoral alliance between the right^[3] and center-right wings of different political parties, back in 2005. Meanwhile, Frente Renovador (FR), is a coalition consisting of different political parties aligned with the right-wing of the Peronist Movement, including several unions and syndicates. Sergio Massa is the front's candidate to the presidency. According to some of the most respected surveys Massa holds a 15% of vote intention; while PRO (39%) and the FPV (45%) remain ahead. Nevertheless, FR's 15% of prospective votes is still extremely relevant to the other two coalitions because of its' bargaining power, in case of a constricted end with ballotage^[4].

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Argentina's defense foreign policy^[5] and its contribution to a collective system of defense in South America

The Kirchner Administration's foreign policy has been characterized by returning to a historical geopolitical dispute with the US in the region. With the exception of the Menem period (1989 – 1999) and the dictatorship of Onganía (1966 – 1970); throughout history, Argentina has disputed the hegemony of the US in the region. (Eissa, 2013) FPV's foreign policies have aimed at consolidating levels of economic independence and political sovereignty by establishing strategic



alliances with countries in the South American region and among the BRICS; through the implementations of policies for debt reduction, nationalization, the protection of natural resources, and employment creation.

Consequently, the Kirchnerist defense model is characterized by reflecting upon the traditional Interamerican Defense System, created after the end of World War II, to consolidate the influence of the US in the continent, deter communist penetration and assure the geopolitical alignment of Member States with the West. In opposition to the years of Cold War, Argentina's neighbors are no longer perceived as a threat and conflict hypothesis have been rejected by countries in South America, through the implementations of measures to promote and build, mutual trust. Hence, the Argentine Republic assumes a strategic defense identity of rejection and opposition to policies and offensive power projections of capabilities to third States[6].

Argentina's national defense policy is characterized by favoring the construction, through agreements and political dialogue, of a regional system for collective defense in South America. In itself this represents a linkage between the processes of South American integration and the progressive reduction of mutual threat perceptions[7].

The current context of international crisis shows that the economic changes that have occurred in recent decades have revitalized the race for natural resources and control of transport routes. This dynamic is a potential factor of tension and confrontation between rich states and regions of the world that increase their tendency to seek guaranteed sovereign control of their resources. Therefore Argentina, seeks to promote and ratify its' sovereignty in different strategic scenarios, such as the Malvinas Islands and Antarctica. In this sense, Argentina assumes that each State is sovereign and able to find the necessary consensus to settle its own internal issues, therefore the country does not adhere to peace enforcement actions, such as interventions. Nevertheless, the country recognizes its commitments to peace in the international system and actively participates in Peacekeeping Operations along with other Member States of UNASUR[8].

In this context, defense policies play a key role in the construction of an autonomous defense for the country and a cooperative security system for South America.

Since the signing of the Mechanism for Building Confidence and Security (MFCyS) between the Member States of UNASUR in 2009, it is the frequent exchange of information on military exercises and maneuvers as well as on defense spending, which forms a typical cooperative security mechanism[9]. The political changes that will occur after October's elections will impact Argentina's defense foreign policy in a certain level, possibly, altering a continuity of twelve years.

Different perspectives of hemispheric relations: and their impact in the defense agenda

On October 5th, at the University of Buenos Aires (UBA), three members of the Argentine diplomatic service[10], presented their coalition's approach and perspectives on foreign policy for the next four years. Their opinion about the future of Argentina's foreign policy varied



considerably; from a regional and more integrationist perspective posed by the FPV, to another centered in the (re)construction of close ties with the US and the “West”.

Ambassador Ricardo Lagorio, from the FPV described Scioli’s future foreign policy as multidirectional and dedicated to support development and regional integration. According to Lagorio, Argentina’s foreign policy should contribute to integrate the region, geographically and functionally, through agreements with neighbor countries for the joint construction of critical infrastructure for development. Thus, connectivity^[11] seems to be a key factor. Moreover, Lagorio stated that Argentina’s soft power and the protection of the “Blue Pampa” (term coined after Brazil’s Blue Amazonia^[12]) should be priorities of the new government.

Meanwhile, PRO claimed the need to return to an alignment with policies, interests and values “*proper of the West*”, such as liberty and freedom. According to Ambassador Pfirter (PRO), “*Argentina should return to past open-trade policies, prioritizing alliances with the US and the European Union (EU); by joining the Trans Pacific Partnership to have access to development funding*”. This is in line with PRO’s right-wing ideologically-driven neoliberal economic perception; and their disposition to maintain close links with the right-wing of the Republican Party. As it was recently unveiled by the press; a US based NGO^[13], funded by NML, a vulture fund^[14] were funneling funds for PRO’s presidential campaign^[15].

Likewise, according to Pfirter the relation with China and Russia should be “*moderated*”, restraining Argentina’s participation in any sort of “*geostrategic experiment that might derive in a confrontation with other western countries*”. Regarding to the role of the region, Pfirter highlighted the importance of working along with Brazil, Chile, and Uruguay.

In line with Pfirter, Ambassador Moritán who was representing the FR, called for the need to increase exports and production through free trade^[16] while returning to an alignment with the US. A recipe proven to be fatal^[17]. According to Moritán, Argentina’s ethical convictions should be coupled with an excellent relation towards world powers, placing the Organization of American States^[18] at the center of the political agenda for South America, in clear detriment of UNASUR, an organization created to tackle the inconsistencies and desuetude nature of the Interamerican System of Defense^[19], from which OAS is a fundamental part.

In this new context, the System presents several institutional dysfunctions such as; the establishment of autonomous institutional agendas, based on self-assignment missions and functions, reflecting poor effective supervision by national authorities; low representation of the civilian element, caused by low turnout and dwindling membership by the set of countries in the hemisphere, a fact that affects also their degree of legitimacy; the few concrete and relevant results to meet the needs of member countries on defense cooperation and the growing difficulties in their fiscal sustainability, reflected in the dependence on the financial and material support of a very few countries. These common denominators, presented with features particularized in each of these instruments elevate the need for substantial revision in order to form a true cooperative (not collective) defense system among the American nations. Moreover, according to Moritán, political relations with the region should be more “*homogeneous*” (a clear reference to Argentina’s close relations with Venezuela, Ecuador, and Bolivia); trade should be



liberalized and international efforts should be aimed at the construction of critical infrastructure for development. In terms of security, the relationship with Brazil should address transnational issues such as terrorism and drug-smuggling activities. Regarding the South-Atlantic conflict and Argentina's sovereign claim over the Malvinas Islands, the FR calls for the need to *"maintain a harmonious process of negotiations with the United Kingdom in order to obtain tangible results, without provoking the British Government"*; in a clear genuflect rejection of the process of international negotiations conducted by Argentina, since the British occupation in 1833.

Furthermore, FR's candidate, Sergio Massa[20], has been spearheading an initiative to militarize the interior security, an initiative that had proven to be terrible for the people of Mexico and Colombia. Through the use of securitization discourse; Massa is presenting drug-smuggling and trans-border activities as an extraordinary threat to the survival of the State that requires the intervention of the military[21]. This kind of initiatives receive the support of the US[22], through its many instances of cooperation, such as the South Com and USAID[23]. It is still unclear why the US calls for the use of the military in Central America and South America, when the Posse Comitatus Act of 1878[24]; forbids the military from enforcing laws within its territory.

The future of Defense

Regardless of the result of the elections, changes will come in the field of Defense. In case Scioli wins there is no doubt that his platform, less ideological and more technocratic; will affect the defense policy-making process. Two things can happen. The less probable scenario is Defense becoming a "second" priority for the administration, as other issues will be considered more important. Scioli has avoided making big statements about Defense and the sovereignty of the nation. Therefore, a "frozen" ministry would not be a surprise, moreover, when the Ministry of Defense is not considered one of the most influential offices in Argentina's daily politics. A more likely scenario, is a Ministry of Defense involved somehow in reforms, under the direct supervision of the president.

In case PRO wins, the alignment with the US will entirely affect Defense. It's probable that the implementation of disarmament policies will become a priority[25]. PRO's evident close ties with the US Embassy in Argentina[26] will affect directly the development of the country's missile and nuclear program. When it comes to Argentina, the US is particularly concerned about two things, firstly, Iran's relation with the region and the possible consequences of this; especially in fields like nuclear cooperation. Secondly, the US is concerned about Argentina's capability of developing a missile[27]program[28]. In part because of the aforementioned Iran issue, also because England will interpret this as a threat to the illegal occupation of the Malvinas Islands by the British Armed Forces.

If FR wins, there is no doubt that changes will occur[29]. Massa's most popular TV spot claims for a new law of "enhanced security"[30]. This represents a euphemism for severe reform; that will involve the direct use of the Armed Forces for tasks of interior security, something prohibited by laws 24.059[31]; 23.554[32], 25.520[33] and 27.126. Although Massa is less likely to become president, his bargaining power[34] in case of ballotage, might result in FR elements



disembarking at the Ministry of Defense. This would be a win-win outcome for the US Embassy in Buenos Aires[35]. Nevertheless, it is important to mention that according to the polls, the FPV will retain an important number of seats in Congress in October. Thus, the final battle for legislative changes that may or may not affect Defense, will depend extensively on the performance of these representatives in Congress.

To de-securitize this debate, it is necessary to move issues off the ‘security’ agenda; back into the realm of public political discourse and normal political dispute in Congress. Additionally, through the involvement of Civil Society in the discussion of Security, precisely, because the securitization process operated by FR and PRO, insulates security from a process of public debate, making it susceptible to being pulled back into the public realm and capable of transformation, particularly when the social consensus underlying the capacity for decisions is challenged, either by questioning the policies, disputing the threat, or both. (Williams, 2003)

Sobre el autor

Este blog está dedicado a la publicación de artículos de opinión y de análisis sobre: conflictos contemporáneos, cooperación internacional, defensa y seguridad, geopolítica y/o geoestrategia. Estas contribuciones voluntarias deben incitar al debate sobre las dinámicas actuales y los desafíos futuros en estas temáticas.

This blog is dedicated to the publication of editorials and papers of analysis about: contemporary conflicts, international cooperation, defense and security, geopolitics and geostrategy. These voluntary contributions should stimulate discussion on the current dynamics and future challenges in these themes.

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[1] Nestor Kirchner’s Vice President, between 2003 and 2007.



[2] <http://www.buenosairesherald.com/article/197589/new-poll-puts-scioli-10-points-clear-for-october-elections>

[3] PRO's candidate Mauricio Macri, is proposing a former Army Officer who led a Coup d'état against President Ricardo Alfonsín in 1987; as future Ministry of Defense. See (in Spanish) <http://www.lapoliticaonline.com/nota/92965-alfonsin-esta-preocupado-porque-macri-quiere-a-un-ex-carapintada-en-defensa/>

[4] The two-round system (also known as the second ballot, runoff voting or ballotage) is a voting system used to elect a single winner where the voter casts a single vote for their chosen candidate. However, if no candidate receives an absolute majority or 40-45% with a winning margin of 5-15%, then those candidates having less than a certain proportion of the votes, or all but the two candidates receiving the most votes, are eliminated, and a second round of voting occurs. The two round system is used around the world for the election of legislative bodies and directly elected presidents. For example, it is used in French presidential, legislative, and departmental elections as well as in Argentina.

[5] Argentina's international defense policy is based on a self-defense cooperative model that seeks to achieve adequate self-defense capabilities, while cooperating through bilateral and multilateral mechanisms in a regional and global context where mutual trust and transparency promote better protection of national interests and an atmosphere of freedom, peace and justice, strengthening institutions and international law. (See in Spanish: http://www.mindef.gob.ar/mindef_politica_inter_defensa/index.html)

[6] See <http://www.ceedcds.org.ar/Espanol/09-Downloads/INST-DEF-ESP.pdf>

[7] Moreover, this integration process is also characterized for contributing to the internal development of countries, by promoting the defense industry, after years of scrapping driven by neoliberal policies. The defense industrial policy seeks to deepen the margins of autonomy from dependence on foreign military equipment, while seeking cooperation between the Member States of UNASUR for the growth of domestic markets, increased intra-industrial cooperation in the region, generating economies of scale and joint development of technology.

[8] This is the case of the Combined Joint Peace Force "Cruz del Sur" with Chile and the Combined Peace Force "Libertador José de San Martín" with Peru. Finally, Argentina cooperates with other states in the Atlantic and West Africa within the so-called "South Atlantic Peace and Cooperation Zone" (ZOPACAS).

[9] Furthermore, countries from UNASUR have promoted permanent Working Groups for the design, implementation and monitoring of projects whose development requires continuity; while the South American Defense Council, has focused on more than 120 specific activities around four areas: a) defense policies; b) military cooperation, humanitarian action and peace operations; c) industry and defense technology d) education and training in defense; thus,



consolidating South America as a “zone of peace”, strengthening the widespread commitment of their States with the schemes of regional and global collective security. (Guevara, 2009)

[10] **1)** Ambassador Ricardo Lagorio (FPV): Former undersecretary for Policy and Strategy of the Ministry of Defense and international affairs adviser to Vice President and Governor Daniel Scioli. **2)** Ambassador Rogelio Pfirter (PRO): Lawyer (Universidad Nacional del Litoral); former Director of the ABACC and CONAE, former ambassador to England, former General Director of the International Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (2002-2010). **3)** Ambassador Roberto Garcia Moritán (FR): Lawyer (UBA), and Master in International Politics (New School for Social Research, NY); Former Vice Chancellor (2005-2008), former president of former president of MTCR and Conference on Disarmament.

[11] See (in Spanish): <http://www.pagina12.com.ar/diario/ultimas/subnotas/20-74825-2015-10-12.html>

[12] See (in Portuguese) <http://www.adescg.net.br/noticias/a-amazonia-azul>

[13] <http://www.buenosairesherald.com/article/194863/%E2%80%98vultures%E2%80%99-spat-turns-into-legal-labyrinth>

[14] See <http://allabouttheargentinedebtcase.org/> ; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dCc-3bEpUy4> and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dCc-3bEpUy4>

[15] See (in Spanish) <http://www.infonews.com/nota/57654/fondo-buitre-financia-una-ong-vinculada-a-una-diputada-del-pro>

[16] Moritán made no clear statements about how this is possible, especially when in the past, the asymmetries and disparities between Argentina and the US, lead Argentina to become more competitive by reducing salaries and cutting social welfare. Thus, gaining competitiveness through austerity and the consequent social exclusion of important parts of the population.

[17] See (in Spanish) <http://tiempo.infonews.com/nota/189855>

[18] For a more detailed description of FR’s platform regarding Defense and Security, please, see (in Spanish): <https://civismundirevista.wordpress.com/2015/09/10/los-riesgos-de-la-securitizacion-la-lucha-contra-el-delito-y-la-militarizacion-de-la-seguridad-interior/>

[19] The central components of the Interamerican system (OAS, TIAR Treaty, IADB and the CID), were consolidated during the Cold War, articulating regional security around the centrality of the security of the US; and its asymmetrical relationship with the rest of the continent. This system became the target of criticism; since the end of the ideological and strategic East-West conflict. This criticism arises from the delegitimization of this system after the South Atlantic Conflict in 1982 (Malvinas War) when the US sided with NATO and the UK, in clear violation of the TIAR treaty for reciprocal assistance in case of a foreign intervention in the region.



Subsequently, the consolidation of democratic regimes in South America, resulted in greater control of the Armed Forces by the civilian element, discarding conflict hypothesis, something that derived in the formation of a “zone of peace” in the South American sub-region. The System’s instruments and components have become obsolete for the requirements of today, because their nature and design obey to the needs of collective defense. They characterized the second half of the twentieth century.

[20] Massa, has declared its intention to involve the army on internal security affairs; building partnership between Argentina and the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA). Massa motioned this during his visit to the Council of the Americas in the city of New York, in March of 2014. Since then, he repeats this systematically; as a campaign proposal in search for the votes of the right-wing electorate, convinced that the answer to security problems resides in the use of more “robust” means. See (in Spanish) <https://civismundirevista.wordpress.com/2015/09/10/los-riesgos-de-la-securitizacion-la-lucha-contra-el-delito-y-la-militarizacion-de-la-seguridad-interior/>

[21] See (in Spanish) <https://civismundirevista.wordpress.com/2015/09/10/los-riesgos-de-la-securitizacion-la-lucha-contra-el-delito-y-la-militarizacion-de-la-seguridad-interior/>

[22] See (in Spanish) <http://www.defensasur.com.ar/index.php/america-del-sur/8730-se-propone-la-creacion-de-una-fuerza-multinacional-en-america-latina>

[23] See (in Spanish) <http://www.infodefensa.com/latam/2014/03/09/noticia-colombia-conferencia-fuerzas-aereas-americanas.html>

[24] http://civilliberty.about.com/od/waronterror/a/posse_act.htm

[25] See <http://www.globalsecurity.org/space/world/argentina/launch.htm>

[26] <http://www.pagina12.com.ar/diario/elpais/1-154612-2010-10-09.html>

[27] See in English: <http://www.nti.org/country-profiles/argentina/delivery-systems/>; <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/npihp-partner-hosts-conference-brazils-and-argentinanuclear-history/>

[28] During the 1980s, the Alacrán (English: Scorpion) and Cóndor 2 (English: Condor) missiles were developed. The Cóndor 2, with a range of around 1,000 kilometres, was reportedly scrapped during the Menem administration under pressure from the United States government. See: <http://www.astronautix.com/lvs/alacran.htm>

[29] For similar cases in the region see: <http://www.infodefensa.com/latam/2015/10/06/noticia-colombia-celebra-quinta-conferencia-naval-interoperabilidad.html>



[30] See (in Spanish) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PMunUd-sAIg> ; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pPD200-Q7Q4> and <http://www.lanacion.com.ar/1821543-massa-presento-su-plan-de-seguridad-ampliada>

[31] <http://infoleg.mecon.gov.ar/infolegInternet/anexos/0-4999/458/texact.htm>

[32] <http://www.infoleg.gob.ar/infolegInternet/anexos/20000-24999/20988/texact.htm>

[33] <http://infoleg.mecon.gov.ar/infolegInternet/anexos/70000-74999/70496/norma.htm>

[34] 10 to 15% of votes in the first round of October's election, remain as an important number to negotiate positions in future cabinets, in case Scioli and Macri end up in a Ballotage situation.

[35] There is a manifest tendency of the US to securitize strategic parts of the continent. A prominent US military officer recently called for a "Plan Colombia" in Central America. (Lohmuller, 2015) Admiral (R) James Stavridis argued that rates of violence in Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador, require an intervention. According to the admiral, "specialized and well trained personnel should be deployed, as opposed to large numbers of troops. The US should send more lawyers to these countries to help implement legal mechanisms to address transnational crime" (extradition of people to the US. UU.), "while support should be focused on a fusion of defense, diplomacy and development" Also, another recommendation is "to systematically finance maritime interdiction operations".