

Theory and Practice of Autonomy: Illia's foreign policy*

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ABSTRACT

This article is a summary of Alejandro Simonoff's doctoral thesis. The thesis originated from a number of papers written since the end of the 80s in which a double phenomenon was observed: 1) the existence of political instability which had the consequence of an erratic attitude to foreign affairs by our country; and, 2) the absence of a proper categorisation of many periods of our present history. The question posed was if this could obey to two reasons or just one of them. In order to solve the dilemma the policy of radical Arturo Illia was analysed. Such government, being weak and showing internal and external conflict, was thus unstable and had trouble in defining the Argentine position in the Cold war from an autonomist perspective.

The characterization of Arturo Illia's government as autonomist proves complicated. This could be due to two reasons: either the designation is a result of instability or the models used for foreign policies analysis are inadequate to solve the dilemma.

Therefore, our motivation to analyze the issue of autonomy involves both theoretical as well as practical aspects. Our main hypothesis has two parts as a consequence of this ambiguity: the theory itself and its application. Is the autonomist model enough to explain this foreign policy or is it that its limits arise from the events analyzed?

1. THE AUTONOMIST THEORY/THEORIES

Evidently, the autonomist theory makes a strong impact on the development of Argentine international relations which allows us to track down its evolution as a theoretical concept as well as to analyze the way it has affected the interpretation of foreign policies.

The big question is whether the accumulation of contradictions between facts and theory gives way to a paradigm crisis or to a paradigm shift, something which is ignored in the works that deal with this topic.

We deem the existence of at least three disciplinary paradigms to be relevant: Puig's classic model, Escudé's model of the nineties and a more recent one. The question is how far the first peripheral realism was displaced by the paradigm of the nineties, considering the goals of the latter are substantially different. We may wonder to what extent the new autonomy highlighted by Russell and Tokatlián (based on Escudé's critique as well as on other authors such as Figari and Rapoport who are closer to Puig's ideas) has been established as a paradigm.

The concept of autonomy needs redefining because the world has changed. But redefining it and making it disappear are two different things. Many authors, like Figari, try to restore it not only in the current debate but also by means of retrospective analyses.

While the first autonomists aim at achieving greater margins for maneuvering in the international system by means of alliances with countries with similar resources and values, pro-Westerners only prioritize policies that satisfy the dominant power. As Figari puts it:

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(...) the relationship between developed and underdeveloped countries is a command-obedience one, which cannot lead us to an autonomist policy but which can only lead us to a dependency policy instead. [FIGARI, 1985, 25]

Autonomism, more closely associated with mid-20th century nationalist and reformist revolutions and movements of the '60s, holds that the flexibility of the international system and its distribution of tasks give countries margins for maneuvering to fulfill national goals, and makes an interpretation in accordance with this definition. It could be said that under this light, a country's decision prevails over the international system. For the peripheral realism of the last decade, on the other hand, evidently influenced by neo-conservatism, since the international system is hierarchical and static, it will prevail over the country's decisions.¹ It is interesting to notice that the most recent analysts share the same view on the ¹prevalence of the external over the internal structure, even if they analyze the process differently.

While Puig and his followers praise autonomist decisions as positive, given their relation to the domestic interests of the country, Escudé and his consider them costly challenges or even victories which are not worth the sacrifices they entail. This change of views relates to Escudé's reformulation of autonomy which distinguishes mere consumption from investment of autonomy. Once again we find different perspectives and inevitably we make pedagogical references to the past, present and future.

These differences do not prevent us from seeing some of the cores of our foreign policy history such as the foreign policies of the second half of the 20th century, the political instability and the non-direct involvement in the Cold War. We think that these cores are a result of the dialectic nature of autonomy and insertion, which are not found in their pure state. What we need to do is redefine both concepts.

Evidently, between both views there is an abyss and analyses and descriptions hinder rather than clarify. That is why we deem it necessary to reevaluate the theories in order to achieve a satisfactory theoretical model for the analysis.

In the case of the classic theory of autonomy, we find that some elements in Illia's administration are assessed both positively and negatively in terms of the search for maneuvering margins. Our country accepted the American leadership of the bloc and also accepted that its own development model should differ from the expectations the United States had for Argentina. Examples of these divergences are: the annulment of oil contracts, the establishment of strategies which were globally different from those of the United States as regards its economic relation with the South, and even market diversification.² This issue is controversial since on the military-strategic level, the government supported the United States without distinguishing the interests of the dominant power itself from those of the bloc. This was not the case in other spheres, such as the economic.

On the other hand, Escudé's paradigm could imply, *prima facie*, a greater adjustment, since the Radical foreign policy aimed at the development of the national interest specifically in its economic aspect. Nevertheless, the critiques that these works make, reveal their agendas. Even if they value commercial pragmatism, the decision to annul oil contracts is seen as a result of ideological prejudice and as a source of countless problems which, as we prove, in the end was not.

In the relational autonomy analyses, we find a third paradigm, since it differs both from the classic and neoconservative views. The emphasis is on domestic weakness and on the fact that the division of the interests of the United States and those of the Western world do not necessarily bring about confrontation with autonomist policies. On the contrary, there might be cases in which the interests of the dominant power may coincide with those of the peripheral nation. Roberto Miranda's work sheds light on this topic.

Consequently, none of the characterizations are enough to determine whether these policies are autonomist or not. Therefore, we refuse to talk about autonomy in absolute terms and we will establish a certain gradation instead.

2. DEFINING A FOREIGN POLICY AS AUTONOMIST

We should point out that the Radical foreign policy corresponds to a limited democratic regime in which the concepts of autonomy and insertion are seen as complementary and within the context of an international system characterized by a bipolar confrontation and with our interests rooted in the development issue. Hence, the strategy for international economic insertion. In order to achieve this insertion, compensating and horizontal strategies were established to diminish the weight of the United States in our asymmetric relation as well as the territoriality policy.

3. THE FOREIGN POLICY OF A WEAK GOVERNMENT

One of the main sources of instability that Illia's government had to deal with was its original weakness. But also, the domestic confrontation favored those who supported a solid alliance with the United States, as the opposition gained strength. There was a recurring game in which internal negotiation was displaced by struggle. That was an unavoidable reality (which seemed impossible in those days), for the design of a sustainable foreign policy. Especially if the aim was to diminish the enormous pressure from America and to reassert our decision-making capacity at the same time

The decision-making strategy was determined by a classic liberal conception in which power factors were pushed to the second or third circles. This bothered immensely those who were displaced and was doubtlessly one of the reasons for the conspiracy against this administration.

The analysis of the decision-making dynamics shows how these factors tried to be part of the decision-making process either by exerting pressure themselves, like the Army did, or by means of the media. The media would announce a different measure every day, without counting on sufficient information, only to criticize the government the following day once the measures were not put into practice.

President Illia was very clever to use the players that were historically relegated to the decision-making periphery as institutional counterweight. During the Santo Domingo crisis, those in favor of Illia's decision not to send troops, such as the Congress and his own party, were supported and not those who were against it. This way, he eroded the latter but at the expense of eroding his own image.

During the Falklands/Malvinas conflict, the government took clear advantage of the bureaucratic resources and also realized how important the issue of decolonization was in this matter. The administration also succeeded in beginning bilateral talks on the topic, something which Great Britain had systematically refused to, and framed the problem within the concept of territorial unity without bringing up the issue of self-determination.

4. THE GAME OF AUTONOMY AND INSERTION

The previously highlighted aspects of this administration show a strong commitment to the idea of national interest in its economic, political and territorial defense aspects. These elements allow us to make out the idealistic components in the discourse, compatible with a universalist view which held that the country had the international resources necessary to design an autonomist alternative.

Autonomist ideas revolve around Krause's philosophy. This line of thought was not the only one since the liberal institutionalist influence had its bearing on all Cold War-related events, altered the autonomist position and led to a redefinition of the concept of autonomy.

But these tensions were not enough to avoid the rise of innovative elements to do with foreign relations with a North-South approach.

One way of analyzing these elements is by taking the concept of national interest as criterion for analysis³ in its three fundamental values: physical surface, freedom and survival of the population. [GEORGE, 230-1]

The government's clearly idealistic and autonomist policies aim at achieving margins for maneuvering that allow for the independence of the Nation. Obviously, starting a dialogue with England on the sovereignty over the Falklands/Malvinas islands shows how important the national interest was to this administration.

Even if the distributive struggle did have an impact on the political system and generated instability, the government tried to create the necessary conditions to make sure the struggle gained momentum and had a strong social content. What's more, its national interest idea is based not only on a political concept but rather on an economic one since it promoted protection of domestic production and the increase and diversification of our exports.

Economic survival is implicit in the principle of economic security which took shape in the Charter of Alta Gracia; in the integration with neighboring countries (bilaterally as well as multilaterally) to broaden the margins of autonomy, as pointed out by Puig [1988, 34-35]; in the improvement of the balance of trade in our favor by means of the diversification of destinations; in the increase in industrial exports, etc. [JAPAZ, 1985, 232-235]

5. THE INTERNATIONAL SYSTEM AND A DEVELOPING COUNTRY

It is important to understand that autonomy and insertion are not empty concepts and they are not worth much by themselves. This is not merely a conceptual matter, it is also a matter of analyzing the international scene and the opportunities it may offer.

Even if there is a historiographic debate that aims at determining exactly when the classic model of insertion ends, we think that the end of World War II was decisive since a new international scene appeared after the definitive displacement of the Europeans and the rise of the Soviet Union and the United States, situation which had an impact on our foreign policy. [SIMONOFF, 2003c, 146]

The projects of joining the new international scene were tainted by the struggle between autonomist ideals and insertion vis-à-vis the United States, which we call new foreign policies (1946-1983). The lack of institutional stability gave rise to constant changes as civilian and military governments passed and even in some cases within each administration. Due to this lack of stability, our country had an incoherent attitude towards the international sphere. This was one of the main reasons it lost influence worldwide; which is contemplated by both approaches though with different meanings.

The post-World War II scenario posed difficulties for Argentina. The American leadership aimed at solving problems in its relation with the country which had existed at least since the end of the 19th century: hemispheric security and the application of a non-intervention policy.

The new Cold War reality was a unique opportunity for the United States to tear down the obstacles in its relation with Latin America in general and with Argentina in particular.

The first objective turned out to be relatively simple: the bipolar world proved a strong argument for the signing of 1947 Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance, and nobody in the hemispheric community, including our country, was willing to stay at the margins of this new reality, regardless of criticism against Washington.

The second objective, that of non-intervention, proved more difficult since the general tendency of the period was to reduce it gradually but significantly. Yet, it wasn't a linear process but rather a much more complex one.

It is obvious that the situation in Cuba heightened Washington's obsessive focus on the region which, consequently, increased interference in domestic affairs by means of the National Security Doctrine and led to the justification of military coups against civil reformist governments that appeared after World War II.

Argentina's behavior towards the region changed. We can see an attempt, especially during civil administrations, to create cooperative associations to diminish the weight of Washington and other superpowers, like Western and Eastern Europe and the Afro-Asian world.

Both Peronists and Radicals and their variations supported this position. However, this new Argentine model of international insertion had powerful enemies, domestic as well as foreign. Some were related to the old agro-export model and others were new ones such as foreign investors who strived to change that relation to cater for Washington's interests rather than our own.

5.1. THE ASYMMETRIC STRATEGY TOWARDS THE UNITED STATES

In the relation with the United States, we can see an asymmetric pattern of interaction. Even if this asymmetry was not new, since both Perón and Frondizi had tried it, the terms in which it was dealt with were. Political stands were more flexible and pragmatic like in the case of Santo Domingo. This sparked a strong debate inside and outside the government.

Examples of pragmatism are found in the reform proposed in the OEA charter on the issue of Venezuela, in the trip to Southern Vietnam and in the ambiguous attitude adopted towards the intervention in Santo Domingo of supporting multilateral intervention without sending troops. These events did not satisfy neither those who expected to continue with a more traditional non-intervention policy nor those closer to an alignment with the United States, such as the military. As Rapoport states, these...

(...) hesitations and ambiguities on the part of the Argentine government in this case –within the frame of the shift in American foreign policy with President Johnson- set precedent for the American change of attitude towards Argentina. [RAPOPORT, 2002, 192]

The signs sent by the government and their political gestures were deemed ambiguous and in many cases, misunderstood. Besides, the redefinition of the much mentioned non-intervention concept has a pragmatic rather than a doctrinal origin, with future ideological implications, though. 4

From an economic point of view, the annulment of the oil contracts generated friction with the United States. However, this did not affect our relation with that country in its entirety. Even if with those contracts the country had come close to self-sufficiency, the exploitation of the resource was not rational,

something which the state company did guarantee. It is evident that for the Radical administration, the strengthening of autonomist ideals was grounded on economics and not on politics.

But there was one difficulty, since the United States was not only trying to avoid communism in the region. Reformist-populist regimes were also on their list of enemies.

The development of this type of regime, which Illia's administration fits perfectly, was frowned upon by Washington since they expected the implementation of free market policies to promote exports towards peripheral countries. As a collateral effect, the Johnson Doctrine started to back authoritarian regimes that safeguarded American interests rather than democratic ones, which limited the international arena. [CARELLA y MONETA, 1974, 104]

5.2. COMPENSATING STRATEGIES: WESTERN EUROPE AND THE SOCIALIST BLOC

The creation of several options was one of the priorities for this foreign policy. Traditional as well as completely new interlocutors were aimed at.

Among the traditional ones was Western Europe, a historical counterpart for Washington. However, subsidies policies in the European Economic Union hindered this strategy even if the government still managed to find ways of economic approach.

Western Europe gradually lost its share in our exports. Some countries, such as the United Kingdom and GDR, did not wish to compete with the United States for these markets, neither as regards goods nor as regards destination for their investments, which counteracted the compensating effect that these strategies would have had. The exception was Gaullist France. This political project was after an "autonomizing" policy and therefore was more interested in establishing relations with the countries of the region.

The USSR was half way between a traditional and a new interlocutor since the constant interruptions in the relation since 1930 would always force a brand-new start. This is what happened with Yrigoyen, Perón and Frondizi. For this Radical administration, the USSR was a market with the potential of replacing the restrictions of Community Europe but also a possibility to diversify our energy sources. Excellent trade relations were a result of a pragmatic policy towards that part of the world which made dissent no obstacle to them.

5.3. HORIZONTAL STRATEGIES: LATIN AMERICA AND THE THIRD WORLD

After what we have stated, it is evident that this government gave the region priority status. In its foreign policy we see the emphasis placed on multilateral mechanisms. As an example of this, we find those initiatives tending to reinforce the economic link, as part of its foreign trade and growth strategies concerning the widening of margins for maneuvering, and those tending to mediate between hard and soft sectors which were closer to the States. This in itself meant a change for our country since it had usually sided with the hard sectors.

Bilateral policy marks a first regional nucleus, in which bordering countries are clearly favored in the search for economic complementation, greater integration, infrastructure works and the resolution of border disputes.

Only in one case multilateralization took place with one of the bordering countries, Brazil. The Argentine government tried to diminish the influence of the Brazilian government both in the bilateral as well as in the regional spheres, since the existence of a military regime reinforced its image of pivot country in favor of the United States.

Like previous civil administrations, such as Perón's and Frondizi's, Illia looked for a privileged partner. Unlike them, who had chosen Brazil, the Radical administration chose Chile, which also allowed for a better regional positioning, especially in relation to Brazil. This created an interesting balance in the region, which evidences, once again, a very clever pragmatism.

Joining the Non-Aligned Movement was definitely something new. On the one hand, it had the goals we have already pointed out of increasing the number of interlocutors but it also had a specific motivation which was the Falkland situation. We also need to highlight the attempt to recognize Popular China, but clearly in this case, domestic weakness prevented the completion of this action.

5.4. DEVELOPMENT POLICY AND ECONOMIC SECURITY

Dissent with international financial agencies was a result of their interference in domestic issues of the Argentine government since they prescribed neoliberal "recipes" which were very different from those

promoted by the Radicals. As a result, the government imposed its own programs, without breaking up with those agencies.

As we stated earlier, the focus of our development policy and economic security was market diversification: price improvement for our products, struggle against policies of agricultural protectionism and opening new markets. Integration, regardless of how privileged the region was, had an instrumental value in the face of these other problems.

Evidently, Argentina took advantage of its traditional markets and aimed at finding new ones disregarding ideological barriers and despite the foreign minister's pro-Western stand. The administration achieved this diversification, mainly as a result of the participation of socialist countries and, to a lesser extent, Afro-Asian countries which were considered potential destinations for our exports.

We should also mention the signing of the Charter of Alta Gracia in this multilateral economic policy. Under the auspices of the charter, commodity countries discussed and analyzed their international trade situation, and raised their voices against the discrimination commodities suffered in the trade world.

The "World Food Forum", as generous as it might sound, had a more pragmatic side to it: finding where to place our agricultural surplus.

5.5. TERRITORIAL POLICY

The government ratified the declaration of sovereignty on our territorial sea and on our continental and epicontinental platform. Border disputes with Chile and Uruguay could not be solved during the administration due to several domestic reasons.

The passing of Law 2065 evidenced political insight, an accurate understanding of the international scene and a sense of opportunity which evidence a very strong pragmatism. Opening the dialogue with the United Kingdom was a decisive step in itself. This was a result of a reality-based idealism which was wasted by the following military government, so keen on geopolitics and the National Security Doctrine, as Miranda points out [1994].

This opportunity was wasted during the "Argentine Revolution" since the forms drawn up by the joint commission were not replied to in time. In these forms Great Britain made the most significant acknowledgement of our sovereignty over the Falklands/Malvinas.

6. CONCLUSIONS

The abrupt end of this constitutional experience hindered these ideas from bearing fruit. Many were simply abandoned.

The variety of concepts surrounding the autonomist issue provides us with many options that we have explored throughout this work. Therefore, we think it is very important to highlight certain aspects.

Domestic and foreign circumstances limited this autonomist policy. Among domestic circumstances, we find an income distribution struggle between sectors as well as the policy logics that ruled the situation, sometimes setting people with similar ideas against each other. The foreign context was of growing pressure from Washington towards the region, which limited the autonomist potential of the Argentine government.

However, an efficient use of available resources, many times due to ideological coincidences (between foreign bureaucracy and our foreign minister) and some other times due to strong pragmatism allowed for a fair share of autonomism.

The balance in the strategic-military sphere, which was up to a certain extent neglected due to the ideological convictions of Zavala Ortiz⁵, is not so positive. But the non-compliance with the sending of troops must be valued, even if our support to the multilateral intervention to cover the American invasion of the Dominican Republic meant a significant change. On the other hand, in the economic field, there is a clearly autonomist policy.

The priority given to the region, and to Southern countries in general, is another aspect of autonomism vis-à-vis Washington, but it was complemented with compensating strategies towards Western Europe, which was less and less relevant, and towards the socialist bloc, which was completely receptive to our exports and could provide us with energy as well as with technological resources.

However, despite important achievements in the domestic as well as in the international arenas, the solutions adopted inconvenienced many power groups. And it was them who conspired against Illia's government and worked on the coup which finally took place on June 28th, 1966 and opened the Western option, a new setback to our international insertion.

Evidently, theory must continue to dig deep in order to achieve an accurate reading of the international scene which should look for gaps for the generation of autonomy and for the consolidation of a domestic front which will extend beyond the duration of one administration.

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1 Actually, in Escudé's work, anarchy as a concept appears later on and is presented as marginal and not integral to the international system.

2 This aspect is denied by Puig, who only considers it a mere discursive matter.

3 According to Alexander George, national interest has clearly two senses:

The concept has been used in two different ways: first, as criterion to assess what is at stake in any given situation and to decide which is the "best" course of action; secondly, as justification for already made decisions. Especially, as regards the later use national interest there are reasons to feel uneasy and unsatisfied. [GEORGE, 1991, 224]

We choose the latter use of the concept.

4 As Krasner states, these principles are used ambiguously: "governors adhere to the conventional norms or rules because this grants them with resources and support (both material and ideological). On occasions, they have broken the rules for the very same reasons." [KRASNER, 2001, 41]

5 The idea of the anticommunist crusade was one of the key elements in liberal institutional thinking, which had been a part of other crusades such as that of democracy against totalitarianism of the '30s and '40s.