

## **The Wrong Partner: Peripheral Realism and Argentina's Defense Foreign Policy towards China and the United States between 2005 and 2015**

*El socio equivocado: el realismo periférico y la Política Exterior de Defensa Argentina hacia China y Estados Unidos entre 2005 y 2015*

**Victoria Álvarez Magañini**

**Lautaro Nahuel Rubbi\*\***

**Resumen:** Nos enfrentamos a un contexto internacional inestable, condicionado por un declive relativo del poder norteamericano, sobre todo en el ámbito económico. Este escenario de creciente multipolaridad genera tensiones e incertidumbre en los países periféricos a la hora de diseñar su política exterior. En este trabajo se presenta un análisis de las relaciones bilaterales en el ámbito de la defensa que la Argentina tuvo con Estados Unidos y con China en el periodo 2005-2015, para identificar las consecuencias empíricas de las acciones argentinas en ambos casos. A partir del marco conceptual del realismo periférico, se analizan aspectos relacionados con el comercio de armas, los préstamos para la defensa, los ejercicios conjuntos y la capacitación de personal. Las conclusiones indican que, en un mundo donde la unipolaridad norteamericana en términos militares es aún indiscutible, la política argentina de alineamiento con China y de confrontación con los Estados Unidos en materia de Seguridad Internacional trajo pocos beneficios y múltiples consecuencias para el país en materia de Defensa.

**Palabras Clave:** Realismo Periférico – Defensa – China – Estados Unidos – Argentina

Degree in Government and International Relations from Universidad Argentina de la Empresa. Student of the Master in Cyber Defense and Cybersecurity from Universidad de Buenos Aires. VictoriaAlvarezmag@gmail.com

\*\* Master in International Studies from Universidad Torcuato Di Tella. Ph.D (c) in International Studies from Universidad Torcuato Di Tella. Nowadays, he is teacher in Universidad Argentina de la Empresa. Lrubbi@uade.edu.ar

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**Abstract:** We live in an unstable international context, characterized by a relative decline of American power, primarily in the economic sphere. This scenario of growing multi-polarity produces tensions and uncertainty in peripheral countries at the time of developing their foreign policy. This work presents an analysis of the bilateral relationships in the defense sphere that Argentina had with the United States and with China in the period 2005 - 2015, to identify the empirical consequences of Argentinian actions in each case. Based on the conceptual framework of peripheral realism, we analyze aspects related to arms trades, loans on defense, joint exercises and training of personnel. The conclusions indicate that, in a world where US unipolarity in military terms is still indisputable, Argentina's policy of alignment with China and confrontation with the United States in matters of international security represented few benefits and multiple consequences for the country in terms of its defense agenda.

**Keywords:** Peripheral realism – Defense – China - United States – Argentina

## **Introduction: A system in incomplete transition**

Based on the theoretical bases of Peripheral Realism (PR), an international relations theory with clear prescriptions for peripheral countries, the following work aims to investigate the consequences for the Defense agenda of Argentina's Foreign Policy during the 2005-2015 decade with respect to the two main superpowers: the United States and China. In a complex world where the hegemonic transition is still incomplete, the PR can provide adequate guidance, but only if the context of the International system is accurately comprehended and the 'right partners' are chosen. This case study points to the decisions of Argentina's foreign policy in this regard and the consequences that resulted from them on its Defense Agenda.

First, to understand the development of the following work, it is imperative to develop an overview of the International System during the second decade of the 21st century. In this regard, many authors conclude that American unipolarity, which characterized the world during the 90s, is over. The world today is characterized by a decline in relative terms in US economic supremacy, mainly in the face of the enormous rise of China and other emerging powers. Never in history, a nation has grown so high and in so many dimensions of power in such a short time as China. Over the course of 20 years, it has maintained its growth rates between 8 and 12% and has multiplied its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) by 12<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> The growth rates of China in recent years and the projected estimates for the future are three times higher compared to those of the United States. In addition, China has already surpassed the United States as the world's largest trading partner, the largest holder of foreign reserves, destination for foreign direct investment, energy consumer and steel producer. Today, China is also the main market for cars, smartphones, e-commerce, luxury goods, and internet users. At the military level, the United States remains the world's only superpower. But in all other dimensions (industrial, financial, educational, social, cultural) the distribution of power is moving away from American domination.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> World Bank. 2018. "China Economic Performance [GDP (US\$ at current prices)]". *World Bank Group*. June 8. <https://datos.bancomundial.org/indicador/NY.GDP.MKTP.KD.ZG?locations=CN>

<sup>1</sup> World Bank. 2018. "China Economic Performance [GDP (US\$ at current prices)]". *World Bank Group*. June 8. <https://datos.bancomundial.org/indicador/NY.GDP.MKTP.KD.ZG?locations=CN>

<sup>2</sup> Allison Graham, *Destined for War: Can America and China Escape Thucydides's Trap?* (Scribe, 2017), pág. 9.

<sup>3</sup> Zakaria Fareed, *The post american world. Release 2.0.* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2011), pág. 4.

This situation indicates that Argentina, like many other peripheral countries, is on the threshold of a new historical era that can improve its global insertion, since it shares a complementary economy with the rising power.<sup>4</sup> However, in terms of military power and political influence, the transition is yet not so clear. Consequently, it is a moment of uncertainty for the construction of foreign policy in peripheral countries.

In this regard, it is essential to stress that US supremacy in military terms remains undisputed: Its annual investment in defense exceeds that of the following ten states, being three times that of China by 2017.<sup>5</sup> It maintains the world's second largest nuclear arsenal in terms of the number of warheads and the first in qualitative terms, far ahead of the Chinese arsenal in size. Its navy remains the largest and most advanced in the world, the only one with effectively global reach and patrolling power across all major oceans.<sup>6</sup> In addition, the United States is the largest weapons exporter, with 33% of the world total exports between 2011-2016, while China accounts for only 6,2%.<sup>7</sup> The United States is also the leading international lender for defense matters and the one who takes part in the largest number of joint military exercises. It also has military bases in at least 46 countries and troops around most of the world.<sup>8</sup> The United States also has security partnerships with more than 60 countries, while China has only one (North Korea).<sup>9</sup>

In terms of conventional firepower capabilities, considering tanks, armed combat vehicles, tactical combat aircraft, and helicopters, bombers, strategic attack drones, submarines and ships, American superiority is indisputable.<sup>10</sup> Despite China's impressive growth in its military capabilities, these are still not even remotely close to those of the United States. Christensen is clear: 'Any quantitative measure of national power will conclude that U.S. military leadership is enormous and historically virtually unprecedented'.<sup>11</sup> In relative terms, the United States is likely to remain the most powerful player in the system for several decades to come, a pattern that is replicated and maximized in the Americas due to obvious geographical conditions.

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<sup>4</sup> Carlos Escudé "China y la inserción internacional de Argentina", *Documentos de trabajo de la Universidad del CEMA*, No. 462, (Buenos Aires: Universidad del CEMA, 2011), pág. 4, <https://www.econstor.eu/bitstream/10419/84494/1/669351741.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), *SIPRI yearbook 2016: armaments, disarmament and international security* (Oxford University Press, 2016), págs. 510-519.

<sup>6</sup> Max Boot, *War made new. Weapons, warriors and the making of the modern world*. (New York: Gotham Books, 2006), pág. 421.

<sup>7</sup> SIPRI, *op. cit.*, pág. 567

<sup>8</sup> IISS, T. I. *The Military Balance 2016* (Glasgow, United Kingdom: Routledge. Taylor & Francis Group, 2016).

<sup>9</sup> Michael Beckley "The Myth of Entangling Alliances", *International Security*, Vol. 39, No. 4 (Spring 2015), págs. 7-48.

<sup>10</sup> IISS, *op. cit.*

<sup>11</sup> Thomas Christensen, *The China challenge: Shaping the choices of a rising power* (WW Norton & Company, 2015), pág. 182.

Faced with this scenario, then we can say that we currently live in a world of multiple boards.<sup>12</sup> The economic, military and political levels are no longer dominated by a single hegemonic power. A 'double periphery' is being reconfigured, where peripheral states are falling into the orbit of an established power and a rising power, which makes the international dynamic more ambiguous and the problem of calculation errors more dramatic.<sup>13</sup> This forces less powerful countries like Argentina to rethink their international insertion. So far, Peripheral Realism, a foreign policy theory that was on the rise in the 1990 decade, remains an adequate guide in certain aspects.

However, despite the direct influence that peripheral realism has had on the formation of the foreign policy of some peripheral countries (especially Argentina), few concrete developments have been made to effectively measure the costs or benefits of adopting a position of alignment or opposition vis-à-vis the major powers. Peripheral realism, in general, has not been tested.

In regard of this, the objective of this paper is to conduct an empirical analysis of the consequences of the failure to apply the PR's prescriptions to Argentine foreign policy during the 2005-2015 decade, in order to contrast theory with facts. The analysis, in this case, is restricted to Argentina's defense agenda and the bilateral relationship maintained with the two main powers of the international system of the 21st century: the United States of America and the People's Republic of China. We present a qualitative case study of Argentina in the period 2005-2015, by taking the theoretical framework of peripheral realism as a base for the analysis of the content of diverse secondary sources in order to explore on the consequences of Argentina's relations with both countries.

The independent variable (foreign policy of the peripheral country towards the hegemonic state) is structured from an analysis of Argentina's foreign policy towards China and the US at the Defense and International Security Agenda through reference to official documents, executive power declarations and concrete actions in the field of foreign policy. On the other side, the dependent variable (response of the hegemonic state) is measured through various indicators pertinent to the defense agenda (mainly arms trade, joint military exercises and training of troops abroad). The research was based on the use of secondary sources such as official

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<sup>12</sup> Joseph Nye, "The twenty-first century will not be a "post-American" world", *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 56. No. 1 (2012), págs. 215-217.

<sup>13</sup> Juan Battaleme, "Realismo periférico y doble periferias: La política de seguridad internacional de Chile y Argentina frente al ascenso de Brasil y la preponderancia norteamericana", *Revista de la Sociedad Argentina de Análisis Político*, Vol. 21, No. 1 (Junio de 2016), págs. 11-42.

government reports, and reports and databases from International Organizations and Non-Governmental Organizations. We did not advance on the collection of data from primary sources, such as conducting interviews, since we consider that the actors who were active in the formulation and execution of Argentina's foreign policy during the period under study present biased visions, given their own role during it. However, it is proposed to incorporate these sources in future studies.

We also have excluded from the analysis discussions on the domestic formulation of Argentina's foreign policy in the period under review, as well as other important aspects, such as the relationship between the Foreign Policy and the Security and Defense agendas, and budgetary and legal issues, among others. The objective of this work is not to develop a comprehensive analysis of the situation of the armed forces in the selected period. On the contrary, the aim is to give priority to a commonly neglected factor when dealing with this topic, such as the relationship with strategic actors of the International System, in order to look more deeply into this important variable of analysis

The defense agenda has been chosen because it is a subject of radical importance for any State within the international system, especially during a hegemonic transition such as the current one. Although often overtaken by economic issues, the logic of realism, security, geopolitical competition, defense, and survival continue to operate on the strategic calculation of states. Moreover, in view of the increase in number and importance of transnational state and non-state threats, among which organized crime and drug trafficking stand out in the case of Argentina, the national defense cannot be simply neglected. It is likely that the logic of interstate confrontation has been overcome in the Latin American region; however, transnational threats continue to grow in size, strength, and danger. At the same time, the unresolved conflict over the Malvinas islands continues to be a cause for the maintenance of capable armed forces, under the premise of imposing costs on the British strategic calculation of its position.

The PR of Carlos Escudé has given priority to economic development over security, leaving the latter as an area of exclusive relevance for the geopolitical game of the great powers. Except for a few brief studies made by Escudé himself concerning the purchase of Chinese arms, PR has never been used to discuss national security issues. So, this work presents a new point of view that can be useful for the development of successful foreign policies in Argentina and the rest of the world.

Regarding the structure of the paper, in the first part PR theory is developed, making special reference to the existence of a relationship between the Foreign Policy of a peripheral country with respect to a superpower and the relative gains for the peripheral country that could arise from that relationship. Based on this assumption, we then analyze Argentina's foreign policy towards the United States and China at the Defense and International Security Agenda. Finally, we investigate the practical consequences for Argentina of these behaviors in the field of defense.

The conclusions indicate that, while the hegemonic transition is still not clear at the military level, with the United States remaining as the main power, during the decade under study Argentina developed a confrontation policy towards the US and an alignment policy towards China in the field of international security. This alignment with China brought few benefits to Argentina, while the confrontation with the United States had practical consequences in terms of defense. In other words, having chosen a 'wrong partner' to exercise its policies of alignment and confrontation, Argentina was adversely affected in its military and defense capabilities. In this case, a misreading of the international system, as predicted by Peripheral Realism, had profound consequences for a peripheral country like Argentina.

## **Introduction to the Theory of Peripheral Realism**

For many years, the International Relations discipline lacked a normative study attempted to clarify which are the most functional foreign policies for the growth and development of a peripheral country.<sup>14</sup> In this regard, many Latin American theorists rebelled against Anglo-Saxon realism, which was insufficient to explain the entire international system; understanding that the absence of a theory based on the lack of power and the subsequent importation of conventional theory is potentially harmful. When the Third World replaces the great powers as the author of the theory, new kinds of problems, research agendas and methods of knowledge take place. Among other things, in Latin America, for example, there is no perception that the international system is anarchic, but rather the opposite. The modification of this basic assumption opens a whole new spectrum of possible theorizations and practical prescriptions associated with the context of the periphery.

<sup>14</sup> Carlos Escudé, *El realismo de los Estados Débiles. La política exterior del primer gobierno de Menem frente a la teoría de las Relaciones Internacionales* (Buenos Aires: Grupo Editorial Latinoamericano, 1995), pág. 4.



Peripheral realism is a foreign policy theory derived from the Latin American perspective of the peripheral states, structured by Carlos Escudé, its main exponent, in the 1990's. It was a theoretical development especially produced to give a more pragmatic character to Argentina's foreign policy.

The PR theory attempts to correct some of the main concepts of the Realist and Neo-realist schools of international relations, objecting the idea that the international system has an anarchic structure. Together with this, it criticizes the two main consequences of this assumption: the maximization of security over other priorities -the well-being of citizens- (and therefore the hierarchization of the agenda around security) and the autonomy of the political sphere in relation to other spheres of action of the state and of human life. Focused on supporting the development of the foreign policies of developing countries, PR is a theory of international relations with enormous normative value.

Even if it opposes the assumption of total anarchy, the PR still represents, according to the author himself, a kind of Realism. Political realists consider a 'rational' foreign policy (objective and not passionate) to be a good foreign policy since only a rational foreign policy minimizes risks and maximizes profits.<sup>15</sup> According to Escudé, in the PR, self-interest and the calculation of costs and benefits of states' foreign policy actions remains the foundational stone of the theory, which is deprived of idealistic allusions. The PR's concern lies in the tangible rewards and punishments that result from the action at the international level, a level where there is inequality between self-interested states.<sup>16</sup>

Escudé's theory is based on the assumptions that there are unwritten rules in the inter-state order and that the most powerful states have a preponderant role in setting them. For the PR, good foreign policy must recognize that there is no absolute freedom of a state to act in the interstate system.<sup>17</sup> Thus, the peripheral approach introduces a different way of understanding the international system, that is, from the unique point of view of states that do not impose the 'rules of the game' and that suffer higher costs when confronted with those on the top of the hierarchy.<sup>18</sup> According to this theory, the interstate reality is more complex

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<sup>15</sup> Hans Morgenthau, *Politics among nations: The struggle for power and peace* (New York: Alfred P. Knopf, 1948), pág. 10.

<sup>16</sup> Carlos Escudé, *Principios de realismo periférico. Una teoría argentina y su vigencia ante el ascenso de China* (Buenos Aires: Lumiere, 2012): pág. 106.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, págs. 18-20

<sup>18</sup> Carlos Escudé, "Realismo periférico. Una filosofía de política exterior para Estados Débiles". *Serie Documentos de Trabajo de la Universidad del CEMA*, No. 406 (Septiembre 2009), págs. 2-3.



than Waltz's anarchy in a significant way, as the differences in capabilities are so great that they generate different types of states with different needs and functionally differentiated roles. There are states 'authorized' to command and others 'obliged' to obey.<sup>19</sup>

For the PR the interstate system is 'imperfectly hierarchical': it presents two behavior principles and not one as Waltz's conventional structural realism points out.<sup>20</sup> A similar distribution of power is preceded by the principle of anarchy, with the development of the behavioral patterns of structural realism. But in the face of an unequal distribution of power, the guiding principle is the hierarchy or proto hierarchy, which conditions the space for maneuver and autonomy of weak countries. It is this hierarchy that sets the rules and sets out what is allowed and what is not. Anarchy, recognized *prima facie* by most theoretical approaches to international relations tends to be limited to the great powers. The international structure is therefore made up of three types of states that are functionally distinct from each other: rule-makers, rule-takers, and rebels.<sup>21</sup>

Once the differentiation of the capacities and functions of the States of the system has been established, the important is to note that the weak and peripheral states are forced to accept an inter-State hierarchy under the risk of suffering great sanctions from the dominant powers. Autonomy in PR is not understood as freedom of action, but rather in terms of the costs of using that freedom, the 'consumption of autonomy'. The maneuvers *vis-à-vis* other states are costly and even the strongest face limits to their 'freedom' in the outside world.<sup>22</sup> In this regard, PR emphasizes the costs to the citizens of states without the power to set the rules of challenging the order established by the strong. Mere consumption of autonomy is contrary to the 'national' interest of peripheral countries; even if it does not produce immediate tangible costs.<sup>23</sup>

Another important premise of the PR lies in its distinction between the interest defined in terms of power for strong states, versus the interest defined in terms of development for weak states. According to Escudé, in the agenda of peripheral realism, that is, in the agenda of weak countries, economic power replaces military force as the goal of interstate politics. The author maintains that we must disagree with Morgenthau when he proposes that the main objective of international politics is the concept of interest defined in terms of power.<sup>24</sup> At least from a peripheral perspective,

<sup>19</sup> Carlos Escudé, *Principios de realismo periférico. Una teoría argentina y su vigencia ante el ascenso de China*, pág. 20.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, pág. 42

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, págs. 101-112.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> Morgenthau, *Politics among nations: The struggle for power and peace*, pág. 5.

the correct formulation is that the main objective is the concept of interest defined in terms of economic development, without which there can be no real power in the long term, nor well-being for the population.<sup>25</sup> According to this, peripheral states must avoid the logic of confrontation in search of power and should look for the promotion of economic development.

Furthermore, the PR understands that at the international level, and especially with regard to the peripheral countries, the economic and political spheres are intertwined, rejecting the postulates on the autonomy of the political sphere, characteristic of Classical Realism. Escudé understands that, in practice, the different agendas of the States are overlapped and interconnected at the international level, developing cross consequences between them. For the author, the confrontations or concessions that the peripheral countries carry out in the political sphere will have their correlate in the economic sphere.<sup>26</sup>

From Escudé's perspective of the PR, the direct consequence of breaking the main assumptions of structural realism is that non-central states must avoid confronting the superpowers in order to avoid paying high economic and social costs. The PR understands that reducing costs and risks must be the main objective of a dependent state's foreign policy.<sup>27</sup> Therefore, confrontational policies must be avoided and relegated to the interests of the nation's economic development. Involvement in unproductive political confrontations with major powers should be avoided, even if such confrontations do not generate costs immediately, as they could generate costs in the future. The secret of success for a peripheral country like Argentina lies in not practicing a 'sterile rebellion'. As the Japanese, West Germans or South Koreans did under US hegemony, alignment is the tactic that will most benefit the weak states. According to the PR, only commercial and financial disputes are justified, not political or symbolic ones. Foreign policy, then, must be the result of an immediate and contingent cost-benefit calculation. The capacity for confrontation, as if it were a scarce good, must be saved.<sup>28</sup>

Having seen the main prescriptions of peripheral realism for the foreign policy behavior of non-central states, we will now focus on the bilateral relationships that Argentina has maintained with both the United States and China, especially on those aspects related to the sphere of defense and international security. Finally, the consequences of such relations

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<sup>25</sup> Escudé, *Principios de realismo periférico. Una teoría argentina y su vigencia ante el ascenso de China*, pág. 102

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, págs. 43-45

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, pág. 102

<sup>28</sup> Carlos Escudé "El realismo periférico y su relevancia teórica ante el ascenso de China", *Desarrollo económico - Revista de Ciencias Sociales*, No. 51, (January - March 2012), págs. 529-542.

will be observed, in order to conclude on the positive or negative results of the positions adopted.

## **Argentine-United States relationship at the Security Agenda between 2005 and 2015**

At the beginning of the 21st century, Argentina's foreign policy presented signs of change, following its main characteristic: constant fluctuation. Domestic considerations, also ever-changing, determined to a large extent the basic guidelines of Argentina's foreign policy during the first years of the new millennium. In the case of the United States, Argentina left behind 'carnal relations' to turn them into primarily conflictual relations.<sup>29</sup>

Returning to its historical path, since the beginning of the new millennium, Argentina has behaved erratically in the field of defense and security in relation to the United States. On the one hand, it was completely confrontational on the rhetorical level, opposing the United States on several matters related to international security, although it continued to have limited trade relations with the country. In addition, Argentina supported Venezuela and Brazil, resumed the rhetoric of dispute over the Malvinas islands and abandoned military exercises with the United States and NATO countries.<sup>30</sup> In this sense, and as the first decade of the 21st century unfolded, Argentina moved away from the PR, deepening this situation in the second decade, with the change from the administration of Néstor Kirchner to the one of Cristina Fernández de Kirchner.<sup>31</sup> A relationship of distance rather than convergence was developed between these two countries, whether due to the non-complementarity of their economies, Argentina's defiant attitude at the Pan American Conferences or the excessive arrogance of the United States on certain issues. In general terms, it can be noted that there have been more frictions than encounters.<sup>32</sup>

One clear example was that Argentina maintained an ambivalent profile in fields such as international terrorism, proliferation and the fight against drug trafficking during the Kirchnerist mandate. Also, accompanying the rejection of the Free Trade Area Of The Americas agreement (FTAA), this being the most important and ambitious project of the Uni-

<sup>29</sup> Facundo Calvo, 2012. "La política exterior de la Argentina hacia los Estados Unidos (2003-2011)". *Argentinareal*. 29 de octubre. <http://argentinareal.org/la-politica-exterior-de-la-argentina-hacia-los-estados-unidos-2003-2011/> (Consultado el 10 de Junio de 2018), párr. 05-25.

<sup>30</sup> Francisco Corigliano, "La política exterior de Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner: una típica política de un gobierno peronista del S.XXI", *Mural Internacional*, No. 1, (2011), págs. 22-27.

<sup>31</sup> Battaleme, *op. cit.*, pág. 22.

<sup>32</sup> Calvo, *op. cit.*

ted States in recent years at the continental level, tactical needs began to emerge on the part of the government of Néstor Kirchner, linked to Argentina's debt, energy and repositioning in terms of the region, which led to an increase in the opposition against the United States.<sup>33</sup>

This shift in external priorities began to be felt in the field of Argentina's defense and international security agendas, moving forward with protective nationalism and continuing with the discourse of the 'war for the resources'. The confrontational rhetoric only served to increase mistrust of the United States and silently abandon the extra-NATO ally status that had been obtained in the late 1990's, taking positions back to stages prior to the decade of normalization of relations.<sup>34</sup> After these events, the military exercises with the U.S. Armed Forces were reduced, their troops were denied entry into the country, the agreed exercise programs were canceled and the educational exchange programs of Argentine civilians with U.S. defense institutions were questioned. In addition, the Argentine government refrained from censoring Cuba within the United Nations Commission on Human Rights.<sup>35</sup>

Under the same confrontational and messianic rhetoric, the conflict over the Malvinas Islands began to increase again, leading to a growing diplomatic confrontation with the United Kingdom and an attempt of regionalizing the territorial dispute with a measure similar to a 'subtle' blockade. As a result of the increasing level of confrontation, Argentina faced direct sanctions and created the opportunity for the United Kingdom to point to a worsening of the security situation in the South Atlantic; not as a result of military action, but as a result of indiscriminate rhetoric and measures such as closing the region's ports to vessels with flag of the Malvinas Islands.

These acts contributed to the increase of the limited opposition policy until it reached its highest point with the arrest of a C-17 US military aircraft that had been authorized to carry out exercises with the Security Forces and Arms Forces. There was also an incident in which Argentina seized military equipment owned by the U.S. government. Argentina's contacts with Iran led to increased friction as well<sup>36</sup>, accompanying the announced and later failed nuclear and missile cooperation with Venezuela, openly opposed to the United States. As a result, the US decided to totally restrict military cooperation.

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<sup>33</sup> Battaleme, *op. cit.*, págs. 22-24.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibíd.*

<sup>35</sup> Calvo, *op. cit.*

<sup>36</sup> José Siaba Serrate, "EEUU: el triunfo de Obama, su política exterior y las relaciones con la Argentina", *ancmyp*, 15 de noviembre. <https://www.ancmyp.org.ar/user/files/01-Siaba-serrate-busso.pdf>, pág. 10.

In addition to this, there have been many 'anti-imperialist' statements and speeches, such as the one made in the Women's Hall of the Casa Rosada in 2014, during which President Cristina Fernandez went so far as to accuse "if something happens to me, don't look east, look north!".<sup>37</sup> All these elements reaffirmed the distance between the two countries. From the perspective of the three Kirchnerist administrations, the United States was more a problem than a partner. At the same time, Washington considered Argentina as an ambiguous actor, shaping the relationship of apathy, weariness, and indifference. As we will see, this had direct consequences for Argentina over the improvement of its defense capabilities.

## **Argentine-China Relationship at the Security Agenda between 2005 and 2015**

From the beginning of the 21st century, China began to play a global geopolitical and economic role with important implications for Latin American countries. Today, Beijing is approaching the Latin American area through active economic diplomacy characterized by pragmatism, sustained in conciliation, seeking stability, concerned about not irritating Washington and aimed at strengthening interstate ties.<sup>38</sup> However, China's dependence on the global economy, in addition to its new power, induces it to adopt a new military strategy of international projection to protect its access to food and energy markets. This also included several tries to deploy links with Latin America in the security agenda.

In relation with the global hegemonic transition and in order to show signs of independence from the military-political point of view, Argentina began to work with the expectation of creating agreements with the emerging powers on the security field; especially with Russia and China, also as a way of undermining the US presence in the region.<sup>39, 40</sup>

In 2004, after the visit to China by Néstor Kirchner, the President of China Hu Jintao visited Argentina. In this context, the Argentine govern-

<sup>37</sup> "Si me pasa algo no miren a Oriente, miren hacia el norte: CFK", Video de YouTube, 2:52, publicado por "YouTube", September 30, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oubvDpO02c4>

<sup>38</sup> Juan Gabriel Tokatlian, "Las relaciones entre latinoamérica y China: un enfoque para su aproximación", *Revista Análisis Político*, No. 59 (January - April 2007), págs. 46-56.

<sup>39</sup> Carlos Escudé, "China y Estados Unidos frente a América Latina", *Horizontes Latinoamericanos - Revista de Humanidades e Ciências Sociais do Mercosul Educacional*, No. 2, Vol. 1 (June 2014), págs. 65-78.

<sup>40</sup> Carlos Escudé, 2015. "Una estrategia nacional argentina para una época de transición: China, importaciones militares y realismo periférico". *Web del Observatorio de la Política China*. 27 de Junio. file://xdfileserv01/Profile\_Admin/rubbi/Downloads/1435421942Una\_estrategia\_nacional\_argentina\_para\_una\_epoca\_de\_transicion\_China\_importaciones\_militares\_y\_realismo\_periferico.pdf. Párr. 14.

ment recognized China's market economy status. Both countries saw potential gains for them in the increasing of their relations. In 2008, with the publication of the White Paper on Latin America, continuing with the concept of complementarity as a guide, China made it clear that Latin America could provide it with energy, food, and minerals. This discourse of complementarity and search for natural resources was evident in the case of Argentina, who saw many monetary benefits. However, in part due to the Chinese factor, the official speeches on Argentine economic de-primarization were far from being fulfilled in practice.<sup>41</sup>

Because of Argentina's necessity of Chinese demand, the Kirchner administrations remain remarkably silent on human rights issues in the cases of China and Cuba, ally of the Asian country in the region. The defense of human rights was completely subordinated to the commercial relationship and the potential expectations generated by the Chinese market.<sup>42</sup>

During this century the US developed several suspicions about the Chinese actions in Latin America. The United States observed the economic interdependence and the political cooperation translated into an increase in Chinese influence in the region to the detriment of its own. Other aspects negatively related to Chinese actions in Latin America by the US, were that of an institutional nature (deterioration of corporate transparency due to the negotiation modalities of Chinese firms), the control of maritime traffic in the Panama Canal by Hong Kong companies, the takeover of ports in the Pacific (Manta, Ecuador), the sale of arms to Cuba and Venezuela and the active presence of Chinese triads on the triple border (Paraguay, Brazil and Argentina). Another important development was the increase in Chinese immigration, legal and illegal, which generated tensions over immigration policy and human trafficking.

Regarding Argentina, the aerospace agencies of both countries, the National Space Administration Agency of the People's Republic of China (CNSA) and the National Commission on Space Activities (CONAE), began to cooperate in the design and construction of satellites. Simultaneously, they signed several agreements on nuclear power plants to be located in southern Argentina.<sup>43</sup> In this context, the 'Framework Agreement on Technical Cooperation for the Peaceful Use of Outer Space'

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<sup>41</sup> Eduardo Daniel Oviedo, "El ascenso de China y sus efectos en la relación con Argentina". *Estudios Internacionales*, Vol. 47, No. 180 (Enero 2015), pág. 73. <https://revistaei.uchile.cl/index.php/REI/article/view/36432>

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, pág. 84.

<sup>43</sup> Sergio Cesarin, 2007 "China – Argentina: reflexiones a 35 años del establecimiento de relaciones diplomáticas". *Centro Argentino sobre Estudios Internacionales*. Enero 2017. <http://www.caei.com.ar/workingpaper/china-argentina-reflexiones-35-a%C3%B1os-del-establecimiento-de-relaciones-diplom%C3%A1ticas> (Consultado el 22 de abril de 2018), párr. 21.



was signed in 2004 during the visit of President Hu Jintao to Argentina.<sup>44</sup> There, China expresses its willingness to provide the country with launch services, satellite components, and communication platforms. In 2005, the relation progressed by the signing of a technical consultancy agreement for the manufacture of satellites. Following that, in 2010 the possibility of installing a satellite antenna for the Chinese space program in Argentina began to be studied, finalizing in an agreement reached in 2015. In theory, this type of equipment would facilitate a (highly unlikely) Chinese attack on third country (US) satellites.

As for the security relationship, we can conclude that Argentina tried to reach a mutual understanding with the Asian power, finding shared interests and positions in multiple international forums, in addition to trying to advance in cooperation agreements that exceed the economic level. Similarly, there was mutual support and recognition of Argentine sovereignty over the Malvinas islands and of China over Taiwan.<sup>45</sup> It is also important to point out the various Defense agreements announced that were not finally concreted, a point which will be extended later. In brief, the objective of the position adopted by Argentina was to align itself with Chinese interests, at least from a discursive point of view.

## **Empirical consequences of Argentina's bilateral relations with China and the US for its Security and Defense Agenda**

According to Escudé, from the perspective of the PR, it is assumed that alignment with the established power may have benefits, while confrontation will probably have negative costs for a peripheral country.<sup>46</sup> Having carried out an analysis of the type of relations that Argentina has maintained with both China and the United States, we will now proceed to analyze the consequences of those relations for Argentina.

In this case, the analysis is restricted to the results obtained at the defense agenda, understanding that the maintenance of state sovereignty and the security of its citizens remains a desirable objective of states, even when for RP it is below economic development. We analyze the

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<sup>44</sup> Carlos D'Elia, Carlos Galperín y Néstor Stancanelli, "El rol de China en el mundo y su relación con Argentina", *Revista del CEL*, No. 13 (December 2008), pág. 67-88.

<sup>45</sup> Oviedo, *op. cit.*, pág. 83.

<sup>46</sup> Escudé, *Principios de realismo periférico. Una teoría argentina y su vigencia ante el ascenso de China*, pág. 102.



pattern of arms sales by the major powers to Argentina, financial aid for security and defense issues, joint exercises and training of Argentine troops abroad. From the aggregate of these indicators, the aim is to obtain at least a first approximation to the consequences of a policy of clear confrontation and antagonism with the United States, the leading global military power and regional hegemon, and of alignment with China, an extra-regional rising power.

One important issue to note before proceeding with the study concerns the linking of agendas and issues as a PR premise. In this case, contrary to the analysis commonly carried out by Escudé, we analyze the consequences of Argentina's actions on the same agenda where these actions were made. In the PR, the linkage of issues is conceived in an almost direct way, that is to say, that Argentine actions on the defense agenda are expected to have a direct impact on its economic relations.<sup>47</sup> We understand that further study should be undertaken in this area because, while the linkage of issues certainly exists, in the reality of diplomatic negotiations it is not as simple or direct as the PR intends to conclude. In practice, agendas touch and interact with each other but are not always overlapping.

Having noted the restrictions of the analysis, we can now proceed to analyze Argentina's armed forces situation under the proposed period. In this regard, most researchers and politicians agree that, under a policy that many have come to call 'unilateral disarmament', Argentina's armed forces have diminished in their capabilities since the 1990's, and that this trend has continued in the period under review. Among the many causes are the low budget allocated to the defense area (the lowest in Latin America in relative terms), the disproportionate distribution of this budget and the oldness of most of the military equipment. In addition to this, there was practically no acquisition of new equipment in the last 30 years. Most of the defense systems and equipment in the country are obsolete and/or maintenance-free, dating back 25/35 years. Although a certain number of troop-carrying vehicles and light helicopters have been received, in addition to some airspace control radars, this new material (which in most cases has not fire capabilities or functionality beyond troops transport) was not enough to cover the shortages of the Argentine armed forces.

In this context, Argentina's military equipment supplier scheme has remained small and undiversified over the last decade. According to

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<sup>47</sup> *Ibíd.*, págs. 42-45

data collected by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI),<sup>48</sup> a reference source for international arms trade, it can be noted that the country's main supplier during the period under review was the United States; with the number of arms import agreements having fallen along the decade. Except for the United States, Argentina does not seem to have strong ties with any other important international supplier. Despite the strengthening of diplomatic ties and political declarations, there was little military exchange relationship with Russia and China, two increasingly important players in the international arms commerce. We should also highlight the scarce relationship in military matters with Brazil, a neighboring country, a member of Mercosur, a fundamental commercial partner in other areas and owner of an expanding military industry.

In the case of China, the only purchase of military equipment from the Asian country was of four 6x6 armored personnel carriers type WZ-551, model WZ-551B1, for a total of \$2.6 million. This vehicle, used in large quantities in the Chinese army, was launched in 1984 in its first version. It was exported to countries as dissimilar as Bangladesh, Bosnia, Chad, Burma, Burundi, Cameroon, Congo, Djibouti, Gabon, Indonesia, Iran, Kenya, Nepal, Nigeria, Pakistan, Oman, Senegal, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Tanzania, Venezuela, and Zambia. The acquisition was carried out through international public tender No. 18/2008, in which the Chinese military factory Norinco was the only bidder for the tender, offering three variants of the same basic model. Having closed the agreement at the end of 2008, the 4 vehicles were delivered during 2010. The armored vehicles were purchased to equip the Argentine Joint Battalion assigned to United Nations missions deployed in Gonaives, Haiti, as part of Argentina's participation in the MINUSTAH mission.<sup>49</sup>

In addition to this, after the visit to China in 2015 of the then President of Argentina, Cristina Fernández, a statement was made detailing the positive consequences of her meeting with Chinese President Xi Jinping. Apart from numerous declarations of cooperation intentions, mainly focused on economic and tourism aspects, collaboration agreements in military and defense matters were announced. It was stated that once these agreements were finalized, China would provide a large number of exports on military equipment, providing competitiveness and technological sophistication. In the framework of a military force that had

<sup>48</sup> Stockholm international peace research institute. 2018. "SIPRI Arms Transfer Database". SIPRI. 19 July. [http://armstrade.sipri.org/armstrade/page/trade\\_register.php](http://armstrade.sipri.org/armstrade/page/trade_register.php).

<sup>49</sup> Irene Valiente, 2018. "WZ-551B1, los fallidos blindados argentinos comprados para Haití". Infodefensa. 11 de Agosto. <https://www.infodefensa.com/latam/2018/08/11/noticia-wmz551b1-fallidos-blindados-argentinos-comprados-haiti.html>

been flattened for years, the announcements by the Argentine government were initially well received. China, for its part, saw in the agreements the possibility of extending the relationship beyond the commercial sphere and perhaps using Argentina as a platform to extend its arms sales market throughout Latin America.<sup>50</sup>

However, as of July 2018, only the project for the construction of the outer space control station has progressed, not without numerous demands and debates regarding its legality, utility, and construction process. Apart from that, none of the promises on the acquisition of Chinese military equipment has involved the signing of legal contracts. On the contrary, the cancellation of the acquisition of Chinese light helicopters was public. The most likely cause of this is related to Argentina's budget deficits and tense relations with international creditors, which may have limited its ability to make purchases effective.

These facts are evidence that relations between China and Argentina have been characterized by a lack of continuity in bilateral cooperation policies, mainly between different Argentine administrations, but sometimes even within the same administration. Without ever having reached moments of tension or open confrontation, the understanding between the two countries has varied. This has meant that, on several occasions, the announcements of cooperation made during stages of rapprochement have not been finally implemented. As of July 2018, there was still no news on the acquisition or joint development of naval destroyers, combat aircraft or motorized land vehicles. The extravagance of the agreements signed, in terms of the quantity of equipment, their unlikely joint production and what the amount of the acquisition represented for the country and the region as a whole, together with the fact that virtually none of these projects have been finally carried out, leads us to believe that the agreements were merely a populist announcement with little chance of being implemented from the beginning.

Concerning the relations with the US, it has remained the main supplier of military equipment to Argentina, although with a decreasing influence in the period analyzed. The effect of increasingly tense relations with Argentina affected the provision of military material. No modern equipment from that country was acquired, but only paraphernalia of extreme necessity to keep secondary equipment operational and some second-hand helicopters and ground transport vehicles.

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<sup>50</sup> U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, *China's Military Agreements with Argentina: A Potential New Phase in China-Latin America Defense Relations* (Washington, D.C: 2015), pág. 2.

Within this analysis, it is important to highlight the veto of the United Kingdom, within the framework of the conflict over the Malvinas Islands, for the acquisition of any military equipment with British components. The United States, as a historical British ally and member of NATO, strictly complies with the conditions of this military embargo to a peripheral country of little strategic importance for its vital interests, such as Argentina.

As can be seen in table 1, based on the data obtained from SIPRI, the number of contracts with the United States for the acquisition of new equipment was reduced over the years. While the causes are varied, including Argentina's budgetary limitations and the difficulties on the access to international credit, the lack of willingness on the part of the United States to sell modern equipment to the country cannot be ruled out (Table 1).

**Table 1.** Arrangements for purchase of military equipment from the US by Argentina (2005-2015)

Custom year	Quantity	Type	Model	Note
2005	40	Turbofan engines	TFE 731	Only 8 units delivered
2006	5	Light helicopter	Bell 205 - UH-1H	Secondhand
2006	36	Light helicopter	Bell 205 - UH-1H	Assembled in Argentina
2007	4	Transport helicopter	S61 - H-3A	Secondhand. Modernized for delivery
2009	5	Light helicopter	Bell 206	
2011	1	Helicopter	Bell 412	
2014	2	Helicopter	Bell 412	Secondhand
2014	1	Light Plane	Pa28 Cherokee	
2015	2	Light transport plane	C212	Secondhand
2015	2	Light transport plane	Cessna-208 Caravan	

Source: SIPRI Arms Transfer Database<sup>51</sup>

<sup>51</sup> Stockholm international peace research institute. 2019. "SIPRI Arms Transfer Database". SIPRI. 19 March. [http://armstrade.sipri.org/armstrade/page/trade\\_register.phps](http://armstrade.sipri.org/armstrade/page/trade_register.phps).

Looking at the list, we can first note the sharp decline in the supplies of military equipment from the US over the decade. In addition to that, the contract for the purchase of 40 Turbofan TFE 731 engines, which were supposed to be used for the production and modernization of the Argentine Pampa III aircraft, was canceled and only 8 units were delivered. Based on the information available, the reason for the cancellation of these acquisitions or whether they were finally completed, is unknown.

The largest agreement for the acquisition of military equipment, at least in terms of the number of units agreed, was during 2006, that is, at the beginning of the decade under analysis, when antagonism and friction with the US power were not yet so strong. After this important transaction was completed, the sale of US military equipment to Argentina declined fast in the following years. In addition, we can see that in all cases the acquisitions were equipment for troops transport, reconnaissance or troops training, without any significant firepower that could effectively increase Argentina's defensive capabilities. We can find many reasons for this, including the low budget allocated to defense in recent years. However, we can also argue that, to some extent, the confrontational position adopted by Argentina vis-à-vis the continent's dominant power probably had some kind of impact on the US decision to sell arms to the country.

As for joint military exercises and troops training, the picture is not much more encouraging. In the case of the United States, in the framework of the International Military Education Program and training funds (IMET), 367 Argentine military personnel had been trained in 2008, while by 2015; this number had fallen to 64. With respect to the Unified Command Plan, there was only one Argentine personnel trained in 2008. This number increased to 75 units trained in 2010. However, there was no other training from that year onward. On the other hand, in relation to Section 1004 of security assistance against drug trafficking, there were 22 soldiers trainees in 2008. Following this trend, in 2008 there were 65 military personnel trained under the Counter-Terrorism Fellowship Programme (CTFP). However, there were only 9 in 2013. No training has been conducted for the Non-Proliferation, Counter-Terrorism, Demining (NADR) Program or the International Narcotics Control and Law Enforcement (INCLE). In 2010, a single Argentine officer was trained in the United States in relation to peacekeeping operations.

On the other hand, public information available on military contracts between Argentina and China is virtually non-existent. Although in other

areas, such as trade, there are explicit agreements and official pages in large numbers; this is not the case regarding security and defense issues. This is a clear difference from what happens in relation to the United States<sup>52</sup>. At the discursive level, it has been stated that certain agreements have been reached. However, the information about loans for military purposes, military joint exercises and military personnel exchange have been limited and difficult to reach. Various articles and technical reports by both embassies constantly speculated on the possibility of Argentine President Cristina Fernández signing agreements with China to increase military cooperation, but there was never any evidence of any plans being implemented. The testimonies only show projects. Nor have there been any joint exercises between Chinese and Argentine troops.

With respect to the exchange and training of military personnel, a memorandum of understanding on cooperation between the Ministry of Defense of Argentina and the Ministry of Defense of China was signed in 2012. This document planned to deepen existing military relations and to promote mutual military visits, specialized missions and training for officers. The only data available refers to the regional level in the period 2001-2010, during which only 155 visits were exchanged between military authorities from China and Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Cuba, Ecuador, Mexico, Peru, Uruguay, and Venezuela. There have been no other joint training or exercises in other fields or under other arrangements. Also, at the 3rd meeting of the China-Argentina Joint Defense Commission in 2015, both parts agreed to promote the exchange of troops for mountain training and the strengthening of cooperation between training centers for peace operations. However, little is known about the implementation of these agreements.

In conclusion, although on several occasions the intention to strengthen cooperation in the development of National Defense between Argentina and China has been made explicit, it can be said that there were more intentions, agreements, and speeches than concrete actions. While there are multiple agreements and memorandums of understanding and several bilateral meetings have been held, no concrete data have been found on the number of military visits or joint training conducted. The lack of transparency leaves doubts about the credibility of the signed agreements.

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<sup>52</sup> U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, *op. cit.*, pág. 3.



## **Conclusions, limitations and final comments**

In the present century, the US shares its global presence with the rise of China. The space for maneuver and autonomy for peripheral countries has expanded, but that does not mean that power disparities do not intervene by setting structural limits. Uncertainty plays in favor of maintaining a prudent and good relationship with established and emerging powers, a fact that seems not to have been considered by the Argentine political leadership. As can be concluded from the analysis carried out, the costs to Argentina of closer ties with China than with the United States in terms of defense have been higher than the benefits. Apart from the profits that the Argentine attitude may have derived in the economic sphere, from the point of view of the Defense, the Argentine losses were clear. In an environment where hierarchy continues to be present, and where geography is still important, Argentina decided to ally itself with the distant rising Asian power. That choice had important consequences for Argentine military forces and the national security system.

It should be noted that the conclusions obtained in this research question to some extent certain policy recommendations of Carlos Escudé himself in some of his recent writings,<sup>53</sup> where he argues for the benefits of a relationship of alignment with China in all areas of the bilateral agenda, including the military. We argue that the conclusions drawn from those analysis are derived from what we understand as three theoretical shortcomings adopted by Escudé himself as basic premises of his recent studies:

- 1) A rigid reading of the international system, understanding that the hegemonic transition has already happened at all levels, when, as we have seen, at the military level the world remains markedly unipolar.
- 2) The direct linking of agendas, a fact that in everyday reality is much more complex.
- 3) The rigid hierarchization of the foreign policy agenda of the states, that in practice is much more flexible and complex.

PR remains a useful explanatory tool for many states in the international system, as long as they maintain their subordinate status as the result of an unequal distribution of power. However, its rigid application and a limited appreciation of the international context may lead to hasty conclusions. The present work has obtained, from the same theoretical ba-

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<sup>53</sup> Escudé, *op. cit.*



sis, a different analysis from that obtained by the author of the theory himself. In this way, new questions arise from this work. Further and deeper research on these points is expected to be undertaken in the future.

And so, finally, we return to Thucydides: *"the strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must"*. Whoever does not understand this iron rule of history loses. This corollary established more than 2,000 years ago, remains as valid today as it was then. The strong dominate. The weak must be accommodated so as not to be punished. The problem lies in the misreading of today's international system: at the military level, the United States remains the strongest; the United States does what it can. Argentina, a weak state, by aligning itself with the wrong partner, suffered the consequences.

It is important to stress that Argentina also has important common interests in the area of defense and security with the United States, such as the prevention of drug trafficking, border control concerning illegal migration, humanitarian support for United Nations peace missions, non-proliferation of arms and the defense of democracy and human rights. This coincidence of interests, some of which are not shared with China, can strengthen cooperation and translate into benefits for Argentina and its citizens.

We should also notice, as has been done on several occasions through this work, that the present international system is distinguished for its complexity and multipolarity and that an alignment within the security agenda with the United States should not imply a direct confrontation with the People's Republic of China, which remains a fundamental economic partner for Argentina. Faced with the scenario of double periphery in which Argentina and other peripheral countries are currently inserted, diversification, cooperation and good relations with the multiple powers should be given priority, trying to move away from the often unnecessary and always costly confrontation.

As for the limitations of the analysis presented here, it should be noted that this paper does not represent a complete view of Argentina's defense policy during the period under analysis. Among other things, the domestic political level, which has always influenced the formation of the country's Foreign Policy and Defense Policy, has been omitted. The interconnection between defense policy and foreign policy and the legal plexus that regulates the actions of the Armed Forces also has not been studied, which in this period is essential for a more comprehensive

analysis. The problems in the country's defense structure are not limited to the level of international relations, but also in relation to budgetary, legal, ideological and internal power struggles issues. An analysis that aspires to broader conclusions on the issue must consider all these bureaucratic, ideological and political factors.

On the contrary, in the present study priority has been given to a factor that is commonly neglected when dealing with the situation of the Argentine Armed Forces, such as the relationship with strategic actors in the international system, in order to add a new variable to the analysis. It is essential to always remember that Argentina and the peripheral countries are part of an international system and will be affected at all levels, particularly in the military, by their relationship with the major powers.

Finally, it is noted that in-depth interviews with decision-makers could contrast the theoretical assessments and help to get deeper analysis, so it is planned to continue the development of this study in the future. It is hoped that the work carried out here will be the basis for future research and will contribute to the development of an appropriate Foreign Policy and an efficient Defense Policy. It is also expected that the conclusions of this paper will serve as primary lessons for other peripheral countries when considering the development of their foreign policy. In an international system as complex as the current one, the analysis of success cases (or, in this case, of relative failure) is essential for peripheral countries, in order to avoid costs and maximize benefits. The Argentine case may be an example for the rest of the world.