

Making Sense of Rapprochement between Argentina and Brazil, 1979-1982

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Leading Argentine and Brazilian scholars in the international relations of the South American Cone have recently complained about the excessive insistence on the essentially conflictive nature of Argentine-Brazilian relations, suggesting that such a view is not historically accurate (Cervo and Rapoport 2001; Cervo 2001). Conflict was certainly a salient aspect but it was not the only one. A pattern of attempts at cooperation is strongly present throughout the history of Brazil and Argentina. It should be sufficient to mention here the attempts by Rio Branco in the early twentieth century, by Aranha and Pinedo in 1941, the understanding for an ABC Pact between Vargas and Perón in the 1950s, the agreements of Uruguayana in 1961 and the proposal for a sectoral customs union under Castello Branco in 1967. Indeed, it is arguable that attempts at cooperation have even outnumbered occasions of direct confrontation. Professor Lafer, former Foreign Minister of Brazil, identified the attempt to diminish rivalry and explore possible constructive relations with Argentina as one of the recurrent themes in Brazilian foreign policy in the twentieth century.¹ Professor Moniz Bandeira indicates conflict and integration as the main forces in the Southern Cone international politics from 1870 to 2003, and he sees the trend toward integration between Argentina and Brazil as constantly informing their rivalry (Moniz Bandeira 2003).

A second misperception about Argentine-Brazilian relations concerns the supposed turn to improved relations following the settlement of the Itaipú dam conflict in 1979. In this respect, discussion hinges on one main general question: whether or not one single event, no matter how salient, can reverse the political, economic, legal and cultural legacy of many decades. The 1979 Tripartite Agreement that solved the quarrel over the use of water resources between Argentina and Brazil can certainly be regarded as the starting point of a new course of relations between the two countries. But it cannot, on its own, be regarded as decisive, unless one accepts that the dispute over the dam of Itaipú was the one and only significant reason for friction between Argentina and Brazil, so that, once this was eliminated, no further obstacle remained for the development of friendly and cooperative relations. If, on the contrary, one takes the view that the reasons for friction were many and complex, then it may be more appropriate to say that the agreement on the use of the river Paraná, rather than prompting a new course in Argentine-Brazilian relations, was the first manifestation of it, and that a 'long turn approach' has to be preferred to a 'turning point vision'.

The argument proceeds in three sections. The first outlines the diplomatic steps that led to the signature of the Tripartite Agreement. In particular, it asks whether deeper reasons (other than the desire to solve the quarrel over the water resources) at the national, regional, and international level, contributed to the Argentine-Brazilian rapprochement. The second describes the significance of the presidential

visit of General Figueiredo of Brazil to Buenos Aires in May 1980 as a confirmation and consolidation of the new friendly course of bilateral relations. The third demonstrates how the Falkland/Malvinas war, potentially disruptive of the newly friendly relations between the two countries, resulted not in the collapse of Argentine-Brazilian understanding but its reinvigoration. Each of the three episodes, the Tripartite Agreement, the presidential visit and the war in the South Atlantic, will be concisely compared to the most significant bilateral rapprochement up to that moment: the 1961 agreements of Uruguayana, in order to show how the late 1970s and very early 1980s were distinguished from earlier periods by the unusual and unprecedented strength of political will in both countries to pursue good relations. The paper finally attempts to clarify the relation between the Tripartite Agreement (and the sequence of events occurred between 1979 and 1982) and the Argentine-Brazilian integration process formalised in 1986.

The Tripartite Agreement of 1979

The quarrel over Itaipú was only one aspect, although an important one, of Argentine-Brazilian rivalry through the 1970s. The roots of this tension were deeper and concerned political, economic and security issues. Correspondingly, the combination of a complex set of international, regional and domestic factors was required to pave the way for convergence between Buenos Aires and Brasilia. Nor could any single event be sufficient to establish the endurance of a bilateral shift from ambivalence to cooperation. Too often in the past, single moments of good understanding had been greeted as decisive turning points in Argentine-Brazilian relations. A consistent and self-reinforcing sequence would be required. New attitudes had to be established, confirmed and tested against adverse conditions and potential reversal.

At the international level, in the wake of détente, the Carter presidency decreased its level of support for authoritarian governments and promoted democracy and the protection of human rights. Furthermore, in order to limit access of other countries to nuclear power, the North American administration intensified its non-proliferation policy. This included the severing of diplomatic and economic relations with, and the termination of military aid to non-compliant states. The military regimes in Argentina and Brazil were significantly affected. U.S. tolerance towards abuses of human rights in the name of the fight to communism came to an end. The nuclear programmes of Argentina and Brazil were censured in Washington. In particular, the U.S. opposed the agreement for nuclear technological transfer Brazil had signed with West Germany. The Argentine ambassador to Brasilia, Oscar Camilión, clearly understood that Brazil was only the first target and that Argentina was to come next, therefore he expressed his solidarity with Brazil. The right of any country to develop nuclear programmes for peaceful ends was a claim common to Argentina and Brazil.

The international oil crisis of 1974 had shown the vulnerability of Brazil to energy supply shocks. Brazilian interest in alternative sources of energy supply became pressing. In particular, hydroelectric plants in the Plata basin seemed an excellent solution. Disputes with Argentina could jeopardize the Brazilian energy strategy, and this consideration increased Brazilian determination to find a negotiated solution. Moreover, the growing protectionism practised by the United States and the European Economic Community in the mid-to late-1970s compelled Ar-

gentina and Brazil to redirect exports towards alternative markets, whether regional or more distant. The increase of common interests and claims towards the international system was highly significant. This materialised, for instance, in the steady convergence of Brazilian voting in international forums with the Non-Aligned Movement, of which Argentina was a member.

At the regional level, Brazilian relations with Paraguay and Argentine relations with Chile seem to have played a role in the search for a solution to the Itaipú question. The 'policy of pendulum' (Fraga 1999, 373) practised by Paraguay towards Argentina and Brazil for the use of the rivers contributed to the Brazilian decision to look for a negotiated solution with Argentina. In the absence of such an agreement, any problem that might have arisen between Brazil and Paraguay would prompt the latter to align with the Argentines, to the detriment of Brazilian security.

Where clashes between Paraguay and Brazil remained in the field of geopolitical speculation, Argentina and Chile came close to war. In April 1977, Queen Elizabeth II of United Kingdom ratified the arbitrator's award for the dispute over the Beagle Channel between Argentina and Chile. Three strategic islands were allocated to Chile, providing direct access to both the Atlantic and the Pacific Ocean. This was unacceptable to Argentina as Chile would have appropriated fish and oil resources at that time under Argentine control and increased its influence over Antarctica. In the light of this risk, Argentina could not afford to keep open two fronts of tensions and was willing to compromise on the Itaipú question, regarded as a less important and urgent geo-strategic problem than the Beagle Channel.

Internally, Argentina was facing an increasingly aggressive campaign of subversion. This made it highly inconvenient to maintain a conflictual stance towards its most powerful neighbour. It has also been suggested that ideological affinity between the regimes in Buenos Aires and Brasilia contributed to the solution of the quarrel (Fraga 1999; Motta Pinto Coelho 2000). Yet, while this explanation may have some validity, its actual effectiveness should not be overestimated. Ideological affinity had not prevented the conflict over the water resources from escalating under the administrations of Castello Branco, Costa e Silva and Medici in Brazil, and Onganía and Lanusse in Argentina. The initial moves of the Videla administration were informed by the traditional ambivalence, and the Brazilian chancellor Azeredo da Silveira was very sceptical about the intentions and the methods of Ambassador Camilión (Spektor 2002).

Instead, what can safely be said is that the armed forces in both countries were opposed to a possible conflict. It seems more than mere coincidence that, when relations were the most tense, in July 1977, the military activated parallel channels of dialogue (Moniz Bandeira 2003; Spektor 2002). Eventually, soon after a high level meeting in Foz de Iguazu between the chief of Brazilian air forces, Jardim de Matos, and a member of the Argentine military *junta*, Orlando Agosti, chancellor Azeredo da Silveira decided to re-launch negotiations.

The key reason why the Argentines opposed the construction of a Brazilian power plant at Itaipú was their awareness that such a plant would give Brazil a clear economic and geo-strategic advantage in the Plate Basin area. Still, one of the main arguments used by Buenos Aires was that, by altering the normal flow of the river, the Brazilian dam would invariably compromise Argentine projects, such as the Corpus dam, downstream of Paraná. A big advance in negotiations occurred

when Argentina finally recognised that the construction of the power plant of Corpus was not a priority. Minister of Economy Martínez de Hoz confided to Ambassador Camilión that Corpus was neither economically nor technically viable² (Camilión 1999). Agreements on the partial and temporary interruption of the flow of the river Paraná were then reached. A compromise on the engineering technical details, such as the size of the dam and the production capacity of the power plant, was also finalised.

The Tripartite Agreement between Argentina, Brazil, and Paraguay was signed in Ciudad del Este, then Puerto Stroessner, on 17 October 1979, bringing the long dispute over the water resources of the river Paraná to a definite close. However, one may ask whether this is sufficient to consider the Tripartite Agreement as a watershed in bilateral relations.

First, if we assume that the controversy over Itaipú was the only significant reason for tension, then the Tripartite Agreement may be seen as a turning point. But the true causes of tensions lay in the unbalanced distribution of power between the two countries, and the question of Itaipú, although important issue in itself, had been aggravated by its being an indicator of the state of a broader and traditional competition for dominance in the region. Furthermore, if the question of the dams was the only remarkable problem, and if it was clearly in the interest of both parties to solve it, then the long delay in finding a solution has to be considered as a failure of negotiations (Spektor 2002) and not as a success. Certainly, there was caution at the time. During a seminar in Porto Alegre in 1983, one of the most celebrated experts in Brazilian foreign policy remarked that ‘the Itaipú agreement inaugurates a less competitive phase, [...], the duration and continuity of which are difficult to predict’ (Camargo 1987, 21).

Second, and probably even more convincingly, historical experience shows that in several occasions a single and discrete event has been mistaken for a fundamental change in the course of Argentine-Brazilian relations. The most far reaching attempt at political cooperation before the mid-1980s, the Uruguayana understanding of 1961, is a good example. The Convention of Friendship and Consultation, signed on that occasion, provided for a permanent system of consultation and for greater economic, legal and cultural integration. Two Brazilian foreign ministers, San Tiago Dantas and Horacio Lafer reckoned at that time that the period of rivalry between the two countries had been overcome (Cervo and Bueno 2002). Yet, in less than two years the agreement of Uruguayana was abandoned. So whilst the Tripartite Agreement opened the way to a process of rapprochement, it could constitute a real shift in Argentine-Brazilian relations only if followed by confirmatory events. The presidential visit of 1980 and its implications were particularly significant in this respect.

The presidential summit of 1980 and its consequences

The visit paid by General Figueiredo to Buenos Aires and the bilateral agreements concluded on that occasion confirmed a new cooperative spirit in Argentine-Brazilian relations. The visit of a Brazilian Head of State to Argentina was a rare event and therefore significant. The conclusion of nuclear and military agreements inaugurated a process of confidence-building that was to characterise bilateral relations throughout the 1980s. Commitment to periodical consultation between foreign ministers initiated a serious political dialogue on topics of international rele-

vance. The creation of a *grupo binacional* introduced integration as an issue for careful reflection.

The visit of Figueiredo to Argentina in May 1980 was only the third paid by a Brazilian President to the neighbouring country during the twentieth century.³ The visit therefore had very high symbolic value. The context was that Figueiredo had been consolidating and expanding the use of presidential visits as an instrument of negotiation and leverage to back Brazilian foreign policy. 'Presidential diplomacy' (Danese 1999) under Figueiredo became systematic and universal, covering a wide range of issues and geographical areas. In particular, presidential diplomacy prioritised Latin America and the Platine countries, reflecting a new Brazilian diplomatic orientation. Brazilian Foreign Minister Saraiva Guerreiro recalls in his memoirs that after that meeting 'the frame of bilateral relations turned into a different one, a new one' (Saraiva Guerreiro 1992, 98).

During the presidential visit, a number of agreements were concluded between Argentina and Brazil. Each was salient for the advance it brought in its respective field. The nuclear agreement was one of the major achievements of the presidential summit. A set of circumstances favoured this understanding, leaving scarcely any alternative to bilateral cooperation (Hirst and Bocco 1992). Argentine mastery of nuclear power was more advanced than that of Brazil, which was experiencing tensions with its suppliers. Both countries took a firm decision to move ahead with nuclear development, despite financial difficulties affecting their respective programmes. There was also a great consensus at the level of the political class and at the level of public opinion on nuclear development. Both Argentina and Brazil had stood aloof from the Non-Proliferation Treaty, and both had refused to adhere to the Tlatelolco Treaty, which had made a nuclear-free zone of South America and the Caribbean.

Consequently, the nuclear treaty of 1980, following hard upon the Tripartite Agreement of the previous year, initiated a confidence-building process fundamental to consolidation of the bilateral rapprochement. Nuclear development was no longer to be regarded as a mutual threat, and was instead it turned into an instrument subservient to the economic and social development of the two countries (Fraga 1999).

Other salient agreements were signed in May 1980, further contributing to the new climate of confidence and trust between the two countries. Agreement was reached on a protocol for the joint construction of military planes and rockets. A convention on the interconnection of the two national electrical systems was signed, reinforcing other understandings in the energy sector. On the diplomatic front, a memorandum of understanding established a mechanism of permanent political consultation between foreign ministers. This was a considerable advance in the formalisation of political dialogue.

One of the most interesting experiences resulting from the presidential meeting was the so-called bi-national group. This was created in the course of preparatory work for the visit and its aim was to discuss effective measures for economic and trade integration between the two countries.⁴ The legacy of the group is not clear, nor its actual influence on future developments of integration. However, two interesting ideas were generated. First, the group concluded that the private sector had to be actively involved in the integration process. Second, the nature and structure of the bi-national group reportedly provided inspiration for the design of the Common Market Group within Mercosur.⁵ After a number of meetings held over two

years, the group reached the conclusion that Argentina and Brazil were not ready for economic integration and terminated its activity.

Whereas it is plausible that this experience had a very limited concrete impact upon the future of integration,⁶ it is also true that incumbent undersecretary Felix Peña transmitted the files of the group to Jorge Romero, just before the latter replaced him as undersecretary for external economic relations of the new civilian administration in Argentina. Peña held discussions with Romero over three days. Much emphasis was put on the functioning of the group and issues of potential interest for the democratic administration were carefully highlighted and analysed.⁷ There can be no certainty about how much of those conversations stayed with Romero. What is certain is that ideas of integration and trade liberalisation later found a good reception from Romero himself and future Foreign Minister Dante Caputo and future President Raul Alfonsín. The great merit of the bi-national group was to have initiated serious debate about economic and trade integration between Argentina and Brazil.

For all the consequences it engendered and for the scope and nature of its achievements, the presidential visit of 1980 can safely be considered a solid confirmation of the new course of Argentine-Brazilian relations. However, a rigorous scholar may ask whether it is possible to consider a period of nine months – from the Tripartite Agreement to Figueiredo's trip to Buenos Aires – as sufficient to talk of turning point and watershed. By the same token, it is legitimate to ask whether reversal of these newly established friendly attitudes was now virtually impossible. Historical comparison once again urges one to be careful.

The agreement of Uruguayana had also appeared to be a solid and enduring commitment, expected to inaugurate a new era of friendly cooperation; this too was vigorously endorsed by presidents Frondizi and Goulart one year after its signature. Even more, the two presidents urged their foreign ministers to make their consultation system more effective and spoke fulsomely of the profound friendship and solidarity between their two peoples. Yet, when the commitment was tested against adverse circumstances it did not last. Domestic opposition in Argentina, mainly originating from the military, obstructed the consolidation of the Uruguayana agreement, fearing an increasing political dependence on Brazil. Internationally, the United States did not welcome the joint Argentine-Brazilian attempt to raise their autonomy in foreign policy, especially considering that the understanding between Frondizi and Goulart excluded interference in the Cuban question at a time when the United States was operating to expel Havana from the OAS. Due to these internal and external pressures, the spirit of Uruguayana quickly evaporated and the traditional ambivalence replaced concord.⁸ To assess how significant the rapprochement of 1979 and 1980 was, it has to be tested in circumstances with the potential to disrupt bilateral relations.

The Falkland/Malvinas war

The Falkland/Malvinas war could have destroyed all the efforts that were being made to build-up confidence between Argentina and Brazil (Saraiva Guerreiro 1992). Argentina did not consult with or inform Brazil about its intention to invade the Malvinas, and this behaviour was perceived in Brasilia as unilateral and non-transparent (Hirst and Bocco 1989). There is no doubt that Argentina was the aggressor, and this hazardous policy caused a certain resurgence of suspicion about

Argentine imperialist ambitions in chancelleries across South America. Despite a first reaction of astonishment and irritation, Brazil officially took a neutral position, although in practice it was rather sympathetic with the Argentine cause and provided diplomatic and material support.

This 'imperfect neutrality' (Moniz Bandeira 2003) was not determined by unconditional trust in the friendly relations recently consolidated with its neighbour. Feelings of continental solidarity may have played a part, but most of all Brazil followed the logic of national interest, adopting a calculated position of partial neutrality, which served its own advantage at the regional and international level (Laffer 1984; Vieira Walsh 1985). On the one hand, Brazil did not want to jeopardise the new phase of good relations with Argentina, a key country for the success of any Brazilian diplomatic strategy in South America; on the other hand it did not want to jeopardise its relation with a major financial centre such as London, and possibly with the United States and the European Economic Community.

Minister Saraiva Guerreiro issued a declaration that incorporated the basic principles of Brazilian diplomatic action during the crisis. Brazil recognised the rights of Argentina over the Malvinas islands. The statement stressed the consistency of the Brazilian position, which had been adopted first in 1833, when Britain occupied the islands with the use of force. Brazil at the time had instructed its representative in London to back the Argentine protest. The statement had three important aspects: First, Brazilian support of Argentina was not inspired by contingent convenience but was grounded in a consistent position, maintained for over a century. Second, there was no mention of Argentine military intervention; this omission was a light form of dissociation from forceful occupation. Third, strong emphasis was given to the need for a peaceful solution of the conflict. The Brazilian stance was the result of careful strategic thinking, involving economic, political as well as security considerations.

From a geo-strategic point of view, after the failure of mediation by the U.S. Secretary of State Alexander Haig, the camps for and against the two opponents became clearer. Whereas Great Britain could count on the support of the United States, the European Economic Community and Chile, Argentina attracted the solidarity of all the other Latin American countries, of the Third World in general and of the Soviet bloc. The involvement of the latter was regarded with particular suspicion by Brazil. Had Buenos Aires been tempted to ask for Soviet or Cuban aid, the regional dispute would have turned into an East-West conflict, with the potential for direct intervention by the United States. Brazil sensed the danger and acted to minimise this possibility.

From a political and economic point of view, Brazil had no interest in exploiting a temporary Argentine difficulty to replace it as a supplier of meat, wheat, soy and other cereals in international markets. Instead, economic aid and diplomatic assistance to Argentina were calculated to draw Buenos Aires further into Brasilia's political sphere and foster economic interdependence between the two countries. For all these reasons, Brazilian action during the crisis aimed at restoring the pre-conflict situation. Such an objective entailed the adoption of a partial neutrality, so to slightly favour Argentina, the weaker party in the conflict and the potentially more rewarding partner.

The Brazilian strategy materialised in diplomatic, economic as well as military support. Itamaraty displayed its diplomatic action both at the bilateral and multilateral level. Brazil took up the representation of Argentine interests in London when

the two opponents broke off diplomatic relations.⁹ Brasilia conducted an active lobby to dissuade the British from attacking the Argentine mainland, which would have brought an increase in Brazilian, and most likely broader South American support to Argentina. A visit by President Figueiredo to Washington was scheduled for May 1982. Brazil was tempted to cancel the meeting as a protest at United States solidarity with Britain, which operated, in the eyes of the South Americans, to the detriment of the U.S. hemispheric security commitment. However this might have compromised relations with Washington irretrievably. When it did take place, the meeting between Reagan and Figueiredo predictably neglected the Brazilian-US bilateral agenda and concentrated on the crisis in the South Atlantic. Figueiredo was able to reiterate his request that Britain refrain from attacking the Argentine mainland lest this be perceived as an aggression against South America as a whole, activating mechanisms of collective defence.

At the multilateral level, Brazil used all the available forums to implement its diplomatic strategy and contain the negative consequences of the war on Argentina. Brazil insisted on the compulsory character of UN Security Council resolution 502. The resolution urged the cessation of hostilities, the withdrawal of the Argentine troops and the use of negotiation to solve the dispute. From the Brazilian point of view, and in accordance with the partial neutrality, the latter point did not entail a mere return to the *status ante*, provided that negotiations indeed directed toward a solution to the dispute and not merely the immediate conflict.

Also, within the Organization of American States, Brazil tried to maintain a pragmatic and balanced position. The final OAS resolution on the Malvinas strongly supported Argentine claims, but did not characterise British intervention as an attack on the continent, therefore there was no legal base to invoke collective defence measures, as advocated by the hawk countries. Within the Latin American Economic System, too, Brazil sponsored the adoption of a moderate position. Brazilian diplomats were instructed to dissuade the other members from the 'rhetoric of resentment' (Cervo 2001, 271) towards Britain and its allies, for this was prejudicial to good relations with the industrialised countries.

Brazilian economic support resulted in concrete measures aimed at evading the economic embargo declared on Argentina by Britain, the European Economic Community and the United States. The ports of southern Brazil were used to transit Argentine exports to their final destinations. Ironically, these facilities and infrastructures were those that Brazil had developed through the 1970s and had already contributed to a diversion of freight traffic from the port of Buenos Aires (Moniz Bandeira 2003). Then Argentina had reacted with irritation and retaliation; now it was counting on them. Moreover, Brazil fought in multilateral forums to declare the economic sanctions illegitimate, arguing that they found juridical justification neither in UN Security Council resolution 502, nor in the UN Charter, or GATT norms (Lafer 1984).

Finally, Brazil granted Argentina limited but significant military assistance. What remains unclear is the extent to which military assistance was a response to precise political instructions as distinct from an unauthorised initiative of the Brazilian air forces. Foreign Minister Saraiva Guerreiro explained that Brazil had resolved not to concede the use of any naval or air base in its territory to units involved in war operations. The only authorised exceptions referred to emergencies, mainly concerning the rescue of crews in distress (Saraiva Guerreiro 1992). The extensive use of airfields in Southern Brazil by Argentine war units, with sched-

uled missions and dates, may be attributed to a broad interpretation of the concept of emergency by the Brazilian air force. This was ‘a violation of political directions, which were, in military terms, neutral’ (Saraiva Guerreiro 1992, 112).

The new deal between Argentina and Brazil stood firm through a period of deep crisis. Back in the 1960s, the agreement and spirit of Uruguayana had been abandoned because of internal opposition and disagreement on international questions, most of all U.S. policy towards Cuba. Now, the unilateral aggression by the Argentine *junta* in the South Atlantic challenged Brazilian commitment to closer association with Argentina. However, given the changes in the international scenario, Brazilian national interest largely coincided with a cooperative policy vis-à-vis Buenos Aires. This was regarded as instrumental to Brazil’s own development, security and presence at the continental and world level. Actually, a close association satisfied the needs and aspirations of both nations. This was the root of the strong political will indispensable to friendly cooperation.

Conclusion

This article has tried to identify and disclose three false views about the Itaipú question. The first of these was that the quarrel over the water resources was the principal if not the sole source of Argentine-Brazilian conflict throughout the 1970s. Instead, it has been shown that there were deeper sources of rancour, mainly arising from long run changes in the international position of the two countries and their relative economic status. At the beginning of the twentieth century Argentina had been a flourishing economy and the established power at the regional level, while Brazil trailed. From the 1930s Brazilian economic potential for development took off, while the Argentine economic model, and consequently its political projection, stagnated. Between 1960 and 1980, differences in economic performance widened. Management of economic policy certainly made a difference, but natural, geographic and demographic factors mattered too. The change in relative power is evident from the figures.¹⁰

Gross domestic product (billions of 1982 USD)

	1960	1970	1980
Brazil	55.0	100.0	229.0
Argentina	32.7	49.0	62.6
Ratio	1.7:1	2.0:1	3.7:1

Value added to economy by manufacturing (billions of 1982 USD)

	1960	1970	1980
Brazil	13.7	26.7	63.0
Argentina	8.0	13.2	15.5
Ratio	1.7:1	2.0:1	4.1:1

Argentina lacked the resources to compete successfully. As early as 1972, U.S. President Richard Nixon acknowledged that ‘as Brazil goes, so will go the rest of Latin America’ (Nixon quoted in Moniz Bandeira 2003, and Gibson Barboza 1992). The economic gap altered the regional balance of power and this was the real essence of the tensions between the two countries. The question of Itaipú merely epitomised this situation.

Another reason for bilateral antagonism during the 1970s is noteworthy. Geopolitical doctrines pervading the military administrations in both countries between the mid-1960s and the late 1970s certainly amplified the sense of frustration in Argentina and the desire for power status in Brazil. Guided by geo-strategic doctrine, Argentina perceived Brazilian economic expansion as a threat to its security in the long run (Moniz Bandeira 1993). Brazilian diplomacy was actually used as an instrument of economic expansionism (Cervo 2001). And while geo-political thinking is not sufficient alone to explain the acrimony over Itaipú, in combination with the unbalanced distribution of power it may account for a good number of things. Any administration, regardless of its regime type, would have had to cope with the uneven economic, political and military positions, trying to achieve a redress. The military administrations, informed by geo-strategic thinking, were inclined to attribute disproportionate importance to disagreement over the dams and to over-dramatise its potential consequences. Perhaps for this reason, they chose more confrontational methods to face the question than another regime type may have done.

In particular, the Geisel government of 1974-1979 appeared as a clear break with the traditional attitudes towards Argentina. These had been characterised by tolerance of the high profile of the Argentine diplomacy, a consistent search for areas of cooperation to dilute potential frictions, the inclusion of Argentina in Brazilian international initiatives, and the promotion of good relations between Buenos Aires and Washington (Spektor 2002). Now, the growing economic and political preponderance of Brazil in the region, the redefinition of the bilateral links of Argentina and Brazil with the United States, and the quarrel over the uses of water resources were of the utmost importance for the abandonment of traditional stances. The critical conjuncture occurred between 1968 and 1973, and from 1974 the Geisel administration rejected all the traditional paradigms and adopted a hard posture towards Buenos Aires.

Towards the end of the 1970s, however, this reversal of the traditional policy vis-à-vis Argentina was at odds with the new changes in the international and regional scenarios occurring in the mean time, including the shattered dreams of Brazilian grandeur. The realisation that international constraints were changing again¹¹ forced a redefinition of mutual relations, roles and perceptions (Spektor 2002). Quite ironically, precisely the fact that confrontational strategies had proven to be ineffective accelerated the design of new paradigms in the late 1970s, which eventually made the rapprochement of 1979-1982 possible and were later maintained and consolidated under the democratic administrations.

This consideration uncovers a second misinterpretation. Itaipú, as such, did not change the sign of Argentine-Brazilian relations, and the adoption of new paradigms did not occur instantly. Instead, international and domestic elements slowly but steadily contributed to the emergence of a new approach to bilateral relations. A closer association between the two countries became a fundamental element of their national interest. The formation, consolidation and assimilation of this new view of national interest required time. Only from the combination of the Tripartite Agreement, the presidential meetings of 1980 and the Malvinas war did it become clear that the new approach was enduring and was the result of a consolidated political will. Therefore, the solution of the Itaipú dispute cannot be considered alone as a turning point. The turn was long and covered the years from 1979 to 1982. But at the end of the day, perhaps, the question is ill posed. It was not the solution to

the Itaipú problem that prompted a new course in Argentine-Brazilian relations; instead it was a firm political will that gave rise to a new course in Argentine-Brazilian relations, the first manifestation of which was the signature of the Tripartite Agreement.

A final misinterpretation concerns the relationship between Itaipú and Argentine-Brazilian integration from the mid-1980s. The Tripartite Agreement and the accords of 1980 have been regarded as the nucleus of what would be Mercosur (Pastor 1996). The results of the rapprochement were so striking that, on the one hand, a possible tighter economic partnership started to be envisaged (McCann 1981), on the other hand, the former opponents had to soothe the anxiety of the neighbouring countries by stating their condemnation of regional power axis or blocs (Camargo and Vasquez Ocampo 1988). An important aspect of the rapprochement was the development of closer relations between civil societies. The Brazilian entrepreneurs who accompanied Figueiredo to Buenos Aires negotiated a number of commercial deals with their Argentine counterparts, including a complementation agreement in the automotive sector. A few months after the Malvinas war, a joint Argentine-Brazilian entrepreneurial meeting in São Paulo put forward the idea of fostering economic integration through sectoral agreements.

Despite these events being significant and bearing some similarities with the process of Argentine-Brazilian integration of 1986, none of these constitute a decisive indication of undertakings cognate to Mercosur. First, the Itaipú Treaty and the nuclear agreements of 1980 eliminated major security obstacles to further cooperation (Fraga 1999). That is they were a necessary condition for, but did not themselves amount to, political or economic integration. Second, the economic commitments agreed in Buenos Aires were extremely limited in scope and did not represent a breakthrough as compared to previous bilateral conventions; in addition, they raised strong opposition in Argentina and resulted in scant implementation. As to the São Paulo proposal, the idea of a sectoral integration dated back to the times of Castello Branco and, as in 1967, did not command immediate consensus.

What is noteworthy is that between 1979 and 1982, in the wake of political rapprochement, an effervescent discussion about modalities and instruments for closer integration took place within political elites and civil society more generally. Agreements on double-taxation and mutual investments were concluded, but both Oscar Camilión and Ramiro Saraiva Guerreiro, foreign ministers of Argentina and Brazil during the late military period, dismissed the idea that the integrationist project started during those years.¹² The former insists that no discussion regarding a free trade agreement or customs union was ever put forward under the military. The latter recalls that times were felt to be premature for such an undertaking.

It is important to make clear that the theoretical possibility of economic integration under military regimes is not at stake here. Between 1979 and 1982 a favourable climate for deeper cooperation and integration between Argentina and Brazil was created. However no formal scheme or proposal to this purpose was designed. The experience of the long turn in Argentine-Brazilian relations constitutes an antecedent to, but not a precedent of, bilateral integration.

As a final note, broader implications can be drawn from this case study. Methodologically, political analysis always needs to be put in context, in terms of both time frame and geographical scenarios. As Hedley Bull (1972) observed, history may not be sufficient to understand international relations but cannot be overlooked for at least four reasons. First, certain political situations are not merely

illustrations of general patterns but genuinely singular events. Second, any international situation is located in time and to understand it the scholar must place it within a sequence of events. Third, the quality, techniques and canons of judgement of diplomatic history as a discipline are often less obscure and controversial than those of theoretical studies. Fourth, history itself is the primary material for the social sciences, which have themselves a history and emerge within a defined historical context. This latter point, in particular, stresses how history is constructed, narrated and unravelled by men, with their own histories, contexts and interpretative criteria influencing the reading of the past.

From an analytical point of view, complex phenomena require complex explanations and to allocate causes exclusively to one level, external or internal, would not capture the whole picture (Malamud 2000). This article has challenged the turning point view of Argentine-Brazilian relations to propose a more comprehensive and long term approach. The importance of long term forces is not incompatible *per se* with exceptionally significant moments in history, but 'history does not begin *ex novo* every ten years. It is, on the contrary, the consequence of a cumulative experience process through the years' (Peña 2003, 5). Drawing on the Annales School of historians, the French School of International Relations has defined these long-term factors and their sequence as the deep 'underlying forces' of history (Renouvin and Duroselle 1968). 'Geographical conditions, demographic movements, economic and financial interests, the collective characteristics of peoples and nations, public opinion – these are the underlying factors which make up the setting within which human groups have developed, and which largely determine the nature of the relations between them' (Renouvin and Duroselle 1968, v). The underlying forces compelled Argentina and Brazil to share the same geographical space and spheres of interest, namely the Plata Basin and the South Atlantic. Therefore their interactions were numerous and inevitably gave rise to commonalities and divergences, complementarities and competitiveness, resulting in both, and one should stress both, conflictive and cooperative trajectories.

The intensity and ratio of the two dimensions has varied across time and political circumstances but this duality is still present in today's climate of general and peaceful understanding, as divergences and diplomatic skirmishes about topics such as the reform of the UN or the launch of the Free Trade Area of the Americas demonstrate.

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Interviews

- Amb. José Botafogo, Chief Adviser to Minister Delfim Neto.
- Amb. Oscar Camilión, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Argentina.
- Prof. Amado Luiz Cervo, Professor of History of International Relations, University of Brasilia.
- Min. Sergio França Danese, Minister Councillor at the Brazilian Embassy to Argentina.
- Prof. Celso Lafer, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Brazil.
- Dr Felix Peña, Undersecretary for Economic International Relations, Argentina.
- Amb. Joao Hermes Pereira de Araujo, Brazilian Ambassador to Argentina.
- Amb. Ramiro Saraiva Guerreiro, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Brazil.

Notes

1. Interview with Celso Lafer.
2. As of this writing, the Corpus plant is not yet operational.
3. President Campos Sales crossed the river Plate in 1902, and Getúlio Vargas travelled to Buenos Aires in 1935.
4. Interviews with Felix Peña and José Botafogo.
5. Interview with Felix Peña.
6. Interview with José Botafogo.
7. Interview with Felix Peña.
8. Eventually the Argentine Senate failed to ratify the Uruguayana accords. A military coup ousted Frondizi from power in 1962 and Goulart in 1964. Within a few years, the dispute over the water resources replaced cooperation as the main theme in bilateral relations.
9. Britain entrusted Switzerland with the protection of its interests in Argentina.
10. Original source: Inter-American Development Bank, 1984, *Economic and Social Progress in Latin America*, IADB, Washington; reported in Selcher 1985.
11. Most of all, the economy was slackening and the U.S. was distancing itself from Latin American military regimes.
12. Interviews with Oscar Camilión and Ramiro Saraiva Guerreiro.

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