# "Homeland security" as a State policy in 1970's Argentina*

# La "seguridad nacional" como política estatal en la Argentina de los años setenta

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ABSTRACT
This article analyses a series of legal and illegal state policies and ruling-party strategies, of a repressive nature or involving political persecution, which were implemented by Peronist governments between 1973 and 1976, in the period prior to the military dictatorship that imposed State terrorism in Argentina. The observation of these practices is combined with the study of the discourses of diverse members of the political system from the period.
The study reveals the gradual establishment of a discourse about "national security", that is to say, based on the idea of a subversive enemy of a domestic nature and alien to the "national spirit". The Argentinian case study shows that this type of discourse, which is generally associated with the military regimes of the Southern Cone, also existed and was put into practice in constitutional regimes.

KEYWORDS: national security; violence; democratic regime; authoritarianism; Argentina.

RESUMO
Este trabajo analiza una serie de políticas estatales, paraestatales e intrapartidarias de carácter represivo o de persecución política llevadas adelante por los gobiernos peronistas entre 1973 y 1976, en el período anterior a la dictadura militar que implantó el terrorismo de Estado en la Argentina. Asimismo, la observación de esas prácticas se articula con el estudio de los discursos de diversos actores del gobierno y del sistema político.
Ello permite mostrar la progresiva implantación de un discurso propio de la "seguridad nacional", es decir, basado en la idea de un enemigo subversivo, de carácter interno y ajeno al "ser nacional". El caso argentino muestra, así, que este tipo de discursos, en general, asociados a los regímenes militares del Cono Sur, también circuló y se puso en práctica en regímenes constitucionales.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: seguridad nacional; violencia; régimen democrático; autoritarismo; Argentina.

In Latin America's Southern Cone, the problem of "homeland security" has historically been associated with the Armed Forces and with the military dictatorships of the 60's to 80's. However, the theme goes far beyond this classification and, in the world context of the Cold War, it permeates the

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constitutional and *de facto* regimes. Therefore, for instance, the Argentinian case shows the presence of an ideological persecution discourse and a repressive nature, as well as certain political practices associated to it and dubbed "homeland security," fully installed in the public space and in the state practices several years before the Military took over the power with the coup of March 27th 1976.

With this in mind, the goal of this article is to articulate a series of elements, namely the analysis of the state policies and the political and public discourse of the dominant players of the institutional-political system that allow us to observe how in Argentina the issues of homeland security and defense, in the terms that were soon the motto of the military dictatorship (1976-1983), had been in effect inside the political system under constitutional and democratic rule at least since 1973, during the governments of Juan D. Perón and Maria Estela Martínez de Perón. Although nowadays the historical investigations and several political and human rights groups acknowledge that the repression and political persecution that eventually led to the state terrorism of the military dictatorship started before 1976, this acknowledgement is restricted to denouncing the *Triple A* (*Alianza Anticomunista Argentina* – Argentinian Anti-communist Alliance) – the parapolitical organization connected to José López Rega, Minister of Social Welfare of both Peronist governments – or, in a best case scenario, to mentioning the "background" of "*Operativo Independencia*" (Operation Independence) carried out by the Armed Forces in 1975. The perspective used in this article will go beyond this understanding, not only to show that the repressive practices actually began with Perón – which has been shown by some authors (GILLESPIE, 1998; DE RIZ, 2000) –, but also to show that: a) It was carried out in the name of "homeland security" and by a complex set of legal and illegal practices in which the very notion of legality loses its broad and historic (although not analytical) sense; b) It was a state policy legitimated by multiple political sectors by the fact that it was backed by the massively supported Peronism in the ballots; and c) It was articulated with the use of a repressive discourse that was installed inside a wide range of political and social sectors.

This means the study of the most significant legal measures put into effect for the sake of "security" must be done along with the analysis of a series of practices parallel to the public actions of governing and the observation of the intraparty practices which affected the functioning of Peronism in several instances and jurisdictions within this same period. By its turn, this set of practices will be studied in its articulation with the political discourses of both the government and other players in the institutional political system and of traditional sectors of power (opposition parties, trade unions, churches, Armed Forces) in order to show the rise of a political imagery that highly contributed to the execution of "anti-subversive" policies in the name of defending the endangered nation. This option means working with the political discourse of players with dominant roles in the public space and in the political system, while it explicitly excludes the players that were responsible for the political radicalization (armed movements, left-wing parties of revolutionary orientation, trade unions and "combative" worker movements, several popular organizations).[1] Finally, this focus on the political discourse means considering the discourses at hand as part of the elements that explain the political action (SIGAL and VERÓN, 2004)

The background historiographic discussion supporting this approach is the idea that this repressive political imagery and the legal and illegal practices through which it was executed (as well as the period in which they happened) must be analyzed as an issue of its own and not as simply a "waiting room" of the 1976 coup. Just the same, it means examining the institutional and/or traditional power players, usually little dealt with for this period, since the greatest interest of the current investigation is going to focus the political and popular radicalization phenomenon of the time and around their multiple players.

## Political violence and "security"

After several years of the military dictatorship self dubbed "Argentinian Revolution" (1966-1973), May 25th 1973 marked the beginning of a new constitutional period in the country. Peronist Héctor Cámpora, Perón's direct advisor, was elected president with almost 50% of the votes, since Perón himself

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[1] On the process of political radicalization and the rise of a "New Left" in this period, see Tortti (1999).

could not be elected due to a series of legal restrictions imposed by the departing dictatorship. The return of Peronism to power was followed by a huge explosion of political energy and the increase of a social mobilization with great hopes for transformation and in an existing context of great radicalization of the juvenile, proletarian-union, and middle-class sectors that had been growing since the late 60's.

However, less than two months after his inauguration and once the exiles and repressive legislation were revoked, Cámpora and his vice-president resigned under the pressure of the Peronist party machine and of some legal artifices. The resignation allowed for new elections, which were won by Perón himself with 62% of the votes in September 1973. Until his inauguration, in October of that year, Raúl Lastiri held the position of interim president. The "leader" ruled until his death in July 1st 1974 and was succeeded by his widow and vice-president María Estela Martínez. She was eventually overthrown by a military coup on March 24th 1976.

By its turn, the political radicalization process started in the 60's was being carried out in its most visible form – albeit it was not the only one nor the most important in terms of social mobilization – by a series of armed organizations which since 1970 had been highly active. The actions and discourses of these organizations merged the resistance to the outgoing military dictatorship with a revolutionary socialist project, or "national socialist", channeled to an armed fight strategy. The actions of these groups were centered in taking over military units, robbing banks, kidnappings and/or assassinations ("executions") of servicemen, policemen, businessmen, union members considered "sold out," etc.; and were heavily repressed since their inception.[2] Thus, General Alejandro Lanusse, in charge of the political transition from the dictatorship which ended in 1973, at the moment of passing over the power to Cámpora, denounced the

[2] According to the newspaper *La Nación*, between April 1969 and April 1971, 252 robberies of banks or other financial institutions; 682 public intimidation or sabotage acts; 127 assaults; 73 thefts of guns; 3 kidnappings; and 3 assassinations had been carried out (Apud. AMÉZOLA, 1999: 88). According to data from the Montoneros, the main Peronist guerrilla organization, between 1966-1973, in the government's repressive acts, 100 people had been murdered and 500 others had been jailed for political reasons. (GILLESPIE, 1998: 148). The most significant fact was the execution by the military government of a group of guerrilla members from several organizations that had attempted to escape prison in August 1972. The way this massive assassination was carried out has led many author to consider the "massacre of Trelew," the location in Patagonia where it took place, as the first State terrorism act (DUHALDE; 1999; PITTALUGA, to be published).

"subversion" that "aims at chaos, destruction, and violence" and "has deprived itself of this Argentinian dogma and its actions endangers the institutions."[3] In great part it was this growing violence, along with the general atmosphere of popular and proletarian mobilization, that led the military decision of making way to a new constitutional period, in a scenario where the return of Perón was seen as "a lesser evil" or "embankment" of both the armed actions and the increasing social conflict, even at the price of accepting the integration of Peronism into the political system and giving it its legitimacy back (AMARAL, 2004; DE AMÉZOLA, 1999).

Nevertheless, the actions of the armed organizations continued. After Cámpora won the elections, the Marxist guerrilla, whose main exponent was the *Ejército Revolucionário Del Pueblo* (People's Revolutionary Army), the armed branch of the *Partido Revolucionário de los Trabajadores* (Workers' Revolutionary Party - PRT-ERP), publicly announced "conditional support" to the constitutional government and claimed it would keep acting against the "enemies of the people" (Armed Forces, multinational companies, etc.)[4] By its turn, Montoneros, the main Peronist guerrilla, two days after Perón was elected president, murdered José Rucci, the mais union exponent of Peronism and Secretary General of the *Confederación General del Trabajo* (General Work Confederation - CGT). This last deed must be seen as part of an internal fight of Peronism, overtly deflagrated from July 1973 and with which we will deal later on.

As the guerrilla groups kept active even under a constitutional regime, this became the focus of the public disapproval, which could be seen in the national media, and the questioning of violence, at least along 1973, became the motto of the traditional players of the political system. Thus, as early as Cámpora's election, in March of that year, it could be foreseen the circulation of a public discourse of multiple origins, both from the most important partisan opposition – the *Unión Cívica Radical* (Radical Civil Union - UCR) – and from several sectors of the future Peronist government, demanding the end of the armed actions, since it was claimed their previous legitimacy was backed by the lack of democracy and by the dictatorial nature of the previous regime, and hence it

3 *La Opinión*, 5/4/73.

4 Ibidem, 4/25/73.

was expected that their activities would cease after the return of a constitutional rule. Perón himself had indicated this when he pointed out that "the matter of the guerrilla can't avoid a natural law that establishes that, once the causes disappear, so must the effects."[5]

Notwithstanding, the guerrilla actions grew in a context of political radicalization and strong internal clash against Peronism.

The intraparty conflicts of Peronism:

The return of Peronism to power in 1973, first with the figure of Cámpora and especially with the arrival of Perón himself to the presidency, ignited the competition among the multiple internal sectors that postulated their own interpretation of Peronism as the legit one and worked to drag their "leader" towards that position, besides declaring full loyalty to him.[6] Up until then, the amplitude of the movement and the needs for a political strategy by their ultimate leader, in exile and banned since 1955, had allowed the co-existance of numerous opposing internal sectors. But with the arrival in power and without Perón having previously mediated the clashing sectors, the dispute for controlling the government and the party reached great extremes (DE RIZ, 2000; SIGAL and VERÓN 2004).

Following Cámpora's resignation and the failure of the "leader's" authority and of the doctrinarian verticalism to contain and discipline the "special formations" – as the guerrillas originated inside Peronism were called – the intraparty conflict started to wane with the progressive dislocation and expulsion of these sectors whose role was considered over with the electoral legitimacy they obtained. The most visible materialization of such process was the "Ezeiza massacre," in June 20th 1973, where the Peronist Youth factions, connected to the Montoneros and the *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias* (Revolutionary Armed Forces - FAR), were confronted by the political and

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5 Ibidem, 3/15/73.
We have analyzed several aspects of these public discourses about the violence in Franco (2008 and 2009). For this study, we briefly revisit some of these issues.

6 As Sigal and Verón (2004) point out, in this conflict each sector "intends to take over the 'true' Peronism, each one defines its 'We' as the only possible collective and classifies the opponent as *traitor* or *infiltrated*" (2004: 150, highlightings in the original).

union sectors that represented the right wing of the movement.[7] However, the conflict was more than the elimination of the "organized violence," publicly rejected, and reached the whole so-called "Revolutionary Tendency." In short, the conflicting internal sectors were, on the one hand, the left-wing "tendency," whose members were young groups, armed organizations, a combative wing of trade unions, intellectuals, and several forces originated in the left, who had joined Peronism in previous years and who defended a "socialist nation," and, on the other hand, the right-wing "tendency" which "negotiated" – made up by the majority union branch and some political-partisan sectors rooted in fascism and anti-communism, later connected to López Rega and the security forces.

In the months following the Ezeiza incident, the physical and verbal clash was constantly present in threats, attacks, and assassinations. As we will see, the persecution focused on the goal of "cleansing" Peronism through the elimination of the "internal enemy" and those "infiltrated," a wide range of people that included all the radical internal sectors, whether or not militarized, in all of its heterogeneity. An example of this was the case of the Peronist governors close to those radical sectors that were removed from office through forced resignations or federal interventions, a theme we will explore later on. Nevertheless, the process was not a unilateral one. The deterioration and the worsening of the internal conflicts of Peronism was fed by the actions of the Peronist guerrilla itself. Therefore, as early as in 1972, the youth leader Rodolfo Galimberti, in large assemblies of the Peronist Youth, had openly threatened the "union bureaucracy" by saying: "We shall crush them as cockroaches" (Apud. GILLESPIE, 1998: 154). The aforementioned assassination of Rucci can be included in this same line, soon after Perón's electoral tryumph.

Under the impact of this assassination, the *Consejo Superior Del Movimiento Nacional Justicialista* (Higher Council of the National Justicialist Movement) issued a classified document of "ideological depuration" of an anti-Marxist nature aimed at "terrorists" and "subversives" inside the movement and in the name of national liberation and loyalty to Perón.[8] This document was

7 In June 20th 1973, Perón returned to the country after 18 years of exile and was awaited in the Ezeiza Airport by a large popular crowd. There, the Peronist right-wing – in charge of organizing the demonstration – started a confrontation and promoted a bloodshed against the radicalized internal sectors (see VERBITSKY, 1985). Until today, many aspects of the events of that day are the subject of discussion and have not been clarified.

8 *La Opinión, 10/2/73.*

distributed among the province governors in a meeting arranged by interim President Raúl Lastiri (ANDERSEN, 1993). The same way, Rucci himself had called for the "ideological purification against the infiltration into the movement," just before being murdered (DE RIZ, 2000: 142). Therefore, the traditional anti-communism of Peronism was articulated as a central argument of the internal ideological fight and caused a wave of violence in different levels of the partisan and governmental system, which included everything from the assassination of senators and politicians connected to the *Tendencia Revolucionaria* to "purges," such as the case of Mendoza governor, Martínez Baca, who was "summoned" by a provincial partisan congress to "clean up" his government from the "Marxist infiltration" within 72 hours.[9]

As we will see, part of these clashes were ratified by means of instruments obeying the constitutional legality – federal interventions, interventions in universities and unions, laws and decrees for intensifying the repression against "subversion," etc. Others were solved with the overt employment of parapolice and para-state violence. In either case, for several years the unrest of Peronism was established as a variable which did not depend on the national political rationale, one which was articulated and fed by the problem caused by the employment of other forms of political violence of and against the non-Peronist left.

The "right-wing violence":

In parallel with this intraparty process, the press started to increasingly turn a blind eye to the so-called "right-wing violence," in broad and vague accounts that referred to "parapolice formations" or to "illegal pressures,"[10] "shock groups" (union-related or partisan) and forms of violence that would only later be clearly imputed to the *Triple A* and the figure of López Rega. Although these forms of violence were not new, the phenomenon, of diverse and heterogenic origins, reached new levels in 1973 and began to be publicly known as "right-wing violence."

Probable, the most significant advance in this line rose from inside

[9] Ibidem, 10/16/73.

[10] *La Nación*, 3/18/73; *La Opinión*, 1/30/74.

Peronism itself, which along the years of 1973 and 1974 was established as the main conflict of the national politics. Even before Ezeiza, union "gangs" connected to the *Unión Obrera Metalúrgica* (Metallurgic Workers' Union - UOM) and the *Juventud Sindical Peronista* (Peronist Union Youth - JSP) and other groups of the extreme Peronist right such as the *Comando de Organización* (Organization Commando - C de O) and the *Concentración Nacional Universitaria* (National University Concentration - CNU). To those we must add, of course, the parapolice commandos that were part of the *Triple A*, the organization led by López Rega, Minister of Social Welfare of the Peronist government, which started acting openly since November 1973. These groups acted against both the members of the *Tendencia Revolucionaria* of Peronism and the left-wing union and political militants, attorneys of political prisoners, intellectuals, journalists and other ways of ideological questioning, not necessarily linked to the armed organizations. It is estimated that between 1973 and 1976, they openly murdered more than 2,000 people, besides carrying out numerous bombings and kidnappings. Some of the chiefs of the *Triple A* commandos in action since 1973, Commissaries Alberto Villar and Luis Margaride, were put in the head of the Federal Police by Perón himself in 1974 (GONZÁLEZ JANZEN, 1986). While the *Triple A* was publicly denounced in numerous opportunities, no denounce or public request for investigation or interpellation of government members had significant results. Just the same, even though the connections of López Rega with the organization were the target of public denounces, its association with the rest of the government or with Perón himself went unnoticed (FRANCO, 2009).

In this context, the violence spiral became routine, establishing a state of normality characterized by this violence and its counterpart: A rejection discourse from all dominant sectors of the political system and a governmental practice that was increasingly centered around exceptionality for the sake of "homeland security."

State action: Discourses and practices:

In September 1973, ERP tried to overtake the *Dirección de Sanidad del Ejército* (Army's Sanitation Directory), carrying out the first really important guerrilla attack since the return of the constitutional legality. At that moment, the Executive Power, under the interim rule of Raúl Lastiri until Perón's inauguration, declared:

> The persistence of these anti-national elements in producing actions such as the ones of this morning shows that these groups simply seek to create chaos and are enemies of the Argentinian State. Moreover, it shows their complete disconnection with the people whom, at some time, they intended to fool pretending to support in their social demands. (...) The national government (...) also declares its decision of putting an end to the misdeeds of the minority groups who carry out services which are contrary to the national interests.[11]

The *Sanidad* episode was equally condemned by other sectors from both the government and the opposition. The CGT, for instance, called ERP an "anti-people, a minority that was fully divorced from the feelings, the struggles, and the aspirations of the millions of Argentineans who raised the flag of national liberation," stating that "gorillas[12] and Trotskyists are hand in hand (...) to sow hatred across the country."[13] By their turn, the deputies of the governing coalition, the *Frente Justicialista de Liberación* (Liberation Justicialist Front - FREJULI), denounced that "relentless right and the sepoy left want to once again affront our people."[14] The main opposition party, the UCR, through its foremost leader, Ricardo Balbín, in the line of condemning all violence that he kept throughout the analyzed period (FRANCO, 2008) declared: "we understand that [the guerrillas] serve the non-national interests they claim to fight, but they rather disturb the task of national liberation."[15] ERP's illegality, for being a "subversive group" and for "sedition," took effect through Decree 1454 of September 23rd 1973. With a peculiar detail: It was the first time a legal norm was disclosed in the *Boletín Oficial* – Argentina's legal and official information organ – under the title of "subversion."[16]

As it can be easily seen through the given examples, the distinct understanding of the traditional political and institutional players took violence as a problem which was external to society, which had infiltrated it and was totally alien and opposite to the "Argentinian spirit," to the "fatherland," and to

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11 *La Opinión, 9/7/73.*

12 Traditional derogatory denomination of the anti-Peronists.

13 *La Opinión*, 9/9/73.

14 Ibidem.

15 Ibidem, 9/11/73.

16 Ibidem, 9/25/73. 2.

the "national being." Under this rationale, it was considered that the nation had been jeopardized by the "representatives of chaos" and these would progressively both those on the left and the right, "the terrorism of both signs," anti-nationals and anti-Argentinians, who threatened society. Moreover, in the context of the Peronist hegemony of the time – let's keep in mind that Perón had been elected with 62% of the votes in 1973 – the fatherland and the nation as the heart of the threatened identity merged and mixed with Peronism. The "Argentinian national identity" was thus interwoven with the Peronist's (SIGAL and VERÓN 2004). This mix of discourses allowed for the revival of a complex antagonism mechanism towards the exclusion of political opponents – be them inside or outside Peronism –, now in the name of comdemning violence from the State, of order and of the institutions.

In this context, in the end of 1973, Perón signed, along with his Ministers and all province governors, the "Act of commitment to homeland security" that created the National Security Council and new mechanisms of centralizing around the government the coordination of police actions and the national and province security forces for immediate intervention in case of "criminal" acts or acts that risked "public order," aiming at the "definite eradication from the Argentinian Republic of all kinds of organized criminal action." The text of the Act detailed:

> [...] there must be greater concern and severity in repressing the trafficking of drugs, guns and literature that instructs subversion and chaos, aware that such evils, it would be naïve not to acknowledge it, fulfill the desire of creating states of collective anguish that do not share the reality that builds the country day after day.[17]

In the same Act, the Minister of the Interior Benito Llambí, president of the Council, pointed out: "There are no frontiers to terrorism, crime and subversion; there will be no frontiers to eliminate and eradicate them."[18] In the press conference following the Act, Perón denounced:

> There's law and there's justice and those who offend them will face this law and this justice through the natural pathway that every democracy grants its citizens. Believing the contrary would be guaranteeing injustice and we would go about killing people in the streets who neither deserve nor have a reason to die. I shall not take the path of violence since, if to the violence of these elements I add the violence of the State, we will reach no solution.[19]

[17] Ibidem, 12/21/73.

[18] Ibidem, 12/22/73.

[19] Ibidem, 12/21/73.

The same legal instrument was also used by the Minister of Labor to control the protests of the more combative workers' associations, since he allowed for punishing with 1 to 3 years of imprisonment those who encouraged a conflict which had been already declared illegal by the authorities (DE RIZ, 2000: 164). Meanwhile, several important combative unions directors were removed from their positions by interunion disputes, such as René Salamanca from the mechanics' union of Córdoba, or Raimundo Ongaro of the print work laborers' association by declaring their union illegal (Ibidem).

As some government decisions and the discourses of the time show, along 1973 the theme of violence was explicitly approached as a police issue regarding the labeling of those responsible for it was "delinquents," similar to the "classic" forms of criminality and its forms of control through the traditional law enforcement institutions such as the police. This concept, to which Perón himself showed particular interest, progressively changed, but the theme only reached its full political character in most understandings in mid-1974, after the "leader" was already dead (FRANCO, 2009).[20]

Soon after the homeland security Act, in January 1974, PRT-ERP assaulted a military facility in Azul (in Buenos Aires province), in a deed whose journalistic and political impact cannot be understated. On the one hand, the episode sped up the Penal Code reform, already attempted by Perón since 1973 and which was concluded few days after the armed incident. The change implied heavier punishment to the guerrilla acts – even beyond the penalties enforced by the previous military dictatorship – and the repression of the illegal strikes.[21] In this occasion, Perón declared, quickly drifting away from his previous public pose and in a clear reference to the resistance of the sectors that did not want to vote the change in legislation, that "If there is no law, we shall also act out of the law and we shall do it violently. Because to violence nothing can be opposed

[20] In every way, even in the same act of signing the Act of commitment, the political statements of Perón and his Minister contradict each other regarding the limits of legality to contain the violence. The difference would last little (...) On the other hand, the goal of maintaining a police understanding of the problem had to do with moving away from the understanding prior to 1973 typical of the outgoing dictatorship that conveyed a political character to the guerrillas, stimulated by Perón himself (FRANCO, 2009).

[21] The reform of the Penal Code had been sent to Congress in July 1973 by Lastiri. Previously, Cámpora, when he was inaugurated, had criticized the repressive legislation imposed by the *de facto* governments. *La Opinión, 1/25/74.*

other than violence itself."[22] Notwithstanding, the opposition parties opposed the reform arguing that it meant the return of repressive measures typical of the previous dictatorship. Moreover, in the landmark of the intraparty conflict, eight deputies of the Peronist Youth, inside FREJULI, were forced to resign in face of their denial to vote in favor of the new legislation.[23] The Peronist Youth, in consonance with Montoneros, denounced the law calling it the "Baton against the people," to which the government responded by censoring the publications *El Descamisado* and *Militancia* due to "Marxist infiltration."[24]

On the other hand, as Perón's speech clearly shows, the attack to Azul seemed to have meant a widespread rupture with a certain tolerance to violence. The national Peronist unions, the business associations, the political parties of the whole institutional spectrum, the Catholic Church, and the Armed Forces came forth in "disapproval of violence" and in "defense of the nation." In the case of the Peronist sectors, this discourse was built since the vertical attachment to Perón and in defense of the projetct of "National Liberation." Taking as an example one end of the spectrum, which had multiple similar interventions, the contractors' association threatened:

> Be them from ERP, FAL [*Fuerzas Armadas de Liberación* – Armed Forces of Liberation] or FAP [*Fuerzas Armadas Peronistas* – Peronist Armed Forces], or whatever they are called, they now begin to know the honor of all Argentinians. Our Armed Forces (now more ours than ever) have been punished by these drugged delinquents, dressed as revolutionaries. They claim for a firing squad. So they shall have it. Perón has appointed the time. They are blood. We are more than that. As Evita has said: For me, millions will rise.[25]

The Unión Industrial Argentina (Argentinian Industrial Union - UIA) classified the incident as an "attack against the Argentinian Nation," highlighting that "deeds of such nature intend to impose to the Argentineans a way of life that ignores and mercifully destroys the values of the country."[26]

Thus, the public disapproval of violence and the progressive construction of an image of reality in terms of defending the national identity attacked by part of these institutional sectors was articulated and fed with the government's

[22] *La Opinión, 1/23/74.*

[23] Ibidem, 1/24/74.

[24] Ibidem, 1/24/74.

[25] *Movimiento Unificado Nacional de Obreros de la Construcción* (National Unified Construction Workers Movement), *La Opinión,* 1/24/74.

[26] *La Opinión, 1/23/74.*

political practice, backed in discourse by the State and constitutional monopoly of violence, and in an intraparty practice of "cleansing" from the "internal enemy" supported by the legitimacy of Perón's voice and the need for defending the leader and his national project.

Immediately after Azul, and although the attack had not been the reponsibility of the Peronist guerrilla, the Executive Power threatened with a federal intervention in the province of Buenos Aires due to the "complacence" of its governor, Peronist Oscar Bidegain, in face of the attack. It caused the resignation of the latter, who was close to the Revolutionary Tendency of Peronism.[27]

Therefore, the constitutional instrument of federal intervention or the governmental mechanism of forcing resignations were employed with a clearly ideological motivation aiming at "purging" workers close to the Revolutionary Tendency of Peronism or, later on, members of the Partido Peronista Auténtico (Authentic Peronis Party - PPA).[28]

The first case was the governor of Buenos Aires in January 1974; soon thereafter it was the province of Córdoba with the resignation of its governor and the federal intervention approved by Congress in March 1974;[29] shortly, in June, the resignation of Mendoza governor, Alberto Martínez Baca, the roots of a request for a legal trial and the federal intervention in the province in August; [30] in that same month, the destitution of Jorge Cepernic, governor of Santa Cruz, and the federal intervention in the province;[31] and finally, in October 1974, the destitution of Salta governor, Miguel Ragone, under the argument that with power acephalia there could be no fight against terrorism and subversion, and its later federal intervention.[32] The dates clearly show the interventions took place in a short time span and seamlessly between Perón's presidency – until

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[27] Ibidem, 1/23/74.

[28] PPA was created in March 1975 to compete in the elections for the government of the Misiones province. It was formed as a coalition that gathered members of the revolutionary tendency of the Montoneros, overthrown ex-governors, and former trade union members of the Peronist resistence and also from the 60's movements, such as Andrés Framini (GILLESPIE, 1998). Under this same logic of depuration, much later, in April 1975, ex-president Cámpora was expelled from Justicialism for his support to the PPA and for cooperating with the "obscure interests of the foreign subversion." *La Opinión, 4/23/75.*

[29] Law 20,650.

[30] Law 20,718.

[31] Decree 1018.

[32] Decree 1579.

July 1973 – and under the rule of Martínez de Perón,[33] as well as the discretionary use of the Executive Power's authority by means of the decrees – mostly during the government of Perón's widow – and, in other cases, through the parliament, were Peronism as a coalition of parties held the majority in both houses of Congress.

In the most significant episode of this list, Córdoba governor, Ricardo Obregón Cano – who came from a "democratic Peronism" (SERVETTO, 1998: 34) – had incorporated representatives from the Peronist Youth and the Revolutionary Tendency into his government and into the province's partisan leadership. Cano and his vice-governor, Atílio López, a member of the so-called "combative unionism" had to resign in face of an uprising of his own province police chief, an episode known as "Navarrazo," in February 28th 1974. This incident had the active participation of the officialist unions of the 62 Organizations, the *Juventud Sindical Peronista* (Peronist Union Youth) and the support in arms and equipment sent by the Ministry of Social Welfare. The silent support of Perón, who had been denouncing the Córdoba province as an "infection site" where, just like in "many provinces, there have been infiltrated people and this has caused problems,"[34] culminated with the province intervention sent to Congress in March 1st. The intervention project condemned "the subversion, mother of chaos and source of insecurity," of which the authorities were held responsible for having "tolerated" its presence (Ibidem: 99). The pronvince intervention cause moreover a parallel but interconnected problem: The union conflits between Córdoba's "combative" associations and the Peronist national unionism, which denounced Córdoba's SMATA as sectors that followed "anti-Argentinian interests" and "intend to create chaos."[35] As Alicia Servetto (1998) points out, the federal intervention, to which all of Cordoba's political forces opposed, except for the Peronist sector who had supporte the "Navarrazo," legitimated the intervention of the police forces in order to overthrow the government and hence solve the local Peronist issues, also consolidating the "union bureaucracy" and the displacement of the most radical Peronist and association groups.

33 To this list, the death of members of the Executive of the Misiones province in a strange plane crash must be added.

34 *La voz del Interior, 2/21/74 (Apud. SERVETTO, 1998: 92)*

35 *La Opinión, 8/9/74.*

In parallel with this legal and intraparty advances, another set of political and ideological control measures was put into action. One of them was the Law of Professional Associations, which strenghtened CGT's power – the foundations of Peronism, according to Perón – and its intervention mechanisms over trade unions[36]; another measure was Law 20.713, or of expendability, which left the laying off of State workers in the hands of the authorities of each facility.[37] Other important areas of intervention were the cultural and educational activities, since they were spaces of governmental power, areas of pressure and of the intraparty game of Peronism and, at the same time, places where popular mobilization and radicalization found a home. It was the case, for example, of the replacement of the dean of studies of the Buenos Aires University and of the Minister of Education by persons who were close to the Peronist right-wing or openly fascist. These were followed by the University Law,[38] passed in March 14th 1974, which allowed for the "normalizing" intervention in multiple universities across the country, taking away their autonomy and prohibiting any political activity in them.[39] Also throughout this period several publications of general interest and/or partisan nature were arrested and censored, such as the Peronist weekly magazine *El Descamisado* in April 1974 and the Montoneros-connected daily newspaper *Noticias* in August of that same year (GILLESPIE, 1998).

As it has already been mentioned, the ideological offensive by the State and through legal instruments was further articulated with the growing action of the parapolice right-wing groups clandestinely connected to the police and State machines. Nevertheless, this "right-wing violence," which was always presented as alien and disconnected from the authoritarian legal advance of the State, was seen by the press and by other players of the political system as a negative consequence of the left-wing violence. Therefore, the latter was always the most important target of the denounces by the press and by the players of the institutional political system. For example, the radical party claimed that "as an answer to the extreme left-wing violence, the extreme right-wing has been

[36] Law 20,615; *Boletín Oficial*, 12/17/73.
[37] *Boletín Oficial, 8/14/74.*
[38] Law 20,654.
[39] *Boletín Oficial, 3/25/74.*

perched with a message of terror."[40] This way, many interventions seemed to suppose, either explicitly or implicitly, that the "right-wing violence" was a response to the deeds of the "left-wing violence", which made the right wing act in the name of "order."[41] Jut the same, the daily newspaper *La Opinión* considered the *Triple A* a "counter-guerrilla" and the *Buenos Aires Herald* claimed that this organization had been formed to fill "a vaccum in the fight against the guerrilla."[42] Even the Communist Party accused the guerrillas of inciting the reactionary violence (CAMPIONE, 2008), and even the *Partido Comunista de los Trabajadores* (Workers' Communist Party -PST)[43] disapproved of both the right-wing violence, linked to the State, and the "left-wing guerrillarism that wants to make a revolution through a civil war and in disregard of the proletarian class."[44] Hence, the "left-wing violence" was since its origin held responsible of the spiral of violence, an understanting of that time which will be revisited starting in 1983, after the dictatorship was over, by the constitutional government of Raúl Alfonsín.[45]

In this context of growing violence and of enforcing repressive legal measures, the military voices began to rise in order to claim a more active role in the "anti-subversive fight," within the constitucional limits, since until mid-1974 the "anti-subversive" action had been embedded into police operations. So, Army Commander Leandro Anaya, declared in May 30th of that year that his arms "will decisively contribute to keeping the nationless aggressor from ever reaching their final goal: Taking over the power and dissolving the institutions that make up the essence of our nation."[46] In effect, as early as August, September and November 1974, under the government of "Isabelita," after

[40] Antonio Tróccoli, *La Opinión*, 5/15/75.

[41] *Sindicato de Luz y Fuerza* (Light and Force Union), *La Opinión*, 1/22/74.

[42] *Buenos Aires Herald,* 5/30/75.

[43] PST is a party of Trotskyist origin founded by Nahuel Moreno in 1972 from the merger of a fraction of PRT – the *PRT-La Verdad* (PRT-The Truth) – with a group coming from the Socialist Party.

[44] PST, La Opinión, 11/6/74.

[45] The decrees 157 and 158, issued by Raúl Alfonsín in December 13th 1983, ordered first the legal prosecution of the heads of the main armed organizations – Montoneros and ERP – and, shortly later, the prosecution of the military hierarchy that carried out the coup and the repressive regime that followed it. Notwithstanding, while the prosecution of the military heads was carried out in the trials of the Military Commitees of 1985, the prosecution of the guerrilla leaders only reached the sentence – not fulfilled – of thirty years of imprisonment for the montonero director Mario Firmenich in 1987.

[46] *La Opinión, 5/30/74.*

Perón's death, the Army took part in several repressive operations in Tucumán and Catamarca.

From this year on, "terrorism," "extremism" or "guerrilla" were overtly qualified as "subversives" and the terms were used almost interchangeably by many political players and the national press published in Buenos Aires (FRANCO, 2008; 2009). So, for instance, regarding the governmental policies, in late September Congress approved the Security Law[47] for "the repression of the terrorist and subversive activity," publicly insisting that it was targeted at exterminating subversion within legal limits. The new legislation included the imprisonment of those who spread messages likely to "change or suppress the institutional order and the social peace of the Nation."[48] Soon afterwards, in November 6th 1974, a state of siege was declared "against terrorism to guarantee the national lifestyle and the family."[49] This measure was imposed in an answer to the assassination by Montoneros of Commisary Alberto Villar – Chief of the Federal Police, appointed by Perón in January 1974, and one of the chiefs of *Triple A* and of the parapolice repressive system since 1973. It is important to highlight that although the state of siege was ordered during "Isabelita's" government, the measure does not seem inappropriate – at least in essence – since it figures as a latent possibility in the decrees of Perón himself few months earlier.[50] On the other hand, several sectors, from the majority group of UCR to the 62 Organizations, accepted the measure acknowledging it was a constitutional instrument to "fight against subversion" and deemed its use was not arbitrary. Only a few forces, mostly from the left, denounced its repressive character. Raúl Alfonsín – leader of the "Renovation and Change" wing in UCR – considered it an extreme measure and denounced "the perils of an elitist violence in the name of order and the perils of a widespread terror protected by institutuional needs."[51] The state of siege would not be revoked until the rise of the democratic regime in 1983.

As for the press and the subversion discourse, it can be said that the term

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[47] Law 20,840.

[48] *La Nación,* 9/27/74.

[49] Decree 1368, *La Opinión*, 11/8/74.

[50] Decree 811, which censored the newspaper *El Mundo*, connected to the PRT, announced, in an almost threatening way, the possibility of "general suspension of civil rights" in face of a "state of public need." *Boletín Oficial, 3/21/74.*

[51] *La Opinión, 11/9/74.*

and the definition of reality it implied was present in most means of communication analyzed from 1974 on (FRANCO, 2009). Among multiple examples, the position of the conservative newspaper *La Nación* is significant, which, although recognizing the existence of a violent right, did not keep itself from emphasizing the need to condemn the violence associated to the "subversive left," inside or outside Peronism. This way, in its pages it exhorted the government to exclude from its heart those who defended this orientation and later encouraged the centralization of the "anti-subversive fight" around the Executive Power.[52] This periodical even openly reproduced the military parameters of interpreting the conflict as a "revolutionary war" of a new kind,[53] one that demanded, for example, the control of the "subversive penetration" into "the minds and the hearts" of high school students through textbooks.[54]

As such information shows, the idea of the existence of a "subversive enemy" threat and the need for "homeland security" to face it was progressively and increasingly implemented. Nonetheless, the process acknowledges qualitative advances, some of which took place in 1975, during the government of Martínez de Perón. One of them was Decree 261 of February 5th, which established the intervention of the Armed Forces in the province of Tucumán.[55] However, as it has been pointed out, the military interventions of a repressive nature were not new; they had already happened in that same province in May 1974, and in Catamarca, in the killing of Capilla del Rosário in August of that year, where over ten ERP guerrilla members were executed by gunfire. The difference was that the 1975 decrees widened and systematized the military intervention and allowed for the infamous "Operation Independence," aimed at the "anti-subversive fight" in order to control the actions of the localized rural guerrilla created by ERP in this province. With this operation, the first clandestine detention center was opened and the vanishing of people took place.[56]

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52 *La Nación, 9/7/75.*

53 Ibidem, 4/23/75.

54 Ibidem, 4/6/75.

55 *La Opinión, 2/6/75* and nexts.

56 We do not have enough documentation or investigations to know if the vanishings and the repressive methods employed in this occasion were due to the growing autonomy of the Armed Forces actions and and a pressure by them over the Executive Power – as some authors point out (ANDERSEN, 1993) – or if it was in the lookout of the methods employed and even

Later, in October 1975, following the Montoneros assault to the Monte 29 Infantry Regiment, in the province of Formosa, the military intervention and its reach across the national territory were officialized in a series of decrees issued by Ítalo Lúder, who was in charge of the Presidency during the sick leave of "Isabelita." These new dispositions established the creation of the *Consejo de Seguridad Interna* (Domestic Security Council) formed by members of the Executive Power and the Armed Forces for the "anti-subversive fight,"[57] the appointment of another entity, the recently created *Consejo de Defensa Nacional* (National Defense Council), for establishing partnerships with the provinces and putting under its operational control the police and prison staff for the "fight against subversion,"[58] and the appointment of the Armed Forces for carrying out the military or security operations needed to "annihilate the actions of the subversive elements throughout the country's territory."[59] It is important to highlight that this kind of military intervention, after being employed in the province of Tucumán against the guerrilla, was also used in worker conflicts, such as in Sierra Grande (GILLESPIE, 1998: 251).

Along 1975, also in a context of great political tension both inside the government and in trade unions, besides an economic crisis, the public military presence became more frequent and visible, especially when it was legitimated by the State with the mentioned measures. The public martial interventions then showed a visible distancing between a discourse centered in disapproving of "extremism" and "subversion" and a more open disavowal that included the need for "order," "authority" and "defense of the nation," even incorporating the disapproval of the "right-wing terrorism" and the "Lopezreguism."[60] These

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authorized it. In this respect, the little knowledge about this connection between the Executive Power and Armed Forces during the period of 1973-1976 do not allow for the full understanding of the issue. If it is evident – according to the press of the time – that starting in 1975 there was a growing military presencce that excerted public pressure over the government and the political system. Even in the case where the Armed Forces had put pressure over the Executive to obtain the control of the anti-subversive fight and had acted autonomously regarding methods and repressive resources, the governmental responsibility is unquestionable and is articulated throughout the previous repressive escalation.

[57] Decree 2770; Boletín Oficial, 11/4/75.

[58] Decree 2771; Boletín Oficial, 11/4/75.

[59] Decree 2772; *Boletín Oficial*, 11/4/75.

[60] In June 1975, a series of economic measures that implied in a brutal economic adjustment over the wage-earning sectors cause the outburst of a massive protest that further increased the growing tension between unions and the government. The conflict culminated with the

interventions and the legitimation they received from the State and from a great part of the press put the Armed Forces in a position of ultimate arbitrators to settle and reduce the "sedition of both signs."[61] Evidently, the link between the right-wing parapolice violence and the Armed Forces – through the role of the State that dealt with these interventions legally or illegally – did not become very visible, although it might be known and denounced by some militant sectors.[62] So, in October 1975, in a context of an assault of Montoneros to the Formosa Infantry Regiment, Videla, member of the Committee of Commanders that took over the *de facto* power starting in 1976 and one of those responsible for the State terrorism, stated:

> If the dillemas about the protesters of the State as the "legitimate monopoly of force" continue, if the leaders hesitate in their loyalties and if the left- or right-wing violence persists, the crisis of the State will give way to the domain of force, and in this case the military presence shall be the head of the regime. It will them be too late (...) because the current public ideology will the *homeland security* (...).[63]

These statements reveal, as early as the last quarter of 1975, the explicit agreement inside the Armed Forces to take over the "doctrine of the anti-subversive war," a position that became public in the IX Conference of Army Commanders of the Americas in Montevideo in the end of that year. However, in this conference, Videla also kept the apparently apartisan professional position of the Argentinian Armed Forces (DUHALDE, 1999).[64]

Meanwhile, the public perception of a subversive figure, already very advanced in 1975, widely escaped a strict application on the Marxist or Peronist guerrilla organizations and characterized both publicly and generally other forms of protest. It was the case of the worker conflicts such as in Villa

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resignation of López Rega and his ally, the Minister of Economy Celestino Rodrigo. This brought about a wave of criticism and denounces against the questioned servant. *La Opinión, 7/26/75.*

[61] J.R. Videla, *La Opinión*, 9/6/75.

[62] Besides de connection that represented the State as the articulating player, the relations between the Armed Forces and the *Triple A* passed through personal connections of those responsible, with full military awareness of the organization's actions since 1974 and soon the handover of some agents of the *Triple A* to the *Secretaría de Información del Estado* (State Information Secreatry – SIDE) after the coup (GONZÁLEZ JANZEN, 1986). The connection was overtly denounced by Rodolfo Walsh in 1977: "The three A are today the Theee Arms, and the Committee you all preside is not the deciding factor between 'violences of distinct signs' nor the fair arbitrator between 'two terrorisms,' but rather the same source of terror that has lost the sense of purpose and can only babble the discourse of death." ("Open Letter", Rodolfo Walsh, 3/24/77.)

[63] *Revista Critério,* cited by *La Opinión,* 10/3/75, highlightings in the original.

[64] *La Opinión, 10/25/75.*

Constitución, in Santa Fé province, in the first months of 1975. There, the workers' mobilization led by "combative" unions, in a conflict aiming at intervening in the national director board of UOM, was presented by the Executive Power as part of a "subversive terrorist operation put under way by an insignificant anti-national minority."[65] Nor did the press hesitate in classifying as "subversive" the mobilization and the worker conflicts. Then, throughout 1975, the term "manufacturer war" was spread to make reference to the worker and industrial conflicts, put side by side with the "subversion" the Armed Forces fought in several regions of the country.[66]

This way, the "anti-subversive" discourse and practice expanded and fed each other in the discourse of the institutional political players and of traditional dominant sectors, contributing to causing, probably, widespread social consensus whose reach would only later be seen with the 1976 coup. In fact, the existence of the "subversion" was used even as real data to question the government itself and the right-wing parapolice groups connected to it: The *Partido Popular Cristiano* (Christian Popular Party), a member of FREJULI, denounced that the State "is passing the repression against subversion over to armed gangs that are as dangerous as the violence it wishes to repress."[67] This kind of statements, even if when denouncing the State violence, does nothing other than making the existence of "subversion" seem natural and shows the reaches of the social implementation of this ideological discoursive construction.

By contrast, the institutional voices that rose publicly against the repressive practices based on the homeland security and defense with a position of completely eliminating them were few. Among them, the director of the *Partido Intransigente* (Intransigent Party), also a member of FREJULI, Oscar Alende, regularly insisted on the need of fighting the violence with deep-reaching solutions and not only with repression.[68] In general terms, with the growth of extraordinary measures turned into normal (PITTALUGA, to be published), the voices of the institutional opposition limited themselves to

[65] Ibidem, 3/22/75.

[66] For instance, Ricardo Balbín, leader of the opposition, *La Opinión*, 12/14/75; Arch-bishop of Santa Fe, 7/10/75; Armed Forces, *La Opinión*, 11/14/75, etc.

[67] *La Opinión, 4/3/75*.

[68] Ibidem, 10/2/75.

demanding the control of the State actions or parliamentary investigations, all of which without greater consequences of effects. Some of these voices, moreover, such as the case of the largest opposition party, the UCR, were also responsible for creating a political and ideological atmosphere that facilitated the drift towards exceptionality.

## Final thoughts

Undoubtfully, the "security" issue had increasingly become a paradigm that defines "the normal way of governing" of the modern Nation-States (AGAMBEN, 2007: 44). In this sense, the questions raised here would be nothing new. However, the coincidences in the discourses and practices of the State (and of other political players mentioned here with smaller emphasis) with some aspects of what is known as the military doctrine of "homeland security" (DSN) are evident around certain base topics such as the configuration of an internal enemy, born from the infiltration of foreign ideologies, representing a threat to the nation, which must be eliminated, and whose main origin is Communism.[69]

In the case at hand, these topics show the presence of the issues of "security" and "defense" of the assaulted nation as both practice and discourse installed in the government, in the political system and even in the circulation of public and mass discourses in the press and other traditional power players, much before the dictatorship that began in 1976. Through it, the Argentinian case exemplifies the difficulty in analyzing the "homeland security" discourse as a strictly military ideological *corpus* and the need for studying other political practices very close to them ideologically, albeit they are not defined as such nor had strictly the same characteristics of the "national security States" put into

[69] Beyond a core of topics that include the DSN, its contents show a certain variety between the armed Forces and the several countries of the Southern Cone (for example, the different wheight of the "development" issue in the Brazilian case; Moreira Alves, 2005). Just the same, the DSN has been defined in a much more heterogenic manner according to the several academic currents and its weight has been assessed in a different way in each national case and according to the interpretations. Among these national and/or interpretation differences, the variable appreciation of the French doctrinary component of the "couter-revolutionary war" inside the DSN can be mentioned (see López, 1987; Mazzei, 2001), the different overlapping of the DSN with other previous military traditions in each country, for example, "Ibanism" in Chile (Ortíz de Zarate, 2006) or the "authoritarian utopia" in Brazil (D'Araujo, Soares, Castro, 1994); or the assessment of the presence of the DSN in the discourse of the constitutional government in Uruguay (Castagnola y Mieres, 2004).

effect by the Armed Forces of the region.[70]

So, whithout implying a direct attachment to the DSN, nor to its methods, by the Argentinian political forces of the period under study – an issue that will require further investigations –, the analysis performed here shows that the "subversion" became an orchestrator of the political-discoursive relations (under the risk of nullifying all real understanding of the political conflicts) and, its counterpart, the "anti-subversive" discourse, became the orchestrator of the implemented legal practices.

Anyway, it is key to clarify that the discourse on subversion was not new in 1973 and was fully present inside the Armed Forces in the early 60's. In a process of progressive development since 1955, the first military publications of the Higher School of War on the theme date back to 1957 and are connected to the French missions in the Argentinian army (LÓPEZ, 1987; MAZZEI 2001). In fact, in Argentina, the first important application of the anti-subversive doctrine took place with the *Plan CONINTES* (Internal Commotion of the State) enforced by the constitutional government of Arturo Frondizi in 1960, which permitted declaring certain industrial areas or cities as militarized zones where the security forces could carry out operations and occupations. Soon later, since 1966, the military dictatorship of the "*Revolución Argentina*" fully aligned with this military doctrine and with the organisms created by that time, the *Consejo Nacional de Desarrollo* (National Develpment Council) and the *Consejo Nacional de Seguridad* (National Security Council), as well as the National Defense Law of 1966, followed this line (LÓPEZ, 1987). As we have shown, shortly later, in the early 70's, some of these discoursive topics were publicly and frequently discussed outside the military sector.

It then remains to be clarified the process through which this anti-subversive discourse usually understood as a doctrine and domain of the Armed Forces, became – at least in some central topics – a discourse of mass circulation and State pratice. A direct alternative is to think that this discourse emanated from the Armed Forces towards the rest of the political sectors and, in particular, Peronism, also taking into account the military background of its leader. Another alternative, much more complex, is to evaluate the social and

[70] One exceptional but key case to think the complexity of the problem is Colombia. There, the DSN was formally and legally used by the successive constitutional governments since 1965 through the National Security Law (Decree 3398) of 1965, for organizing the "national defense."

ideological basis – wide and diffuse – of a nationalist discourse – of a strong Christian, integralist and anti-Marxist root – over which the hegemony of the homeland security discourse was built inside the Army, and that, given this common ground, was present and could be taken by many other right-wing groups, several of which strongly connected to Peronism, and also driven by the Cold War context and by the political radicalization process of many Latin American sectors after the Cuban Revolution. In any case, analyzing this process goes beyond the goals of this study.

Another aspect that deserves some thought and a specific questioning is the institutional nature of the authoritarian and repressive measures implemented in the period and its articulation with other practices which were neither official nor legal. Although pointing out the authoritarian escalation is nothing new, as we have said, it is only seen after "Isabelita" and/or focuses in the parapolice character (thereby neither official nor legal) of the *Triple A*. If, instead, it is only emphasized that the Peronism conflict was connected to the political need of Perón himself of "cleasing" the movement of those tendencies that grew in the late 60's and that soon ceased to be functional (AMARAL, 2004; DE RIZ, 2000). We believe that the analysis of Perón's repressive policy must be put in perspetive not only against the intraparty conflicts, but also against the global process in which both things are included: The construction of long-term representations inside the political system as a whole and the growing institutional "exceptionality." Therefore, the historical and cronological review of the Peronism policies around its two main presidents in the period (Perón and Martínez de Perón) make up an interweaving of political practices, some legal, others whose legality was backed by the "exceptionality" of the situation, others illegal, and yet others of an intraparty character though mixed with government policies. It all constitutes an interweaving of political practices whose differentiations are analytically necessary, but that must be rearticulated as a mesh in the interpretative level. In this sense, the requirement for mantaining certain repressive ways inside the juridical limits, such as was requested by the political opposition, never meant a safeguard, while the persecution and repression were in great part carried out within the normative limits defined in the Constitution. The problem then was not the legality or illegality of the actions, but rather the growing exceptionality of these "legal" measures.[71] As Roberto Pittaluga points out, recalling Giorgio Agamben:

> the pure opposition between legal and illegal practices or the characterization of the situation prior to the coup as one where the State had lost its legit monopoly of violence due to the acts of the ultaright groups lose sight of this imbrication between the law and its suspension, with the consequent constitution as an excepctional space of vast areas of the social thread. (PITTALUGA, to be published: 4).

On the other hand, as it has been previously said, if the problem of violence must be put under this perspective, one cannot ignore the responsibility of the political system and not only of the players in the government. Because of this, it is important to mind not only the institutional mechanisms and the security practices employed in each case, but also the representative effects of its articulation with the widespread discourse of disapproval of violence and, in particular, the growing denouncing of "subversion" and "chaos" by the several traditional political sectors. In the conceptual framework of Agamben, he dealt with a discourse that accepted and legitimized the exeptionality of the exercise of power as a means of guaranteeing the conservation of a juridical order which was destroyed by the very same exceptional practice.

As to the presence of these ideological topics in the governmental measures and in the circulation of political discourses in the period dealt with here, the analysis indicates an important fact: The continuity of practices and representations with the military dictatorship that began in 1976. It does not mean that we should relativize the specific weight that implied in the institutional disruption of the coup and the implementation of a repressive system articulated and systematized across the country under military responsibility. Instead, it is a matter of studying the importance of the 1973-1976 period with its own logic, and not only as a mere "waiting room" of the military dictatorship; it is a period when the institutional drift and of the political system as a whole was articulated heart and sould with the military State terrorism, not as a "detour" through the para-state path, but actually as a

[71] The point up to which the repressive and authoritarian escalation was solidary of a conception of exceptionality of power can be seen in the short debate, today forgotten, that took place between the last months of 1975 and March 1976, when Martínez de Perón offers the Armed Forced the possibility of "bordaberrizating" the political system, that is, dissolving Congress and creating a civil-military co-government concentrated in the Executive Power, as Juan María Bordaberry had done in Uruguay in 1973. The Armed Forces turned down this option. (DE RIZ, 2000.)

State policy. This drift of the whole system was, probably, what allowed for the violence that ensued. Undoubtfully, the public implementation of certain ideological frameworks and of the idea of the legal exceptionality as necessary in order to face "the problem of violence" contributed to creating a certain consensus on the theme – on its responsibilities and on the possible "solutions" –, which soon to a great extent justified the 1976 military coup.[72]

In other words, the hypothesis proposed here is that it was a process of slow drifting towards authoritatianism *from the heart and through the institutions* of the democratic regime itself, and that by no means was it the result of some governmental measures, of some sectors, or of some parallel or illegal practices. Surely, such drift was soon articulated with the military Pretorianism and the background of coups the Argentinian Armed Forces have.

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[72] The theme of "subversion" and the repression of the guerrillas, without being a strict attachment of the DSN, was also used in other constitutional regimes of the region as part of an ideological offensive against the political and cultural left. The most notable case was Uruguay, where the "early security measures" of the constitutional government of José Pacheco Areco, since 1968, began a repressive and authoritarian escalation that later continued with the government of Juan Maria Bordaberry until the dictatorship formally started in June 1973.

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