

## **José Martí, Argentina, and U.S. militarization**

By Tom Whitney

José Martí, lead organizer and inspirer of Cuba's revolution that secured the island's independence from Spain, brought the idea of "Our America" to his task of national liberation. He thought that all peoples in lands south of the Rio Bravo – now the Rio Grande – ought to get together, and not only that, they'd do well to defend themselves against the United States, ever intent, he believed, on exercising domination over "Our America."

Martí died a martyr's death in battle on May 19, 1895, and since then U.S. aggressive attitudes and actions have validated the thinking and action of Cuba's national hero. Now once more the northern power is interfering in the sovereign affairs of a Latin American nation.

Presidents Néstor Kirchner (2003-2007) and Cristina Fernández (2007–2015) resisted the strengthening of U.S. military influence in Argentina. In 2006, Argentina stopped sending soldiers to train at the School of the Americas. In 2011 Argentinean authorities prevented the unloading of arms from a U.S. Defense Department airplane, arms reportedly intended as instructional aids in U.S.–run police training courses. In 2012, President Fernández blocked negotiations with U.S. embassy officials by the governor of Chaco Province in the country's Northeast that would have brought a \$3 million U.S. Army facility to La Resistencia, on the west bank of the Paraná river. The project was billed as "humanitarian in nature."

But now the door in Argentina is open. Mauricio Macri succeeded Cristina Fernández as Argentina's president in December 2015. His government has moved toward "free trade and an explicit alignment with US economic and foreign policy interests," according to an analyst. Argentina's business class has welcomed relaxed currency exchange regulations and repeal of export taxation on most agricultural products and minerals. The Macri government fired 32,000 public sector workers and borrowed money to pay off the usurious loans of U.S. creditors.

On a state visit to Argentina in March 2016, President Obama praised Macri for efforts "to create more sustainable and inclusive economic growth, and to reconnect Argentina with the global economy and the world community."

Thus in a spirit of refurbished bi-national relations, U.S. and Argentinian military officials held meetings at the Pentagon beginning May 18.

Argentina's Vice-Minister for Defense Ángel Tello and Rebecca Chavez, the U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Western Hemisphere Affairs headed the respective discussion teams.

According to Tello, agreements were reached on "collaboration in confronting humanitarian emergencies and natural disasters, peace missions under

United Nations auspices the concerns of both nations with terrorism, and [Argentinian] troops once more taking instructional courses offered by the United States." In general, "we have advanced in reforming bilateral relations broken in 2009."

There would be a future U.S. role in "re-equipping [Argentina's] armed forces". And, crucially, the Pentagon conferees OK'd preparations for two U.S. bases in Argentina.

One is proposed for the northeastern province of Misiones, specifically for the city of San Ignacio, located on the eastern side of the Paraná River, on the opposite shore and upstream from the aforementioned base proposed for Chaco in 2012. Each is close to the "triple border" area where the boundaries of Brazil, Paraguay, and Argentina join.

That region's strategic value derives in part from its supposed role as a home base for terrorism and from smuggling, drug trafficking, and money-laundering that are endemic there. The giant Itaipú hydroelectric dam is located near the confluence of the Iguazú and Paraná rivers. And the area overlies the Guarani aquifer, the world's largest reservoir of drinkable fresh water.

The U.S. interest in the area is hardly new. The United States had maneuvered earlier to set up a base in the province, and U.S. and Argentine troops engaged in military exercises in Misiones in 2002.

Tello told La Nación newspaper also that "the United States has demonstrated its interest in deepening ties of cooperation in Antarctica." He was referring to "the building of a military base in Ushuaia to provide support for ships and airplanes engaged in 'scientific studies' in Antarctica." Pentagon planners had earlier expressed interest in the project.

Ushuaia, population 57,000, already an Argentinian naval base and formerly the site of a notoriously abusive prison, is the world's southernmost city. The prospect of a U.S. base in Ushuaia has provoked criticism within Argentina. The remarks of Elsa Bruzzone of the Center of [retired] Soldiers for Democracy (CEMIDA) are representative.

The analyst explains: "The United States uses various excuses such as 'humanitarian aid,' and help with natural disasters in order to install military bases ... What they want to do is to fence off all the natural resources we have in Our America." She added that "Antarctica is the greatest reservoir of frozen fresh water on earth, and the greatest deposits of hydrocarbons and highly strategic metals in the region are located on the Antarctica Peninsula.

They are indispensable for military and aerospace manufacturing. The U.S. object is to obtain control over all our natural resources.”

Thus the list of peoples victimized by U.S. greed and by U.S. military power lengthens, and Jose Martí, were he alive, wouldn't be surprised. Nor, one supposes, would he have remained silent while U.S. militarization spread far beyond Latin America.

David Vine has studied the phenomenon of U.S. military bases in the world. There are no less than “800 US bases in foreign countries,” he says, and “US troops or other military personnel [are] in about 160 foreign countries and territories.”