



# The Eichmann Kidnapping: Its Effects on Argentine-Israeli Relations and the Local Jewish Community

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**T**he election of Arturo Frondizi as president of Argentina in February 1958 was welcome news to both the Israeli embassy in Buenos Aires and the leaders of the local Jewish community. And he had not lived in the presidential palace for long before their expectations appeared to have been justified. The Jews of Argentina felt a growing sense of security and well-being, and relations between Jerusalem and Buenos Aires grew closer.<sup>1</sup> The kidnapping of Adolf Eichmann in May 1960, however, interrupted this idyll, precipitating a crisis that nearly severed the ties between the two countries and threatened Argentine Jews' sense of personal security. The Argentine Jewish community, which was then just marking the hundredth anniversary of its existence, became the target of a wave of antisemitic terror and nationalist attacks that sought to cast doubt on Jewish citizens' loyalty to the Argentine republic.

This article will examine the consequences of the Eichmann kidnapping for the Jewish community of Argentina and for Buenos Aires' relations with Jerusalem. The contrast between the very speedy resolution of the crisis in Israeli-Argentine relations and the affair's long-lasting effects on Argentina's Jews indicates once again that the interests of the local Jewish community and those of the state of Israel—which defined itself on the day of its birth as “the Jewish state”—are not completely congruent and involve, at times, different dynamics.<sup>2</sup> It also

indicates that Argentine authorities were too often unwilling or unable to put a stop to antisemitic attacks by nationalist groups. Instead, they opted for closer relations with the Jewish state, hoping in this way to prevent such attacks from blackening Argentina's image in Western public opinion in general and in the American media in particular. Securing U.S. support and economic cooperation was, after all, a prime goal for all Argentine governments in the post-World War II era.

### High Hopes

Argentina abstained from the United Nations vote in November 1947 on the plan to partition Palestine and establish a Jewish state there. Once the state of Israel had been founded, however, President Juan Perón sought close relations with it. Yet all the populist president's efforts to win the confidence and enlist the support of the Jewish community in his own country were in vain,<sup>3</sup> and many Jews applauded his overthrow in September 1955. Frondizi, in contrast, headed the progressive-left faction of the Radical Party (Unión Cívica Radical Intransigente, or UCRI), a party traditionally seen to represent middle-class interests and which accordingly enjoyed the support of most of Argentina's Jews.<sup>4</sup>

Frondizi had courted the Jewish community and shown consideration for the position of the Israeli embassy even before he was elected president.<sup>5</sup> In December 1957, he requested a meeting with the Israeli ambassador, Arye Kubovi. The ambassador attributed this request to "the possibility that his [Frondizi's] advisers urged him to win over the Jewish community through me."<sup>6</sup> In the meeting, the UCRI presidential candidate explained that it was "his intention to re-emphasize his party's friendly attitude toward the Jewish community and the Jewish people." As evidence, he pointed to the candidacy of a Jew, Luis Gutnizky, a member of Frondizi's progressive faction, for the position of governor of the province of Misiones.

Kubovi, considering himself on this occasion to be a spokesman for the Argentine Jewish community as well as an Israeli diplomat, argued that this was not enough, and he urged Frondizi to include a prominent Jew among the UCRI's top candidates for the federal capital's representatives in the national Chamber of Deputies.<sup>7</sup> "If I am not mistaken," the ambassador remarked, "the first Jew on the list is in spot number 12 [Zenon Goldstraj]. How can this be compared to the status of, for example, Arturo Matov, a Popular Radical [the competing faction], who will in fact be the leader of his faction in the constituent

assembly?” Frondizi, forced to defend himself, argued that Matov had achieved his senior position by virtue of his long party career, not because he was a Jew. Kubovi agreed that such was the case but stressed that, nonetheless, “the Jewish public will prefer to support a party that puts a Jewish personality in a central position.”

Frondizi knew that many Jews had not voted for his party in the elections to the constituent assembly in July of that year, and he now began to fear that his meeting with the Israeli ambassador would not only fail in its goal of gleaning support in the Argentine Jewish sector but would actually prove detrimental to his candidacy. He “pondered for a few minutes and said: ‘You think, then, that we should look for a prominent personality in the Jewish community outside party ranks to put on our list of candidates?’ and then relapsed into thought.” The meeting ended amicably, with Kubovi expressing his confidence that Frondizi would be victorious in the coming elections, giving Argentina “a great president,” and Frondizi, for his part, promising that “if we come into power your community will have firm friends in the government.” This interview demonstrated how thin the line was between diplomatic endeavor and interference in the internal affairs of another country, and how blurred the limits were between the Israeli ambassador’s role as a representative of the Jewish state and his role as a representative of the Jewish community in the country in which he was accredited.

During Frondizi’s presidency, many Jews were indeed appointed to senior positions in the administration. David Blejer, for example, served first as deputy minister of the interior and subsequently as minister of labor and social welfare.<sup>8</sup> Samuel Schmokler was appointed executive secretary of the president’s office. In the province of Misiones, Luis Gutnizky was elected governor, as anticipated, and Goldstraj was a UCRI deputy.<sup>9</sup> These were the highest positions Jews had ever held in Argentina. “As for the Jews,” wrote M. Avida, a diplomat in the Israeli embassy in Buenos Aires, after a meeting with Schmokler, “there has never been a period in the history of Argentina like this one, in which Jews have so much influence on the management of the state and so many Jews take active part in executive political life.”<sup>10</sup> The historian Haim Avni noted that, “as individuals, Argentine Jews felt. . . , in 1958–1959, increasingly secure and socially and economically prosperous.”<sup>11</sup>

This did not mean, of course, that in those months antisemitic incidents were nonexistent.<sup>12</sup> In December 1959 and January 1960, swastikas were painted on Jewish houses and institutions in West Germany, and this wave of antisemitism spread to many other countries,

including Argentina.<sup>13</sup> The Argentine government hastened to express vigorous condemnation of these actions to both the Jewish community and the Israeli government. A government statement termed the vandalism “isolated deeds that do not reflect in any way [the] feelings of the Argentine people,” and said that the government would take firm measures “to prevent any attempt to create a climate of racist hatred, which is a sign of barbarism and is against the Argentine tradition and way of life.”<sup>14</sup> When, on January 12, the Argentine Chamber of Deputies reassembled after the summer recess, a good part of their first debate was devoted to condemning antisemitism.<sup>15</sup>

Meanwhile, Argentina’s relations with the Jewish state were growing closer. This was notably reflected in a series of reciprocal visits by senior dignitaries of both countries. The Israeli interior minister, Israel Bar-Yehuda, headed an Israeli delegation that attended the UCRI president’s inauguration ceremony. The Israeli minister of trade and industry, Pinhas Sapir, also visited Argentina and met with all the economic leadership of this Latin American republic.<sup>16</sup> The visit that stood out the most in those months, however, was that of the Israeli foreign minister, Golda Meir, in June 1959. Meir, who had visited Argentina before, met with President Frondizi and senior government officials, and her nine-day visit was widely covered by the Argentine media. The two chambers of Congress held a festive joint session in her honor.<sup>17</sup>

Prominent among the Argentine visitors to Israel in those months were the speaker of the Argentine Chamber of Deputies, Dr. Federico Fernández Monjardín, and the speaker of the Senate, Benjamín Guzmán, who went to Israel as guests of the Knesset. General Pedro Eugenio Aramburu, Argentina’s former interim president, was warmly received as the man who “restored democratic rule and freedom to his country and the 20 million people of his nation.”<sup>18</sup>

Economic relations looked promising after the signing of a new trade agreement on March 31, 1958, in Buenos Aires by the Argentine foreign and finance ministers and Ambassador Kubovi.<sup>19</sup> After Frondizi took office, both states appointed senior diplomats as their respective ambassadors in Tel Aviv and Buenos Aires. Rodolfo García Arias, a veteran diplomat well versed in Middle Eastern affairs, was sent to Tel Aviv, and Arye Levavi, deputy director-general of the foreign ministry, was now his opposite number in Argentina.<sup>20</sup> Nonetheless, in Jerusalem foreign-ministry officials had the feeling that, even in Frondizi’s administration, the Argentine foreign ministry remained under the control of Catholic nationalists,<sup>21</sup> a factor that under certain circumstances might make Israel’s relations with Argentina difficult.

In 1958, Israel celebrated 10 years of independence, and President Frondizi sent Dr. Ignacio Palacios Hidalgo, who had been head of the constituent assembly, to attend the festivities as his personal representative.<sup>22</sup> A few months later, Israelis began a series of gestures honoring the approaching 150th anniversary of the beginning of the revolution (on May 25, 1810) that led to the independence of the Argentine republic some six years later. The Jerusalem municipality named a street after General José de San Martín, the hero of Argentine independence, and a forest was planted on the hills of Jerusalem in his honor. A decision was also made to send a large delegation of dignitaries to Buenos Aires to take part in the anniversary celebrations, which were scheduled to culminate on May 25, 1960. The delegation was headed by Abba Eban, then a minister without portfolio, and included senior army officers and government officials.<sup>23</sup>

### **The Eichmann Kidnapping**

The story of how Adolf Eichmann was found, captured, and taken to Israel has already been exhaustively recounted,<sup>24</sup> and so has the story of the Nazi criminal's trial, which was a formative event for Israeli society in its efforts to come to grips with the Holocaust.<sup>25</sup> This article, however, focuses on the Eichmann affair's impact on relations between Israel and Argentina and on the local Jewish community.

From the outset, the head of the Mosad (the Israeli secret service), Isser Harel, saw clearly that getting Eichmann out of Argentina would mean "a secret operation in the sovereign territory of a friendly state; and the question as to whether we were entitled, morally and politically, to do such a thing faced us in all its pungency."<sup>26</sup> By the norms of international relations, Israel was supposed to notify the Argentine authorities of its suspicion that one of the German immigrants living in the suburbs of Buenos Aires was none other than the war criminal Adolf Eichmann.<sup>27</sup> If Israel had done so, it would have had to wait through the lengthy process involved in extraditing Eichmann to West Germany or one of the other countries in which he was sought. Israel feared that this process, if it took place, would lead to nothing, or that Israel's application would allow Eichmann to disappear before proceedings could be undertaken.<sup>28</sup> The prime minister, David Ben-Gurion, decided that the moral and historical aspect, as he understood it, was compelling, and he gave Harel the go-ahead to kidnap Eichmann, with all the diplomatic risk such an operation entailed.<sup>29</sup>

In those years, Israeli aircraft did not make commercial flights to South America. Accordingly, Israeli officials had decided to send the Israeli delegation to Argentina for the 150th anniversary celebrations in a special El Al plane that was supposedly testing the possibility of instituting a commercial line between Tel Aviv and Buenos Aires. Eichmann, who was kidnapped on May 11, was flown to Israel on that plane.

On May 23, 1960, two days before the independence celebrations in Argentina reached their zenith, Ben-Gurion announced to the Knesset:

[S]ome time ago, Israeli security forces discovered one of the major Nazi criminals, Adolf Eichmann, who was responsible, together with the Nazi leaders, for what they called “the final solution of the Jewish problem,”—that is, the annihilation of six million European Jews. Adolf Eichmann is already in jail in Israel and will soon be tried in Israel under the 1950 Law for the Punishment of Nazis and Their Collaborators [*Hok le-asiyat din be-natsim uve-ozrehem*].<sup>30</sup>

Although Ben-Gurion did not specify the name of the state where Eichmann had been located, the world communication media—beginning with the American weekly magazine *Time*—wasted no time in reporting that “Israeli agents” had kidnapped the Nazi criminal in Argentina.<sup>31</sup> These reports were published on the front pages of the Buenos Aires papers.

The Argentine foreign minister, Diógenes Taboada, promptly requested an unequivocal statement from Ambassador Levavi as to whether Eichmann had been arrested in Argentina. “If Eichmann was captured in Argentina, that is contrary to international norms and will compel Argentina, despite its good relations with Israel, to register a most serious protest, with unforeseeable consequences.”<sup>32</sup> The minister explained that this should not be interpreted as a threat but simply reflected the gravity of the situation. Levavi replied that he did not know the country in which Eichmann had been arrested, nor did he know whether Israeli citizens had been responsible for his capture.

In the wake of this conversation, Levavi advised the foreign ministry in Jerusalem that the government of Israel should deny the report that Eichmann had been kidnapped in Argentina:

In my view, there is an almost certain danger that the Argentine government, weak and beleaguered by the opposition, will be forced to cease diplomatic relations with us if we do not deny the Eichmann kidnapping here. Such a denial will balance the situation, and slowly the good tenor

of relations that prevailed in the past will return. A break in diplomatic relations with us will be a fatal blow to the local Jews and to their actions on behalf of Israel, and will undermine our position throughout Latin America for a long time.<sup>33</sup>

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Thus, Israel's first message to the government of Argentina through Levavi said that "the Government of Israel did not know that Eichmann had come from Argentina, because the Israeli security services had not notified it of this." According to this message, Eichmann had been taken to Israel by a group of volunteers who had managed to locate him in Argentina, where he was living under an assumed identity. When Eichmann discovered that his true identity had been discovered, said the message, "he expressed his consent to come in all goodwill to Israel for trial . . . so that future generations would receive a true picture of the facts." At that point the volunteers handed Eichmann over to the Israeli security services.<sup>34</sup>

Besides critical remarks about the presence of Nazis in Argentina, the Israeli message contained many internal contradictions. This dubious account—which Levavi called *bobe-mayses* (tall tales)—was rejected, of course, by the Argentine authorities.<sup>35</sup> Levavi then suggested that Ben-Gurion send a personal message to Frondizi "in a less official, more flowery style" to improve the atmosphere.<sup>36</sup>

Levavi's suggestion was accepted in Jerusalem, but the Argentine ambassador in Tel Aviv, García Arias, did not want to convey this missive to the foreign ministry in Buenos Aires for fear that it would be leaked and thereby fail to achieve its objective. Accordingly, Levavi was asked to give Frondizi the message directly.<sup>37</sup> The Argentine president replied to Ben-Gurion's placatory letter by saying that he understood "the feelings of the Jewish people about the dreadful deeds attributed to Adolf Eichmann," but he insisted that Eichmann be returned to Argentina and that Israel request his extradition "in the framework of the existing legal arrangement."<sup>38</sup>

President Frondizi, as he admitted after his overthrow in an interview with the historian Félix Luna, found himself caught between opposing forces, "[on one hand] those who believed that Argentina should not press any claim, since it would mean defending a criminal like Eichmann, [and on the other hand] the pressure from those who wanted to turn the problem into a means of persecuting Jews."<sup>39</sup> The president, who certainly could not be suspected of personal hostility toward Jews, did not want an antisemitic campaign, which the nationalists were trying to promote—including nationalists in the foreign ministry ("the Nazis in the foreign ministry administration," as Levavi

put it)<sup>40</sup>—and he perceived the shortsightedness of severing relations with the state of Israel. He was also beating off pressure from the more conservative Radical faction (Unión Cívica Radical del Pueblo, or UCRP), which was trying to take advantage of the situation to attack his government.<sup>41</sup>

To show he was taking a firm stand, Frondizi initially ordered the recall of Argentina's ambassador from Tel Aviv for consultations.<sup>42</sup> However, by June 11, Levavi reported to the Israeli foreign ministry that Frondizi's Jewish adviser had told him: "The president has decided to end the dispute over Eichmann. He wants the affair to be submitted to the U.N. and to sink into the archives somewhere. No one intends for us to return Eichmann. . . . Presumably García Arias will soon return to Israel. Frondizi is very interested in meeting with Ben-Gurion in Paris."<sup>43</sup>

Because the president of Argentina and the prime minister of Israel happened to be in Europe at the same time in June 1960, there was some discussion that a meeting might be arranged, perhaps through the mediation of the French president, Charles de Gaulle, as a way of ending the crisis in relations between the two states. To that end, Avraham Darom, director of the Latin American division in the foreign ministry, was even sent to Rome, Frondizi's first stop in Europe. However, the meeting between Frondizi and Ben-Gurion, scheduled initially for Paris and later for Brussels, never took place.<sup>44</sup> At that stage, the Argentines were still insisting that Eichmann be returned to Argentina.

Argentina did indeed turn the matter over to the United Nations, though the Catholic nationalist Mario Amadeo, Argentina's ambassador to the international organization, was one person, at least, who did not want the issue to "sink into the archives somewhere," and his unyielding stance did nothing to facilitate the resolution of the crisis.<sup>45</sup> In a meeting with Golda Meir in mid-June, Amadeo demanded that the infringement of Argentine sovereignty be rectified. Among other things, he suggested that Israel deliver Eichmann to the Argentine embassy "which is also considered their territory, and there he will wait until some international forum decides to whom he should be turned over." Meir raised the possibility that he would be taken to the embassy "for a few minutes with an explicit agreement that we immediately take him back into our custody," a suggestion that Amadeo rejected as inadequate.<sup>46</sup> Similar mediation efforts by Enrique Rodríguez Fabregat, the Uruguayan representative at the United Nations and chairman of the U.N. Committee on Human Rights, were equally unsuccessful.<sup>47</sup>



The U.N. Security Council was scheduled to hold an emergency meeting on June 22, 1960, to discuss Argentina's complaint. The Argentines demanded a debate on the infringement of their sovereignty and a condemnation of Israel for kidnapping Eichmann in violation of the rules of international law and the U.N. goals as expressed in its charter and conferences. The Security Council duly met, condemned Israel, and ordered it to give Argentina "appropriate reparations." It resolved that "acts such as that under consideration, which affect the sovereignty of a member State, and therefore cause international friction, may, if repeated, endanger international peace and security." The resolution that was eventually passed included two amendments by the United States that were accepted by the Argentines. The first amendment stated that the Security Council was "[m]indful of the universal condemnation of the persecution of the Jews under the Nazis and of the concern of people in all countries that Eichmann be brought to appropriate justice for the crimes of which he is accused." The second amendment expressed the hope that "the traditionally friendly relations between Argentina and Israel will be advanced."<sup>48</sup> The United States, Britain, and France voted in favor of the resolution of censure. It was, interestingly, the Soviet Union that defended, albeit cautiously, Israel's position and, together with Poland, abstained from the vote.

In his speech before the Security Council, Amadeo stressed the good relations that Argentina and Israel had enjoyed previously and the complete equality that Argentina extended to its Jewish citizens. According to him, these facts made it much more difficult to find a reasonable excuse for Israel's infringement of Argentine sovereignty, especially coming as it did only a few days after the two states had signed an extradition treaty. He defended the right of asylum that Argentina granted to political refugees, and he stressed that the political refugees in Argentina included many Jews who, like Eichmann, had entered the country with forged documents but that the Argentine government had turned a blind eye in order to save their lives. These words drew an angry response from Foreign Minister Meir, who was particularly incensed by his mention in the same breath of Eichmann and of the illegal entry of Jewish Holocaust refugees. Even in a legalistic debate, she said, comparing Eichmann to his victims seemed to her "quite extraordinary."<sup>49</sup>

Argentina made its most dramatic move on July 22, when it declared Levavi, Israel's ambassador, "persona non grata." This diplomatic maneuver was the least Frondizi could do, given the pressure being exerted on him from different directions, but it was also the most he

was willing to do. Levavi, who in his telegram to Jerusalem emphasized that he had been notified of the measure “with a marked degree of personal courtesy,” was later to look back on the act as something Frondizi did against his will, in an attempt to preserve his image.<sup>50</sup> A notable feature of the testimony provided by Israeli diplomats serving in Buenos Aires at the time is that they met with no angry or vengeful hostility on the part of the authorities during the two months of the diplomatic crisis.

In any case, by the beginning of August the storm had passed, or, as Levavi said: “The *sulhah* [reconciliation ceremony] was almost immediate.”<sup>51</sup> Israel sent Shabtai Rosenne, the foreign ministry’s legal adviser, to Buenos Aires at the Argentine government’s request.<sup>52</sup> In friendly talks with his counterpart in the Argentine foreign ministry, Luis María de Pablo Pardo, Rosenne was told that the government of Argentina had “reached the conclusion that the tension between the two states should be ended” and that the incident must be

settled as soon as possible and relations with Israel restored to normal. In its eyes, then, the removal of the ambassador seems the simplest and neatest way of achieving that objective. This step will appease the various elements pressuring the Argentine government to take a firm line with Israel. For the government of Argentina, the removal of Levavi will wipe out the incident and it will be possible to re-establish normal relations between the two states.<sup>53</sup>

De Pablo Pardo attributed Argentina’s desire for a speedy resolution of the crisis to “the complicated international situation, and given the difficult situation created in Latin America by the expansion of the Cold War to this region, they are interested in minimizing unnecessary conflicts.” When Rosenne met with Frondizi, who, like de Pablo Pardo, received him “cordially and even warmly,” the Argentine president also stressed that they had “decided to wipe out the incident and emphasized in particular economic motives connected with the development of the state. He already sensed a certain aloofness toward Argentina on the part of wealthy Jews around the world, and such an aloofness might disturb his plans.”<sup>54</sup>

Thus, Rosenne faced no real obstacles in drafting, together with officials of the Argentine administration, a one-paragraph joint communiqué that was published simultaneously in Buenos Aires and Jerusalem. The communiqué included an official apology by Israel for action by some of its citizens that constituted a violation of the sovereignty of the Argentine state, and a declaration that the incident was

over and the diplomatic crisis was at an end.<sup>55</sup> A few days later, the Argentine Chamber of Deputies approved by a large majority a draft resolution expressing satisfaction over the settlement of the differences with Israel in the Eichmann affair.<sup>56</sup>

At the end of September 1960, an Israeli archeological exhibition opened in Buenos Aires as planned, sponsored by the Argentine government as part of the celebration of 150 years of independence. The presence of senior Argentine officials, led by the minister of education and acting foreign minister Luis MacKay, at the exhibition's opening was interpreted as an official renewal of friendly relations between the two countries. Around the same time, the Buenos Aires municipal council approved a plan to name a main street in the federal capital "Estado de Israel" (State of Israel). At the end of November, the Israeli minister of industry and trade, Pinhas Sapir, visited Buenos Aires as an official guest of the Argentine government, and he met with President Frondizi and the foreign and finance ministers.<sup>57</sup> Even before the end of the year, the two states exchanged new ambassadors, who promptly announced that relations had returned to the same friendly level as before the crisis.<sup>58</sup>

Thus, the initiative for ending the crisis, it must be stressed, came from the Argentines and was not the result of negotiations between the two states. The improvement in their relations must be viewed, first and foremost, in the context of Frondizi's strong desire to strengthen Argentina's political and economic ties with the United States.<sup>59</sup> It should be remembered that, a year earlier, Frondizi had been the first Argentine president to visit the United States, and he enjoyed the support of the administrations of both Dwight Eisenhower and John F. Kennedy, who had welcomed the reinstitution of a pluralistic democratic regime in Argentina after three years of military dictatorship. Although difficulties did arise in Argentine-U.S. relations, particularly over the Argentine president's attitude toward the Cuban Revolution, Frondizi understood the vital importance of good relations with Washington, and he made many public gestures toward the United States. He did not want to appear indifferent to the defense of Argentina's national sovereignty, but he recognized—perhaps even overestimated—the influence and economic power of the U.S. Jewish community, and he wanted to avoid unnecessary clashes with American public opinion over the Eichmann affair.<sup>60</sup>

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## Jews and the Accusation of “Divided Loyalties”

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Although Argentina's relations with Israel returned relatively quickly to their normal course, such was not the case with the feelings and situation of Argentine Jews, whose number at the time was estimated at some 420,000 out of a population of about 21 million—about 2 percent of the population.<sup>61</sup> The leaders of the largest Jewish community in Latin America found out about the Eichmann kidnapping in the newspapers.<sup>62</sup> None of the Jewish organizations in Argentina made any public demur to the kidnapping of Eichmann, and some Jewish public figures—such as José Mazar Barnett, president of the Argentine central bank, and Máximo Yagupsky of the Argentine-Jewish Institute—even contributed to resolving the crisis in the relations between the two countries. Others urged friends in the major political parties and the press to try to give the incident a positive aspect.<sup>63</sup> These efforts were partially successful, and some of Argentina's leading newspapers, such as *La Prensa*, *Crítica*, and *El Mundo*, began to show considerable understanding for Israel's position and to criticize the government's policy in the 1940s and 1950s that had allowed Nazi criminals to elude punishment for their deeds by taking refuge in Argentina.<sup>64</sup> Other papers questioned Amadeo's moral right to attack Israel for kidnapping Eichmann. Amadeo was known to have shown sympathy for the Axis countries during World War II. Arturo Matov, a member of the opposition UCRP faction in Congress, asserted: “Doctor Amadeo cannot be our spokesman in the UN, since he himself was an enthusiastic supporter of Hitler.”<sup>65</sup>

Nonetheless, certain circles of the Jewish community were definitely uncomfortable with the way Israel had carried out its operation. According to the American Jewish Committee representative in Buenos Aires,

[A] feeling of panic developed among community leaders in the first days after Eichmann's seizure was revealed. They feared that the tension between Israel and Argentina would reflect upon the local Jewish community; that there would be direct attacks by antisemites; and that they would be accused either of dual loyalty or of greater loyalty to Israel than to their own country.<sup>66</sup>

The more Zionist-oriented Nathan Lerner, vice president of the political umbrella organization of Argentine Jews, the Delegation of Argentine Jewish Associations (Delegación de Asociaciones Israelitas Argentinas, or DAIA), in 1957–58, described the atmosphere in a

slightly different way: “There were mixed feelings. In the first place, we all supported the action. . . . Some of us were worried about the possible consequences. Some said it was an illegal deed. Some said it could hurt [Israel’s] relations with Argentina. . . . But there wasn’t any alarm among the Jewish leadership.” At the height of the crisis, the *Ha-aretz* correspondent in Buenos Aires also wrote of uneasy feelings:

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In the Jewish street, they are saying that the government of Israel showed lack of understanding concerning a sensitive point in these [Latin American] countries. The wording of the Israeli communiqués and explanations did not seem in keeping with either the Jewish public’s status, which is closely linked to Israel’s position, or the friendly relationship with Argentina. The Argentines, including the Jews among them, feel hurt by the lack of respect toward their country, manifest—in their opinion—in the first of these communiqués. The embarrassment is clear even in the position of a man such as Dr. [Gregorio] Topolewski, the former Argentine (Jewish) ambassador in Israel, who is very close to Israeli circles. At first he expressed the view that Eichmann should be returned to Argentina.<sup>67</sup>

Dr. Mario Schteingart, president of the Argentine-Jewish Institute, was not the only one to think that it would be better, from the point of view of both Israel and Argentine Jews, if an international court were nominated to try Eichmann.<sup>68</sup> In this context, it is not surprising that Israeli officials raised the possibility of a meeting between Ben-Gurion and the leaders of the Argentine Jewish community—a meeting, however, that never took place.<sup>69</sup>

The two years between Eichmann’s kidnapping in May 1960 and his execution in June 1962 were the hardest that the Jews of Argentina had known since the “Semana Trágica” pogrom in January 1919.<sup>70</sup> Although it may have seemed that, within a few months after the kidnapping and the resolution of the diplomatic conflict, the wave of antisemitism should have passed, the beginning of Eichmann’s trial in Jerusalem in April 1961 and the wide coverage it received in the Argentine press from that moment up to the pronouncement of the death sentence more than a year later kept the antisemitic campaign alive. A number of nationalist groups sought to exploit Eichmann’s kidnapping and the infringement of Argentine sovereignty in order to attack the Jews in their country.<sup>71</sup> Yet the antisemitic wave should be seen in the context of Argentine political culture and the contemporary socioeconomic circumstances. We should take into account the economic difficulties, the marked alienation of Perón’s supporters, and the disappointment felt by many Argentines at Frondizi’s betrayal

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of at least some of the promises he had made during his election campaign. A combination of the political crisis and a series of strikes and street demonstrations created fertile ground for antisemitic outbreaks and produced growing military pressure on the government.

The campaign against Jews was spearheaded by the extreme right-wing organization Movimiento Nacionalista Tacuara (Tacuara Nationalist Movement), which had appeared in the aftermath of the September 1955 uprising that toppled Perón.<sup>72</sup> This quasi-military organization was initially active in the battle to establish Catholic universities, and in that campaign it had already physically attacked left-wing, reformist, and Jewish students. Tacuara was led by Alberto Ezcurra Uriburu, a nationalist from a traditional upper-class family and a descendant of General José Félix Uriburu, the officer who had seized power in a military coup in September 1930. One of the organization's mentors was the priest Julio Meinvielle, who saw both Jews and communists as a threat to Western Christian civilization. A new edition of his book, *El judío en el misterio de la historia*, was published in 1959. In that volume, Meinvielle described the Jews as the controlling power behind international politics and economics as well as the mass media all over the world. The Jews would thus be able to poison Christian souls and reshape them according to Jewish spiritual models. Argentina, according to Meinvielle, was one of the victims of this Jewish conspiracy.<sup>73</sup> In the 1960s, Tacuara was in contact with neo-Nazi organizations in various countries as well as Hussein Triki, the Arab League's representative in Buenos Aires. Triki—who had collaborated with the mufti of Jerusalem, Haj Amin el-Husseini, during World War II, in campaigning for an Axis victory—now encouraged antisemitism under the guise of anti-Zionism and as a part of the anti-colonialist and anti-imperialist struggle.<sup>74</sup> Another organization that participated in the campaign against Jews at the beginning of the 1960s was Guardia Restauradora Nacionalista (Nationalist Guard of the Restoration), a splinter group that had broken away from Tacuara in November 1960.

In one of Tacuara's press conferences, Ezcurra declared that the organization would

defend Catholic views against Marxist-Jewish-liberal-Masonic-capitalist imperialism. We are not anti-Semites with racist aims, but we are enemies of Jewry. In Argentina the Jews are the servants of Israeli imperialism [who violated] our traditional sovereignty when they arrested Adolph Eichmann. In this struggle we have much in common with Nasser.<sup>75</sup>

In the wake of the Eichmann kidnapping, various nationalist publications, such as *Pampero*, *Cabildo*, and *Azul y Blanco*, made frequent assertions concerning Jews' lack of loyalty to Argentina, or their divided loyalties that in moments of crisis made them support Israel instead of remaining loyal to the Argentine republic, the sovereignty of which had been violated by the Zionists. Other nationalist organs published articles under headlines like "In Israel There Are Less Jews Than in Our Country," or "The Espionage of the Most Racist Race, via Zionist Organizations."<sup>76</sup>

Moreover, hostility was not confined to propaganda against the "Jewish fifth column" (articles, posters, and antisemitic slogans and swastikas painted on the walls of houses in Jewish neighborhoods) but included actual violence: vandalism in Jewish institutions and attacks on Jewish students. One of the most notable incidents took place in the Sarmiento high school in the capital. During a ceremony in honor of the national hero General José de San Martín on August 17, 1960, some Jewish pupils were attacked. One of them, 15-year-old Edgardo Trilnik, was shot and seriously wounded by a Tacuara activist, and several others were injured.<sup>77</sup> This incident triggered a flood of articles of protest in the press and condemnations from government leaders, but the police did not take any categorical measures against Tacuara. An editorial in the Jewish weekly *Mundo Israelita* expressed the anger and frustration at the virtual immunity of those responsible for "those cowardly attacks":

[T]he police never track them down, never punish them. . . . Their identity is no secret, the perpetrators are known, as are their meeting places, the standards they bear, their distinctive slogans; they make no secret of their intentions, even announcing ahead of time the evil deeds that they are about to commit; yet nobody bothers them. On the contrary, the police authorize their public functions; the press, in fulfillment of an ill-conceived informative mission, gives them coverage.<sup>78</sup>

On August 25, students from various high schools marched in the streets of Buenos Aires to protest the antisemitic violence. Police sources, as well as reports sent by the American embassy, emphasized that communist elements joined the march at an early stage, as if this lessened the seriousness of the acts against which they protested. Some spokesmen for the nationalist right used the argument—adopted by both the federal police and American diplomats in this era of the Cold War—that rightist attacks were in fact directed at leftists and radicals. Jews, claimed these spokesmen, were simply overrepresented in

extreme-left organizations.<sup>79</sup> A senior government official told Rabbi Guillermo Schlesinger that the government could not worry about Tacuara's antisemitic activities because the organization was needed as "an assault troop" against communism and everything else was secondary to this mission. Irving Salert, first secretary at the American Embassy in Buenos Aires, explained to Abraham Monk, representative of the American Jewish Committee, that "Frondizi will never court trouble with important Army elements on account of their pro-Tacuara sympathies, as long as silence on his part contributes to the preservation of the balance he seeks. This is simply one of the unavoidable concessions that the feeble Frondizi Administration has to make in order to secure the support of the military."<sup>80</sup> In the following months, almost every week brought reports of additional antisemitic incidents, some more serious than others.<sup>81</sup>

The incident at the Sarmiento high school prompted two initiatives of great significance to the Jewish community. First, Jewish parents joined forces to set up a Jewish day school in which pupils would not be vulnerable to antisemitic attacks. The result was the foundation of the "Tarbut" (Culture) School in Buenos Aires.<sup>82</sup> Second, a self-defense organization for Jews was begun in the capital. Many Jews felt that, even under a friendly government such as Frondizi's, the authorities did not have the power to confront the antisemitic, Catholic, and nationalist right-wing groups head-on.<sup>83</sup> In the early 1960s, spontaneous groups of Jewish youths began training in judo, boxing, and various techniques of self-defense in order to repel possible provocations by antisemitic thugs. Israel's embassy, as well as other Israeli envoys, lent a helping hand. A few Jewish groups even considered acts of retaliation. Their members spoke of the need to put an end to the stereotype of Jews being passive and cowardly—a view commonly held among rightist circles. Dozens of Jewish students attended the lecture halls of the University of Buenos Aires carrying guns in their bags.<sup>84</sup>

The wave of violence against Argentine Jews peaked in June 1962, when the presidential palace was already occupied by José María Guido. In the month following Eichmann's execution in Israel, after the Supreme Court had rejected Eichmann's appeal of the death sentence, about 30 antisemitic incidents were recorded in Argentina: demonstrations, telephone threats, and terror attacks against Jewish institutions. The most serious incident was an attack on a 19-year-old student by the name of Graciela Sirota, who was kidnapped in the street where she was waiting for a bus to take her to the University of Buenos Aires. She was beaten, brutally tortured, and left with a swastika tat-



toed on her chest. "This is in revenge for Eichmann," her kidnappers told her.<sup>85</sup>

Although the three kidnappers were quickly identified, and one of them even boasted of the revenge he had taken for Eichmann's kidnapping, the federal police chief, Horacio Enrique Green, raised the possibility that the attack had been nothing other than an act of provocation by leftist Jews trying to undermine the social order in Argentina. He claimed that there were no grounds for exaggerated talk of antisemitism in Argentina and that complaints of this sort were merely exploited by the communists.<sup>86</sup> Green's statements during the following days represented a new stage in the nationalist effort to identify the Jewish community and the DAIA as communists. Some proclamations distributed by nationalist organizations claimed that Sirota invented the whole story. The leaders of the DAIA were prepared for such an accusation. As soon as they received the first notification of the crime, they had Sirota examined by a physician and two psychiatrists (one was Jewish, the other Catholic). The three of them reported that she was sane and that she did actually suffer the tortures that she denounced. A photographer was also invited to take a picture of her tattooed chest, so as to be able to disqualify any possible disclaimer concerning the authenticity of the crime.<sup>87</sup>

The Jewish community of Argentina was galvanized into angry, firm, and unified action by the appalling attack on Sirota and the police's indifference to violent acts committed against Jews. This reaction was the result of pressure from various sectors within the community that were not willing to continue supporting the tactics of quiet and behind-the-scene efforts to convince the authorities of the need to protect the Jews. These sectors found their position strengthened by the widespread condemnation of the act. Other Jewish sectors opposed any militant form of protest, but this time they were outnumbered. The controversy over the proper way to react was due, in part, to the fact that Sirota was identified as a communist. Some Jewish leaders thought that the DAIA should not defend extreme leftists. But the majority held the view that Jews in Argentina should be defended, regardless of their political creed.<sup>88</sup> Therefore the DAIA protested energetically and sent a request to the president and the interior minister demanding the protection of Jewish lives in the republic. The DAIA also called for the solidarity of sister communities in Europe and the Americas, and it organized a series of protests.

On June 28, a commercial strike of several hours was declared throughout the republic, and many businesses bore signs reading "against antisemitism and Nazism." Most of the Jews in Buenos Aires

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left their workplaces and closed their shops. Although the Jewish protest had been anticipated, the strike turned into an impressive show of strength, since, to the surprise of the DAIA leaders themselves, response extended far beyond the limits of the Jewish community. "Businesses closed not only in Villa Crespo [a Jewish neighborhood] but throughout the Argentine Republic from one end to the other."<sup>89</sup> Huge efforts were made to enlist the support of journalists and politicians, not only for the defense of the Jews of Argentina but also for the defense of Argentine democracy, which was endangered by the violent actions of the antisemites. Representatives of Jewish organizations all over the world pressed the Argentine government to put a stop to the antisemitic thuggery. Anxious about its international image, the Guido government finally took a few measures to curb the activities of antisemitic organizations, and from August 1962 the frequency of serious antisemitic incidents dropped significantly.

## Conclusion

The diplomatic crisis in Argentine-Israeli relations caused by the Eichmann kidnapping was of short duration. The fact that Eichmann was kidnapped at the peak of Argentina's national celebrations occasioned embarrassment and anger in the upper echelons of the Argentine government, and the violation of Argentine national sovereignty called for a clear response. However, President Frondizi was determined to rehabilitate relations between the two countries quickly, because he realized that they were important for Argentina's position in the international arena and Argentine relations with the United States. In contrast to Frondizi's brisk action to repair relations with the state of Israel, however, the Argentine authorities showed marked indulgence toward Tacuara and others responsible for physical and verbal attacks on Argentine Jews.

This placatory attitude toward the nationalists should be attributed to Frondizi's shaky political position. The president had acceded to power at the head of a fragile, heterogeneous coalition, and within the first months of his government he had already managed to disappoint his supporters on both the right and the left, as well as Peronists and anti-Peronists. His various measures engendered fears that he was betraying the Radical principles he had championed in the past (for example, by granting concessions to foreign oil companies), that he was becoming authoritarian (for

example, in declaring a state of emergency in response to labor unrest), and that he was socially insensitive to the plight of the masses, whose standard of living was badly hit by his austerity program and the dizzying rise in the cost of living. His gestures toward the Peronists, who had supported him at the polls in 1958, aroused the wrath of both the civilian opposition led by Ricardo Balbín's UCRP faction and many of the military officers. Meanwhile, the supporters of the deposed president Perón were angered by the continuing restrictions on their political activity, which prevented them from paving the way for Perón's return from exile. The ruling party's strength had dropped considerably in the elections held in some of the provinces in March 1959, and the downward trend continued in the congressional elections of March 1960.

The federal police was controlled by the nationalists, and Frondizi, whose rule depended, as mentioned, on a loose coalition of different political forces, shrank from direct confrontation with the nationalists. He found it easier to curb the nationalist foreign-ministry officials—such as Mario Amadeo—than the domestic nationalist movements. In the Argentine armed forces, which had mistrusted Frondizi from the beginning on account of what they considered his feeble approach to the Peronist camp at home and the Cuban Revolution abroad, the nationalists had more than a few supporters. Certainly Frondizi did not want to give any additional leverage to his enemies in the armed forces, who constantly laid plans to depose him.<sup>90</sup>

However, Frondizi's lack of determination in confronting the activities of the Catholic nationalists and antisemitists did not help him. In March 1962, after elections in several provinces in which Peronists were allowed to participate—and in which they scored impressive successes, proving that their political power was still great—the Argentine army deposed Frondizi. In his place the army generals put the Senate president, José María Guido, as interim president until general elections were held a year later. Guido's temporary administration proved equally weak in dealing with the nationalist right-wing organizations, and the measures it eventually took fell for the most part into the category of too little, too late.<sup>91</sup>

The Argentine nationalists, for their part, continued to bring up the Eichmann kidnapping as a weapon against Argentine Jews and to question their loyalty to the republic. Thus, for example, as late as December 1975, Juan Queraltó, leader of the Alianza Libertadora Nacionalista (Nationalist Liberation Alliance), held a press conference in which he demanded the establishment of a commission of inquiry

to investigate various incidents that had taken place in the country since 1955. One of the things he wanted to find out was “what happened with the Eichmann affair, in which our national sovereignty was violated.”<sup>92</sup>

## Notes

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- 1 Relations between Israel and Argentina during Juan Perón's presidency (1946–1955) have been the subject of academic research in recent years, but later periods have been less studied. On relations in the period of Perón's presidency, see Raanan Rein, “Political Considerations and Personal Rivalries: Peronist Argentina and the Partition of Palestine,” *Diplomacy and Statecraft* 8, no. 2 (1997): 125–47, and Ignacio Klich, “Equidistance and Gradualism in Argentine Foreign Policy Towards Israel and the Arab World, 1949–1955,” in *The Jewish Diaspora in Latin America: New Studies on History and Literature*, David Sheinin and Lois Baer Barr, eds. (New York, 1996), 219–37.
- 2 Moshe Sharett, Israel's first foreign minister, spoke of Israel's relations with Latin America in 1956 as “triangular harmony”: Israel's relations with the governments of Latin America; those governments' relations with the local Jewish community; and Israel's relations with the Jews of Latin America. See *Davar*, June 6, 1956, quoted in Edy Kaufman et al., *Israel–Latin American Relations* (New Brunswick, N.J., 1979), 94. In practice, of course, the situation was more complex. On the Jewish dimension in Israel's foreign policy and on the inherent tension between Israel's definition as a Jewish state and its role in the international sphere as a state that wanted—like any other—to promote and safeguard specific interests, see Walter Eytan, *The First Ten Years—A Diplomatic History of Israel* (London, 1958); Michael Brecher,

- The Foreign Policy System of Israel* (London, 1972), 233–44; and Shmuel Sandler, “Is There a Jewish Foreign Policy?” *The Jewish Journal of Sociology* 29, no. 2 (Dec. 1987): 115–22.
- 3 J. Marder, “The Organización Israelita Argentina: Between Perón and the Jews,” *Canadian Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Studies* 20, nos. 39–40 (1995): 125–52.
  - 4 On the history of the Jewish community in Argentina, see Haim Avni, *Argentina and the Jews: A History of Jewish Immigration* (Tuscaloosa, Ala., 1991); Victor Mirelman, *Jewish Buenos Aires 1890–1930: In Search of Identity* (Detroit, 1990); and Robert Weisbrot, *The Jews of Argentina: From the Inquisition to Perón* (Philadelphia, 1979).
  - 5 On Frondizi’s political career and presidency, see, among others, Emilia Menotti, *Frondizi: Una biografía* (Buenos Aires, 1998); Celia Szusterman, *Frondizi and the Politics of Developmentalism in Argentina, 1955–62* (Pittsburgh, 1993); Daniel Rodríguez Lamas, *La presidencia de Frondizi* (Buenos Aires, 1984); and Isidro J. L. Odena, *Libertadores y desarrollistas* (Buenos Aires, 1977).
  - 6 Kubovi to Foreign Ministry, Dec. 29, 1957, Documents of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in Israel State Archives, Jerusalem (hereafter ISA), 3087/17. Hereafter, in the text of my article, the quotes by Kubovi are from this source.
  - 7 According to Haim Avni, Israeli envoys, and particularly the Israeli embassy in Buenos Aires, constituted a kind of “imported leadership” for the Argentine Jewish community. Since the arrival of the first Israeli ambassador, Yaacov Tsur, in 1949, the Israeli embassy had played an important role in decision making by the leaders of the Jewish community. See Haim Avni, “Jewish Leadership in Times of Crisis: Argentina During the Eichmann Affair (1960–1962),” *Studies in Contemporary Jewry* 11 (1995): 121.
  - 8 Szusterman, *Frondizi and the Politics of Developmentalism*, 186–88, 271n, 281n. In his capacity as deputy minister of the interior, Blejer was also in charge of the police. He expressed to Ambassador Levavi a desire “to maintain close ties with [Israel].” The ambassador defined him as “the Jew with the greatest influence in government here today.” See Levavi to Foreign Ministry, Jan. 20, 1959, ISA 3087/17.
  - 9 In various conversations that Israeli diplomats had with UCRI activists, the name Moisés Lebensohn was mentioned repeatedly, “the Jew who was one of the main ideologists of the Intransigent Radicals when they were in the opposition.” See Levavi to Foreign Ministry, Jan. 19, 1959, ISA 3087/17.
  - 10 M. Avida to Foreign Ministry, Feb. 4, 1959, ISA 3087/18. Another Jew who offered his services to the Israeli ambassador as “an unofficial channel to the

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- president” was Mariano Weinfeld, a doctor who was one of Frondizi’s close advisers. When the UCRI was in the opposition, Weinfeld had been party treasurer and secretary alongside Chairman Frondizi. See Levavi to Foreign Ministry, Jan. 19, 1959, ISA 3087/18.
- 11 Haim Avni, *Emantsipatsyah vehinukh yehudi: Meah shnot nisyona shel yahadut argentinah* (Jerusalem, 1985), 133.
  - 12 *American Jewish Yearbook* [hereafter *AJYB*] 61 (1960): 184.
  - 13 Sidney Liskofski, “International Swastika Outbreak,” *AJYB* 62 (1961): 209–13.
  - 14 *Ha-aretz*, Jan. 14, 1960. On various antisemitic incidents in Argentina in the years 1958–60, see reports in ISA 3087/24.
  - 15 A collection of condemnatory reactions by Argentine public personalities, intellectuals, and all the main communication media appears in a booklet published by the political umbrella organization of Argentine Jews, the DAIA: *La conciencia argentina frente al peligro racista* (Buenos Aires, 1960). According to Nathan Lerner, DAIA vice president in 1957–58, during Frondizi’s term of office members of the Jewish community found it easy to enlist the support of government officials for denunciations of antisemitic actions or for other issues of importance to the Jewish community: “Look, in that period of Frondizi’s short democracy and Illia afterwards, it was easy. It was very easy. It was simply a matter of picking up the telephone, something that didn’t happen of course either in the Peronist era and of course not later, in the time of the generals. It was a completely different game [in the time] of Onganía, and even more so after 1976. But back then, in the Radical period, there was no [problem] . . . here everyone was friends” (an oral account by Nathan Lerner at the Institute of Contemporary Jewry, Oral History Division, Hebrew University of Jerusalem [hereafter ICJ/OHD], 18).
  - 16 *Ha-aretz*, Apr. 17, 20, 1958, and Apr. 15, 1959.
  - 17 *Ha-aretz*, May 21–22, 24, 1959, and *AJYB* 61 (1960): 185. Alongside the many friendly gestures, there were also reports of “venomous incitement” by “hostile elements.” During Meir’s visit, flyers were distributed claiming that the purpose of her visit was only to increase the flow of funds that Jews sent from Argentina to Israel. See Eliahu Arel, “Golda Meir be-Buenos Ayres,” *Ha-aretz*, June 14, 1959.
  - 18 “Oreah me-argentinah hayedidutit,” *Ha-aretz*, Aug. 11, 1959. See also *Ha-aretz*, Mar. 25–27, 29, 1959, Apr. 2, 1959, Aug. 21, 1959, and Apr. 15, 1960.
  - 19 For the text of the agreement and its significance, see “Convenio Comercial y Financiero entre la República Argentina y el Estado de Israel,” in Archivo del Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores y Culto (Buenos Aires), Israel-1958, Exp. 1; Banco Central de la República Argentina, *Memoria annual 1958*

- (Buenos Aires, 1959), 145–46; and Monserrat Llairó, “Relaciones económicas y sociales Argentina-Israel de Perón a Frondizi,” unpublished paper (Buenos Aires, 1999). A new trade agreement was signed on Nov. 28, 1960. Argentina’s main exports to Israel were frozen meat and hides, and its main imports from Israel were chemical products, fertilizers, and raw materials for the plastics industry. The absence of a regular commercial sea link was an obstacle to the development of economic relations between the two countries. For economic relations during the Peronist regime, see Ignacio Klich, “The First Argentine-Israeli Trade Accord: Political and Economic Considerations,” *Canadian Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Studies* 20, nos. 39–40 (1995): 177–205.
- 20 *Ha-aretz*, Nov. 27, 1958. On the ceremony in which Levavi presented his credentials and the coverage it received in Argentine newspapers (including *Clarín*, *La Prensa*, and *La Nación*), see Levavi to Foreign Ministry, Dec. 23, 1958, ISA 3087/18. See also Levavi’s testimony, ICJ/OHD, 4, 5.
- 21 Levavi to Walter Eytan, Sept. 4, 1959, ISA 3087/18.
- 22 *Ha-aretz*, Apr. 18, 1958.
- 23 Robert St. John, *Eban* (Garden City, N.Y., 1972), 365; *Ha-aretz*, May 19–20, 23, 26–27, 1960.
- 24 On this operation, see the book by the former head of the Mosad, Isser Harel, *Ha-bayit bi-rehov garibaldi* (Tel Aviv, 1990), as well as Zvi Aharoni and Wilhelm Dietl, *Operation Eichmann: The Truth About the Pursuit, Capture and Trial* (New York, 1997); Peter Z. Malkin, *Eichmann in My Hands* (New York, 1990); and Moshe Pearlman, *The Capture and Trial of Adolf Eichmann* (London, 1963).
- 25 On Eichmann’s trial, see *AJYB* 63 (1962): 3–131; Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York, 1963); Gideon Hausner, *Justice in Jerusalem* (London, 1967); and Y. Weitz, “The Holocaust on Trial: The Impact of the Kasztner and Eichmann Trials on Israeli Society,” *Israel Studies*, no. 2 (Fall 1996).
- 26 Harel, *Ha-bayit*, 8–9, 97.
- 27 Eichmann arrived in Argentina in mid-1950 and lived there as Ricardo Klement. He was not, of course, the only Nazi criminal to find shelter in this South American republic. There is an extensive literature, at least some of it academically and politically controversial, on the entry of Nazi criminals into Argentina. See, for example, Holger Meding, *La ruta de los nazis en tiempos de Perón* (Buenos Aires, 1999); Uki Goñi, *Perón y los alemanes: La verdad sobre el espionaje nazi y los fugitivos del Reich* (Buenos Aires, 1998); Jorge Camarasa, *Los nazis en la Argentina* (Buenos Aires, 1992); Ronald Newton, *The ‘Nazi Menace’ in Argentina, 1931–1947* (Stanford, 1992); and Ignacio Klich, “The Nazis in Argentina:

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Deconstructing Some Myths," *Patterns of Prejudice* 29, no. 4 (1995): 53–66.

- 28 See, for example, "Editorial Comment," *Jewish Frontier*, no. 299 (July 1960): 3. The request for the extradition of Josef Mengele, submitted by the Federal Republic of Germany to the government of Argentina, resulted in his disappearance shortly before he could be apprehended. According to Arye Levavi, "this was a sort of preamble to the Eichmann affair, because the lesson from the Mengele case was that legal channels would not work" (Levavi's testimony, 7–9, and Weisbrot, *The Jews of Argentina*, 244). In the 1950s, Argentina turned down requests from Yugoslavia, France, Belgium, and other countries to extradite Ante Pavelic and other Nazi collaborators. See Paul Warzawski, ed., *Proyecto testimonio: Respuestas del estado argentino ante los pedidos de extradición de criminales de guerra y reos del delito contra la humanidad bajo el Tercer Reich* (Buenos Aires, 1998). Ironically enough, Israel and Argentina signed an extradition treaty just two days before Eichmann was kidnapped. In any case, crimes such as Eichmann had committed could not be included in the framework of this agreement, among other reasons because the offenses had not been committed on the territory of one of the two signatory states or by a citizen of one of them. Moreover, at the time of the kidnapping, the treaty had

not yet been ratified by the Argentine Congress, and in any case it would not have applied to offenses committed before the establishment of the state of Israel (Levavi's testimony, 11–12; Joel Barromi's testimony, ICJ/OHD, 27–28; *Ha-aretz*, Apr. 26, 1960, May 6, 10, 1960). Nevertheless, some Argentines, looking back, saw the signature of the extradition treaty shortly before the kidnapping as an example of Israel's diversionary tactics.

- 29 While briefing the task force in Buenos Aires, Harel explained to the Mosad agents the responsibility they bore: for the first time Jews would judge their murderers, and the whole world, including the younger generation in Israel, would hear the details of what had happened in the Holocaust; "and it is sad that when we come to fulfill such a lofty national and moral mission, we must resort to force, and hurt a friendly state. We are not happy about this deed, but necessity knows no law" (Harel, *Ha-bayit*, 169).
- 30 *Divrei ha-Knesset* [official records of the Israeli parliament, in Hebrew], 98th Session of the 4th Knesset, May 23, 1960, p. 22; Weekly Report by the American Embassy in Tel Aviv, May 26, 1960, National Archives (College Park, Md.), documents of the Dept. of State, record group 59 [hereafter NA], 784A.00(w)/5–2660.
- 31 *Time*, June 1, 1960. The first daily paper to publish the news



- in Argentina was *La Razón*, on May 26, 1960.
- 32 Levavi to Foreign Ministry, June 2, 1960, in *Teudot li-mdiniyut ha-huts shel yisrael 1960* (Jerusalem, 1997), 14: 801–2.
- 33 Ibid., 802.
- 34 Chaim Yáhil to Israeli Embassy in Buenos Aires, June 3, 1960, in *Teudot*, 804–5; Weekly Reports by the American Embassy in Buenos Aires, June 7, 1960, NA 735.00(w)/6–760, and the American Embassy in Tel Aviv, June 9, 1960, 784A.00(w)/6–960.
- 35 Levavi's testimony, 21; *Ha-aretz*, June 9–10, 1960; and Aharoni and Dietl, *Operation Eichmann*, 168. Argentina responded with a trenchant message demanding Eichmann's immediate return and the punishment of those responsible for this infringement of its sovereignty. See Weekly Report by the American Embassy in Buenos Aires, June 14, 1960, NA 735.00(w)/6–1460.
- 36 Levavi to Foreign Ministry, June 7, 1960, in *Teudot*, 806.
- 37 On Ben-Gurion's letter to Frondizi, see *New York Times*, June 11, 1960, p. 4, and *Ha-aretz*, June 12, 1960.
- 38 Yáhil to Israeli Mission to U.N., June 16, 1960, in *Teudot*, 818; *Ha-aretz*, June 19, 1960; and Weekly Report by the American Embassy in Buenos Aires, June 22, 1960, NA 735.00(w)/6–2260.
- 39 Félix Luna, *Diálogos con Frondizi* (Buenos Aires, 1963), 131.
- 40 Levavi to Foreign Ministry, June 12, 1960, in *Teudot*, 814.
- 41 Levavi's testimony, 16. On Frondizi's denunciations of anti-semitism and racism as early as the 1930s, see Camarasa, *Los nazis en la Argentina*, 120 n. 33, and Juan José Sebreli, *La cuestión judía en la Argentina* (Buenos Aires, 1973), 139–40.
- 42 *Ha-aretz*, June 10, 13, 1960. The government of Israel, for its part, had no intention of recalling its own ambassador from Buenos Aires. On the contrary, the foreign ministry in Jerusalem felt it was up to Levavi to "remain at the helm to the end" (*Teudot*, 807 n. 5).
- 43 Levavi to Foreign Ministry, June 11, 1960, *Teudot*, 808.
- 44 Zellerbach to State Department, June 18, 1960, NA 635.84A/6–1860; Weekly Report by the American Embassy in Tel Aviv, June 16, 1960, 784A.00(w)/6–1660.
- 45 In the presidential elections of Feb. 1958, the nationalists had supported Frondizi (see O'Connor to State Department, Feb. 6, 1958, NA 735.00/2–658). Upon taking office, Frondizi appointed several of them to various positions as ministers or advisers. Among them were Mario Amadeo, Carlos Florit, and Santiago Estrada. On Amadeo, see his book *Ayer, hoy, mañana* (Buenos Aires, 1956) as well as Raanan Rein, *The Franco-Perón Alliance: Relations Between Spain and Argentina, 1946–1955* (Pittsburgh, 1993), 169, 217–19, and David Rock, *Authoritarian Argentina* (Berkeley, 1993).

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- 46 Meir to Foreign Ministry, June 14, 1960, in *Teudot*, 816; *Ha-aretz*, June 13–16, 1960. In a message Frondizi gave Avraham Darom through his adviser Weinfeld, the Argentine president asked that “Israel understand that Amadeo’s unyielding position is intended to satisfy public opinion in Argentina, and Israel does not have to take it seriously.” In *Teudot*, 820 n. 6.
- 47 *Ha-aretz*, June 17, 1960.
- 48 U.S. Department of State, *Bulletin* no. 1099, July 18, 1960, pp. 115–17.
- 49 For the text of the letters that the two states submitted to the Security Council, and for the text of the Security Council’s resolution, see *Teudot*, 841–47. On the debate in the Security Council, see *New York Times*, June 23, 1960, pp. 1, 4; *Ha-aretz*, June 16, 23–24, 1960; Yahil to Israeli Missions abroad, June 24, 1960, in *Teudot*, 822; and Sidney Liskofsky, “The Eichmann Case,” *AJYB* 62 (1961): 199–208.
- 50 Levavi to Foreign Ministry, June 22, 1960, in *Teudot*, 831; Levavi’s testimony, 18, 22; *Ha-aretz*, July 24, 25, 27, 1960, and Aug. 5, 1960; Weekly Reports by the American Embassy in Buenos Aires, July 26, 1960, NA 735.00(w)/7–2660, and the American Embassy in Tel Aviv, July 28, 1960, 784A.00(w)/7–2860. Joel Barromi, too, then serving in the embassy in Buenos Aires, has portrayed Frondizi all along as “a restraining element in that whole affair” (Barromi’s testimony, 32).
- 51 Levavi’s testimony, 18.
- 52 Luis María de Pablo Pardo, the legal adviser of the Argentine foreign ministry, had met Rosenne at the United Nations when they were both there as legal advisers, and it was his idea to invite Rosenne (Barromi’s testimony, 7–8). See also Levavi’s telegram to Foreign Ministry, in *Teudot*, 823. Even though de Pablo Pardo also belonged to the nationalist camp, there was personal enmity between him and the ambassador to the United Nations, Amadeo. Throughout the crisis, the international news agencies reported differences of opinion in the Argentine foreign ministry as to the position it should take in the affair. See *Ha-aretz*, June 13, 1960.
- 53 Rosenne to Foreign Minister, Aug. 8, 1960, in *Teudot*, 833.
- 54 *Teudot*, 838; Reid to State Department, Aug. 2, 1960, NA 635.84A/8–260.
- 55 On Rosenne’s mission, see the report he sent to the foreign minister, Aug. 8, 1960, in *Teudot*, 832–40; Weekly Reports by the American Embassy in Buenos Aires, Aug. 9, 1960, NA 735.00(w)/8–960, and the American Embassy in Tel Aviv, Aug. 4, 1960, 784.00(w)/8–460; and *Ha-aretz*, July 26–29, 31, 1960, and Aug. 1, 3–4, 25, 1960. On the Argentine press’s reaction to the agreement, see *Ha-aretz*, Aug. 7, 1960, and *La Nación* and *El Mundo*, Aug. 6, 1960. Nonetheless, relations between the two countries did

not return completely to their normal course, as evidenced by Argentina's unfriendly votes against Israel in the United Nations in the following months. As mentioned, the head of the Argentine delegation to the United Nations was the nationalist Mario Amadeo. See Yeshayahu Anug to Foreign Ministry, Mar. 5, 1962, ISA 3376/4. The Eichmann kidnapping affair contributed to a change in Israel's foreign policy toward Latin America, stimulating efforts to base relations on greater technical and economic cooperation. See Kaufman et al., *Israel-Latin American Relations*, 94, 117.

56 *Ha-aretz*, Aug. 14, 1960.

57 *Ha-aretz*, June 19, 1960, Sept. 27, 1960, and Nov. 10, 27, 29, 1960.

58 Israel's new ambassador to Argentina, Yosef Avidar, presented his credentials on Dec. 14, 1960, and Argentina's ambassador to Israel, Rogelio Rafael Iristany, presented his credentials a week later, on Dec. 21, 1960. See *Ha-aretz*, Dec. 8, 12, 22, 1960.

59 On Argentina's relations with the United States during Frondizi's presidency, see Joseph S. Tulchin, *Argentina and the United States: A Conflicted Relationship* (Boston, 1990), 119–26; Alberto Conil Paz and Gustavo Ferrari, *Argentina's Foreign Policy, 1930–1962* (Notre Dame, 1966), 183–222; Edwin McCammon Martin, *Kennedy and Latin America* (New York, 1994), chap. 8; and Stephen G. Rabe,

*The Most Dangerous Area in the World: John F. Kennedy Confronts Communist Revolution in Latin America* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1999), chap. 3. For Frondizi's main foreign-policy pronouncements, see his collected speeches: Arturo Frondizi, *La política exterior argentina* (Buenos Aires, 1962).

60 According to Levavi, Frondizi's government feared U.S. Jews' reaction to tough measures against Israel. See Levavi's testimony, 6–7, 18.

61 *AJYB* 63 (1962): 474. Other sources give lower estimates of the Jewish population in Argentina. See Sergio della Pergola, "Demographic Trends of Latin American Jewry," in *The Jewish Presence in Latin America*, Judith Laikin Elkin and Gilbert W. Merkx, eds. (Boston, 1987). On the characteristics and structure of the Jewish community in those days, see Irving Louis Horowitz, "The Jewish Community of Buenos Aires," *Jewish Social Studies* 24, no. 4 (Oct. 1962): 195–222. For a pioneering study of the Jewish leadership in Argentina in that period, see Avni, "Jewish Leadership in Times of Crisis," 117–35.

62 Testimonies of Levavi, Barromi, and Lerner. Although the DAIA had "its own ways of investigating matters connected with war criminals [in Argentina]," it had no advance notice of the plan to kidnap Eichmann or of its implementation.

63 Lerner's testimony, 10, 21, and author's interview with Lerner (Hertzlia, Aug. 23, 2000);

DAIA, *Informe de actividades realizadas por el Consejo Directivo (June 1961–July 1962)* (Buenos Aires, 1962), 8.

- 64 See Weisbrot, *The Jews of Argentina*, 248–49; *La Prensa*, June 16, 1960; *El Mundo*, June 17, 1960; *New York Times*, June 19, 1960; *Ha-aretz*, June 12, 16, 1960, and July 14, 1960; and “Editorial Comment,” *Jewish Frontier*, 3. After the crisis had been settled, Congress deputy Matov said that, if Israel had tried to lay hold of Eichmann through legal channels, Eichmann would have died of old age in Argentina (see *Ha-aretz*, Aug. 14, 1960).
- 65 Weisbrot, *The Jews of Argentina*, 249, and *Ha-aretz*, June 20, 1960.
- 66 Memo by Ralph Friedman, July 1, 1960, American Jewish Committee Archives (New York), Files on Argentine antisemitism (hereafter AJC Files), Box 1.
- 67 Eliahu Arel, “Tguvot ha-tsibur be-argentinah be-farashat eichmann,” *Ha-aretz*, June 15, 1960.
- 68 Confidential memo, July 1, 1960, AJC Files, Box 1. This was also the view expressed by Nahum Goldmann, president of the World Jewish Congress, and rejected by Israeli prime minister Ben-Gurion.
- 69 Levavi’s testimony, 19; Barromi’s testimony, 10. Some Israelis in retrospect claimed that, after the first Israeli communiqué, Jerusalem changed the tone of its messages and declarations, adopting a more moderate tone and emphasizing its desire to improve relations with Argentina, “the most important factor” in this change being “consideration for the large Jewish community in Argentina. Although the government of Argentina expressed its opposition to the antisemitic manifestations that multiplied in the wake of the Eichmann affair, there was anxiety over the fate of the community” (see *Ha-aretz*, July 25, 1960).
- 70 On the events of the *Semana Trágica*, see Victor A. Mirelman, “The *Semana Trágica* of 1919 and the Jews in Argentina,” *Jewish Social Studies* 37 (Jan. 1975): 61–73; Mirelman, *Jewish Buenos Aires*, 61–67; Eugene F. Sofer, *From Pale to Pampa: A Social History of the Jews of Buenos Aires* (New York, 1982), 42–48; Beatriz Seibel, *Crónicas de la Semana Trágica* (Buenos Aires, 1999); and Edgardo J. Bilsky, *La Semana Trágica* (Buenos Aires, 1984).
- 71 It was not the defense of national dignity that motivated them, explained the author Ernesto Sábato, but the fact that they saw Eichmann as a model to be emulated. See Sábato, “Viva Eichmann, Mueren los judíos,” *El Mundo*, Aug. 24, 1960.
- 72 *Tacuara* is the term for a gaucho lance, and the choice of this name reflected the organization’s sympathy with antiliberal historical revisionism. On *Tacuara*, see Robert McClintock to State Department, Apr. 18, 1962, NA 735.00/4–1862; Henry A. Hoyt to State Department, June 13, 1962,

- 735.00/6-1362; *Mundo Israelita*, May 5, 1962; *Primera Plana*, Dec. 4, 1962; Victor A. Mirelman, "Attitudes Toward Jews in Argentina," *Jewish Social Studies* 37, nos. 3-4 (1975): 208-9; Leonardo Senkman, "The Right and Civilian Regimes, 1955-1976," in *The Argentine Right*, Sandra McGee Deutsch and Ronald Dolkart, eds. (Wilmington, Del., 1993), 126-28; and Rock, *Authoritarian Argentina*, 205-9.
- 73 On Julio Meinvielle, see Graciela Ben-Dror, "Shloshah kohanei dat antishemim baknesiyah ha-katolit: Stiyah o normah?," in *Hevrah ve-zehut be-argentinah*, Tzvi Medin and Raanan Rein, eds. (Tel Aviv, 1997), 231-67; Cristián Buchrucker, *Nacionalismo y peronismo* (Buenos Aires, 1987), 123-84; and *New York Times*, Aug. 21, 1962.
- 74 On Tacuara's relations with the Arab League, see DAIA, *Actividades antijudías de los árabes en la Argentina* (Buenos Aires, 1958); Yehuda Adin, "Ha-leumanut vеха-neonatsizm be-argentinah," *Bi-tefutsot ha-golah*, no. 33 (1965): 75-79. For Triki's version, see his *He aquí Palestina . . . El sionismo al desnudo* (Madrid, 1977), chap. 13.
- 75 Quoted in Rock, *Authoritarian Argentina*, 206.
- 76 Quoted from "Propagando Verdades" in Kaufman et al., *Israel-Latin American Relations*, 87 n. 166. On the antisemitism of *Cabildo*, which reappeared as a monthly in 1973, see Carlos H. Waisman, "Capitalism, Socialism, and the Jews: The View from *Cabildo*," in Laikin, Elkin and Merckx, eds., *The Jewish Presence in Latin America*, 233-52.
- 77 Weekly Report by the Embassy in Buenos Aires, Aug. 23, 1960, NA 735.00(w)/8-2360; *La Luz*, Sept. 9, 1960; *AJYB* 62 (1961): 216. For the testimony of one of the Tacuara activists who participated in this attack, see "More about Tacuara's Activities," Dec. 5, 1960, AJC Files, Box 2.
- 78 *Mundo Israelita*, Aug. 20, 1960.
- 79 Weekly Report by the American Embassy in Buenos Aires, Sept. 21, 1960, NA 735.00(w)/9-2160; McClintock to State Department, Sept. 18, 1962, NA 735.00/0-1862.
- 80 Monk to Simon Segal, Jan. 11, 1962, AJC Files, Box 3.
- 81 Weekly Report by the Embassy in Buenos Aires, Sept. 21, 1961, NA 735.00(w)/9-2161; McClintock to State Dept., Apr. 18, 1962, NA 735.00/4-1862; *New York Times*, Nov. 18, 1962. On antisemitic incidents outside the federal capital, see also *La Razón*, Feb. 2, 9, 1961; *El Diario Israelita*, June 7, 25, 1961; *Clarín*, June 25, 1961; and *La Prensa*, Mar. 16, 1962.
- 82 Avni, *Emantsipatsyah ve-hinukh yehudi*, 188-90.
- 83 David Schers, "Anti-Semitism in Latin America," in *Violence and Defense in the Jewish Experience*, Salo W. Baron and George S. Wise, eds. (Philadelphia, 1977), 251; Avni, "Jewish Leadership," 124-25.
- 84 My interviews with Jacob Kovadloff (Washington, D.C.,

- June 14, 2000) and David Schers (Tel Aviv, Aug. 22, 2000).
- 85 McClintock to State Dept., June 27, 1962, NA 735.00/6-2762; *Time*, July 6, 1962, p. 21; *Primera Plana*, Mar. 10, 1964; DAIA: *Medio siglo de lucha por una argentina sin discriminaciones* (Buenos Aires, 1985), 14; "Cronología de la comunidad judía en la Argentina," *Todo es Historia* 179 (Apr. 1982): 42-43; Leonardo Senkman, "El antisemitismo bajo dos experiencias democráticas," in *El antisemitismo en la Argentina*, 2d ed., L. Senkman, ed. (Buenos Aires, 1989).
- 86 *Buenos Aires Herald*, Sept. 5, 1962; *New York Times*, Sept. 16, 1962; and McClintock to State Dept., Sept. 10, 1962, NA 735.00/9-1062.
- 87 See interview with Gregorio Faigon, a leader of the DAIA, in ICJ/OHD, 12-13; Monk to John Slawson, July 2, 1962, AJC Files, Box 3.
- 88 A similar debate among Jewish leaders took place in the late 1970s, during the years of the brutal military dictatorship. This time the willingness of the community to help Jewish victims was less generous when these victims were communists.
- 89 Faigon's testimony, esp. 12-14; and Schers, "Anti-Semitism in Latin America," 250.
- 90 On Frondizi's relations with the army, see Robert A. Potash, *The Army and Politics in Argentina, 1945-1962* (Stanford, 1980), chaps. 8-9, and Alain Rouquié, *Poder militar y sociedad política en la Argentina* (Buenos Aires, 1982), 2: chap. 4.
- 91 According to Sandra McGee Deutsch in her new comparative book, "only in Argentina did the far right leave a profound imprint on governments in every decade between 1930 and the 1980s" (*Las Derechas: The Extreme Right in Argentina, Brazil, and Chile, 1890-1939* [Stanford, 1999], 5).
- 92 Cited in Camarasa, *Los nazis en la Argentina*, 120 n. 38.