

increasingly connected with a United States enjoying enormous expansion.

The Rivalry in the Nuclear Era

Wartime governments in both countries had argued for autarchy in strategic affairs. This had been less pressing for Brazil than for Argentina because of the United States alliance but even in Rio the benefits of self-sufficiency in strategic affairs gained ground as an idea. In Buenos Aires, it became something of an obsession. Military officers claimed that the experience of the two world wars and the Great Depression made manifest the need for an ability to ensure national defence without access to Europe or the United States.³ As early as the Depression steel production linked to national defence needs had been set up and in 1941, a directorate-general of military production was created. By 1943, Argentina was producing its own tanks.

The nuclear era was then upon us. Argentina and Brazil were of course old hands at international politics by the time of Hiroshima. As mentioned, they were in an international rivalry and balance of power situation reminiscent of European traditional diplomacy. At the same time, both countries, but especially Argentina, considered themselves players of importance on the world stage and Western nations of some dignity.

Neither country had significant energy resources in either hydroelectric terms (later on this was to change) or in coal. Both saw significant and growing needs for energy for continuing economic development. The growth of the extraordinary city of Buenos Aires as more than just a capital and rather a European city in the midst of a still very Latin American *arrière-pays*, combined with the speedy electrification of the country in previous decades, emphasized these needs. Brazil's lesser industrialization made these requirements less evident but nonetheless present.

In addition, Argentina had significant quantities of uranium on its territory, a fact that helped stimulate interest in nuclear energy. Military reviews started to discuss nuclear weapons but few indeed considered the feasibility of Argentina acquiring such a thing. In 1950, Argentina founded the National Commission for Atomic Energy, the first of its kind in Latin America. For a decade and a half work centred around the preparation of human resources comfortable in the field and the eventual construction of research reactors.

Brazil was at this stage doubtless behind its neighbour in the nuclear field. Only in the mid-1950s did nuclear power get some priority and this was in the context of help from the long-standing ally, the United States, and its Atoms for Peace programme. A bilateral nuclear cooperation deal was signed in 1955 and two years later Brazil opened its first research reactor.

³ Enrique Obando, *Industrias militares en América del sur* (Lima, Centro Peruano de Estudios Internacionales, 1991), pp. 17-8.