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**Title:** Operation Condor, Free Trade, and Capitalism: The Secret Link Between Genocidal Tendencies and the Free Market in the Southern Cone of Latin America

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**Abstract**

This paper examines the synergies between free trade, capitalism and Operation Condor in the Southern Cone of Latin America. It makes the case that Chile, Uruguay, and Argentina – subjected to deleterious U.S. policy in the omnipotent fight against Communism – had to concede to U.S. demands (albeit in a discrete manner) as the U.S. sought to maintain their imperial hold on the region and take these Latin American countries under its wing (as it has always done since the beginning of the Monroe Doctrine) to protect them from Communism. This paper asserts that the United States kept the Southern Cone nations subjected to a status of second-class citizenry by imposing upon them the doctrine of free trade in conjunction with Operation Condor in order to promote and protect the unwavering notion of capitalism and the free market, against all things else. Without free trade and capitalism, Operation Condor and the military backed dictatorships that accompanied it could not have been possible and vice versa – it was precisely possible because the United States was able to dictate the outcome of these nations in a shadow-controlled manner via economic imperialism and thereby subject them to the horrors of Operation Condor. In the end, this paper demonstrates a correlation between free trade, capitalism, and Operation Condor. It hopes to prove that Operation Condor was nothing less than the workings of the capitalist class – even if it meant forced disappearances, murders, and violent rule.

**Keywords**: Capitalism, National Security Doctrine, Communism, Free-Market, Military Dictatorships, Operation Condor, Free-Trade, Southern Cone, Latin America, United States

**Introduction**

The synergies between free trade, capitalism and Operation Condor are evident in the Southern Cone of Latin America. In the omnipotent fight against Communism – Chile, Uruguay, and Argentina had no choice but to cede to the demands of the United States as the regional hegemon. The Monroe doctrine played a role ever since the beginning and became even more potent and important during the Cold War years as the United States sought to subvert socialism and communism in favor of the free market.

The United States kept its hold on the nations of the Southern Cone via an economic imperialistic manner—not necessarily direct intervention. By dictating the outcome of these nations, the US was able to manipulate their stance on the world stage and helped to install in them fierce right-wing backed military dictatorships. This was aided by Operation Condor, an operation that brutally and systemically quashed all forms of opposition, perpetrating thousands of human rights violations including: torture, extrajudicial executions, enforced disappearances, sexual violence against members of left-wing armed groups, politicians, teachers, students, trade union leaders, and political activists. The operation was a vital component to staving off communism and left-wing ideology. It became transnational in scope by the early 1970s as countries in the Southern Cone fell wave to military dictatorships that promulgated the National Security Doctrine during the Cold War.

Operation Condor was formally established during a meeting of security forces hosted and organized by the despot ruler General Augusto Pinochet in Santiago, Chile in 1975 and dubbed as a secret intelligence and operations system that permitted the sharing of intelligence and seizing of political opponents across South America. Political activists who thought they were safe after relocating to a neighboring country in the Southern Cone after having fled repression and a military coup in their own country, became victims of a deadly ideological trap. A now borderless area of terror and impunity was entrenched in the Southern Cone (Lessa, 2015, 4,5,7). Nonetheless, the United States was exorbitantly pleased with this and in fact, aided Operation Condor. Operation Condor further concurred with the agenda of the ‘West” in the early 1970s. It was facilitated (albeit not directly) by the economic agenda of the IMF and the World Bank who both grandiosely supported neoliberal interests to integrate and deregulate markets worldwide (Steger, 2017, 56). Such institutions are agents of capitalist actors – and such agents fomented the repression of the people in the Southern Cone beginning in the decade of the 1970s. As it stands, without free trade and capitalism, Operation Condor and the military backed dictatorships that accompanied it could not have been possible and vice versa – they were precisely possible because the United States was able to dictate the outcome of these nations in a shadow-controlled manner via economic imperialism and thereby subject them to the horrors of Operation Condor.

**Strategic economic undermining of the Southern Cone**

Latin America so to say has always been viewed as an underdeveloped region. Some pundits even go as far to say that Latin America experiences its immense poverty because its people are lazy or simply because it’s a region that’s considered tropical. However, the world-capitalist system has been strategically set up to disadvantage the region, exacerbated after the end of WW2 and the beginning of the Cold War. Latin American countries are unable to consolidate a political bloc strong enough to influence the international system. They are takers, not makers, of international policy. Furthermore, the dominant role of the United States in the Western Hemisphere leads many to conclude that it is simply best to ‘bandwagon’ with the United States as US leadership has left Latin American countries with no choice but to accept the rules of the game imposed by the hegemonic North in exchange for vague promises to gain access to the US market (Carranza, 2006, 814). As Latin American reformers and modernizers sought after WW2 to bring about economic development and diversification vis a vis state planning and intervention – the United States deliberately construed obstacles in their path while administering its doctrine of free enterprise and private investment (Gilderhus, 1992, 437).

It's worthwhile looking at the role the IMF played in wreaking havoc on the region too. Conditions imposed by the IMF on its credit recipients also dictate the economic policies of military regimes. IMF policies mandate an end to foreign exchange liberalization and import controls, devaluation of the exchange rate, and anti-inflation measures including curbs on public spending. Most importantly, the IMF advocates measures to encourage foreign investors. The 1976 coup in Argentina has often been referred to as the “coup for foreign credit” as the IMF played a massive role in bringing the military to power. Three weeks before the coup, the Argentine economy minister at the time had to obtain credit to prevent Argentina from defaulting on its foreign debt payments—ordered severe austerity measures. As he rose prices by over 100 per cent for basic items and froze wages, a general strike ensued and the IMF abruptly denied the credit needed for Argentina to finance its debt. That same credit that was denied to the civilian government was granted a few days after the military coup (Bertoli et al., 2018, 244-245). This is alarming because the IMF is essentially, a construct of the West. By continuing to shackle nations to debt with new loans just to repay old ones perhaps at a rate that is restructured, Western banks and their capital can continually avoid defaulting on their own loans. Such deceptive use of fiat money has helped to move the world-capitalist system forward and more importantly in the region—allowed for the war machines to continue their fight against the people, and labor. It is worth adding that the market forces unleashed through privatization and deregulation lied the assurance of a technological revolution and universal access to participatory expression (Miller et al., 2005, 348). Except—not so much in the Southern Cone. Such economic and governance measures that should have benefited the people through ‘free-market initiatives’—have failed to do so as the autocratic regimes tightened their grip on power and persecuted dissent of all kinds.

**The ‘National Security Doctrine’ & the Capitalist link**

The dictatorships in Chile, Argentina, and Uruguay had differed from priori military regimes as they were bent on carrying out a definitive transformation of the economic, social, and political structures of their countries. The regimes embodied elements of what is dubbed the “National Security Doctrine”. This doctrine maintained that “total war” is taking place and that international subversion was on the offensive against the nation, the family, and Christian values. The armed forces dubbed themselves the logical defenders of such values while liberty and democracy are among the goals propagated by the National Security Doctrine. However, such objectives must be sacrificed to prevent subversion by internal and external enemies (Bertoli et al., 2018, 242). Meanwhile, the military regimes’ number one objective has always been to crush the working class and its political organizations, which have time and again maintained a fierce resistance to the dictatorships (Bertoli et al., 2018, 242). By crushing the working class, such regimes are able to foment their hold within a capitalist modus operandi. A modus operandi that the United States throughout its history has sought to ensure. Still, by crushing labor and its opposition – the Southern Cone nations were able to ensure that any threat of communist subversion would be swiftly averted. Furthermore, in Argentina, Brazil, and Chile, party leaders believed that alliances with the military would enable them to conceive positions of power in the new governments (Mainwaring, 1988, 95). The dictatorships literally controlled all parts of society – including the parties. Still, at the end of the day, it’s imperative for dictators to address workers given their significance in numbers and their importance in economic production (Wonik & Gandhi, 2010, 646). Labor size is an indication of potential brute power as the greater the working population, the greater the threat of mobilization (Wonik & Gandhi, 2010, 648). This leaves autocrats such as those in the Southern Cone at the time few options: they can either destroy labor and the tactics it employs or they can co-opt it (Wonik & Gandhi, 2010, 648). As was mentioned above, the Southern Cone kleptocrats opted to destroy it.

What makes matters worse for political dissenters and labor workers who face repercussions due to ideological beliefs is the fact that the military regimes often did not operate within their own legal structures. Very few people have seldom if ever been tried by military tribunals for political crimes as kidnapping and indefinite detention are considered better deterrents than long sentences (Bertoli et al., 2018, 244). In the end, the bureaucracy of the military dictatorships and the economic salvage they expected to bring acting in the interests of the capitalist class severely damaged many people and their lineage.

**Lost internal autonomy**

The USA’s interests in Latin America had been shaken since the Cuban Revolution. This led the hegemon to consider the internal politics from each country in the region as an extension of its own external politics (Barreto & Flávia, 2014, 112). Nonetheless, its extension was a capitalist one in nature. According to the logic of the National Security Doctrine and dictatorial regimes in the Southern Cone countries that had roots in the extension, being an informant working for the dictatorship was seen as the same as being a patriot defending the nation. Nationalism was a synonym for anti-communism and a critical component of capitalist ideology from the Cold War promulgated by the United States (Barreto & Flávia, 2014, 113). At this point, the internal autonomy of the Southern Cone nations had been vastly corrupted by capitalism and its nefarious actors.

It is worth saying that the nations in the Southern Cone did not necessarily maintain their internal autonomy either. States enjoy internal autonomy when they are able to formulate their goals when such goals do not reflect the demands or interests of particular social groups. On the other hand, external autonomy is normally characterized as the ability of the state to set its own determinations and make decisions based on its own needs and objectives without interference or restrictions from abroad – including the ability to control processes or events produced beyond its borders. In both cases, autonomy is always related to a state’s corresponding attributes of power, both hard and soft (Roberto & Tokatlian, 2003, 2). Autonomy was and still is more a South American issue than a Latin American one. Many countries in Central and Northern Latin America face the issue more from a viewpoint of sovereignty – given that the region has historically been the target of a multitude of force by the United States including: conquest and annexation of territories, invasion and military intervention, covert operations, etc. In contrast, South America, more importantly the Southern Cone nations maintained a relatively greater margin for diplomatic, commercial, and cultural jockey with respect to Washington (Roberto & Tokatlian, 2003, 7). Still, Dependency ensued as the foreign policy of the less powerful actor is primarily determined by economic, commercial, and financial considerations. Thusly, the alignment of the dependent actor with a stronger and more influential actor guarantees greater security as well as improved material conditions (Roberto & Tokatlian, 2003, 10). Therefore, via the military dictatorships aligning themselves and their priorities with the United States, those in power very well had benefited nicely. Arguably, very nice. On the other hand, the citizenry who had to live under the dictatorships sure enough, suffered immensely. In the end, Latin America was and has been historically viewed from the lens of dependency theory. The responsibility for such pervasive underdevelopment in the region has been a result of the consequence of historical capitalism (Wallerstein, 2004, 12). Such capitalism that has continued to evolve in its historical dialectical process – has turned corrosive, and has undermined all but the most powerful of nations. Nations of which many refer to as “the West”.

**Free market or human rights?**

The international stage – the United Nations specifically – has been a pivotal platform for revolutionaries fighting against superior military forces. (Harmer, 2016, 135-136). However, in a largely state-centric world, responding to transnational human rights atrocities has often been undermined. In South America, the legacy of fear left behind on behalf of the military dictatorships accompanied with the tradition of impunity, helps to account for why such transnational crimes were so often overlooked (Lessa, 2015, 3). The working class, labor, the poor, the peasants, and those who didn’t agree with the politics of the dictatorships rightly feel as if justice has not been served. It is possible that given the inevitable hierarchy demonstrated in Capitalism, justice will never be served to these people who faced brutal repression. These people often have very little decision-making capacity as Latin America has historically been ruled by wealthy oligarchs and land-owners. It’s up for the rest of the world to pressure these Latin American nations to hold accountable the leaders of their past and their actions. However, given the intrinsic synergy between the most powerful capitalist actors in society (including the United States) and military dictatorships—it will take decades, if it even takes form.

**Moving forward into the 21st century—what we now know**

The first world saw the people of the 3rd world as prey for the Second World (Prashad, 2007, 9). Therefore, the first world, principally, the United States – sought to do all it could to protect the 3rd world people of the Southern Cone nations from the Second World Communists and their leader, the USSR. Albeit still fragmentary in documentation – the evidence continues to mount that U.S. officials considered Operation Condor a legitimate “counterterror” organization and that it was assisted and encouraged by U.S. military and intelligence forces (McSherry, 2002, 40). Furthermore, it is now known that the State Department, the Defense Department, and the CIA were all well aware of Operation Condor and that U.S. agencies supported or collaborated with a myriad of Condor operations (McSherry, 2002, 40). It is without question that the ruthless operations against political opposition advanced the security agenda of the U.S. national security establishment in the all-out war against communism and its revolutionaries in Latin America (McSherry, 2002, 41). The fact that the CIA was well informed about secret Condor operations raises the question of why it was unable to stop the Letelier/Moffitt assassinations by Condor agents in Washington, D.C., in September 1976 (McSherry, 2002, 46). Perhaps a blind eye was turned by Washington – in its own heartland. One might never know if the U.S. sanctioned the assassinations of these leftists by Condor agents or not. It is nonetheless, worth questioning. In the end, the culmination of populist, nationalist, and socialist movements challenged the deeply ingrained privileges of local oligarchies of the Southern Cone along with U.S. political and corporate interests (McSherry, 2002, 55). The United States simply could not accept an erosion of any power or influence what so ever – even if it meant, forced disappearances, murders, and violent rule.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, this paper examined the strategic undermining of the Southern Cone nations in Latin America. It demonstrated the extended reach of economic imperialism on behalf of the most powerful capitalist agent in the world: The United States, and how the United States was able to control at will, the nations of the Southern Cone – without direct intervention. It looked at the links between the National Security Doctrine and Capitalism and argued that both are a product of one another and advanced one another in their historical process during the time period in which these events took place. It then probed the lost internal autonomy of the Southern Cone nations and the impact it had on them. A discussion ensued relating to the free-market versus human rights – bringing up critical pieces of information that argued that capitalism is a viable adversary against human rights. The paper wrapped up with a deliberation on where we stand today in the 21st century with what we now know as fact. It is the hope of this paper to leave lectors with a new-found sense of the dangers of capitalism gone awry. As a common people in this world – thinking on a pure theoretical nation-state basis is not enough. People will die, at the expense of others—as has been shown repeatedly in history. It is time for the world to unify, against capitalism and its nefarious actors and for the people, equality, and above all else, equity. The current system is not fair and it deliberately disadvantages its most weak and vulnerable members—the people who we should ideally be helping the most. With equity in mind, on a nation-state level panorama with fairness in all situations, the world will surely be a better place. And we might just save the destruction of our species from total war that capitalism all to willingly seems to enter into a consensual relationship with. A relationship that is, in solidarity with the bankers and politicians, of course.

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