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## *Argentina at a Crossroads*

A new and widespread corruption scandal implicating businessmen with former Kirchner administration officials, may have unforeseen consequences for Argentina's future as a democracy. The recent conviction of former Vice President Amado Boudou to 5 years and 10 months in prison for crimes committed while in office may still offer some hope for the country.

Corruption is certainly not new to Argentina. It has been chiseled into Argentina's political landscape since the beginning of the 20th century, and acquired pandemic intensity after General Juan Domingo Perón's governments. Adolfo Pérez Esquivel, the winner of the Nobel Peace Prize, spoke of Argentina pervasive "moral illness".

Cheating has been the unspoken public policy in school, on taxes, and when paying bills and fines. This social conduct has soiled the roots of the country's political system, and produced its most spectacular finale with the Kirchners' government. Néstor Kirchner was Argentina's President from 2003 to 2007 and Cristina Fernández de Kirchner from 2007 to 2015.

No one should be surprised, however. The germs were there, spreading in the basement, rotting the structures, preparing the final collapse. How can one otherwise explain the bloodthirsty repression carried out by the military during the 1970s without considering its previous acceptance by civilian political circles? How is it possible that people were made to disappear in broad daylight by military tactical commandos without complaints except for a few human rights groups?

How it could also be explained that the *Asociación Mutual Israelita Argentina (AMIA)* terrorist attack that killed 85 people in Buenos Aires in 1994 could occur, without considering the possible connivance by officials from former president Carlos Menem's government? Or how could the assassination of Alberto Nisman be explained? He was the Special Prosecutor in the AMIA case, and was killed the day before he was to testify in Congress denouncing the Kirchner administration's corrupted agreement with Iran. In that agreement, Iran and Argentina reportedly exchanged oil for immunity for Iranians suspected to have been involved in the AMIA attack.

Those disparate events were simply the consequence of corruption at all levels of Argentina's society. The policy of decade-long complicity between politicians and judges not only allowed these crimes to remain unpunished, but condoned bribery as a channel for resolving any investigation of a corrupted system.

In the last scandal, it became known that the driver of one of the main officials in the Kirchner government filled eight notebooks with detailed explanations of meetings, people involved, places and bags with money to corrupt government officials. The notebooks implicated not only major members of government but several wealthy businessmen.

Is there any chance for Argentina to eliminate the chronic illness of corruption in its social life? After all, it seems easier to give up any resistance than to begin a disproportionate fight against a disease that has accomplices at all levels of society. However, as happens when we are confronted with injustice, we may either give up hope or maintain our resistance, believing that we deserve a better future.

Italy fought with success a similar corrupted system with "Mani Pulite" (clean hands.) This was an Italian nationwide judicial investigation into political corruption that led to the demise of the so-called "First Republic". Several politicians and businessmen committed suicide after their crimes were uncovered. Brazil has recently produced "Lava Jato", a similar approach, which shows a chance to get rid of widespread corruption in that country.

It is now up to Argentine judges to use this opportunity to put a final stop to Argentina's endemic corruption. Opportunities like this one are rare, when there is a desperate voice of the population demanding justice.

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