In May 1974, Jorge Casal, the Argentine ambassador in Israel, imagined that “historians in the year 2000 might view the period that ushered in the last quarter of the Twentieth Century as one defined by a crisis in leadership.” French President Charles De Gaulle was dead. Willy Brandt had resigned the German Chancellorship in scandal. In Israel, the “political star of the generation of [David] Ben-Gurion and Golda Meir was expiring.” After Watergate, the American presidency was in a daily, ethical free fall. An era of powerful leadership had passed; “pragmatism and intuition” were supplanting what he called the reflexive gaze of prominent leaders in Cold War geopolitics. There was clinical prescience in this vision of a transition into a later Cold War period when larger-than-life national political leaders would be in short supply. In addition, though, Casal’s analysis reflects long-term Argentine foreign policy making and action in two vital realms often set aside in the analysis of Argentine international affairs. First, the scholarly literature has frequently underestimated the significance of a long-term, sophisticated Argentine global strategic approach to specific foreign relations episodes, regional problems, and bilateral relations. Second, and more specifically, Casal’s analysis brings to bear a Cold War global strategic approach in the first instance to Argentina’s policy toward Israel and the Middle East. This chapter argues that Argentine policy in the Middle East during the Cold War was shaped largely by strategic concerns that took into account a range of regional dynamics, but that almost
always placed those problems in a larger and more vital framework of Soviet-American confrontation.

_Jews, Argentine Foreign Relations, and The Equidistance Trap_

In his epilogue to _Argentina, Israel, and the Jews: Perón, the Eichmann Capture and After_, the historian Raanan Rein cautions readers not to read too much into episodic upheaval as defining Argentine foreign relations. “The diplomatic crisis in Argentine-Israeli relations following the Eichmann kidnapping,” he writes, “was of short duration.”2 This is true more generally of Argentina’s Middle East policy during the Cold War, which was set in the early 1950s and never varied substantially despite multiple crises and radical (or what seemed radical) policy shifts in areas that touched on that policy—for example, Argentina’s entry into the Non-Aligned Movement in 1973.3 At the same time, Jewish Argentines, Argentine Jewish community organizations, and non-Argentine Jews touched Argentine foreign relations in a variety of manners not easily categorized.

Like Canada, Bolivia, and other countries in the Americas (though not necessarily in equivalent forms), a reception of Jewish refugees from Nazi Europe in the 1930s and during World War II (ranging from limited openings to open hostility) was shaped in part by anti-Semitism but also by how Argentine diplomats and political leaders conceived of the nation’s non-belligerent wartime status. During his presidencies in the 1940s, 1950s and 1970s, Juan Perón invested significant political capital in trying to build strong ties to Jewish communal organizations. That may have played a role in shaping Argentina’s stated position on equidistance. While the Eichmann-related turmoil may not have lasted long, a wave of anti-Semitic acts at roughly the same time, during the early 1960s, prompted growing alarm among many Argentine Jews, leading many to leave the country, and at the same time generating concerns from Washington over anti-Semitism that have surfaced periodically ever since. No study has explored the extent to which a number of Jewish Argentines were expressing essentially Jewish identities when they helped determine Argentine foreign relations in different ways. These include the 1950s and

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2 Rein, _Argentina, Israel_ (Bethesda, 2003), 229.