

Version 1.0 | Last updated 08 January 2017

ABC Pact (Alliance between Argentina, Brazil and Chile)

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On 25 May 1915, Argentina's, Brazil's and Chile's ministers of foreign affairs signed a treaty to facilitate the peaceful solution of international controversies in Buenos Aires. Mired in diplomatic discussions for more than ten years, this treaty, known as the ABC pact, was formalized after the European war's outbreak.

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An ABC System in the Southern Cone

In the early 20th century, Argentina, [Brazil](#) and Chile had established themselves as leaders in the Americas' Southern Cone. An arms race, at that time focusing on naval forces, then began and served as a source of tension and uncertainty. The early 20th century was therefore known as an "armed peace." Ever since, a triangular system of alliances and realities has reflected a competition for hegemonic regional power.

Out of this situation arose a debate about relations between the ABC countries. On 21 November 1904, Brazilian Minister of Foreign Affairs [José Paranhos, Baron of *Rio Branco* \(1845-1912\)](#), wrote to the Argentinian ambassador in Rio de Janeiro, [Manuel Gorostiaga Paz \(1848-1918\)](#): "I am more and

more convinced that a cordial intelligence between Argentina, Brazil and Chile could be of great benefit for each three Nations.”^[1] This proposition appeared a few months after the [United Kingdom](#) and [France](#) signed the Entente Cordiale.

In October 1907, [Federico Puga Borne \(1855-1935\)](#), the Chilean minister of foreign affairs, and [Lorenzo Anadón \(1885-1927\)](#), the Argentine ambassador in Santiago, wrote a rough version of a treaty. Rio Branco refused it given the tense relations between Argentina and Brazil at that time. Using the same structure from this first text, he proposed a new version in February 1909 without the controversial question of the naval forces equivalence. In the first round, the ABC project reflected an ambition to insure a regional regulation, which could be seen as a “shared hegemony.”^[2]

The US-Mexican Mediation as a Springboard to ABC

At the same time, the [United States'](#) growing influence over the continent had sparked some new tensions. Military interventions under the Monroe Doctrine became more common. In April 1914, on the eve of WWI, the US occupation of Veracruz during the [Mexican Revolution](#) threatened continental peace. Argentinian and Chilean delegates, [Rómulo S. Naón \(1875-1941\)](#) and [Eduardo Suárez Mujica \(1859-1922\)](#), together with the Brazilian ambassador in Washington, [Domício da Gama \(1862-1925\)](#), quickly offered their mediation services to avoid a war. The three diplomats had seized the opportunity to increase their influence on the continent by showing excellent behavior on a diplomatic level. A conference was then set up at Niagara Falls from 18 May to 1 July 1914.

Against all odds, and despite somewhat unexpected results, the main goal was achieved: war was avoided. This mediation gave a new impulse to the ABC project by offering the South American states strong reasons to consider themselves credible international actors, or at least as counterweights to US continental hegemony.

The ABC Treaty through Diplomatic Fluctuations

The decreasing tensions in the Southern Cone opened a window of opportunity for a pact. In May 1915, the Chilean and Brazilian ministers of foreign affairs, [Alejandro Lira Lira \(1873-1951\)](#) and [Lauro Müller \(1863-1926\)](#), met with their Argentine counterpart [José Luis Murature \(1876-1929\)](#) in Buenos Aires and signed a treaty. The preamble emphasized the idea of “concord and peace that inspire their international policies” and a way “to cooperate as the brotherhood of American republics become even stronger.”^[3] The preamble was a simpler version of previously written texts. It declared that any controversies between the three states would be settled by diplomatic means and recommended the creation of a permanent commission of the three members in Montevideo (Uruguay), charged with finding solutions to any litigation issues.

Unlike previous initiatives, the treaty was primarily significant as a declaration of mutual friendship rather than as a regulation tool. The press congratulated the initiative in an international context

instead of a regional context. The treaty was presented as a new path of peace opened in South America, in opposition to the path chosen by Europeans.

Despite general optimism, the treaty was never promulgated, as only the Brazilian parliament ratified the text. The years 1914-1915 were an exception in the three countries' relationships, as previous tensions soon reappeared. Furthermore, Brazil's choice to join the war on behalf of the Allies in 1917 created a gap between it and Argentina and Chile, who both maintained a neutral position. This situation was not conducive to advancing the ABC pact, which was definitively buried at the [Pan-American](#) conference in Santiago in 1923.

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Notes

1. ↑ Bueno, Clodoaldo: *Política externa da Primeira República. Os anos de apogeu (de 1902 a 1918)* [Foreign policy of the First Republic. Years of apogee (1902-1918)], São Paulo 2003, p. 291.
2. ↑ Conduru, Guilherme Frazão: *O subsistema americano, Rio Branco e o ABC* [The American Subsystem, Rio Branco and the ABC], in: *Revista Brasileira de Política Internacional* [Brazilian Review of International Politics] 41 (1998), p. 76.
3. ↑ Arquivo Histórico do Itamaraty [Foreign Affairs Ministry Historical Archive], Rio de Janeiro, (138-3-24). "Tratado para facilitar a solução pacífica de controvérsias internacionais" ["Treaty to facilitate a pacific solution for international controversies".]

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Citation

Veber, Hélène: ABC Pact (Alliance between Argentina, Brazil and Chile) , in: 1914-1918-online. International Encyclopedia of the First World War, ed. by Ute Daniel, Peter Gatrell, Oliver Janz, Heather Jones, Jennifer Keene, Alan Kramer, and Bill Nasson, issued by Freie Universität Berlin, Berlin 2014-10-08. **DOI:** [10.15463/ie1418.10011](https://doi.org/10.15463/ie1418.10011).

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