

Argentina

Government

Roberto María Ortiz was the president of Argentina at the beginning of the war, in 1939. The country was in a period of political conservatism and economic crisis known as the *Infamous Decade*. The *Concordancia* was accused of electoral fraud and corruption. The Radical Civic Union was divided between FORJA, a line supporting the deposed radical president Hipólito Yrigoyen, and the official leadership of Marcelo Torcuato de Alvear, close to the *Concordancia*. The Socialist Party and the Progressist Democracy were conservative as well. The Communist Party was initially close to the trade unions but gave priority to advancing the interests of the Soviet Union.

At the outset of World War II, in September 1939, Argentina announced a position of "prudent neutrality" toward the belligerents. Its action was based on several factors: freedom of action in its relations with European nations was the keystone of Argentina's foreign policy traditions; its neutrality during World War I had been domestically popular and made the Argentine economy prosper; it wanted to revitalize its economy after the disastrous impact of the Great Depression; and it saw itself as a counterweight in the south to the United States in the north.

Although Argentina agreed at the Havana Conference in 1940 that an attack on any American state would be considered an act of aggression against all American states, it insisted that any action undertaken in response to an attack was a matter for each state's individual interpretation.

Nazi activities began in Argentina in the early 1930s and continued throughout the wartime period. When war broke out in Europe in 1939, there was a very large German population in Argentina. Some 60,000 of them belonged to the Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei, an organization of Germans living abroad. This organization controlled shipping lines, a special news service, and other entities in Argentina. Germans also had a great economic influence in Argentina, controlling a considerable part of the nation's industrial, chemical, pharmaceutical, and electrical goods production, and having a large part of the military and civilian construction.