

Armies in Times of Peace: The Division of Labor Between the Armed Forces and Police

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The end of the Cold War has made obsolete the international security doctrines that dominated strategic thought for nearly fifty years. Even before the fall of the Berlin Wall, new communication and information technologies had shown that the wars of the future would be different. The first example of this was the Gulf War, a conflict that was transmitted by CNN and seen around the world. The ethnic conflict in the former Yugoslavia was to follow. This war showed that intra-state conflicts would be one of the main threats to post-Cold War democracy. The recent terrorist attacks against the United States on September 11, 2001 have again signaled the need to define security in a different manner. While the concept of state security still dominates the official discourse, there is also a growing reflection on the need to include the concept of human security in the discussion.

In the paragraphs that follow, I do not attempt to define a new doctrine for security; my intentions are much more modest. Rather, I will reflect upon the lack of a common definition for security and its consequences for the processes of political transition and democratic consolidation in the world. I will specifically address the division of labor between the armed forces and the national police corps in small- and medium-sized countries like those of most of Latin America.

THE LEGACY OF DICTATORSHIPS:

THE CASE OF LATIN AMERICA

Shortly after the consolidation of national armies and the establishment of territorial borders in the nineteenth-century, the Latin

American military apparatus defined its function as the defense of state sovereignty. In addition to its roles of socialization (particularly through conscription) and nation-building, the military erected itself as the supreme guardian of the republic, the guarantor of the constitution, and, finally, as the last recourse for the defense of democracy. Time and again in the twentieth century, the struggle against communism served as the justification for the armed forces to assume control over the functions of government. In the name of Western values and ideals, the Latin American military establishment repeatedly abolished national constitutions, dissolved parliaments, closed courts, censored the press, delayed electoral processes, and even tortured and “disappeared” its opponents.

Civilian control over the military was never really considered legitimate by Latin American societies, much less by the armed forces. In the best of cases, Latin American militaries considered themselves a specific social subsystem at the same level as the other principal political, economic, and social actors. Even though this subsystem definition has been abandoned by most military entities in the region, public opinion polls show that the army is still a well-regarded institution.

I would venture to say that this subsystem definition is one of the main obstacles to the legitimate establishment of civilian control over the military and is, therefore, one of the



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challenges for democratic consolidation in the region. Even though cultural and attitudinal transformations are seen in the long term, this does not mean that we can only wait for successive generations to become better educated. There are a number of incremental measures that many incipient democracies in Latin America have been taking over the past fifteen years that have increased civilian power over the military and altered social perceptions about the military establishment.

THE ACHIEVEMENTS OF DEMOCRACY AND THE CHALLENGES FOR THE FUTURE

For historical and socio-cultural reasons, it is clear that the democracies in the region have come from different starting points and are in different stages of political consolidation. Regardless of the particular national circumstances, however, all of the countries in Latin America have begun to address the following processes.

The End of Impunity. In cases where the armed forces have been associated with serious cases of human rights violations and extreme abuses of power, it is very important for subsequent political authorities to demonstrate their dedication to justice and to the end of impunity. Various models have been implemented toward this end, such as trying the military in civilian courts (Argentina), amnesty laws and pardons (Uruguay), truth commissions (El Salvador), and "history clarifying" commissions (Guatemala). The discussion of how to reclaim the past and move on is still open. What is clear is that new democratic governments cannot ignore the abuses of past regimes.

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The Establishment of Optional Military Service. In periods of dictatorships, soldiers are usually young men who are forced to enlist. Often they are from poor, rural areas and have a low level of education. Given the importance of military enlistment for a country's security as well as the symbolic value of the problem, the civilian population must address the future of their countries' rules for service in the armed forces.

An Efficient Civilian Police Force and Judiciary. Authoritarian dictatorships usually militarize the police. As a result, one of the main tasks of new democratic governments must be the demilitarization of the police force and the subsequent creation of new public security agencies that are purely civilian in terms of their training, doctrines and beliefs, intelligence gathering techniques, recruiting methods, and living conditions (that is, in addition to being well-paid, the police should live in the community it serves and not in barracks).

The government must also focus on reestablishing confidence in the country's judicial system. With very few exceptions, the judiciary in Latin America has been the "poor cousin" among the three branches of government. In every instance of regime transition and democratic consolidation in the region, it has been necessary to modernize the court system in order to make it more efficient. In many cases, the judiciary has had to be heavily reformed or completely recreated.

All these attempts to redress past abuses of power, in the best of cases, are long-term processes. In most Latin American countries, the weakness of the recently demilitarized police forces has led to high crime rates and a deep sense of growing personal insecurity among the population. Unfortunately, this situation may make it tempting to return to the military the responsibility of maintaining public order. However, this would be a clear step backwards in the process of consolidating democratic control over the armed forces.

NEW ROLES FOR THE MILITARY IN TIMES OF PEACE

The spaces and roles of the military and the police must be clearly specified and properly supported by a country's legal structures. The funds of the armed forces must be part of the national budget in order to give elected officials decision-making authority over their approval. This would give the civilian popula-



tion, through their elected officials, indirect control over the military budget. In addition, civilian courts of justice should be designed to guarantee individual freedoms and citizens' rights in order to limit abuses of power by the military. For this reason, military tribunals and exemptions to criminal laws cannot be allowed under any circumstances. Lastly, it also is critical that defense ministers and the chiefs of police be drawn from the civilian population and placed under the close watch of the executive.

The specter of an excessively powerful and unregulated military is a clear threat to the state and its citizens' security. However, this is just one of many challenges that countries face, including an array of others that demand state and military collaboration: the exploitation of natural resources, environmental degradation, ethnic conflicts, internally displaced persons, and massive human rights violations. While the consensus is that these threats are best managed by a state under civilian authority, it is unclear what the appropriate role of the armed forces should be in solving them.

Peace Keeping Operations. The growth of civil conflicts clearly demonstrates that modern armies must be equipped to organize and participate in peace-keeping operations (Montgomery 2000). For the armies of newly formed democracies, these operations may serve as a "socializing experience" because they amplify their strategic vision from a purely local to a global outlook. They also function to spirit a debate on conceptual issues concerning peacekeeping operations, such as reconciling sovereignty with the right of nations to intervene in other countries for humanitarian purposes. For the participants in these missions, the sole fact of interacting with an array of international agents—the armies of other countries (which have different military traditions) and the employees of international and non-governmental organizations—can be an enriching experience.

Emergency Disaster Operations. Under the civilian government's lead, the armed forces must be equipped and trained to undertake rescue operations, basic infrastructure reconstruction projects, and the distribution of food and medicine in emergency situations that result from natural disasters or terrorist attacks. However, the military's involvement should cease in instances of resettling internally displaced populations and long-term reconstruction efforts, both of which must be done by government agencies.

The Armed Forces and Environmental Policy. Another area in which the armed forces should assume a larger role is in the prevention of conflicts related to the environment, particularly as disputes escalate between countries over the control of energy resources, water, and maritime jurisdictions.

Border Protection. Historically, one of the main sources of conflict between neighboring countries has been the problem of ill-defined national borders (Herzog 1995). Given this situation, it should be a priority for civilian governments to search for mechanisms to negotiate their way out of any existing territorial disputes in order to avoid armed conflict. At the same time, the redefinition of borders would allow these countries to establish a relationship of military trust with neighboring nations. Improved interstate relations would provide a formidable barrier to the use of violence, which should only be a last resort when diplomacy and negotiations have failed.

In order to improve the integrity of a country's borders, a special police force—not unlike the coast guard—must be created to maintain civil order, control crime, and protect citizens in these areas. In many cases, the collaboration between border patrols of neighboring countries is not only efficient but also an important deterrent for conflicts. There are multiple examples of collaboration between countries, one of the most interesting being the cooperation between the U.S. and Cuban coast guards on issues of illegal migration.

THE ROLE OF THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

Mechanisms for Collective Security. As a complement to bilateral border agreements, regional and sub-regional collective security treaties can increase the perception of public safety and the stability of new democracies. These accords act as deterrents against both possible aggressor nations and destabilizing threats from internal antidemocratic forces. Although the Inter-American Treaty for Reciprocal Assistance (TIAR) was only recently invoked (in response to the September 11, 2001 attacks), the Organization of American States (OAS) and various hemispheric summits have constantly pronounced themselves in favor of the collective defense of democratically-elected regimes in the region.



The Multilateral Development Banks, the Peace Dividend, and Public Security. Multilateral banks have begun to link debt relief with a reduction in defense spending. According to the multilateral banks and other international financial institutions, one of the main obstacles to the region's development are the extremely high levels of everyday violence in Latin American countries. In light of this problem, multilateral banks have started to promote violence prevention projects that indirectly strengthen the local police forces and encourage indigenous solutions over the involvement of external agents to combat crime.

The Role of Friendly Countries. During the Cold War, the participation of peripheral countries in military pacts was guaranteed by the flows of military aid from Western countries to their former colonies and from Cold War powers (i.e. the United States and the Soviet Union) to their respective allies. After the fall of the Berlin Wall, many pacifists asked for a reduction in military aid coming from the United States, which was decreased for a brief period of time. Unfortunately, the war against drug trafficking rapidly became a new excuse to reestablish the flow of military aid to third-party nations. The case of Colombia (i.e. Plan Colombia) is possibly the most dramatic example, but it is certainly not the only one. Although many armies initially had doubts about assuming leadership roles in the fight against international drug trafficking, intense pressure from Washington has changed their minds.

CONCLUSION

In redefining military relations among countries, it is important to revise joint-training exercises. For example, the activities that the Southern Command of the U.S. Armed Forces offers to its counterparts in the region still include topics such as control over public order and the construction of bridges and roads—two areas activities that they U.S. armed forces are prohibited by U.S. law from carrying out on their own soil (Isacson & Olson 2000).

Democratic consolidation in Latin America continues to face difficult challenges. As the armed forces and police—the political protagonists during dictatorships—struggle to find their place in a democratic order, new actors must emerge from civil society to aid in the process. In societies where military dominance has left a deep imprint, it is very important that civic organizations remain conscious of the need for their involvement in national debates over defense policy, security and the military, and society's role in policy making. The media, women's organizations, environmentalists, human rights groups, and similar organizations all have an important function to serve in fortifying civilian control over the military. The new democratic order dictates new responsibilities for both the military and civil society. It is now just as important for civilians to be educated in the defense and security of the nation, for example, as it is for military personnel to be knowledgeable about democracy and good governance, especially having an unwavering respect for human rights and civil liberties.

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