

Routledge Studies in Latin American Politics

LATIN AMERICAN MILITARY AND POLITICS IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

A CROSS-NATIONAL ANALYSIS

Edited by
Dirk Kruijt and Kees Koonings



“Has the political role of the military endured or re-emerged in Latin America since the new millennium? This is the central question of this book, a fundamental and timely contribution to understand the current state of civil-military relations in the region. It offers analytical depth, comparative focus, and empirical diversity. A must read.”

Helena Carreiras, Former President of the European Research Group on Military and Society (ERGOMAS) 2017–2019 and at present Minister of National Defence of Portugal

“In this insightful book, nineteen senior analysts of civil-military relations combine rigorous scholarship with local expertise to demonstrate the new political roles assumed by Latin American militaries during the 2000s, from the old political militarism of the Cold War decades to renewed civil-military politics. This book should be a required read for practitioners and scholars interested in Latin American politics and militarism.”

Yagil Levy, Professor of Political Sociology at The Open University of Israel and Vice-President of the Israeli Sociological Society (ISS)

“In this outstanding volume Kruijt and Koonings have managed to provide a solid and genuinely comparative analysis of the Latin American military in domestic politics and governance during the last two decades. They convincingly demonstrate that the Latin American armies have been able to retain their importance in national imaginaries and their role as a semi-autonomous political actor in many countries of the region.”

Patricio Silva, Professor of Modern Latin American History, Leiden University

“In times of great uncertainties, this book explores with deep insight the civic-military politics in Latin America, offering different analysis of the military role in the region. Democratic governments must provide access to essential public goods where security is a central priority, together with safeguarding human rights, political dialogue, and inclusive participation.”

Josette Altmann-Borbón, Secretary-General of the Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales (FLACSO)

“Where are the Latin American military today and what are they up to? This question is as important as it is absent from the contemporary political and academic debate. This book is necessary because it fills an analytical gap and because it insightfully dissects the various strategies developed by the Latin American armed forces to preserve a relevant role in the (post?-)democratic political arena. With its exceptional line-up of authors, the work identifies a fourfold dynamics that mark the military in

different countries: returning to the barracks, playing a latent yet central role, engaging in low-intensity violent confrontations, and sustaining political regimes.”

Salvador Martí i Puig, Professor of Political Sciences at the University of Girona and researcher in CIDOB-Barcelona

“Illuminating how Latin American militaries have adapted to a new twenty-first century reality, this ambitious collection by renowned specialists shows how the region’s armed forces, rather than retiring to their barracks, have in fact found multiple and diverse ways to influence politics under democratic—and not-so-democratic—regimes.”

Lilian Bobea, Assistant Professor at Fitchburg State University, Fitchburg, Massachusetts, and former co-chair of Latin American Studies Association section ‘Defense, Public Security and Democracy’

“This book is a welcome contribution to the field of civil-military relations that captures the diverse relations between the armed forces and society in Latin American countries. The richness lies in the diversity of the chapters, that capture the underlying power dynamics that problematize the influence of the military in politics, the economy, and broader civil society within the unique context of each country.”

Lindy Heinecken, Vice-Dean—Research, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, Stellenbosch University

Latin American Military and Politics in the Twenty-First Century

This volume offers a comparative analysis of the role of the military in Latin America in domestic politics and governance after 2000.

Divided into four parts covering the entirety of Latin America, the book argues that the Latin American military as semiautonomous political actors have not faded away since 2000 and may even have been making a comeback in various countries. Each part outlines scenarios which effectively frame the various pathways taken to post-military democratic society. Part 1 critically examines textbook cases of political demilitarization in the Southern Cone, Peru, and Costa Rica. Part 2 contrasts the role of the military in the post-2000 politics of two regional powers: Brazil and Mexico. Part 3 examines the political role of the military facing ‘violent pluralism’ in Colombia and the northern triangle of Central America. Finally, Part 4 identifies country cases in which the military have been instrumental in the rise, sustenance, and occasional demise of left-wing revolutionary projects within Venezuela, Cuba, Nicaragua, and Bolivia.

Latin American Military and Politics in the Twenty-First Century will be of interest to scholars, students, and professionals in the fields of Latin American history, international relations, military studies, and studies concerning democracy, political violence, and revolution in Latin America elsewhere.

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A Cross-National Analysis

**Edited by
Dirk Kruijt and Kees Koonings**

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Raúl Vergara Meneses, air force pilot and economist was also chief of the cabinet of General Bachelet, National Director of Distribution during the government of Allende (1970–1973) in Chile. After the 1973 military coup he was condemned to death, a sentence commuted to 30 solitary confinement, in 1978 converted to 20 years of exile. In November 1979 he became adviser to the Sandinista Air Force in combat against the Contra Forces. Afterwards he was employed at the Inter-American Institute of Human Rights (IIDH) in Costa Rica (2003–2005). During the first presidential term of Michelle Bachelet, he was appointed Vice Minister of the Air Force at the Chilean Ministry of Defence (2006–2010). During her second presidential term, he was appointed Chilean Ambassador at the peace negotiations between the Government of Colombia and the

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Preface and Acknowledgements

The idea of this book emerged after a panel discussion at a pre-conference session of the Section Defence, Public Security, and Democracy, prior to the 36th International Conference of the Latin American Studies Association (LASA) in Barcelona, on 28 May 2018.¹ There, we presented the paper ‘Political Armies and Military Mystique of the Right and the Left in Latin America’. The debate revolved around the issue of the still existing relative autonomy of the armed forces and the extension of their roles in the region.

Back in 2002, we had published the edited book titled, *Political Armies: The Military and Nation Building in the Age of Democracy* (London: Zed, 2002; edited by Kees Koonings and Dirk Kruijt), written by authors and analysts in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and Eastern Europe at the turn of the century. The book’s leitmotif was the explicit extension of the roles of the military institution as the ultimate guardian of the nation and arbiter on all matters of national security and development, territorial integrity, and the model of progress, and how these roles had given rise to transitions from military rule to ‘post-authoritarian political systems’ (including liberal democracies).

This new book, written two decades later, focuses on Latin America and the old and new missions of the region’s military as defined or at least endorsed by their civilian governments. In the absence of any imminent interstate war in the region and given the demise of Cold War–style insurgencies and armed conflicts, these missions evolved to include external (peace) and internal (public safety, civil defence, disaster relief, and combating organized crime) concerns. But contrary (or in addition) to recent mainstream scholarship, our core question is not how these missions have been shaped under democracy and how this has repositioned the military within democratic governance. Rather, we enquire into how these developments have been reshaping the political role of the military and to what extent the de- or re-militarisation of politics in Latin America relates to the broader challenges posed by democracy. We designed an analytical model for the participating authors, the majority of whom are experienced and well-known Latin American scholars, in some cases former military

officers, in others former or current cabinet ministers, and in one case a former head of state.

In the introduction, we review the more classic works written in the last decades of the twentieth century. We have also incorporated the viewpoints, comments, and developments of scholars writing on civil–military relations, national security, and instability and the decline of trust in the democratic order and its core institutions, plus the still prevailing confidence in religious institutions and, somewhat surprisingly, the armed forces, and the police. This provides a baseline for the analytical approach of the book in which a number of country case studies are performed within four scenarios: (1) de-militarisation and ‘back to the barracks’; (2) the (re-)militarisation of politics in the two regional powers ‘under siege’ by organised crime and urban violence; (3) violent pluralism in post-conflict societies; and (4) the military backstopping of left-wing revolutionary regimes. In the conclusions, we assess these scenarios to reveal key issues in the relationship between the military and politics in Latin America since the year 2000.

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Abbreviations

AASANA	Administración de Aeropuertos y Servicios Auxiliares a la Navegación Aérea (Administration of Airports and Auxiliary Services for Aviation, Bolivia)
AD	Acción Democrática (Democratic Action, Venezuela)
AFPC	Acuerdo sobre el Fortalecimiento del Poder Civil y Función del Ejército en una Democracia (Agreement on the Strengthening of Civilian Power and the Role of the Military in Democracy, Guatemala)
ALBA	Alianza Bolivariana para los Pueblos de Nuestra América (Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America)
ALBA-TCP	Alianza Bolivariana para los Pueblos de Nuestra América—Tratado de Comercio de los Pueblos (Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America—Peoples’ Trade Treaty)
AMAN	Academia Militar das Agulhas Negras (Agulhas Negras Military Academy, Brazil)
AMEB	Academia Militar del Ejército Bolivariano (Military Academy of the Bolivarian Army, Venezuela)
AMLO	Andrés Manuel López Obrador (Mexico)
ANSESAL	Agencia Nacional de Seguridad Salvadoreña (National Security Agency of El Salvador)
ARENA	Alianza Renovadora Nacional (National Renewal Alliance, Bolivia)
ARENA	Alianza Republicana Nacionalista (Nationalist Republican Alliance, El Salvador)
AVEMILGUA	Asociación de Veteranos Militares de Guatemala (Association of Guatemalan Military Veterans)
BCA	Batallón Conjunto Argentina (Argentine Joint Battalion, in MINUSTAH)
BIRI	Batallones de Reacción Inmediata (Rapid-Response Battalions, El Salvador)

BLI	Batallones de Lucha Irregular (Irregular Fighting Battalions, Nicaragua)
CA	Cabildo Abierto (Open Chapter, Uruguay)
CDM	Código Disciplinar Militar (Military Discipline Code, Argentina)
CDR	Comités de Defensa de la Revolución (Committees for the Defence of the Revolution, Cuba)
CEEU	Centro de Estudios Estratégicos de Uruguay (Strategic Studies Centre of Uruguay)
CEMIDA	Centro de Militares para la Democracia Argentina (Military Centre for Argentine Democracy)
CEOPAZ	Centro de Entrenamiento de Operaciones de Mantenimiento de la Paz (Training Centre for Peacekeeping Missions, El Salvador)
CES	Cuerpo Especial de Seguridad (Special Security Corps, Honduras)
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency (USA)
CIACS	Cuerpos Ilegales y Aparatos Clandestinos de Seguridad (Illegal Groups and Clandestine Security Apparatuses, Guatemala)
CICIG	Comisión Internacional contra la Impunidad en Guatemala (International Commission against Impunity in Guatemala)
CIMIC	Civil-Military Cooperation
CINEP	Centro de Investigaciones y Educación Popular (Centre for Research and Popular Education, Colombia)
CIP	Centro de Instrucción Policial (Police Training Centre, Honduras)
CLAP	Comités Locales de Abastecimiento y Producción (Local Committees for Supply and Production, Venezuela)
CJNG	Cartel Jalisco Nueva Generación (Jalisco New Generation Cartel, Mexico)
CO	Commissioned Officers
COPEI	Comité de Organización Política Electoral Independiente (Political Electoral Independent Organization Committee, Venezuela)
COPPPAL	Conferencia Permanente de Partidos Políticos de América Latina y el Caribe (Standing Conference of Political Parties of Latin America and the Caribbean)
COSACO	Comunicación Social Asociada al Combate (Social Communication Associated with Combat)
COVID-19	Corona Virus Disease-2019 (caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus)
CPE	Constitución Política del Estado (State Political Constitution, Bolivia)

CUSEP	Cuerpos de Seguridad Pública (Public Security Forces, El Salvador)
CVR	Comisión de la Verdad y Reconciliación (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Peru)
DEA	Drug Enforcement Administration (USA)
DGAC	Dirección General de Aeronáutica Civil (General Directorate of Civil Aviation, Bolivia)
DGCIM	Dirección General de Contrainteligencia Militar (Directorate General of Military Counterintelligence, Venezuela)
DGIM	Dirección General de Inteligencia Militar (Directorate General of Military Intelligence, Venezuela)
DN-I/II/III	Plan de Defensa Nacional-I/II/III (National Defence Plan-I/II/III, Mexico)
DOI-CODI	Departamento de Operações de Informações-Centro de Operações de Defesa Interna (Centre of Information Operations-Centre for Internal Defence Operations, Brazil)
DOP	Dirección de Operaciones y Planes (Military Operation and Planning Unit, Nicaragua)
ECOP	Escuela de Capacitación para Oficiales de la Policía (Police Officer Training Academy, Honduras)
EDI	Estrategia de Desarrollo Institucional (Institutional Development Strategy, Nicaragua)
EGTK	Ejército Guerrillero Tupac Katari (Tupac Katari Guerrilla Army, Bolivia)
EMCO	Estado Mayor Conjunto (Joint Chiefs of Staff, Argentina)
EMP	Estado Mayor Presidencial (Presidential Guard, Mexico)
EPL	Ejército Popular de Liberación (Popular Liberation Army, Colombia)
EPR	Ejército Popular Revolucionario (Popular Revolutionary Army, Mexico)
EPS	Ejército Popular Sandinista (Sandinista Popular Army, Nicaragua)
ERP	Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo (People's Revolutionary Army, El Salvador)
EsPCEx	Escola Preparatória de Cadetes do Exército (Army Cadet Preparatory School, Brazil)
EZLN	Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (Zapatista Army of National Liberation, Mexico)
FA	Frente Amplio (Broad Front, Uruguay)
FAD-Chile	Fuerzas Armadas Democrática de Chile (Democratic Armed Forces of Chile)
FAES	Fuerzas Armadas de El Salvador (Armed Forces of El Salvador)

FAL	Fuerzas Armadas de Liberación (Armed Liberation Forces, El Salvador)
FANB	Fuerza Armada Nacional Bolivariana (National Bolivarian Armed Force, Venezuela)
FAR	Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias (Revolutionary Armed Forces, Cuba)
FARC	Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia)
FARN	Fuerzas Armadas de la Resistencia Nacional (National Resistance Armed Forces, El Salvador)
FEMOSPP	Fiscalía Especial para Movimientos Sociales y Políticos del Pasado (Special Prosecutor for Social and Political Movements of the Past, Mexico)
FFAA	Fuerzas Armadas (Armed Forces)
FFAA	Fuerzas Armadas de la República Argentina (Armed Forces of the Argentine Republic).
FMLN	Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional (Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front, El Salvador)
FN	Frente Nacional (National Front, Colombia)
FPL	Fuerzas Populares de Liberación Farabundo Martí (Farabundo Martí Popular Liberation Front, El Salvador)
FSLN	Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional (Sandinista National Liberation Front, Nicaragua)
FUSEP	Fuerza de Seguridad Pública (Public Security Force, Honduras)
GAESA	Grupo de Administración Empresarial (Business Management Group, Cuba)
GAFES	Grupos Aeromóviles de Fuerzas Especiales (Air Mobility Groups of Special Forces, Mexico)
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GN	Guardia Nacional (National Guard, Mexico)
GNA	Gendarmería Nacional Argentina (Argentine National Gendarmerie)
GSI	Gabinete de Segurança Institucional (Institutional Security Cabinet, Brazil)
IACHR	Inter-American Commission on Human Rights
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IPSM	Instituto de Previsión Social Militar (Institute for Military Social Benefits, Nicaragua)
ISEP	Instituto Superior de Educación Policial (Higher Institute of Police Training, Honduras)
IUDOP	Instituto Universitario de Opinión Pública (University Institute of Public Opinion, El Salvador)

LDN	Ley de Defensa Nacional (National Defence Act, Argentina)
LGBT	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender
M-19	Movimiento 19 de Abril (19th of April Movement, Colombia)
MAS	Movimiento al Socialismo (Movement for Socialism, Bolivia)
MAS-IPSP	Movimiento al Socialismo-Instrumento Político por la Soberanía de los Pueblos (Movement for Socialism-Political Instrument for the Sovereignty of Peoples, Bolivia)
MBR-200	Movimiento Bolivariano Revolucionario-200 (Revolutionary Bolivarian Movement-200, Venezuela)
MDN	Ministerio de la Defensa Nacional (National Defense Ministry, Uruguay)
MINFAR	Ministerio de las Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias (Ministry of the Revolutionary Armed Forces, Cuba)
MININT	Ministerio del Interior (Ministry of the Interior, Cuba)
MINTER	Ministerio del Interior (Ministry of the Interior, Nicaragua)
MINUGUA	United Nations Verification Mission in Guatemala
MINUSTAH	United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti
MONUSCO	Stabilisation Mission of the United Nations in the Democratic Republic of Congo
MORENA	Movimiento Regeneración Nacional (National Regeneration Movement, Mexico)
MRTA	Movimiento Revolucionario Tupac Amaru (Revolutionary Movement Tupac Amaru, Peru)
MUD	Mesa de la Unidad Democrática (Democratic Unity Roundtable, Venezuela)
MUP	Modelo Unitario Pedagógico (Single Training Methodology, Colombia)
NAFTA	North American Free Trade Agreement
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NCO	Non-Commissioned Officers
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NYSE	New York Stock Exchange (USA)
OAS	Organization of American States
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
OEI	Organización de Estados Iberoamericanos para la Educación, la Ciencia y la Cultura (Organization of Ibero-American States for Education, Science and Culture)
OFAC	Office of Foreign Assets Control (USA)

OMIDELAC	Organización de Militares por la Democracia, la Integración y la Liberación de América Latina y el Caribe (Organisation of Military Officers for Democracy, Integration, and Liberation of Latin America and the Caribbean)
ON	Organización Nacional (National Organization—of OMIDELAC)
OPEC	Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries
PAN	Partido Acción Nacional (National Action Party, Mexico)
PC	Partido Colorado (Colorado Party, Uruguay)
PCC	Partido Comunista de Cuba (Communist Party of Cuba)
PCN	Partido de Conciliación Nacional (National Conciliation Party, El Salvador)
PCV	Partido Comunista de Venezuela (Communist Party of Venezuela)
PDC	Partido Demócrata Cristiano (Christian Democratic Party, El Salvador)
PDVAL	Producción y Distribución Venezolana de Alimentos (Venezuelan Food Production and Distribution)
PDVSA	Petróleos de Venezuela S.A.
PFA	Policía Federal Argentina (Argentine Federal Police)
PGR	Procuraduría General de la República (Attorney General's Office, Mexico)
PLC	Partido Liberal Constitucionalista (Constitutionalist Liberal Party, Nicaragua)
PLH	Partido Liberal de Honduras (Liberal Party of Honduras)
PN	Partido Nacional (National Party, Uruguay)
PNA	Prefectura Naval Argentina (Argentine Naval Prefecture)
PNC	Policía Nacional Civil (Civil National Police, El Salvador)
PNC	Policía Nacional Civil (Civil National Police, Guatemala)
PNH	Partido Nacional de Honduras (National Party of Honduras)
PNR	Partido Nacional Revolucionario (National Revolutionary Party, Mexico)
PR	Partido Radical de Chile (Radical Party of Chile)
PRD	Partido de la Revolución Democrática (Party of the Democratic Revolution, Mexico)
PRI	Partido Revolucionario Institucional (Institutional Revolutionary Party, Mexico)

PRM	Partido de la Revolución Mexicana (Party of the Mexican Revolution)
PRTC	Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores Centroamericanos (Revolutionary Party of Central American Workers, El Salvador)
PSL/PRTB	Partido Social Liberal/ Partido Renovador Trabalhista Brasileiro (Liberal Social Party/Brazilian Labour Renewal Party)
PSUV	Partido Socialista Unido de Venezuela (United Socialist Party of Venezuela)
PT	Partido dos Trabalhadores (Workers' Party, Brazil)
SAE	Secretaria Especial de Assuntos Estratégicos (Special Secretariat for Strategic Affairs Brazil)
SDGE	Sistema de Dirección y Gestión Empresarial (Business Governance and Management System, Cuba)
SEBIN	Servicio Bolivariano de Inteligencia Nacional (Bolivarian National Intelligence Service, Venezuela)
SEDENA	Secretaría de la Defensa Nacional (Secretariat of National Defence, Mexico)
SINAE	Sistema Nacional de Emergencias (National Emergency System, Uruguay)
SIPLAGDE	Sistema Integrado de Planificación y Gestión de la Defensa (Integrated System for Defence Planning and Management, Guatemala)
SL	Sendero Luminoso (Shining Path, Peru)
SPE	Sistema de Perfeccionamiento Empresarial (Business Improvement System, Cuba)
SPP	Security and Prosperity Partnership (Canada, Mexico, USA)
STF	Supremo Tribunal Federal (Federal Supreme Court, Brazil)
STM	Supremo Tribunal Militar (Supreme Military Court, Brazil)
TAM	Empresa de Transporte Aéreo Militar (Military Air Transportation Company, Bolivia)
TCU	Tribunal de Contas da União (Federal Court of Accounts, Brazil)
TERNUMA	Terrorismo Nunca Mais (Terrorism Never Again, Brazil)
TIAR	Tratado Interamericano de Asistencia Recíproca (Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance)
UALA	Unidad Argentina Latinoamericana (Argentine-Latin American Unity)
UCB	Universidad Católica Boliviana (Bolivian Catholic University)
UN	United Nations

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UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNMOGIP	United Nations Military Observer Group in India and Pakistan
UNO	Unión Nacional Opositora (National Opposition Union, Nicaragua)
URD	Unión Republicana Democrática (Democratic Republican Union, Venezuela)
URNG-MAIZ	Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca (Guatemalan National Revolutionary Union, Guatemala sometimes also mentioned as URNG)
US	United States
USSR	Union of Socialist Soviet Republics
ZEDE	Zonas de Empleo y Desarrollo Económico (Employment and Economic Development Zones, Honduras)
ZODI	Zonas de Defensa Integral (Integrated Defence Zones, Venezuela)

1 Introduction

The Latin American Military and Politics in the Twenty-First Century

Kees Koonings and Dirk Kruijt

For almost 100 years, between the late nineteenth century and the end of the Cold War in the 1990s, Latin America was one of the global regions in which the military played a significant role in domestic politics. Initially as uniformed strongmen (*caudillos*), later on as professional institutions, the military leadership in all but a few Latin American countries regarded their involvement in politics as part of their core business, closely linked to their self-definition as guardians of national destiny. Precisely for this reason, we have defined these military institutions elsewhere as ‘political armies’ (Koonings and Kruijt 2002, 1; 2003, 373; Kruijt and Koonings 2013, 92). In the second half of the twentieth century, this was a major factor behind the establishment of prolonged military dictatorships (‘authoritarian civil–military regimes’, according to O’Donnell 1973) in countries such as Argentina, Brazil, Bolivia, Chile, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Peru and Uruguay. Varieties of a more personal form of *caudillismo* persisted in the Dominican Republic, Nicaragua and Paraguay until the final quarter of the twentieth century. Only with the end of the Cold War, as part of the so-called third wave of democratisation (O’Donnell et al. 1986; Huntington 1991; Diamond 1999), did these regimes give way to civilian governments and electoral democracy.

Insofar as this book offers a comparative analysis of the role of the Latin American military in domestic politics and governance after the year 2000, at first glance, it may seem like a topic that belongs to regional history. As of the 1980s, practitioners and observers of the region’s political dynamics shifted the focus towards questions of democratic transition, consolidation, quality and legitimacy. Thenceforth, scholarship on Latin American democracy mushroomed, incorporating closely related issues, such as social movements and civil society, plus the consequences of intersectional exclusion for citizenship along gendered, ethnic and racial fault lines, and the repositioning of Latin America within the neoliberal global order.

In line with this shift in focus, the study of the Latin American military was redirected towards questions such as professional doctrine under democratic rule, civil management, institutional governance and budgeting

(Goodman et al. 1990; Zagorski 1992). Even the incorporation of the military in law enforcement, as a result of the escalation of violence across Latin America, was mostly analysed either in mainstream terms of the ‘modernisation’ of military missions (Pion-Berlin 2016) or, in contrast, as an indication of ‘violent democracy’ (Arias and Goldstein 2010). This scholarship largely abandoned the question of the military as semi-autonomous political actors pursuing a political agenda in which institutional and ideological motives and interests defined by them continued to be at stake.

Is military involvement in domestic politics, or in other words political militarism, really water under the bridge in Latin America, thus making its analysis redundant? We do not believe so. Even if political militarism in the classical sense of the concept has declined (or is at least far less prominent nowadays), the military in—again—all but a few Latin American countries have continued to play important roles in domestic affairs, often beyond the realm of ‘defence and security’.¹ In addition, and despite the recent legacy of violence and state terror under military rule, the Latin American military have managed to retain their importance in national imaginaries and their status as the most publicly trusted state institution. In a recent reflection on what she calls ‘democratic diabetes’ in Latin America, Marta Lagos (2019) points to the gradual decline of public trust in democracy and its key institutions as of 2010, while that in the Catholic and Evangelical Churches and the armed forces persists.²

Accordingly, the intention here is to explore the suggestion that the Latin American military, as semi-autonomous political actors, have not melted away since the year 2000 and may even have been making a comeback in several countries, albeit under different circumstances in each case. Against this changing social, political and ideological backdrop, this book explores how and why—and to what extent—the *political role* of the military has endured or re-emerged in Latin America since the new millennium. In this introductory chapter, we will set out the arguments deployed to sustain our thesis, while creating a framework for its analysis.

Historical Background: The Constitution and Legacy of Latin America’s Political Militarism

During the decades of the Cold War, Latin America was characterised by dictatorships, political soldiers and military politicians. Their doctrines and missions were underpinned by a combination of fervent anti-communism and the sensation of a real or perceived danger from internal enemies influenced by ‘global communism’. This resulted in the introduction of programmes of ‘national salvation’ by a series of military-led governments in Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Panama, Peru and Uruguay between the 1960s and the early 1990s. With the exception of Peru, Ecuador and Panama, these were conservative or radical right-wing regimes that embraced hybrid local and hemispheric ‘national security doctrines’. Many of these regimes

were at war with their own societies, persecuting ‘internal enemies’ and, in some cases, explicitly engaging in domestic armed conflicts. Their anti-communist ideology was not only nurtured by the hemispheric Cold War doctrine of the United States and the impact of the Cuban Revolution (1959) but also by home-grown conceptions of threats to state stability and their economic, social and cultural facets (Gill 2004; Menjívar and Rodríguez 2005).

These military regimes waged war against ‘subversive’ or ‘terrorist’ adversaries, both real (members of guerrilla movements) or imagined (the leaders of trade unions and peasant associations, left-wing writers and students, journalists and priests). In the case of Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Uruguay and especially Central America, the counterinsurgency campaigns took the form of dirty wars: state terrorism, including widespread torture, assassinations, enforced disappearances and even genocide (in the case of Guatemala, according to the report of the official Truth Commission). In Brazil and the Southern Cone countries, the aim of the repression was not only to deal with known adversaries but also to strike fear into the hearts of the citizenry. The civil wars in Central America became proxy wars between the United States and the Soviet Union, the two world powers at the time, especially in the case of Nicaragua.

When examining the underlying fundamental theoretical approaches taken to Latin American political militarism, the overall trend that emerges can be summarised as follows. During the 1950s and 1960s, political militarism was explained from culturalist perspectives (attributing political militarism to the ‘Iberian-Catholic’ conservative and authoritarian legacy of Latin American nations) or by variations on modernisation theory (the armed forces as modernising agents of the state, the economy and society). During the late 1960s and the 1970s, dependency theory and neo-Marxism defined the Latin American military as the executive governing partners of external interests and domestic capitalist elites (Nun 1967; O’Donnell 1973; Cammack 1985). During the 1980s (and beyond), attention shifted towards the military as embedded political agent: institutional missions, ideologies and strategies formed part of a broader dynamics of national and hemispherical politico-economic, institutional and ideological disputes during the Cold War.

In this connection, important contributions were made by Stepan (1976) and Rouquié (1987). Stepan noted the connection between ‘new’ military professionalism, beyond armed territorial defence, plus the way in which this evolved into institutionalised military involvement in politics and governance. Rouquié analysed the connection between these expanded military missions, the establishment of military guardianship over nation-states and the emergence of military political agency in contentious political arenas. This approach set the stage for the study of the political role of military institutions in the region (and elsewhere) as semi-autonomous constituent elements of the civil–military dictatorships holding sway from the 1960s to the 1980s, and subsequently as power players and stakeholders

in Latin America's 'transitional democracies' from the 1980s onwards (Stepan 1988).

At the core of this phenomenon were military institutions that defined themselves as the ultimate guardians of the nation or *la patria* (and not just its bounded territory; cf. Fitch 1998, 175–176). This meant that the military-as-an-institution regarded themselves as the essence of the state rather than merely its security instrument, embodying the state's coherence, competence and continuity (Koonings and Kruijt 2002, 19–21). Given this political identity and mission, the political involvement of the military implied both the pro-active agency of military institutions (through their leadership) for intervening in politics and civilian political actors entering into alliances with the military or incorporating the military-as-an-institution into the power base of government. These political armies never acted in an institutionally or politically autonomous manner. Pro-actively intervening with their 'project' always involved civil political and bureaucratic allies during both the pre-intervention stage and the regime's construction and consolidation stages. Conversely, politicians 'knocking on the barracks door' were unsuccessful without the military institution's predisposition for political agency. By and large, this kind of civil–military political symbiosis also involved the broader social, ideological and even economic roles of the military beyond conventional defence issues.

As part of their mission to safeguard national security, the region's civil–military dictatorships often introduced elaborate economic development programmes, more often than not in alliance with domestic entrepreneurial elites and international capitalism (Evans 1979; O'Brien and Cammack 1985). Yet, the legacy of those dictatorships has been mostly defined by the violence of 'dirty wars' and state terror (Menjívar and Rodríguez 2005). Their military muscle depended on three factors: (1) their control over national intelligence agencies and security forces; (2) the supremacy of the military over the police forces; (3) and the presence of the military, as state representatives, in local and regional development missions in remote areas, combining conventional civic action tasks with new modes of counterinsurgency. They also had transnational links in which the intelligence services of Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Paraguay and Uruguay cooperated in their respective dirty wars, including the actions of death squads, during the years of the Plan Condor in the mid-1970s and early 1980s (McSherry 2005). Less documented is the role played by the Argentine intelligence agencies and military in the dirty wars being waged in Central America before the United States took over (Rostica 2018). Finally, the use of paramilitary forces—some of which, including the AAA (Argentine Anti-Communist Alliance or Triple A) in Argentina, similar paramilitary forces in El Salvador and Colombia, the rural indigenous patrols in Peru during the Shining Path insurgency and the paramilitary self-defence forces in Guatemala which terrorised the country, had a high-profile—was important as a supplementary deterrent and for local law enforcement.

This history of military-led state violence left a significant legacy, which could not but affect the post-authoritarian democratic transitions and their consolidation (De Kadt 2002, 326 ff.; Linz and Stepan 1996, 219–230). The contentious issues that emerged did not only include the de-politicisation of the Latin American military and the reformulation of their mission and role but also the long-term impact of violence, impunity, trauma and memory politics (for the seminal case of Argentina, see Robben 2005). During the 1990s, scholarship focused, as already noted, on the specific role of the military in transition politics. Since the year 2000, most works addressing the Latin American military have performed a more thoughtful enquiry into their role in the process of democratic consolidation and the related issues of security sector reform, civilian control over the military, security and defence.

The Military under Democratic Rule

With the restoration of democracy in Latin America, there was a sort of civil–military compromise. As of 1990, a fair number of elected governments in Latin America sought to curb the political role of the military, placing them under civilian control and confining them to strictly military and defence tasks. This gave rise to a new civil–military relations agenda that, in the main, included a number of key issues (Kruijt and Koonings 2013, 98–100; Marcella 2022; Mares and Martínez 2014; Pion-Berlin 2016).

Firstly, civilian governments and legislators attempted to guarantee the civil political and administrative management of military affairs, including defence policy and military expenditure and intelligence (Marcella et al. 2022). Taking the North Atlantic format of military subordination to civil authority as an ideal benchmark, Pion-Berlin (2009, 581) found that most Latin American states deviated from it, leaving too much of military and defence management to the armed forces themselves. This hybrid outcome can be explained by the lack of experience, expertise or political interest of civilians, in combination with historical legacies and the strategies deliberately implemented by the military to safeguard their prerogatives (Bruneau 2013).

Secondly, and related to the first issue, new missions and roles were established for the military with the aim of establishing new models of professionalism far removed from national guardianship and political tutelage. Civilian governments passed presidential decrees and/or parliamentary legislation formally setting out new internal security and development missions for the armed forces. The development missions took up from where the previous civilian assistance (or ‘civic action’) missions in remote or underdeveloped regions had left off, while the new missions involved environmental issues, like the protection of the biodiversity, an increasingly more important role in ‘civil defence’ tasks and natural disaster relief.

In most countries in the region, these missions have a constitutional or legal basis. Environmental protection and natural disaster relief

(earthquakes, hurricanes, floods, tsunamis and pandemics) are now regarded as regular support roles of the Latin American and Caribbean armed forces. The COVID-19 pandemic has given a boost to this Latin American version of armed humanitarianism, since it has offered the military additional incentives for handling the logistics and planning of public health interventions and humanitarian support in affected areas and populations (Mani 2020). The bottom line of all these examples of ‘civic action 2.0’ is the classic assumption that only the military are organisationally, technically and morally equipped to deal with such major national challenges.

Emphasis has also been placed on peacekeeping missions. Over the past decades, the troops of many Latin American countries have participated, and are still participating, in these missions under a UN mandate. For example, between 2004 and 2017, Brazil and Chile led the UN Stabilisation Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH). For their part, Argentina, Brazil, Chile and Peru have created special peacekeeping schools.

The last scenario for these new military missions is not related to external defence or internal development but specifically to internal security and law enforcement. After the democratisation of the entire region and the end of civil wars in Central America and the Andean countries (Colombia and Peru), new waves of violence, featuring new armed actors, took the shape of local mini-wars in favelas (unregulated low- and middle-income neighbourhoods in Brazil), popular neighbourhoods and rural drug trafficking corridors. In many countries, civilian governments and parliaments passed binding laws to allow the armed forces to participate in new internal security missions, to ‘assist the police’ or even to assume command of the operations against cartels and crime syndicates, youth gangs and urban vigilantes.

However, violent military and police detachments, private security companies and law enforcement agencies have also become actors or partners in the so-called new violence in Latin America (Arias and Goldstein 2010; Koonings and Kruijt 2015). Between 2000 and 2017, more than 2.5 million Latin Americans met violent deaths, mostly victims of intentional homicide. Although Latin American countries accounted for only 8 per cent of the world’s population in 2012, they produced 33 per cent of the world’s homicides, a trend that is not declining. According to the Mexican non-governmental organisation Seguridad, Justicia y Paz (2021), of the 10 most dangerous cities of 300,000 inhabitants or more in the world in 2020, seven were Mexican; and of the 50 most dangerous cities, 40 were Latin American or Caribbean: 17 in Mexico, 11 in Brazil, six in Venezuela, two in Honduras, two in Colombia, one in Jamaica and one in Puerto Rico. Most of the victims were young non-white males, living in the suburbs, killed by firearms. Yet, this ‘new warfare’ is not limited to urban centres but has also expanded to the rural drug trafficking corridors in Colombia, Central America and Mexico.

In parallel, a reciprocal process can be observed: the militarisation of the police with heavily armed ‘special units’ trained in urban warfare. Even the language of these ‘civilian missions’, some of which extend police roles way beyond their remit, is embedded in military semantics: the *war* against crime, the *war* against terrorism and the *war* against drugs. In Brazil, for example, they are enshrined in the 1988 Constitution as missions for the guarantee of law and order (GLO), under the (nominal) supervision of elected state governors.

So, reluctantly or not, given the absence of external warfare, the Latin American armed forces have assumed multiple internal security roles: (1) as providers of internal security; (2) as parallel police forces; (3) as principal actors in internal warfare, be it against ‘terrorists’ or ‘organised crime’; (4) as pacifiers in slum wars; and (5) as the last resort against gang lords in the drug trafficking corridors. It should be noted that civilian politicians, critical civil society (including the media) and the military themselves tend to frame these missions explicitly in terms of *warfare*. Indeed, all these new internal security missions are, in a strict formal sense, called for or at least tolerated by democratically elected governments and based on legal charters or decrees (Pion-Berlin 2019).

This certainly differentiates the current situation from the decades of military dictatorship during which overt counterinsurgency and covert intelligence and security operations involved paramilitary forces and death squads, without constitutional or legitimate mandates. But there are at least two pitfalls here, one short and the other long term. The former is that military involvement in public security and law enforcement not only militarises a civil realm but also exposes the military to the risk of breaking the law: acting extra-legally through either the use of excessive and disproportionate violence or becoming involved in criminal activities and governance (or both). In the long run, militarising public security, thus invoking the related spectres of counterinsurgency, exceptionality and human rights violations, goes against the grain of separating the military from the obsession with guaranteeing domestic peace, order and stability against internal security threats.

Military Politicians on the Democratic Stage

Despite these efforts to deconstruct the classical model of political militarism, the military did not disappear altogether from the Latin American political and public stages.³ Political militarism might have been formally abandoned, but the phenomenon of military politicians did not vanish; in some countries it was only modernised, that is, adjusted to the demands of electoral politics. On the whole, Latin American electorates have a weak spot for soldiers and former military strongmen in politics (Kruijt 2017, 21–22). The most striking example is that of the erstwhile lieutenant-colonel Hugo Chávez who occupied the Venezuelan presidency between 1999 and 2013.

Despite Venezuela's decades-long status of a civil democracy following the Jimenez dictatorship in the 1950s, the (initial) electoral success of Chávez's Bolivarian revolutionary project cannot be decoupled from his acquired status as a military leader and coup perpetrator during the 1990s. From the beginning of his rule, Chávez gave the Venezuelan military a pivotal role in the 'business of government', while his successor Nicolás Maduro has reinforced even further the administrative and repressive roles of the military.

The region also witnessed the presidential election victories of former conservative dictators in the guise of seasoned democrats. In Bolivia, the former dictator General Banzer won the presidential elections in 1998. In Guatemala, Banzer's colleague, the former dictator General Rios Montt, controlled the National Congress in 1999—although Rios Montt's party had won the elections, President Portillo governed as his figurehead, while his subordinate Reyes López coordinated the cabinet. In Suriname, the two-time coup perpetrator and ex-dictator Dési Bouterse won the presidential elections in 2010 and 2015, while already under the suspicion of torture and murder, crimes for which he was sentenced to 20 years in prison by the Surinamese Military Court in 2019 (see Hoogbergen and Kruijt 2005; Kruijt 2020). Similarly, in Guatemala, the former general Otto Pérez Molina was elected president in 2011, after promising law and order and thanks to the support of the country's small billionaire elite. Nonetheless, together with his vice-president and key cabinet members, he was imprisoned for corruption during the last year of his term in office.

These specific examples of servicemen-turned-politicians are more than just vestiges of the region's former dictatorships. These 'civil-military strongmen' (Koonings and Kruijt 2003) often appeal to order, progress and patriotism, namely, notions that do not differ that much from those defended before by the twentieth-century dictatorships. Together with the continuing high levels of public trust in the Latin American military in the post-authoritarian age, as already observed, it seems that there may still be room for military politics. This is indeed something of a paradox that requires further explanation.

First and foremost, we contend that most civilian governments came to power for other reasons (such as economic reform, social equity and fighting corruption) than tackling their countries' legacies of political militarism. We further sustain that, during the democratic transitions of the 1980s and 1990s, only a nostalgic 'hard core' minority in the political and social spheres defended the experience of military rule. Yet, the consistently higher level of trust in the region's armed forces than in its civil political institutions seems to contradict this. We believe that this can be explained by the successful self-transformation of the military into 'new old professionals': a belated adoption of a 'conventional', that is, apolitical, image focusing on professionalism and national defence, on old and new technical-military missions (including international peacekeeping missions and domestic crime fighting) and, for the most part, on accepting

the democratic rules of the game. In other words, the military reinvented themselves as patriots, aloof from the quarrels and corruption of electoral democracies, while implicitly playing their historical role as the ultimate guardians of the wellbeing and destiny of their nations.

There is one specific issue that, to our mind, has played a crucial role here, to wit, the ambivalent effects of post-dictatorship and post-civil war transitional justice and memory politics. Notwithstanding the blanket amnesty granted in most of them (except in Argentina), most Latin American countries emerging from military dictatorships and/or civil wars endeavoured to establish historical truth. The truth and reconciliation commissions made important contributions to the recovery of memory, but their impact was mostly visible in sectors of civil society and in academia where the military had already lost the ‘moral battle of history’. At the same time, these efforts had a limited impact on memory politics, in a broader sense of the word, within public opinion and political life, where a preferred approach to the present and (immediate electoral) future co-existed with the occasional civilian courtship of the military top brass and a lingering nostalgia for ‘military order and security’ among some sectors of society.

As will be suggested below, these factors have resurfaced in recent years as part of a radical right-wing revival of military authoritarianism. Particularly in Brazil, South America’s largest and most influential country, this form of extreme right-wing populism has gained strong electoral support, as evidenced by the election of the former army captain Jair Bolsonaro to the presidency in 2018. On the other side of the ideological divide, leftist-populist regimes in Venezuela (since 1999) and Nicaragua (since 2007) have also increasingly incorporated their armed forces into their support structures in the face of growing discontent, polarisation and protests. Regardless of whether these examples are illiberal episodes in the ongoing consolidation of third wave democracies in Latin America or portend the end of the democratic interlude, they at least suggest that it is yet again relevant to examine the way in which the military relates to politics in Latin America.

Resilience or Resurgence of Political Militarism?

While background and context are necessary to identify the social, institutional and ideological ‘vestiges’ and ‘legacies’ of Latin American militarism, the key rationale of this book is the proposition that post-Cold War democracy in the region has meant that the political involvement of the military is not a thing of the past. Since the new millennium, the military in all but a few countries have continued, sometimes covertly, sometimes overtly, to nurture or perform their role in domestic politics (Diamint 2020; Ugarte 2020). Yet there is (still) a fundamental difference from the political militarism of the second half of the twentieth century: the military have not been pursuing institutionalised autocratic rule or authoritarian regimes that are explicitly grounded in the military institution and

military political doctrine. This means that military involvement in politics since the year 2000 has had to adapt to quite different domestic and international social and political conditions. Arguably, (1) the idea and the institutions of electoral democracy and those discontented with them; (2) the conditions and constraints of neoliberal globalisation (including the ‘securitisation’ of poverty and inequality (cf. Gledhill 2015); and (3) the modalities and impact of social protest and violence have been central to shaping these conditions. One of the aims of this book is to examine the impact that they have had in each country analysed here.

Obviously, these conditions have varied depending on the country and have intersected differentially with the background and contextual aspects of political militarism. For this reason, the intention here is to offer an overview of a few ideal-typical scenarios so as to contextualise these various pathways. At this point, however, it is important to stress that political militarism in Latin America since the new millennium has taken on a variety of new forms that have been largely ignored by post-2000 scholarship, which tends to focus on civil–military relations and security issues *strictu sensu*. By no means are we arguing that politics is the ‘only’ *raison d’être* of the military or that more specifically focused themes relating to conventional military professionalism and security concerns are not important. Our approach is different in that neither do we take for granted that democratic institutions and civil politics are ‘unproblematic and hegemonic’, nor do we place the spotlight on precisely how the fragility and contested nature of democracy continues to be associated with politically active and influential military actors.

The growing dissatisfaction with Latin America’s democracies is due to problems prevailing during the past 30 years: persisting inequality, abundant and visible violence, continuing political corruption and institutions that are too weak to change this destructive pattern. The preferred model of ‘equity with growth’, either espoused by the Pink Tide or neoliberal governments, resulted in exhaustion. There are underlying structural processes that reinforce each other, such as widespread long-term informal urban and rural employment as a key factor of inequality and exclusion, mass migration to other countries in South America, the United States and Europe and the persistence of social violence and public insecurity, including the securitisation of social protests. Obviously, the specific properties and intersections of these trends vary from country to country, but their eroding effects on democracy across the region cannot be ignored.

In several Latin American countries, political leaders and regimes riding the wave of public feeling and polarisation, generated by the aforementioned processes, have shifted towards illiberalism, repression and political closure. Positioned beyond the conventional Left–Right divide in countries such as Brazil, Colombia, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and Venezuela, elected presidents and governments display traits such as nationalism, populism, egoism and cronyism. They are hostile towards dissent, repress any sign of opposition, challenge or subvert

mechanisms of accountability and rely on the use of force through the police, the army and a variety of para-state and extra-legal armed actors. These arrangements have resulted in the involvement of (sectors of) the security forces in politics: the security sector, the military, forming part of the alliances and balances of power of elected politicians and legislators (Sanahuja and López Burián 2022).

This facet of the military as a post-authoritarian power player in Latin American democracies goes back to the transitional period of the 1980s and 1990s. Brazil's 'New Republic' (1985–1990), emerging from the military regime following democratic elections, developed under substantial military tutelage. During the 1990s, electoral right-wing populism in Argentina and Peru relied on 'backstage' agreements with the armed forces, but these regimes of 'delegative democracy' openly sought (il)liberal terms of office in the ballot box and the support of public opinion.

What can be observed in Brazil after the election of Jair Bolsonaro seems to be a completely different kettle of fish. President Bolsonaro has not only embraced a discourse of illiberalism and intolerance but has and continues to take an apologetic political stance on the military dictatorship and its violent practices, which has gone down well with many voters (Hunter and Power 2019). In addition, he has included many (retired and active) military officers in his government and the top echelons of the federal public administration. This variety of radical populism consists of a heterodox brew of anti-Left (anti-cultural Marxism), anti-globalist yet neoliberal, pro-conservative Evangelical and pro-military authoritarianism (Evans 2020; Garcia 2019; Doval 2022). With respect to the relationship between the ex-captain Bolsonaro and the Brazilian armed forces, the jury is still out on the question of who is using who (see Castro, Chapter 7, this volume).

The Book's Approach: Scenarios for Rethinking the Political Role of the Military

In light of the foregoing, there are apparently solid reasons for re-examining the relationship between the military and politics in Latin America. As already seen, during the most recent democratic cycle between 1990 and 2015, the military clearly sought to re-orientate their institutional mission towards 'apolitical' professionalism. Paradoxically, however, this often reproduced their domestic societal role through their delegated involvement in public security and policing, other old and new forms of civic action and, more recently, the securitisation of social protests. In most Latin American countries, the military preserved the essence of their corporate mystique and prestige as national guardians and arbiters.

So, does this mean that the Latin American armed forces are (again or still) occupying the same stage, in the sense of renewed political involvement or even armed support for governments as a legitimate component of their institutional mission 'under certain critical conditions'? How have 30 years of formal democracy affected this? And to what extent has current

political militarism in the region been reshaped by unstable global geopolitics, economic challenges and sociocultural and ideological change, among other things?

To answer these and other questions, this book is divided into four parts, each addressing one of the following scenarios for gaining a more thorough knowledge of the relationship between the military and politics in Latin America: (1) 'back to the barracks', (2) 'regional powers under siege', (3) 'violent pluralism' and (4) 'armoured Bolivarianism'. The country case studies in each of the four parts are preceded and concluded by two analytical and comparative chapters (this introduction and the conclusions). All the country chapters have been written by native experts in military affairs or (in the case of the chapters covering Mexico and Venezuela) by scholars who have been comprehensively studying the issue for many years. The chapters also include two essays based on personal experience or eyewitness accounts. The chapter on Costa Rica reflects the author's scholarly insights into the country's remarkable demilitarisation, further enriched by his recent experience as the head of state. While in his essay on the Organización de Militares por la Democracia, la Integración y la Liberación de América Latina y el Caribe (Organisation of Military Officers for Democracy, Integration and Liberation in Latin America and the Caribbean [OMIDELAC]), the last executive secretary of this regional body recounts the untold story of the legacy of democratic military activism in Latin America from a specific personal angle.

The country case studies included in each scenario share characteristics that are relevant to the object of study and which allow for identifying different kinds of military relations with domestic politics since the year 2000. Twenty years ago, we proposed a typological framework based on experiences of democratic transitions and political de-militarisation in the 1980s and 1990s (Koonings and Kruijt 2003, 377 ff.). That typology focused on the way that the military related to politics during the period in question: (1) 'back to the barracks', (2) 'armoured democracy' and (3) 'military strongmen'. The approach followed here only partially reflects that previous classification, inasmuch as Brazil and Mexico are now grouped together, mainly because of their rising, yet problematic, middle power status (Armijo and Burgess 2010; Schiavon and Domínguez 2016), which has gone hand in glove with an increasingly more complex situation of escalating violence and declining public safety. The so-called ALBA countries (including Cuba) have also been addressed together because, after two decades, it is now possible to examine more precisely the role of the military in these leftist 'revolutionary' experiences.

The '*back to the barracks*' scenario (Part I) critically examines textbook cases of political demilitarisation in Peru, the Southern Cone (Argentina, Chile and Uruguay) and Costa Rica. The first four South American countries are often presented as paradigmatic cases of the progressive elimination of the military from politics, after gradual transitions from military

rule to democracy during the 1980s. The country case studies included in this group are examples of negotiated institutional transitions from bureaucratic authoritarianism to civil liberal democracy. In our opinion, this has helped in part to encourage the military to recover their ‘old professionalism’, combined with their selective engagement in civic action and in countering new security threats. Indeed, this has led to the deconstruction of the ‘military party’ (on this notion, see Rouquié 1987, 202–203). For its part, Costa Rica is included as a radical pioneer of demilitarisation as a key condition for stable democracy.

The ‘*regional powers under siege*’ scenario (Part II) contrasts the role of the military in the post-2000 politics of the two regional powers: Brazil and Mexico. These two countries stand out because of their tendency towards re-militarisation from radically opposite historical baselines. In Brazil, the establishment of a semi-autonomous military with a moderating role and the power of veto as of 1889 led to prolonged institutional military rule from 1964 to 1985. In Mexico, the military emerged from the Mexican Revolution (1910–1917) first of all as a junior partner and then as an extension of an originally popular and later institutionalised model of civilian one-party rule. Both countries are emerging middle powers yet face an escalation of (territorial) drug-related organised crime and violence, which is endangering not only their international status but also the quality of their democracy. This has resulted in recently elected presidents leveraging military support to a greater or lesser extent.

The ‘*violent pluralism*’ scenario (Part III) examines ‘violent democracies’ that have recently been, or are still, embroiled in armed conflicts that have given rise to complex situations of criminal, social and political violence. We have adopted Arias and Goldstein’s (2010) related notions of violent democracy and violent pluralism to characterise Colombia and the *Triangulo Norte* of Central America (El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras). For decades, these four countries have experienced non-state criminal and political violence, which has its roots in the state-guerrilla civil wars breaking out in the 1960s or 1970s and which, after the formal restoration of peace and democracy (in the Central American countries) or its upgrading (in Colombia) during the early 1990s, morphed into more complex situations of violence involving local gangs, drug trafficking organisations and paramilitary and state security forces.

Finally, the ‘*armoured Bolivarianism*’ scenario (Part IV) examines a series of country case studies—the (former) ALBA countries Venezuela, Cuba, Nicaragua and Bolivia—in which the military have been instrumental in the birth, maintenance and occasional demise of left-wing revolutionary projects. These four countries represent historical and recent experiences of left-wing projects for social transformation. Albeit steering very different courses, their regimes, associated in the ALBA group, have managed to survive, while continuing to implement social reforms for the benefit of the poor and working classes, under the veneer of a historical and symbolic ‘revolutionary’ mystique. However, just as these

revolutionary regimes have trodden different paths, so too have the military played a different role in their constitution and consolidation. Cuba and Nicaragua converted their victorious guerrilla forces into national armed forces. Venezuela's 'Bolivarian' regime politicised its military, converting them into its staunchest supporters (especially after the failed coup against Chávez in 2002). In Bolivia, the regime established by Evo Morales after his election as president in 2006 has tried to drum up support among the military, with only partial and ambivalent results (as evidenced by the ousting of Morales from power in 2019). Honduras' short-lived membership of the ALBA also ended in a coup (2009).

These scenarios emerging over the past 20 years are the starting point for the analysis of the military's relationship with politics in each of the four parts of the book. In the conclusion, comparing the main findings of the country chapters, we will critically re-examine our initial assumptions.

Notes

- 1 The November 2021 edition of Latin American Special Reports offers an overview of the ongoing role of the armed forces in domestic politics and government in Latin America. See 'The Military in Latin America: In Search of a New Role', *Latin American Special Reports*, 2021, issue 5. London: LatinNews; available at Latin American Special Reports (latinnews.com), accessed 16 December 2021.
- 2 Marta Lagos is the director of *Latinobarómetro*, which performs an authoritative annual survey on social and political trends among more than 20,000 respondents in 19 Latin American countries. See Latinobarometro.
- 3 In the literature, a related but relatively ignored subject is the specific social insertion of the military in Latin American societies. This has been marked by relative socio-spatial insulation, transgenerational career paths and self-perceptions of superiority, patriotism and occupying the moral high ground. Nun (1967) made an early effort to factor this into the explanation of military coups. Castro (2018; see also his chapter in this book) makes an insightful interpretation based on a historical-ethnographic analysis of the Brazilian 'military family'.

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Part 1

Back to the Barracks?



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2 Peru—The Armed Forces in Search of a Place in the World

Martín Tanaka

The Legacy of the Twentieth Century

Peru has a long history of military interference in politics. Most of the nineteenth century was marked by a succession of coups d'état in which military strongmen seized power. For its part, the twentieth century was characterised by different military interventions whose aim was to 'stabilise' the country in favour of conservative interests, in a context of serious political conflict. In the main, they were highly personalist and ideologically pragmatic conservative governments, but a very important change was brought about by the Gobierno Revolucionario de la Fuerza Armada (Revolutionary Government of the Armed Forces, also known as the Peruvian Military Junta), led by General Juan Velasco Alvarado (1968–1975). It was an institutional government of the armed forces with reformist pretensions, similar to the national-popular processes occurring in Latin America in the previous decades. Francisco Morales (1975–1980), his more conservative successor, began to 'dismantle' some of those reforms to a certain extent, while paving the way for the transition to democracy, in the context of the 'third democratising wave', which would ultimately be established in 1980.

So, during the first half of the 1960s, whereas the armed forces in other countries in the region led repressive dictatorships inspired by the National Security Doctrine, in Peru there was a reformist dictatorship of a national-popular character, which introduced structural changes as part of a logic of preventive action so as to hinder the spread of guerrilla *focos* such as those emerging in the 1960s. The agrarian reform, involving the expropriation of the country's major haciendas, curtailed the power of the traditional oligarchy, for which reason its impact should not be underestimated: it can be claimed that the Velasco government marked a turning point in Peruvian history. But notwithstanding its anti-oligarchical and democratising character, it should be recalled that it was an institutional government of the armed forces that sought to contain the expansion of communism. This allows for understanding the fact that, as the most reformist sector identifying with Velasco gained ground, it led to the opposition of the conservative sectors of the armed forces, which came into the public eye with

the coup d'état perpetrated by Morales in 1975 and the measures that his government would subsequently implement. Morales had to tackle the crisis in the mid-1970s, for which he adopted structural adjustment policies. Following the wave of protests to which these policies led, he decided on repression as the answer. By and large, the second half of the 1970s was characterised by a greater preference for market liberalisation policies, which were being adopted by the dictatorships of the Southern Cone, as well as measures aimed at controlling the country's social movements, albeit without unleashing a repression on par with that in other countries on the continent.

Altogether, for the Peruvian armed forces, it was impossible to remain in power in the midst of the economic crisis; the social protests and the national and international pressure brought to bear on them in pursuit of democracy. This is why they negotiated and set in motion a democratic transition with the country's political parties, which involved the election of a constituent assembly in 1978 and general elections in 1980.¹ What seemed to be the start of a stage of withdrawal from politics and internal reorganisation for the armed forces, however, turned out to be one in which they became very actively involved in domestic politics in the new democratic context. On 17 May, on the eve of the 1980 general elections, the Communist Party of Peru (PCP)-Shining Path (hereinafter SL) began its armed insurgency, followed shortly afterwards by the Tupac Amaru Revolutionary Movement (MRTA), which carried out its first action on 31 May 1982. SL posed the greatest challenge to the Peruvian state, insofar as it would have a huge influence in many areas of the country. It was precisely for that reason, in light of the weakness of the local authorities and the inability of the security forces to meet such a challenge, that there was growing pressure for the armed forces to assume control over those areas where a state of emergency had been declared, which they finally did on 31 December 1982.

The armed forces deployed political-military commandos in those areas under a state of emergency, despite the fact that high-ranking officers, such as the minister of war Luis Cisneros, had declared that 'it is essential to find another type of solution, before deciding to involve the armed forces: that it should be the last option. Because we will assume control over the area and act, we are experts in war and are prepared to kill: that is war'. The reaction of the Peruvian armed forces to the challenge of the insurgency did not envisage the promotion of a programme of reforms, as had occurred during the Velasco government, but rather followed the logic of the 'second conservative and repressive stage'. This highlighted the fact that the Velasco government was water under the bridge and that the main benchmark for counter-insurgency operations was that of the Southern Cone dictatorships, although paradoxically in a democratic context.

The armed forces' involvement in counter-insurgency operations went through several stages (Comisión de la Verdad y Reconciliación 2003; Degregori and Rivera 1993). The first were clearly marked by repressive

strategies that led to serious human rights violations, including practices like arbitrary arrests, the use of torture, forced disappearances and extrajudicial executions, as well as the perpetration of sexual offences. Over the years, the strategies shifted towards others in which intelligence work, the quest for the citizenry's support and backing, and the promotion of self-defence brigades were key. This type of approach allowed the army and the security forces to defeat the insurgency by rounding up its leaders and dismantling movements, which occurred in 1992 with the capture of Abimael Guzmán in the case of SL and the recapture of Víctor Polay in that of the MRTA. Since then, some SL networks and spin-off groups have managed to survive, albeit mostly in the Amazonian areas of the country where coca production and networks associated with drug-trafficking predominate. So, it is possible to assert that the armed forces managed to extricate themselves from this situation, presenting themselves as the 'victors' in the struggle against the insurgency, while also achieving a high level of recognition and legitimacy for their troubles. Be that as it may, they were unable to shrug off the legacy of the many reports and evidence of serious human rights violations.

The 1990s were marked by the hegemony of Fujimorism (Murakami 2007; Tanaka 2001, 2020). Following an initial democratic stage, marking the first year of his term in office, the president Alberto Fujimori began to monopolise decision-making with his intelligence advisor, Vladimiro Montesinos, and the commander-in-chief of the army (1991–1998) and the president of the Joint Command of the Armed Forces (1992–1998), Nicolás de Bari Hermosa. It was this power structure that led to the coup d'état in April 1992 and which, as the years passed, tended to become stronger and to subordinate the participation of political and civil leaders, establishing a sort of civil–military government.

Fujimori was a highly popular president during his terms in office, a popularity based on both an anti-political and anti-establishment discourse, the implementation of economic reforms aimed at transforming the market in order to put an end to the country's hyperinflation and deep recession and to reactivate the economy, and taking credit for defeating the insurgency. But from the self-coup in 1992 emerged an authoritarian regime, which had been legitimised by elections, thus shaping a 'competitive authoritarianism'. Under Fujimorism, recourse was still had to counter-insurgency strategies contrary to human rights, including the creation of a commando tasked with carrying out extrajudicial executions. Moreover, far-reaching networks of corruption were gradually created, in which the military top brass would be ultimately involved. To top it all, the armed forces' institutional character was much tarnished by both Hermosa's perpetuation as the commander-in-chief of the army and the president of the Joint Command of the Armed Forces, and their subordination to the designs of Montesinos. An eloquent example of this was the 'Ceremonia de Adhesión de Generales y Almirantes' ('Ceremony of Adherence of Generals and Admirals') held in March 1999, in which practically all of

the top brass signed a document in which they expressed their support for the coup d'état of 5 April 1992.

Specifically, the high-ranking officers who have been tried and convicted for crimes of corruption include, in addition to Montesinos and Hermosa, the former minister of the interior (1997–1999), commander-in-chief of the army and president of the Joint Command (1999–2000) José Villanueva, the former minister of the interior (1997 and 1999–2000), minister of defence (1997–1998) and commander-in-chief of the army (1998–1999) César Saucedo, the former minister of the interior (1991–1997) Juan Briones, the former commander-in-chief of the air force (1997–2000) Elesván Bello, the former head of the National Intelligence Agency (1998–2000) Humberto Rozas, and the former minister of defence (1998–1999) and head of the National Intelligence Agency (1991–1998) Julio Salazar, among many others (Obando 2000; Rospigliosi 2000).

So, at the end of the twentieth century, the Peruvian armed forces had emerged from their political dealings rather worse for wear and with their legitimacy questioned. To issues relating to human rights violations during counter-insurgency operations were added their support for an authoritarian government and the involvement of many high-ranking officers in serious corruption cases.

'Post-Fujimorist' Peru (2001–2016)

Between 2001 and 2016, after the fall of Fujimorism, there was a democratic period that elsewhere we have called 'post-Fujimorist', because one of the main challenges that had to be met was how to cope with the legacy of Fujimorism during the 1990s. This legacy was chiefly reflected in the predominance of an anti-political public spirit and the state institutions' scant legitimacy among the citizenry; the prevalence of neoliberal discourses among the political and social elites; the extreme weakness of the country's political parties, but with a certain continuity as regards some leaders; and the fact that their instability paradoxically led to the strengthening of a technocratic elite in key areas of state administration, essential for achieving an unprecedented institutional continuity and important improvements in growth and poverty alleviation. This was how Peru steered a course through the 'Left turn' affecting much of the region, without shifting too much from market-oriented policies, despite the fact that even Alan García and Ollanta Humala won the elections with discourses critical with neoliberalism—they would both implement rather orthodox policies during their presidencies.

Against this backdrop, with respect to the Peruvian armed forces one could say that there were a number of factors that both limited or reduced their importance and influence, while opening a window of opportunity for redefining their identity and missions. Some of the factors obliging them to step back to reassess their *raison d'être* and to reorganise themselves included the legacy of the domestic armed conflict and those cases of

human rights violations that had yet to be clarified, as well as the involvement of high-ranking officers in far-reaching networks of corruption and their ‘subordination’ to the power of Montesinos. But, on the other hand, there were also aspects that gave them bargaining power with the political class and the capacity to legitimise themselves in the eyes of the citizenry.

First of all, the armed forces were still required to support actions aimed at guaranteeing public order, above all in those areas where SL persisted. Even though SL as such had been defeated and its leader Guzmán had proposed signing a ‘peace agreement’ in 1993, a number of grassroots dissidents, claiming to belong to the group, were still operating in those areas of the country in which coca was produced and the drug-trafficking networks all but did as they pleased. Secondly, it was essential that they be capable of undertaking conventional tasks, such as acting as a deterrent in conflict scenarios or border disputes with Peru’s neighbours. And, lastly, they were also required to play new increasingly more important roles, like combating illegal organisations, often forming part of transnational criminal networks, and providing relief services and aid to the civilian population in emergency situations and, in the wake of natural disasters, more frequent than ever owing to climate change.

The weight and relevance of these issues varied throughout this period, leading to a relative improvement in the professionalisation of the armed forces. The agendas of the transition government of Valentín Paniagua (2000–2001) and his successor Alejandro Toledo (2001–2006) largely revolved around democratic institutionalisation and investigating and punishing those servicemen involved in human rights violations during counter-insurgency operations or in serious cases of corruption. In relation to the armed forces, the transition government retired 50 senior and brigadier generals of the army, 20 vice and rear admirals of the navy and 14 generals of the air force who had signed the document at the ‘Ceremony of Adherence’ in March 1999.²

During the Toledo government, there was a certain tendency to appoint civilians as ministers of defence and to make progress in the institutionalisation of the military. In this respect, an important milestone was the drafting of the National Defence White Paper (Ministerio de Defensa del Perú, 2006), setting out national security and defence objectives and policies. Another important milestone was the creation of the Comisión de la Verdad y Reconciliación (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, hereinafter CVR). The Truth Commission—as it was first called—was created in June 2001 during the transition government of President Paniagua, before having its name changed to the CVR and increasing its members during the Toledo government, between August and September 2001. Submitted in 2003, the CVR’s final report contained abundant information and, in its conclusions, declared, ‘The CVR has discovered that the armed forces implemented a strategy that initially involved indiscriminately repressing those people suspected of belonging to the PCP-SL. Later on, that strategy was more selective, although it still gave rise to numerous human rights

violations.’ Furthermore, ‘The CVR asserts that in certain places and moments during the conflict the actions of members of the armed forces not only included some individual excesses of officers and rank and file, but also widespread and/or systematic human rights violations, which are regarded as crimes against humanity and violations of international humanitarian law’ (Comisión de la Verdad y Reconciliación, 2003, general conclusions 54 and 55). It is also important to mention the work of the ‘Investigating commission of cases of corruption occurring during the decade 1990–2000’ of Congress.

Over the years, this led to the prosecution and conviction of high-ranking military officers. In this context, the new top brass behaved rather ambiguously. On the one hand, they overhauled the officer corps, devoted time to self-criticism and reaffirmed their allegiance to democracy and the armed forces’ institutional values. But, on the other, they were critical with the final report of the CVR. This criticism was expressed in the document entitled, *En honor a la verdad (In Honour of Truth)*, published by the Comisión Permanente de la Historia del Ejército del Perú (Permanent Committee of the History of the Army of Peru) (2010). Moreover, retired officers expressed their strong differences of opinion with regard to the report and its conclusions in many statements (Barrantes and Peña 2006; Hurtado 2006).

With the second government period of Alan García (2006–2011), things began to change in favour of conservative positions. During his first term in office (1985–1990), there had been many human rights violations in the struggle against the insurgency, for which reason the CVR’s final report came in for a fair amount of criticism. García made his government’s political leanings quite clear when appointing Vice Admiral Luis Giampietri, who had participated in the extrajudicial execution of members of SL in June 1986, as the first vice president.

In addition, different developments led García to give the armed forces greater bargaining power. During his government, the spotlight was placed on the demarcation of the maritime boundary between Peru and Chile, an old dispute that had yet to be resolved. This had already become a relevant matter during the Toledo government, but during that of García, it occupied a central place on the bilateral political agenda. In 2008, the Peruvian government asked the International Court of Justice (The Hague) to redraw the maritime boundary between both countries, an issue that was resolved with the court’s ruling of January 2014, which was accepted by both parties. While the controversy still raged, it was necessary to increase military spending—the Toledo government, by contrast, had continued on the path of budget cuts initiated in 1997. During García’s term in office, it was alleged that most of the armed forces’ equipment was obsolete, for which reason the initiative aimed at creating an ‘efficient basic defence core’, which would maintain essential areas and resources operational, was implemented. As a result, military expenditure increased slightly in relation to the country’s gross domestic product (GDP), a trend that would continue during the presidency of Humala.³

But during the García government, there were also new challenges beyond their traditional mission of defending Peru's borders, which would give the military greater legitimacy. In August 2007, for instance, the coastal region of Ica was struck by an earthquake with a magnitude of 8.0, which caused 597 casualties. The armed forces played a very important role in the rescue operations, assisting the wounded and moving rubble, among other tasks, which earned them the citizenry's full recognition. Subsequently, they would be involved in similar operations, like, for example, following the floods caused by the El Niño phenomenon, between December 2016 and March 2017, which left 101 dead and affected nearly one million people. It also warrants noting that in February 2011, towards the end of García's term in office, the armed forces participated in a very important operation against illegal gold mining operations in Puerto Maldonado, during which they destroyed hydraulic dredges used in the extraction process. Operations of this type were repeated in the Pampa, in the region of Madre de Dios, in February 2019, also against illegal mining and human trafficking.⁴

In 2011, the presidency was occupied by Humala, an ex-serviceman retiring with the rank of lieutenant colonel in 2004, who had also been involved in the counter-insurgency war. Back in 1992, Humala had been an army captain and commander of the military base of Madre Mía, in the region of Huánuco, where counter-insurgency operations had been launched. There were a number of reports on the use of torture, disappearances and extrajudicial executions perpetrated by servicemen deployed at the base around that time. Despite these accusations, Humala won the elections and, to his credit, he knew how to benefit from the image that the military evoked among the citizenry: strength, determination and discipline, which would better qualify him for coping with the country's main problems, such as corruption, among others.

As to the Peruvians' views on their armed forces, notwithstanding the fact that, according to the 2009 LAPOP opinion poll, the level of trust in them was among the lowest in the Americas, paradoxically it was one of the institutions that inspired most confidence. In this connection, according to the IPSOS opinion poll conducted in October 2017, the armed forces figured among the three most trustworthy public and private institutions of a total of 32, even ranking above the Catholic Church. On the other hand, there was the perception that they 'generally had not respected ... human rights in the areas in which they operated' during the domestic armed conflict (66.9 per cent in Lima and 70.7 per cent in Ayacucho, the region most affected by the violence), while, in contrast, the role played by them in the defeat of the insurgency was seen as having been very positive in Lima and positive in Ayacucho (Barrantes, 2007).

Throughout the period, the bad memory of corruption and human rights violations were gradually relegated to a relative second place, while the armed forces gained more recognition for their achievements and participation in different tasks. During the Humala government, military expenditure continued to increase, which was exemplified by, for instance,

the launching of the Peru SAT-1 satellite (September 2016), under the responsibility of the National Commission of Aerospace Research and Development (CONIDA), an agency under the aegis of the Ministry of Defence. In addition, in the continuing operations against the remnants of SL ‘comrad Artemio’ (Florindo Flores) was captured in 2012, and the country’s coca production was gradually reduced (while it increased in Colombia).

In 2016, Pedro Pablo Kuczynski won the presidential elections. During his term in office, the post-Fujimorist stage initiated in 2001 gave way to another marked, as will be seen, by fierce political confrontation. But before ending this section, it is important to stress that, as to the performance of the armed forces, the previous trends were apparently consolidated. His government was marked, as noted above, by the havoc caused by the El Niño phenomenon, with the military playing a very important role in rescue operations and attending to the needs of the flood victims, constructing emergency infrastructures (bridges, for instance), clearing communication routes, building refugee centres and distributing medicines, food and so forth, while employing all the air, sea and terrestrial transport resources at their disposal. Moreover, in order to improve decision-making, for trans-sectoral coordination and implementing the decisions reached, the National Emergency Operations Centre (COEN), attached to the Ministry of Defence, was created under a sole command, which was considered to have been key to efficient disaster management.⁵

In the regional context, Peru’s evolution was akin to that of countries like Argentina, Chile and Uruguay, which had experienced a relatively successful sort of ‘demilitarisation’ and democratic institutionalisation. Whereas in other countries the armed forces played a more important role, because they were co-opted and integrated into coalition governments, as in Venezuela and Nicaragua, because they still retain an important power quota, as in Guatemala and Honduras, or because they hold real power due to their importance in the war against drug-trafficking in broad swathes of the territory. The Peruvian experience is rather unexpected, given the weakness of the country’s democratic institutions, the military’s long tradition of meddling in politics and the leading role that they have played in disaster relief and combating illegal activities, plus the prime importance of coca production. But the blow that they received at the end of the 1990s had consequences and the new generations of servicemen seem to be more committed to carving out a professional and institutional niche for themselves in the democratic context. Nevertheless, this commitment appears to have been sorely tested in recent years.

A New Stage: And the Armed Forces?

With the election of President Kuczynski in 2016, the post-Fujimorist period, initiated in 2001, was brought to a close. In these presidential elections, Fujimorism won an absolute majority in Congress and, with

Kuczynski occupying the presidency, the conditions seemed to be ripe for a sort of ‘relaunching’ of the market-oriented structural reforms. However, since then there has been much political unrest and a high level of institutional instability, resulting from the breaking of the neoliberal consensus that had characterised the country’s political life until then. In particular, Fujimorism, hitherto the ‘guarantor’ of the continuity of the market-oriented economic reforms, became the opposition to President Kuczynski, the symbol of the neoliberal order.

In sum, since 2016, political instability has been a matter of course, whereas between 2001 and 2015, the institutional and economic continuity was noteworthy. The political conflict led to President Kuczynski’s resignation, following the first impeachment process initiated by Congress, in March 2018. It seemed that the vice president Vizcarra, after assuming the presidency, would manage to be on better terms with Fujimorism, but in July 2018, hostilities broke out again. The situation then went from bad to worse until it was proposed that his term in office be cut short and the elections scheduled to be held in July 2019 be brought forward, which was followed by the constitutional dissolution of Congress on 30 September of that same year.

In view of this, President Vizcarra decreed the dissolution of Congress, assuming that he had the authority to do so, according to Article 134 of the constitution, insofar as Congress had tabled no-confidence motions against two Cabinet meetings. It was a highly controversial decision. On 26 September, the president of the Cabinet asked Congress for a vote of confidence, requesting that the procedure for electing the judges of the Constitutional Court be changed, indicating that it had been done hastily and without guaranteeing the transparency of the process. Congress voted in favour of the motion but continued with the election of the judges, for which reason the president ordered the dissolution of Congress and the calling of new elections, for ‘confidence had been factually denied’. In response, Congress decreed the temporary ‘suspension’ of President Vizcarra in the exercise of his duties, while the Vice President Mercedes Aráoz was sworn in as president. In the midst of the controversy about the legality and constitutionality of the measures adopted by President Vizcarra, and in light of the fact that the Constitutional Court’s ruling on these matters would take time, the armed forces appeared as a sort of an umpire. On this occasion, they backed the president, which was very eloquently expressed in a photo of President Vizcarra meeting with the commanders-in-chief of the army, navy and air force and the director general of the police. It is true that, in a majority vote, the Constitutional Court would subsequently declare, on 14 January 2020, inadmissible the request submitted by the chairman of the permanent committee of Congress to declare the decision of the executive power null and void.

The question is that this situation transformed the armed forces into a sort of arbitrator, which they had not sought but which was a result of the circumstances and the pressure brought to bear by the civilian leadership,

which would only increase later on. In November 2020, the new congress, elected in January of that same year to complete the period of the dissolved congress (elections in which none of the lists of candidates represented the executive power), in the midst of the pandemic, swiftly resumed its confrontation with the executive power. Congress began to debate on the impeachment of the president ‘for permanent moral incapacity’, following press reports relating to crimes of corruption that Vizcarra had purportedly committed as the regional governor of Moquegua between 2011 and 2014, as well as having allegedly pressed for the irregular hiring of personnel in different public agencies. President Vizcarra thus faced a first motion of impeachment on 18 September 2020, which was rejected, and a second one on 9 November, which was passed. The evidence substantiating the accusations was weak and of dubious constitutionality, but the president of Congress, Manuel Merino, assumed the presidency on 10 November. This triggered widespread protests throughout the country, thus forcing Merino to hand in his resignation only five days later, while Francisco Sagasti was finally elected on 16 November.

During the mass protests against the Merino government and the efforts of the security forces to re-establish law and order, in which the police committed excesses and abuses, on 14 November, two young protesters were killed. Consequently, several ministers of state resigned. In this connection, according to the press, on the morning of 15 November, President Merino set up a meeting with the commanders-in-chief of the armed forces and the director general of the police, which they did not attend, this being behind his decision to resign that same day.

This gives rise to two troubling aspects: on the one hand, the prevalence of a conspiracy theory among the political powers that be and the conservative elites in recent years, according to which the social protests were the result of the manipulation and infiltration of external actors, which, in turn, would justify the repression. This view had also been expressed by conservative sectors in several countries in the region, including Chile and Colombia, for which reason military intervention would be essential, given the meddling of foreign governments (Cuba and Venezuela, among others). And, on the other, the fact that in contexts of political and institutional crises, the civil leaders themselves end up resorting to the armed forces to settle their disputes.

The tension has not subsided. The 2021 general elections were marked by yet another crisis of representation in the midst of the effects of *Operação Lava Jato* (see Chapter 7 on Brazil by Castro) and the pandemic, with Peru being one of the countries with the highest COVID-19 death tolls per capita and the greatest decline in GDP in the world in 2020. This led to a high level of political fragmentation and, against this backdrop, a run-off between Pedro Castillo and Keiko Fujimori, two very unpopular candidates representing the two extremes of the political spectrum. It was exceedingly close run, with a very tense vote count, initially in favour of Fujimori, before Castillo finally edged ahead to win by a very

narrow margin. Throughout the process and depending on who of the two candidates was currently in front, the followers of both claimed that fraud was being committed and called for protests to prevent this from happening. For their part, the armed forces were also called upon to take a stand and to intervene to prevent the alleged ‘fraud’ from being consummated, while plenty of fake news about military ‘manoeuvring’ in this respect circulated.

Conclusions and Future Prospects

The Peruvian case highlights the importance of legacies in the long term, but which, at the same time, are increasingly more distant in time. Reports of human rights violations committed by members of the armed forces are still on the national public agenda, but it would seem with less political impact than before. A recent example of this is the figure of General Daniel Urresti, who stands accused of being involved in the murder of a journalist in Ayacucho in 1988, when he was an army captain and the head of intelligence in the province of Huanta. Notwithstanding the fact that the judicial investigations were initiated in 2009, Urresti was the minister of the interior during the Humala government from 2014 to 2016, attempted to run for the leadership of the Partido Nacionalista Peruano (Peruvian Nationalist Party [PNP]) and was a candidate for Podemos Perú in the local elections of Lima in 2018, in which he came in second place with 20 per cent of ballots cast. In the 2020 parliamentary elections, Urresti ran as a candidate for the same party and was elected with the highest number of votes in the country.

It is also true that in the period running from 2001 to 2015, there was a fair amount of stability in the country, owing to which the armed forces achieved their highest level of professionalisation and built a new identity and established new objectives on the basis of a new generation of officers. Their discourse was more modern, institutional and committed to democratic values. Another development that should be mentioned was the growing presence of women, who had been allowed to attend the military academy since 1997. At present, women account for 12 per cent of the military personnel, including colonels in the army and the air force and captains in the navy.

The big question now is the role that the armed forces will play in an increasingly more polarised situation, in which it is the civilian leaders and a conservative sector of retired servicemen who are pressing the military ‘to speak out’ and in which, given the fragility of the country’s democratic institutions, they feel, in a way, ‘obliged’ to settle, by action or omission, disputes between political actors. Over the past few years, the discourse of much of the Peruvian Right had become increasingly more conservative. Many prominent retired officers, including the former admirals Luis Giampietri and Jorge Montoya, have recently endorsed this discourse. But to what extent has that discourse permeated the top brass of the Peruvian armed forces? There is a possibility that their long-standing profile will

remain unchanged: much more conservative in the navy, associated with the middle and upper classes of Lima; somewhat more sensitive to social issues and more associated with the working classes and provincials in the army; and an intermediate position in the air force.

In the midst of the political unrest, institutional controversies and clashes between the executive and Congress, social protests and calls for the military involvement and intervention from the political and civilian worlds, what role will they play in the future? It is hard to imagine the armed forces adopting unilateral decisions, because there would not be any project for establishing an alternative system to democracy. It is also difficult to conceive repressive or violent solutions, above all when bearing in mind the legacy of the 1980s and the 1990s, and of the reports and trials. But a situation similar to that occurring recently in Bolivia is indeed plausible: as with Evo Morales, a president whose credibility is undermined, with problems of electoral legitimacy and faced with a wave of protests, may be ‘invited’ to resign or something similar. At any rate, in Peru the threats hanging over the armed forces seem to stem from the precariousness of civilian and democratic leadership, and not the other way round as in the past—a striking paradox (Vergara and Watanabe 2019).

Notes

- 1 On the military government and the transition to democracy, see Cotler (1975, 1986, 2011).
- 2 When this became common knowledge, the commanders-in-chief of the three wings of the armed forces and the director general of the police signed a communique in April 2001, in which they apologised to the Peruvians for their institutional participation in the 1992 coup d’état, as well as expressing ‘their commitment to fulfilling their duties while respecting human rights, to reinforcing their moral values and, consequently, to combating staunchly and permanently any indication of corruption or misconduct in institutional life that jeopardises such values and principles’ (Arce 2011).
- 3 Figures for Peruvian military expenditure are available at: <https://datos.bancomundial.org/indicador/MS.MIL.XPND.GD.ZS?locations=PE> [Accessed on 6 September 2021].
- 4 Other non-conventional operations include the armed forces’ participation in international peacekeeping missions. For example, Peru deployed troops in the United Nations Stabilisation Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH), from 2004 to 2017. The country has also participated in similar missions in another five countries, most importantly the Central African Republic (Kahhat and Olcese 2009).
- 5 On the new roles of the Peruvian armed forces, see Gómez (2018).

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3 Chile—A Democracy with Semi-autonomous Armed Forces

A History of Civil–Military Relations Since 1990

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Prologue

Civil–military relations in a democratic system reinforce the idea of a civil pre-eminence over the armed forces. Furthermore, the rule is that officers should remain totally aloof from politics. Only a democratic constitutional civil administration can lay firm foundations for democracy, for it allows for constructing legitimate and trustworthy institutions, based on cooperation. Thereby civil–military relations should be grounded in state policies. Since the beginning of the debate on the topic of modern democratic societies, civil control has been the essence of the professionalism of the armed forces and the adequate functioning of a free and democratic society.

This chapter examines the evolution of the Chilean armed forces, particularly since the end of the Cold War. Likewise, it analyses their fundamental roles and the reason why there should be a constitutional separation of powers between those whose job is to ensure domestic and external security, leaving this last task in the hands of the military institution. It is a combination between the history of the armed forces' constitutionalism and subordination to the civil authorities, on the one hand, and the uninterrupted autonomy that the military top brass have enjoyed since the transition, on the other. In the midst of the current social, health and political crises, there has been a tendency to return to the situation during the initial years of the country's democratisation. However, the fundamental dispute now is not with those who opposed the military dictatorship but with the political elites of the government (especially the Right).

With the restoration of democracy in Chile over 30 years ago, the country's armed forces slowly but surely returned to the barracks. They invariably retained a certain degree of autonomy, with each wing adopting its own decisions as regards planning, institutional development and acquisition and procurement. In other words, there was no precise control over the day-to-day running of the three wings but a formal control in which the military high command respected the civil authorities (Varas and Agüero 2011).

Conversely, the civil authorities had no precise control over military activity. Until 2010, two different paths were taken: first and foremost, though the constitutional reform of 2005. With this important transformation of the constitution, the commander-in-chief of each one of the wings of the armed forces now only depended on the confidence of the president as the head of state. The National Security Council's right to appoint four senators from among former commanders-in-chief of the armed forces and former directors general of the Carabineros (militarised police), with all the voting rights of their elected peers, was eliminated. That same National Security Council also had the right to veto the civil authorities. The success of the transition was due, in part, to the fact that the civil authorities managed to cope with the authoritarian prerogatives that the military still retained. Additionally, they gradually assumed the capacity to subordinate formally the chain of command to their jurisdiction—a characteristic that has remained unaltered down to the present day.

In contrast, the chief problem lay in the lax control of the political elites, at first driven by the fear of a swift return to authoritarianism and then by their lack of interest during the consolidation of democracy. It was assumed that the adequate funding and internal autonomy of the armed forces would be enough to dissuade the military from meddling in politics. Nonetheless, the last decade has shown that this has been insufficient. The positive light under which the authorities and the citizenry saw the military's involvement in disaster relief and in peacekeeping missions was the first indication. This was then followed by the civil unrest that swept through the country as of October 2019. And, last but not least, the COVID-19 pandemic, which has highlighted the fact that the military have been obliged to undertake unconventional tasks. This has led to an ongoing debate—expressed in the constitutional process—on the basic missions that they should fulfil, their necessary capabilities and, above all, their democratic rules of engagement.

On the other hand, several cases of corruption had undermined the military's position in Chilean society, placing them on par with the country's political parties and members of Parliament. It was a critical moment in the country's history, which revealed the underlying tensions that had existed from the initial years of the democratic transition. Moreover, it is fair and essential to say that it was not the military command that was to blame for all those tensions but the lack of civil leadership.

Employing a process tracing method, the rest of this chapter is devoted to enquiring analytically into the characteristics of the evolution of civil–military relations from before the 1973 coup d'état to the complex situation in which the armed forces established an authoritarian government during the dictatorship of General Augusto Pinochet. This was followed by a long and onerous democratic transition. Throughout that period, much progress was made, chiefly in the constitutional reforms of 2005, which put an end to the armed forces' last prerogatives, to which should be added

the long-term effect of the arrest of the former dictator in London in the autumn of 1998.

Afterwards, an analysis is performed on the developments of the last decade, particularly the reform of the Ministry of Defence in 2010, considered as the most far-reaching in a century. The third section is devoted to examining the current shortcomings in this respect, employing the prerequisites established by Bruneau and Matei (2008), namely, civilian control and military effectiveness and efficiency. An analysis is also performed on the roles of the branches of the armed forces, in view of the fact that South America is a region, albeit far from being free of violence, without interstate wars (Mares 2001). Lastly, a number of preliminary solutions to the current tensions in the wake of the social protests in 2019 and the pandemic will be proposed. Although the military are currently edgy about accepting civil control, they want to avoid offering the same image as in the 1970s and the 1980s. It can thus be concluded that the semi-autonomous character of the branches of the armed forces is a reality, despite their pretention of being obedient and impartial. It is clear who is governing the country, but not necessarily how each institution is being run.

Tracing an Evolution

The history of civil–military relations in Chile since the mid-twentieth century can be divided into five different periods. Firstly, there was the period running from the establishment of the 1925 Constitution to the beginning of the civil–military dictatorship in 1973. The second was the dictatorship itself from 1973 to 1990. The third period started with the transition to democracy and ended with the arrest of Pinochet in London at the end of 1998. The fourth corresponded to the reforms of the constitution in 2005 and the Ministry of Defence in 2010. And the fifth and final period covers the last decade, during which the armed forces have never been so well equipped and trained in their history, but with pending challenges relating to undemocratic autonomy and administrative problems that may lead to a management crisis. In this connection, the new constitution marked a turning point.

As to the history of Chile before 1973, there was a period during which civil society and the military were completely detached. The main reason behind this was the lack of mutual understanding, with the armed forces being badly paid and equipped and showing a total lack of interest in the political elite. There were also plenty of reasons for feeling resentful. All this led some servicemen to be less inclined to support democracy. In this respect, the syllabi of the country's military academies and the borrowing of ideas from the National Security Doctrine and new professionalism were also especially relevant. To this should be added, as Weeks (2003, 38) points out, the fact that during the period from 1932 to 1973 the military

wielded a great deal of power in the country's civil institutions, occupying senior board positions in the National Airline (LAN), the Chilean Nuclear Agency and the National Sports Agency (the present-day Ministry of Sports), among others. The most striking point is that these changes went unnoticed by the general public, with the armed forces gaining political influence behind the backs of the rest of society and the ruling classes.

The second period encompasses the civil–military dictatorship led by Pinochet from 1973 to 1990. The bureaucratic authoritarian regime has been comprehensively analysed in the region's literature. Nonetheless, there are fewer studies of those servicemen who, during the regime, never left the barracks. And the same can be said about the wide gap separating them from those who did indeed become involved in politics during the dictatorship. In particular, the members of the navy and the air force remained in their posts in order to maintain their branches operational.

During this period, Chile was plunged into a crisis that left it on the brink of war with Argentina. At the time, the armed forces were poorly trained and equipped and strained to breaking point by a major crisis between the army and the air force. The only significant moment of discord in the military junta, it ended with the purging of most of the high command of the air force. The following crisis would occur a decade later, on the night of the referendum held in 1988, when no other commander-in-chief endorsed Pinochet's intention of not recognising the results which removed him from power.

In this respect, the ousting of General Gustavo Leigh as the commander-in-chief of the air force at the beginning of 1978 gave rise to a critical situation at the worst moment possible. In the midst of the escalating tension, with the Chilean armed forces poorly armed and divided, the crisis with Argentina that same year brought the regime to the brink of collapse. To all these problems should be added the attitude of the United States towards Chile's appalling track record as regards human rights violations. The bomb that killed the former Chilean minister of foreign affairs Orlando Letelier in the centre of Washington, in 1976, should be framed in this context.

In addition, the (Edward M.) Kennedy Amendment froze the US sale of arms to Chile. As Bawden (2013) contends, the reality was that 'the sanctions heightened Santiago's diplomatic isolation and the sense of military vulnerability. Chile's chief antagonists, Peru and Argentina, not only possessed superior conventional forces in the mid-1970s but also depended less on the United States for the supply and maintenance of their defense structures'. Be that as it may, Peru and Argentina were also experiencing internal rifts and important governance problems at the time.

In a way, this gave the Chilean and Argentine military dictatorships a mission for their armed forces and helped somewhat to improve their relationship with the civilian population. However, there was a difference between the two countries. Chile was obliged to play a defensive game, for which reason a comprehensive knowledge of the lie of the land was more

important than the force of arms. Furthermore, Mares (2001) holds that the country's security had been based on the maintenance of the status quo since the nineteenth century. Therefore, the Chilean armed forces were prepared in a way for a resistance scenario, fighting to the bitter end, which would only cause thousands of casualties without yielding any apparently useful results. War was avoided in the eleventh hour, when John Paul II—under the extraordinary management of Cardinal Samoré—mediated in the dispute, which ultimately resulted in the Treaty of Peace and Friendship, signed in 1984.

Beyond any shadow of doubt, the crisis with Argentina led to a critical situation and goes a long way to explaining the track record of the armed forces in the following decades. Their technology, weaponry and capabilities made such a qualitative leap forward that they scarcely resembled their forerunners. Although the following decade witnessed the implementation of many initiatives aimed at modernising the military institution, these hardly affected the procedures for recruiting commissioned officers (hereinafter COs), non-commissioned officers (hereinafter NCOs) or the rank and file. There was also an important problem in military training and in the way in which the core of the armed forces was renewed. The tension between the professional development of the military personnel, technology and recruitment for fulfilling that mission still has not been resolved four decades after the first crisis. The armed forces' present mission is totally different, but their current level of training is a direct result of that period and has nothing to do with the technology or quantity of weapons systems available at the moment. Chilean military culture is still more conservative and averse to change than many of its counterparts in the region.

Subsequently, in the 1980s and under the constitution imposed by the military, a new feeling of pride and unity arose among the armed forces. The main problem was that the division between most of Chilean society and the military junta was difficult to resolve. In the end, it was Pinochet himself who reluctantly accepted to step down following the 1988 referendum and the constitutional reforms in 1989, during a period fraught with tension. In the first days of the transition, some of the most significant progress was made in foreign affairs, especially in relation to the resolution of the border disputes with Argentina, to which end the development of the Measures of Mutual Trust and Security was crucial (Rojas and Tulchin 1998).

The third period involved the complicated transition to democracy that got underway in 1990 in a context in which the military continued to enjoy many authoritarian institutional prerogatives, thus preventing the civil authorities from fully exercising their democratic powers. As already noted, one such prerogative allowed the military to appoint several senators. The commander-in-chief of each wing of the armed forces could not be contested or relieved of his post by the president of the Republic of Chile (except for a handful of causes relating to very serious crimes or gross misconduct). Additionally, a national security council with generals

and admirals as commanders-in-chief had the power to veto or 'contest' decisions adopted by the civil authorities. Indeed, Pinochet himself remained supreme commander of the army and subsequently obtained a seat in the Senate, after retiring as a general in 1997.

Those prerogatives were a constant source of problems for the consolidation of democracy. In that atmosphere, there were many strong differences of opinion between the civil authorities and the military. The arrest, prosecution and conviction of servicemen and policemen who had formed part of the regime's repressive apparatus was taken as an attack by many of the military top brass. The worst case was probably the army's Lightning Project, whose intention was to develop a Chilean missile system in partnership with the British company Royal Ordnance (now called Land UK). Many other scandals, including Pinochet's finances and his shady arms dealing business and the illegal tax rebate cheques mailed to one of his sons, were also bones of contention. The two most important crises were known as 'Boinazo' and 'Ejercicio de Enlace', taking the shape of military protests and seditious acts against Chilean democratic governments.

With time, the threat of descending once again into authoritarianism and Pinochet's power gradually dwindled, a process that took decades. The transition to democracy and its consolidation were finally possible. There were two main reasons behind this. First of all, there was Pinochet's arrest in London at the end of 1998. Notwithstanding the angry reaction of President Eduardo Frei and the discrepancies of some of the regime's former opponents with the dictator's imprisonment, the truth is that it marked a turning point. No one, not even Pinochet, was now untouchable.

In point of fact, the country's economic elites were willing to use the fate of the former dictator as a bargaining chip so as to safeguard the free financial system. In sum, their objective was to replace the military as actors with the power of veto once and for all, claiming it for themselves. In this connection, in a diagram Baeza (2008) shows how the replacement of the military influenced Chilean politics in the following years (Figure 3.1).

In terms of change, it was also possible to address the complex issue of the human rights violations committed by the army. Despite the fact that there is still much to be done as regards justice and redress, at that moment, it was possible to take the first step. Owing to the crucial fact that Pinochet was no longer a member of the army, the 'Never Again!' policy gained momentum in the armed forces.

In addition, it was fundamental for performing a thorough review and restructuring of the Ministry of Defence, by virtue of Act 20.424 passed in 2010. In this context, the cooperation between the military high command and the civil authorities was also conducive to a cultural change in the armed forces. This does not necessarily mean that they no longer had any operational autonomy or decision-making powers, but that they accepted civil pre-eminence and pledged to respect the country's democratic institutions. More importantly, some consider that the military showed a

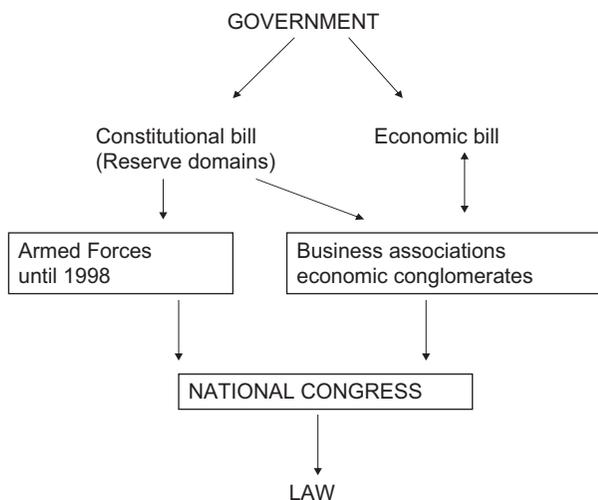


Figure 3.1 Veto player model for Chilean institutional process after 1990.
Source: Baeza (2008).

positive attitude towards the working group that President Ricardo Lagos created to investigate the human rights violations during the Pinochet dictatorship.

That spirit of collaboration was a relevant step towards accepting the brutality with which some members of the armed forces had treated their fellow citizens during the dictatorship. The basic difference was that thenceforth the problem would not be the acceptance of democracy or the devastating effect of the human rights violations. On the contrary, it would lie in the military's ability to act with autonomy while accepting what had happened and never again attempting to impose their will on the country's civil authorities.

The fourth relevant moment in civil–military relations in modern-day Chile revolved around the constitutional reform of 2005. This legal reform brought about crucial changes in the political system (the rules of the binominal electoral system) and the restructuring of the Ministry of Defence. As to the former, the principal changes included the elimination of unelected senators, the future irrelevance of the National Security Council and the establishment of a maximum four-year term for all commanders-in-chief and their prior endorsement by the president. Regarding the reform of the Ministry of Defence, it gave rise to some of the most significant changes in the armed forces in their history. According to Varas and Agüero (2011), it was the most important transformation in the ministry and defence policy as a whole since the nineteenth century.

In the first place, the reform of the Ministry of Defence, by virtue of Act 20.242, created the Defence Sub-Secretariat, under its jurisdiction. It

eliminated the former Departments of the Army, Navy and Air Force, which were replaced by the Armed Forces Sub-Secretariat, tasked with managing the three branches, run by a civil servant. In another far-reaching change, the Ministry of Defence relinquished control of the country's two police forces, whose roles were also redefined, to the Ministry of the Interior. Specifically, the Carabineros¹ and Investigaciones (judicial police) ceased to form part of the armed forces, which had been the state of affairs since the military dictatorship. Thanks to these changes, the army had never been better equipped and trained in its history.

Moreover, the ministry's new structure included the creation of the Joint Command of the Armed Forces. This operational and structural change placed the spotlight on the armed forces' joint nature in defence planning for the first time in their history. Regrettably, it did not involve the elimination of the institution of the commanders-in-chief or the creation of a joint chiefs of staff, as in the majority of advanced democracies, but was at least a step in the right direction. The last Defence White Paper (Ministerio de la Defensa de Chile 2017) also introduced significant changes in the establishment and broadening of the operational scope of the armed forces, placing the accent on their participation in peacekeeping missions and in disaster relief. In this respect, the experience of Chilean troops in the United Nations Stabilisation Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH) was also fundamental for the interaction between the Ministry of Defence and other civil agencies. However, it also highlighted deficiencies and the lack of previous experience, above all as regards the behaviour of the troops and the excessive autonomy of the military commanders during the 13-year mission.

Simultaneously, Chile's relations with its neighbours improved considerably, thus making an interstate conflict in the region all but impossible. In parallel with the Defence White Papers, Chile made progress in reinforcing mutual trust with its neighbours, particularly Argentina and Peru. Somehow or other, the country also made room for diplomacy in its Ministry of Defence, at least as to overcoming past mistrust.

Chile has introduced new mechanisms for reinforcing mutual trust with Argentina, two of which are especially relevant. Firstly, the meetings between the Ministries and Sub-Secretariats of Foreign Affairs and Defence of both countries. And, secondly, the annual meeting between the Chilean and Argentine ministers of defence. To this should be added the agreement reached between both countries to create the Fuerza de Paz Combinada 'Cruz del Sur' ('Southern Cross' Joint and Combined Peace Force), formed by troops from both countries for participating in peacekeeping missions. Chile has also introduced two mechanisms for improving relations with Peru, the most important being the 2+2 meeting between their ministers of foreign affairs and defence. As already observed, cooperation is one of the cornerstones of Chile's defence policy. Villar and Rojas Aravena (2020, 40) note that 'Chile's defence policy has mainly focused on the implementation of measures aimed at fostering mutual trust and preventing crises,

as well as collective and verifiable commitments with a fully transparent policy in relation to military expenditure and procurement’.

In conclusion, there are several relevant and seemingly permanent features that help to understand the current situation. To start with, there is constant tension between the role of the armed forces and the real mission and activities that the rest of society (and the state) expect them undertake. Secondly, the military are aware that they do not see eye to eye with the civil elites. Even before the 1973 coup, they had already tried to gain influence in civil society.

Thirdly, there is plenty of evidence that the crisis with Argentina shaped the future of the Chilean armed forces. The trauma that it caused at the time gave rise to a desire for modernisation, which was finally fulfilled by the centre-left government as to new weaponry, technology and capabilities. Nonetheless, there is still much room for improvement in military training, diversity in the recruitment of COs and NCOs and the lack of interest of broad swathes of society in military activities. As already noted, the country’s business elite substituted the military as actors with power of veto. In this connection, they were actors who banded together to underpin the dictatorship but afterwards went their own ways when they now had no interests in common. The bureaucratic authoritarian regime was a sort of union between the military, the economic elites and technocrats. In the new millennium, it is no longer the case.

Chilean civil–military relations demonstrate that some of the elites have remained loyal to the former regime. By contrast, the armed forces have accepted their subordination to the civil authorities in exchange for autonomy. They have promised to refrain from becoming involved in politics again, provided that this does not affect their interests. Nowadays, they are no longer actors with power of veto.

Current Civil–Military Relations in Chile (2021)

At present (June 2021), civil–military relations in Chile are at a crossroads and yet again on the verge of being plunged into crisis. The most pressing problems lie in two main areas: the armed forces’ missions and the maintenance of a high level of autonomy (especially as regards the commanders-in-chief). As to the former, there are problems associated with the high level of ‘in-house’ recruitment, namely, from among the offspring of the military. There is also a need for reviewing the training of COs and NCOs. The fact that less young people are now tempted to join the armed forces, because of the lack of multiple forms of access, just goes to show that the future of the Reserve Officers’ Training Corps (ROTC) and similar programmes like the Officer’s Candidate School (OCS) need to be rethought. Artificial intelligence (AI) and new autonomous weapons systems also pose important challenges affecting planning and training.

As to their high level of operational and administrative autonomy, the main concern for the future is to reform the structure of the higher ranks

in the chain of command, to encourage a greater involvement of the civil authorities in recruitment and to facilitate promotion between ranks (for both COs and NCOs). There is also the crisis looming over the armed forces' pension and healthcare systems. The state ultimately pays their retirement pensions which are much higher than those of the civilian population. If it is not diffused forthwith, it is a time bomb that threatens to blow apart future civil–military relations in Chile. It would also be necessary to take measures to eliminate all the unprecedented processes tainted with corruption in this regard in the armed forces.

The pending challenges of civil–military relations in Chile are very similar to the three prerequisites established by Bruneau and Matei (2008): improved civil control, the clarity and efficiency of military missions and the efficient use of available resources. The new reality calls for a readjustment towards an army based on modern democracy, focusing on cooperative security, peacekeeping and protecting Chile's vital interests in the South Pacific and the Antarctic. There are still some indications of the military's erstwhile participation in politics and their continued adherence to Cold War doctrines, which should both be resolved once and for all.

In addition to other urgent matters affecting the armed forces in the past few years, it is vital to make the pertinent changes in the Ministry of Defence and the state's primary mechanisms in order to clarify their role. In this connection, authors like the former general John Griffiths (2017) contend that their role should be clear and fall within their traditional missions. Nevertheless, he also notes that they should also promote the presence of the state throughout the country. At the same time, they should participate in disaster relief, while cooperating and lending their support to other state agencies.

The White Paper of the Chilean Ministry of Defence (*Libro Blanco del Ministerio de Defensa de Chile 2017*, 17) holds that the armed forces should be versatile, which means that they can participate in activities beyond their classical functions relating to being in an adequate state of combat readiness. The government's official publications indicate that Chile should not refrain from using these capabilities in a broader range of missions, above all when natural catastrophes threaten the welfare of the citizenry. Likewise, reference is also made to the role of the armed forces in combating climate change and global warming, social needs such as healthcare and the integration of communities living in isolated areas or in extreme conditions.

From this approach, the idea of the armed forces' versatility, with their involvement in disaster relief and combating climate change, among other activities, may be hard to swallow for some professionals and scholars. The concept of versatility may be questioned by those who consider that it would be more appropriate to assign those tasks exclusively to civil agencies. But it is important to stress how important it is for the state to make its presence felt throughout the country. This implies, as Foweraker (2016, 13) observes, the 'inability of the democratic government to implement its

public policies effectively'. Ultimately, states of calamity involve more than providing relief and aid in the wake of earthquakes and other natural disasters. The wave of social protests in 2019 have also raised the issue of the armed forces' participation in states of emergency that have nothing to do with natural catastrophes.

The participation of the Chilean armed forces in peacekeeping missions, with observers and the deployment of troops since 1949, when they formed part of the United Nations Military Observer Group in India and Pakistan (UNMOGIP), is probably questioned less than before. Over the past decades, they have participated in international peacekeeping missions in Iraq, El Salvador, Cyprus, East Timor and Bosnia-Herzegovina, although, due to the number of troops deployed and their greater capabilities, plus the mission's duration—from 2003, one year before it started, until 2017—their role in MINUSTAH has had the greatest impact (Segura 2010, 136). Several lessons can be learned from their many international peacekeeping missions, in which they have provided relief in record time and in a highly professional manner. Still, the military considers peacekeeping as an extension of their traditional mission rather than a way of engaging with the civilian population in a different role (Jenne 2020, 3).

There is a risk that they might become inward-looking, yet again aloof from society in general. As to the military approach established by the Chilean high command, all the stakeholders agree that there is room for improvement and not only in the training received. Political and humanitarian factors also have to be taken into account. During the term in office of President Piñera, the armed forces' participation in peacekeeping missions has decreased considerably.

Besides the peacekeeping missions, a sort of window of opportunity has opened for establishing the limits of the missions of the Chilean armed forces. It is necessary to clarify how they are trained to undertake unconventional tasks like disaster relief, states of emergency, the protection of the country's maritime boundaries and airspace, the Antarctic and so forth. In this respect, Baeza and Wehner (2018, 25) are of the mind that the cornerstone of Chile's security concerns should be the Pacific and the Antarctic, which although they are seemingly distant areas of influence, are closely linked to the shift in the transatlantic axis towards China and emerging Asia, highlighting the nation's position in South America in the context of the Asia-Pacific region and its importance for the defence of its natural resources.

In order to address the roles of the armed forces, it is necessary to be doubly clear. Firstly, the real limits of their activities should be considered. Secondly, the necessary forces should be planned for. Historically, Chile has addressed its defence requirements in light of the threat posed by its immediate neighbours. In recent years, there had been a notable shift towards capability-based planning (Baeza and Escudero 2018, 93). In plain English, planning is no longer based on a hypothetical war, but on those capabilities that the country wishes to obtain from its armed forces.

In this regard, the Chilean government announced a decree in March 2018, providing some crucial details. Villar and Rojas Aravena (2020, 44) remark that the Ministry of Defence has made progress in the development of a methodology that is no longer risk-based but focuses on fulfilling requirements when faced with a specific danger. There is, however, a lack of knowledge of the new global realities that link the approach that should be taken to a technologically more demanding environment, which even affects the civil servants working at the Ministry of Defence and the education policies of the armed forces. A decree dealing with doctrine, which came to light in May 2021, reproduces in part what was previously held in the Defence White Paper but is very vague about issues relating to defence planning and establishing global scenarios beyond South America.

Another pending issue is related to military personnel, whose pension and healthcare systems differ from those of the rest of the country. Whereas civilians have a fully funded capitalisation system, servicemen have one based purely on national insurance payments. This is an especially worrying aspect from a budgetary point of view since it puts pressure on the system as a whole. The funding of the armed forces has had a dual nature: on the one hand, the public budget; and, on the other, a special fund based on copper revenues existing since the 1950s—since the end of the dictatorship, it accounted for 10 per cent of the global sales of the Public Copper Company. Finally, in 2018, Congress passed a bill by virtue of which that fund was replaced by another managed in several overseas bank accounts, which did not depend on copper sales. Contreras and Salazar (2020, 144–145) explain that it was the minister of national defence, to whom the budgetary requirements of the branches of the armed forces and public services are reported, who got the new process underway. Inland Revenue now establishes the minimum levels of military expenditure. Similarly, their functional autonomy in light of any political decision implying a reduction in their regular funding is guaranteed by law. Bearing in mind the funding of the armed forces and their roles and functions, plus the short careers of officers (most of whom retire at 55) and the cases of corruption that have shaken the foundations of the military institution, any review should be comprehensive and performed forthwith.

All the transformations and modifications in civil–military relations have been put to the test by the social protests in 2019 and the COVID-19 pandemic. Chilean society has been in turmoil ever since. Until then, in the rest of the world it was widely held that the country had managed to shake off its past. As a matter of fact, many complained about the social inequalities and the perspective of a system in which the privileges of a few adversely affected the majority of the population. Nowadays, Chile is in the process of drafting a new constitution, which will uproot the remnants of the legacy of the Pinochet dictatorship once and for all. The role of the armed forces will be discussed and publicly established during the Constitutional Convention, whose members have been popularly elected. From that democratic deliberation will emerge a new social contract, for

the first time since the country's independence in 1810. The new constitution should be enacted in 2022. The armed forces also form part of this Chile and, as such, are by no means irrelevant in the debate. Certainly, further research will be conducted and further questions will be posed in the coming years. Scholars both from Chile and abroad have already offered some initial reflections.

In that context, some question the use of the armed forces in the repression following the outbreak of disturbances in Santiago. The impact that these activities will have on the future of civil–military relations in the country has yet to be fully appraised. To make matters worse, there has been a rift in the relationship between the government and the military top brass. At the time, in the midst of the confusion and the citizenry's recollections of past events during the darkest days of the military junta, in an address to the nation, President Piñera referred to being at war with an unknown foe. The following day, General Javier Iturriaga declared that he was a happy man who was not at war with anyone. The tension is palpable. The armed forces have unwillingly remained on the streets, their prolonged presence being due to the COVID-19 pandemic. *La Tercera* and *El Mercurio*, two of the country's most important Sunday papers, were already covering the mounting tension back in March 2021. At present, the semi-autonomous armed forces are walking on a knife edge.

Although no political actor would encourage a military intervention, due to the many changes in recent years, the armed forces are not prepared to take sides or to participate; they only wish to be less conspicuous. The cases of corruption, in addition to other issues, are stretching the relationship between the military institution and the government to breaking point. The only thing for sure is that they will continue to be semi-autonomous, regardless of whoever governs the country in the years to come. There is a need for all the stakeholders to broker a new democratic agreement in which they are all fully aware of their obligations.

Conclusions

In Chile, civil–military relations have hit crisis point again. The transition beginning in 1990 evolved—at least in appearance—towards the democratic control of the armed forces. No impartial political actor would cast doubt on the country's high level of stability or the improved living conditions of the Chileans. Nevertheless, the social unrest in 2019 is a time bomb whose moment of detonation has only been brought forward by the effects of the pandemic. There is absolutely no danger that the armed forces will seize power. Throughout this chapter, the main objective has been to describe how the military dictatorship affected self-perceived roles in society during and after it, covering the period running from the coup d'état to the current moment of uncertainty after the pandemic and the havoc that it has wreaked. The difference is not significant. Against this backdrop, it has been revealed how the military gained influence during

the years preceding the 1973 coup, which went unnoticed by the public at large. It is evident that returning to the barracks turned out to be more complicated than having complete control over the country.

The democratic experience in Chile over the past decades shows how the military gradually understood that remaining static with respect to its prerogatives was untenable. To this should be added that they adapted to the new reality in exchange for resources and an essential level of freedom, which here has been called ‘semi-autonomy’. An analysis has also been performed on the current missions of the armed forces, their planning, resources and the main problems that they have encountered when attempting to fulfil their duties. In view of their continued participation in peacekeeping missions, while undertaking other tasks such as providing disaster relief, collaborating with the security forces in states of emergency and defending the Antarctic and the Pacific, among other things, the armed forces require modern training and need to represent the huge diversity of Chilean society. Lastly, the failure to open up the military institution to society explains, in part, the cases of corruption and other related problems.

The new constitution should clearly establish the civilian control and effectiveness and efficiency of the armed forces (Bruneau and Matei 2008). Accordingly, it is now more necessary than ever that all the stakeholders discuss the future responsibilities of an institution that is essential to the Chilean state. This should be done without preconceptions and with an open mind for a new post-pandemic local, regional and global reality with the Asia-Pacific region as the new strategic centre of the world. The election of the members of the Constitutional Convention sheds some light on how the functions and definitions of the armed forces will change significantly over the next few years, although not in the sense of a profound transformation, but as regards increasing their participation in peacekeeping missions and other similar operations.

Note

- 1 The Carabineros have received plenty of attention in the literature due to their unique character. Defined as hybrid by Pion Berlin (2010), it is a police force but with a military hierarchy and structure.

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4 Uruguay—The Military and Politics in the Twenty-First Century

The Chronicle of a Conflictive Relationship

Constanza Moreira

In the literature on Latin American political regimes, Uruguay is considered to be one of the oldest and most stable democracies on the continent, especially one in which the ‘military factor’ has carried less weight throughout its history. The reason for this is that the country’s democracy and political parties have established institutional checks and balances to control its expansion and leadership.

Uruguayan democracy—in a restricted manner—appeared at the beginning of the twentieth century (1903–1904), universal suffrage for men being attained in 1918. Thenceforth, the country’s system of electoral competition has been characterised by guaranteed suffrage and high voter turnouts, revolving around an already classical model of bipartisanship in the region (between liberals and conservatives), featuring the Partido Colorado (Colorado Party, hereinafter PC) and the Partido Nacional (National Party, hereinafter PN). In the twentieth century, Uruguayan democracy was interrupted twice, by the Terra dictatorship from 1933 to 1942 and by the military dictatorship from 1973 to 1984. Both were the result of self-coups perpetrated by the elected presidents at the time, namely, Gabriel Terra in 1933 and Juan María Bordaberry in 1973. The influence of the country’s political parties on the population and the discrete role played by the military and the Catholic Church, central to the consolidation of the colonial states and oligarchies in Latin America, are quite remarkable. Both actors remained dormant during most of the twentieth century, but the ‘conservative waves’ currently sweeping over Uruguay will surely rouse them from their slumber.

The aim of this chapter is to describe the long cycle of military presence in Uruguay since its heyday with the so-called militarism of the nineteenth century until its involvement in the twentieth-century dictatorships. This is followed by an analysis of the armed forces’ tenacious resistance to their transformation and modernisation, the marked tension between the military and the political class during the ‘progressive’ cycle (2004–2020) and the consolidation of a ‘military party’, which is currently (June 2021) participating in the conservative government of Luis Lacalle Pou.

The Military Factor in the Construction of the Nation-State

As occurred in most Latin American countries, in Uruguay the armed forces were a key factor in its development throughout the nineteenth century. Following the country's independence, in the wake of the revolutionary movements at the beginning of the nineteenth century, different regional wars consolidated the armed factor on the continent. Likewise, the civil wars between the two major parties emerging from the revolutionary process were a constant during the last third of the nineteenth century. The attempts to establish a nation-state, the growing dissatisfaction with the political parties (Barrán and Nahum 1987; Barrán 1974) and the need to 'pacify' the countryside and administratively centralise authority converted armies into central actors during that period. The professionalisation of the region's armies and the increase in their troop numbers went hand in glove with vast national budget expenditure in order to maintain them. In the case of Uruguay, between 1854 and 1893, military expenditure represented the country's largest budget item (42.3 per cent), while military liabilities accounted for 90 per cent of the total, according to Martínez (2019). In the last quarter of the century, military governments were promoted to lead the capitalist modernisation of the state and agricultural output and to consolidate land ownership. This stage is known as that of 'militarism'.¹

The Uruguayan military also paved the way for the incorporation of the dynamics of transatlantic capitalism in Latin America (Real de Azúa 1973). This influenced the early education reform in 1877, thus extending basic public education throughout the country, in addition to the process of secularisation (such as the civil register reform), which subsequently led to the separation between the Church and the state and to the passing of state-of-the-art laws in the first two decades of the twentieth century.

The Cold War and the Role of the United States in the Restructuring of the Military Factor

With the pacification of Uruguay in the twentieth century, the armed forces were professionalised and started to lose political power, thus allowing the country to consolidate a full democracy at an early date, which deepened a pacifist and anti-militaristic sentiment fuelled by the mythical past depicted in *The Purple Land* (Hudson, 1916 [1885]) and the rejection of 'barbarity'. This led to the idea of 'military superfluity' (González, 2004), which was accompanied by the armed forces' relative marginalisation in Uruguayan society and which contributed to the early consolidation of a stable democracy, grounded in the legitimacy of political parties.

In this context, the military were 'used' by the country's political parties, especially by their conservative factions when its fledgling democracy began to steer a too reformist and 'progressive' course (as occurred with

‘Batllism’).² The dictatorship established in 1933, responsible for bringing the first wave of democracy in Uruguay to an end—a movement emerging simultaneously on the rest of the continent due to the undermining of the liberal order caused by the 1929 crisis—is an example of this. Nonetheless, the twentieth century saw the adoption of ‘a liberal democratic conception and its corresponding legal formulation: the military were prohibited from intervening in politics ... in the country’s inner workings ... and their scope of action was limited to defending the country from external aggressions’ (Bottinelli 2010).

From that moment onwards, the ‘partisanship’ of the armed forces kept in step with the predominance of one party or the other. With the exhaustion of the two-party system towards the end of the second wave of democracy, the armed forces constructed a different enemy: anti-communism, represented by the Frente Amplio (Broad Front, FA), the trade union movement and the armed Left. The dictatorship was a civic-military reaction to the collapse of the compromise system between the parties and the reorientation of the armed forces towards the ‘maintenance’ of domestic law and order.

Militarism ‘returned’ in the 1960s, peaked in the 1970s and concluded at the end of the first half of the 1980s, in a period clearly longer and more decisive for the country’s future than that of the first dictatorship in the 1930s. The Cold War context is decisive for understanding how the Uruguayan military acquired increasingly more strength, troops and power, before finally ending up governing the country for more than a decade, thus aborting the second wave of democracy and establishing the limits of the third.

Against the backdrop of the Cold War, Uruguay formed an alliance with the United States on the basis of the hemispheric defence system formally established by virtue of the 1947 Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance (ITRA). The Agreement for Military Cooperation signed in 1953 did not only guarantee the donation of U.S. military equipment but also served as a military training programme in the national security doctrine and in the fight against communism. The role of the United States was decisive in converting the armed forces into a relevant political actor.

There were many causes behind the 1973 self-coup. It was perpetrated by an elected president and supported by civilians and politicians (above all by important sectors of the business world). But, for the first time since the ‘militarism’ of the nineteenth century, the military played a key role in it. The pretext was the guerrilla and the ‘political instability’ that it was causing. Be that as it may, many studies (Franco and Iglesias 2011) have shown that the coup d’état was perpetrated after the urban guerrilla had already been decimated. The deconstruction of that account could only be performed by the Left itself, which subsequently governed for 15 years, but the ‘radicalness’ of the different left-wing currents offered a plausible explanation for the reasons why it had been possible to convert an

enlightened and modern Uruguay into a ‘giant police station’, in the words of Liliana de Riz (2008), for more than a decade.

But beyond the objectives and the account, it is important to highlight the mechanisms that were employed to carry out the coup d’état, for they were the tools that, embedded in the norms and the constitution, allowed, and still allow, the military to play the role of the national police: the so-called exceptional measures that enable the armed forces to protect ‘national security’ against an ‘internal’ enemy.

In the period immediately preceding the dictatorship (between 1968 and 1972), President Jorge Pacheco Areco governed under an ‘exceptional regime’ that allowed for suspending individual freedoms, encouraged police brutality and violated civil, social and political rights. Juan María Bordaberry, his successor in the presidency and the author of the coup d’état, proclaimed an internal state of war and passed the National Security Act that stipulated that all those suspected of subversion were to be prosecuted under the military justice system. The armed forces were thus transformed into an additional, and very important, actor on the domestic political stage. The growing number of institutional milestones that consolidated the leadership of the armed forces ranged from the repeated recourse to the state of emergency (1959, 1963, 1965, 1967 and then almost continuously as of 1968) to the suspension of individual guarantees, placing the armed forces in charge of managing the counter-subversion war (September 1971) and, ultimately, the declaration of an internal state of war on 15 April 1972 (Franco and Iglesias 2011). The doctrine of impunity for crimes against humanity, which would be imposed following the dictatorship, would have a legislative and constitutional basis and a matching narrative.

The Military Government in Uruguay (1973–1984) and Its Post-traditional Legacy

Bordaberry, the president perpetrating the coup, gradually lost support and the armed forces began to act with increasing autonomy. As of 1976, in the words of Marisa Ruiz (2016), ‘[...] the dictatorship lost its civil support to become fully military’.

During the dictatorship, Uruguay had the dubious distinction of being the country with the highest number of political prisoners per capita, according to the statistics provided by the Servicio Paz y Justicia (SERPAJ 1989). The widespread, professional and systematic surveillance and control system of Uruguayan society went beyond its borders: the Condor Plan³ introduced a system of repression coordinated between the Argentine, Chilean, Uruguayan and Brazilian military.

The military were totally convinced of their own successes; the dictatorships of the Southern Cone had become durable and robust and received such a tremendous amount of support from the United States (the Organisation of American States which had expelled Cuba in 1964,

never opposed any of the savage military dictatorships during the 1970s and 1980s) that, as Gabriel García Márquez remarked, ‘The generals believed their own story.’⁴ On 30 November 1980, emboldened by the triumph of Pinochet’s constitution in the Chilean referendum, they decided to hold a referendum to approve a new constitution that would allow for institutionalising the *de facto* regime, ratifying all the restrictions on individual freedoms, constitutionalising the ‘internal state of war’, holding elections without a contest between presidential candidates and granting the armed forces the power to dismiss presidents and to penalise legislators. The constitutional reform proposed by the military government was ultimately rejected by 57 per cent of the electorate.

Two years later, a financial crisis was brought about by the mass flight of capital from Latin American countries, which led to a huge devaluation. The economic system collapsed owing to the scale of debt and the weaknesses bequeathed by the liberalising strategy implemented throughout the period (Yaffé 2009), although with the support of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the financial system remained afloat and helped to consolidate Uruguay as a ‘financial centre’ in the 1990s.

In 1984, a civil–military pact sealed the accords that re-established the rules of the game of the democratic regime and, since then, the presence of the military in Uruguayan politics has to a greater or lesser degree become a constant.

In that same year, and with important political restrictions (the leaders of the FA and the PN were prohibited from fielding candidates in the elections), Uruguay emerged from the dictatorship thanks to an ‘accorded’ transition. The PC yet again won the elections, after which it left the budget and roles of the armed forces relatively intact. First and foremost, they were shielded from any legal prosecution for human rights violations thanks to the amnesty granted by virtue of the Ley 15.848 de Caducidad de la Pretensión Punitiva del Estado (Expiration of the Punitive Claims of the State Act, with respect to servicemen and civilians involved in crimes committed during the dictatorship), also known as the Expiry Law. Secondly, they maintained many of their privileges, including military justice, while whole areas of public policy, such as civil aviation, the national weather service and the merchant navy, remained under their control. Thirdly, a campaign was launched to ‘clean’ their public image, constructing the account known as ‘the two demons’ theory. This revolved around the idea that a sort of civil war had been fought in the country, in which there were two warring parties: the anti-democratic guerrilla and the armed forces that committed ‘excesses’, attributable to that war.

Twenty years later, when in 2004 the FA came to power, it would have the difficult task of attempting to reform and reduce expenditure on the armed forces, to repeal the amnesty laws or at least their effects, to eliminate the national security doctrine and to change the military education system in order to make it fully compatible with the defence of human rights. The first excavations were performed in military properties in search of the

remains of missing persons and the administrative acts that had hindered any possible investigation by the judiciary on crimes against humanity were revoked, giving rise to a particularly tense relationship between the armed forces and the government.

The Military and Human Rights in the FA Government

One of the first developments after the FA came to power was President Tabaré Vázquez's announcement of the application of Article 4 of the Expiry Law, which enabled the executive branch to conduct investigations or to authorise the judiciary to do so with respect to everything that the law did not prohibit (economic crimes, enforced disappearances and the kidnapping of children). It was also announced that enquiries would be made into the whereabouts of missing detainees (including excavations in military properties in search of clandestine burials). Furthermore, the go-ahead was given to legal action in cases not covered by the law and, finally, it was decided to permit the extradition of human rights violators, which the judiciary resolved in the affirmative. During this period, the first prosecutions occurred, including the highly symbolic proceedings against Bordaberry, the author of the 1973 coup d'état. In 2009, towards the end of the first term in office of Tabaré Vázquez, the Supreme Court declared the Expiry Law unconstitutional.

The FA government then commenced its second term in office, presided this time by José 'Pepe' Mujica (2010–2015), who decided to appoint erstwhile guerrilla cadres to key positions in the ministries controlling the armed forces, including Eleuterio Fernández Huidobro as Minister of National Defence and Eduardo Bonomi as Minister of the Interior. Towards the end of the FA's second term in office, the opposition managed to orchestrate a referendum on lowering the age of criminal responsibility from 18 to 16, a measure that, albeit never enforced, was supported by 47 per cent of the electorate. The idea that public security was one of the main domestic problems was thus widely endorsed by public opinion, reinforced the position of the political Right and led to stiffer penalties and a substantial increase in the prison population. But, above all, it paved the way for new roles for the military in issues relating to 'national security'.

Mujica's presidency marked the start of a rapprochement with the armed forces and a conflictive relationship with human rights organisations. Despite having been one of the most iconic prisoners during the dictatorship, his controversial statements contrasting 'truth' with 'justice' and claiming that the truth would only be known 'when all of them had died', did not remove the main legal sword of Damocles hanging over the military: the prosecutions for crimes against humanity. Nor did it contribute to tone down the confrontation between the minister of defence and human rights organisations (he had been appointed to that position after having relinquished his seat in the Senate so as not to have to vote on a law invalidating the amnesty granted to the military). In contrast, all this contributed

to plant the seed of the idea that the armed forces and the ex-guerrilleros had sealed a sort of ‘pact’ that still prevailed.

It was not only Mujica who was ambiguous about these issues. During his first term in office, Tabaré Vázquez had introduced a bill on redress, which equated the victims of state terrorism with those of ‘the sedition’.⁵ He had also alluded to the ‘fratricidal’ struggle⁶ without mentioning ‘state terrorism’ and had even dared to propose a sort of ‘national reconciliation’, which was dissatisfying for all concerned.

The initiatives aimed at repealing the Expiry Law failed at least on three occasions: the 2009 referendum on this issue, the introduction of a first bill in this respect by the Mujica government and a subsequent piece of legislation that did not take into account the time during which the Expiry Law had been in force in order to avoid the statute of limitations were declared unconstitutional by the Supreme Court.

As a result, the military increased their political power, the FA’s programme proposals for returning activities and institutions that had been ‘militarised’ during the dictatorship to the civil authorities were abandoned (except for the national weather service which was indeed ‘demilitarised’) and the armed forces became involved in ‘civic’ activities for the purpose of improving their image.

The Failed Reform of the Armed Forces During the FA Governments

In one of his studies, Battaglini (2015) observes that the assignment of non-primary missions to the armed forces (such as their participation in public security and the administration of areas of governance) is an indicator of the expansion and projection of the military presence on the political system and society. In the ‘pink tide’ countries, politics seems to have been accompanied by a process of military expansion, rather than the opposite. During that period, Uruguay was the country with the highest number of troops per capita deployed in peacekeeping missions (Battaglini, 2015).

Battaglini notes that, although this can be interpreted as the result of the democratic transitions brokered between civilians and the military, the truth is that they gave rise to ‘democracies that have coexisted with high levels of military political power’. This is reflected in the strong presence of right-wing parties associated with the military in the region, as well as the fact that some of the most successful right-wing parties have been those that have relied on the organisational legacy of the dictatorship (Luna, 2014). The most illustrative examples of this include *Aliança pelo Brasil* (Alliance for Brazil) announced by Bolsonaro but never formally created, and *Cabildo Abierto* (Open Chapter, CA) in Uruguay, which consolidated their position—and not by chance—towards the end of the progressive cycle in both countries.

Thus, apart from the fact that the country’s society and political class have a moderating and buffering effect on the real power of the former

actors of the oligarchic state (the Catholic Church and the army), the Uruguayan experience has not differed much from that of other Latin American states.

The accorded democratic transition in Uruguay left many of the military's privileges intact, including troop numbers⁷ and entire areas of governance under their jurisdiction. In addition, the struggle against impunity, which took place during the first government following the dictatorship and seemed to lose steam after the defeat of the referendum on the repeal of the Expiry Law in 1989, left many with the sensation that, during many years, they had been practically untouchable.

Shortly after the FA had commenced its first term in office, there was a national debate on defence, in which the National Defence Act (No. 18650) was framed: the subjection of the armed forces to civil authority, their loss of autonomy in managing peacekeeping missions and the need to reform the military retirement fund regulating military pensions. The appointment of Azucena Berruti, a lawyer and human rights advocate, as the minister of national defence, seemed to pave the way for change. However, the FA government increased the participation of the armed forces in the United Nations Stabilisation Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH), which had begun in 2004, thus leading to a heated debate in the FA and to the resignation of two members of parliament. For their part, the military top brass repeatedly refused to recognise the government's authority, threw in red herrings to confuse the issue of the whereabouts of missing detainees and announced burials that did not exist.

As already noted, during Mujica's term in office, there were setbacks in the attempts to transform the armed forces and relations with human rights organisations were tense, in view of the government's intention to enter into a 'political dialogue' with the former. During this period, the commander-in-chief of the army was Guido Manini Ríos, one of President Mujica's right-hand men, who immediately following his dismissal from the post by Tabaré Vázquez in the following period, created the so-called military party, CA. The party subsequently obtained 10 per cent of the ballots cast in the 2019 presidential elections and currently forms part of the national government.

During the last FA government (with Tabaré Vázquez yet again being elected as president), the debate on the cost of the armed forces and their weight in the budget came into the public eye. This was evidenced by the discussion on the military retirement and pension system, which accounted for 1 per cent of the country's GDP. But the magnitude of military expenditure was basically due to the number of troops per capita. According to the figures per 10,000 inhabitants for 2018, Uruguay had 80 troops, Brazil 16, Argentina 17, Chile 43, Mexico 32 and Colombia, with armed conflicts for more 50 years, 61 (RESDAL, 2018). Expenditure on the armed forces was also high when compared with that of the rest of the ministries. In the implementation of the 2016 budget, the Ministry of National Defence (MDN) received the second largest slice of the cake (with 8 per cent of the

total budget), behind the Ministry of the Interior (with 12 per cent), and way in front of the Ministries of Transport and Public Works (5 per cent) and Housing (4 per cent).⁸ The ‘repressive’ state budget yet again depleted the public purse as a result—but not only—of the second wave of ‘militarism’ in Uruguay.

The programme of the FA government, approved in 2008 for the 2010–2015 period, envisaged several agreements in relation to the armed forces: reviewing the ‘military jurisdiction’ issue, eradicating the national security doctrine, demilitarising the civilian institutions in the orbit of the MDN and downsizing the armed forces so as to ‘determine clearly their functions, to professionalise them and to furnish them with the necessary means’. But no substantial progress was made in this respect. The armed forces continued to control their education system and civil aviation, while stepping up their participation in the National Emergency System (SINAE) (of which they were practically in charge). Their budget remained by and large intact and also their troop numbers. Moreover, they increased their participation in peacekeeping missions and developed an open ‘corporate’ policy, especially as regards the army.

The military and police education reform bill, which was enacted during Mujica’s term in office (No. 19188), did not introduce any substantial modifications and continued to consolidate military education as the exclusive preserve of the armed forces, with little or no link to the rest of the public education system.

During Tabaré Vázquez’s second presidency, and following the death of the minister Fernández Huidobro (2016), progress was made in some important initiatives, including the reforms of military justice, the Organic Military Act and the military retirement fund,⁹ to which was added a tax on high retirement benefits. Most of these initiatives were either failures (such as the tax on high retirement benefits) or were completely attenuated or bastardised. Soon after coming to power, the government led by Luis Lacalle Pou (as of 2019) reversed the little progress that had been made, involved the armed forces in the struggle against the COVID-19 pandemic and made sure that they were not included in the 15 per cent cut in public spending.

It warrants noting that there were two opposing visions in the FA. The former president of the Defence Commission of the Broad Front, the retired general Víctor Licandro, had defended the idea of ‘professional’ armed forces strictly subject to civilian control and necessarily far removed from the national security doctrine and their ‘politicisation by the Right’. By contrast, the minister Fernández Huidobro and part of the old armed Left held that it was possible—and necessary—to work with the armed forces to prevent them from only being under the influence of the PN and the PC.¹⁰ Beyond the fact that the Left did not have its own ideas on what to do with the armed forces (as it did indeed in relation to the economy, foreign affairs and collective bargaining), it was clear that they were much more in tune with right-wing thought. With time, it became evident that

they had developed their own logic. Towards the end of the 15 years of the ‘progressive’ FA governments, they had regrouped as a political party and had found their main leader.

A Military Party in Uruguay?

The commencement of the last FA government was marked by the referendum on ‘the militarisation of public security’,¹¹ a measure supported by 47 per cent of the electorate. It was promoted by the senator Larrañaga of the PN, who would later become the home minister of the current government (2019–to date). Indeed, public security was a very central issue in the campaigns of the country’s right-wing parties.

For many years, the military had had an indisputable leader, resulting from the appointment of Guido Manini Ríos as commander-in-chief of the army during a period encompassing the two FA governments. By the time President Tabaré Vázquez dismissed him from the post, in view of Manini Ríos’ clear political role evident from his statements in defence of the armed forces (particularly in relation to the reform of the military retirement fund) and of his ‘comrades-in-arms’ (those servicemen arrested for crimes relating to state terrorism),¹² the serpent’s egg had already been laid. Manini Ríos¹³ thus became the indisputable leader of the ‘military family’ and created his own party to the amazement of ‘Blancos’ and ‘Colorados’. It was he who designed the best strategy for ‘colonising’ public opinion by promoting, in many publications, the prestige that the armed forces’ participation in peacekeeping missions and weather-related emergencies and their offer to collaborate in the implementation of social policies, especially as regards those aimed at addressing the Ni–Ni problem (Neither–Nor, 16- to 24-year-olds, neither educated nor employed), bestowed on Uruguay.

The way in which CA came into being caused a splash. In March 2019, a few days after his dismissal, the former commander-in-chief of the army publicly announced that he was running for president as the candidate of CA. The discourse and programme of the Artiguista Social Movement, the precursor of CA, were typical of the radical right: combating crime and restoring ‘respect for authority at all levels of society’, obligatory work in prisons, the military enlistment of Ni–Ni, ‘ideology-free’ justice, restructuring the tax system ‘so as to favour private enterprise’ and ‘strengthening the family as the basis of society’, among other initiatives.

The presidential candidate Manini Ríos created CA with retired officers of the armed forces and political cadres of the conservative parties. After obtaining over 10 per cent of the ballots cast, mostly in the country’s interior, poor constituencies, regions with a strong military presence and rural areas, the ‘Uruguayan Bolsonaro’ thus became one of the government’s indispensable allies and was rewarded with the control of the Ministries of Public Health and Housing, plus some bodies under the aegis of the Ministry of Social Development, while expressing his willingness to involve the officer corps in the implementation of social policies.

At the Ministry of Defence, the military yet again monopolised ministerial positions, obscuring the policy of civilian appointments, which had predominated since the start of the progressive cycle.

The colonisation of entire areas of governance by ex-servicemen (a strategy adopted by Bolsonaro in Brazil) was allowed and encouraged by President Lacalle Pou (2019–to date). An illustrative example is that of the Ministry of Public Health, where, according to the statements of a leader of CA, more than 100 members of this political party were directly appointed. A prospective parliamentary candidate of CA remarked to a well-known local newspaper¹⁴ that ‘it is an open secret that CA is led by a military group, and they are not rank and file, but high-ranking officers who meet as if they were at a casino to resolve and organise “the troops” ... and in front of which there is a rather decorative civilian screen’. In the aforementioned newspaper, another well-known leader noted that ‘CA is the culmination of the Uruguayan population’s favourable stance towards the armed forces’, before emphasising considerable presence of the military in the administration, ‘as has not occurred in years’ in Uruguay.

The fact that the military were formerly banned from getting involved in politics seems to be water under the bridge. González Guyer (2021) observes that the officer corps ‘has radicalised its conservative bias and has cooled its relationship with the traditional parties in the authoritarian period ... political conservatism appears to have become just another dimension of the corporate spirit of military organisation’.

In 2020, Decree No. 271/020 on National Defence Policy broadened the missions and powers of the armed forces. On the one hand, the former hemispheric defence doctrine, consistent with the country’s return to the 1947 ITRA, came into force once again.¹⁵ Nowadays, CA is an actor with the power to veto in the Uruguayan political system and the military enjoy a privileged political status.

In the twenty-first century, the military’s ability to create a political party with the country’s rural constituents and to imitate the example of Brazil, plus their sense of opportunity, have transformed them into a relevant actor. At least while the conservative cycle (which has just begun in Uruguay) continues strong, the ‘military’ party will have a broad electorate, a place in the Uruguayan parliament and a legitimate public voice.

Notes

- 1 ‘Militarism’ is the term employed to designate the historical period between 1876 and 1890 during which Uruguay was governed by the military who based their dominance not on political parties but on the army.
- 2 ‘Batllism’ is the name given to the period encompassing the two presidencies of José Batlle y Ordóñez (1903–1907 and 1911–1915), characterised by the state’s central role in modernising the country, by an intense process of secularisation and by the advanced social reforms that laid the foundations of a modern, egalitarian Uruguay.

- 3 The Condor Plan was a joint operation of political repression and state terrorism, with the support of the United States, officially and formally implemented as of 1975 by the leadership of the dictatorial regimes of the Southern Cone. Including intelligence operations and the assassination of political leaders and cadres, many Uruguayans were arrested or went missing in Argentina in the context of the Condor Plan.
- 4 'The Story of the Generals Who Believed Their Own Story' is the title of an article by Gabriel García Márquez published in *El País* (Spain, Madrid) on 8 December 1980.
- 5 Introduced by the government in 2007, the bill was not well-received by the FA (nor by human rights organisations), which understood that the proposal placed the victims and the perpetrators on the same level.
- 6 When occupying the presidency for the first time, on 1 March 2005 Tabaré Vázquez remarked, 'What is known will be published, what has been revealed will be published, neither for the purpose of fanning the flames of hatred, nor for the purpose of bringing anyone to justice, beyond what is established by the Expiration of the Punitive Claims of the State Act, but so that—Uruguayan ladies and gentlemen—what occurred shall never again come to pass in Uruguay, never again, never again brothers against brothers, Uruguayan men against Uruguayan women.' The full speech can be consulted at: http://archivo.presidencia.gub.uy/_web/pages/vazquez06.htm.
- 7 In 1960 there were 12,800 troops, while in 1985 there were 42,764 (including civilians). By 1995, the number had fallen to 35,140 and, by the time the FA came to power, it had dropped to 31,857. There was no significant reduction in military personnel during the three FA governments.
- 8 For example, the number of employees only in the army was equivalent to the total number of primary school teachers in the country (approximately 15,000 or, including temps, 22,000) (MEF 2017).
- 9 When the government announced its intention to reform the military retirement and pension system, this was done in the frame of the 'adjustment' of the accounts rendered in 2016 and because the deficit had reached \$570 million (1 per cent of GDP).
- 10 On 5 May 2012, in a statement made to the agency Telam of Argentina Lucía Topolansky, Mujica's wife and subsequently the vice-president of the republic (2017–2020), declared that the military also 'voted' and that they could not be subject to the influence of 'Blancos' or 'Colorados'—the supporters of the PN and the PC, respectively. This led to the minister of defence being convened by the Senate Defence Committee to explain the possible intention of 'bringing the armed forces closer to the FA'.
- 11 The aim of the 'Live without Fear' proposal was to create, through a constitutional amendment, a national guard capable of collaborating with the Home Office in public security tasks, which was formed by servicemen supporting the police in the fight against crime.
- 12 In the last year (2019) of the third FA government, there was a scandal as a result of the rulings of the courts of honour on the servicemen prosecuted for crimes against humanity committed during the dictatorship, owing to the fact that they refused to strip them of their military status. This was accompanied by the statements of the commander-in-chief of the army and 'strong' man of the armed forces, challenging the impartiality of the legal process and the lack

of evidence for prosecuting them. Following this, President Tabaré Vázquez dismissed him from the post, along with those who had sat on the courts of honour, which were eliminated from the legal system.

- 13 Guido Manini Ríos comes from a long line of conservative politicians. His grandfather, Pedro Manini Ríos, was a member of parliament, a senator and the home minister in the first decades of the twentieth century during the presidencies of the reformer José Batlle y Ordóñez, who he swiftly abandoned to create the most conservative sector of the PC, which came out in support of the first dictatorship in Uruguay, during which he was the chancellor of the exchequer. It was Guido's uncle, a member of parliament, a senator and the minister of government of Jorge Pacheco Areco, who helped to establish the 'exceptional measures' anticipating the coup d'état in Uruguay. Guido's brother was the president of the Association of Rice Producers of Uruguay and the founder of the Juventud Uruguaya de Pie (JUP) in the 1970s, an anti-communist youth organisation that was involved in violent political acts anticipating state terrorism.
- 14 *Semanario Búsqueda*, 23–29 July 2020.
- 15 In Communiqué No. 18/20 of the Foreign Office (10 March 2020).

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5 Argentina—The Reinvention of the Armed Forces in the Face of the Challenge of Demilitarising the Nation-State

Sabina Frederic

Background

Since the last military dictatorship at the beginning of the 1980s, the Armed Forces of the Argentine Republic (hereinafter FFAA) have undergone a far-reaching transformation. The memory politics of truth and justice and the legal action taken against the culprits, together with the defeat in the Malvinas War, all played a key role in that transformation. This pattern aptly called ‘the traps of the past’ meant that Argentina’s post-authoritarian transition differed from that of other countries in the region, like Chile, Brazil and Uruguay.

Accordingly, this chapter focuses on describing the process that led to the peacekeeping operations and roles of the FFAA, with the accent being placed on how the military themselves limited the expansion of their functions as regards homeland security. In particular, this had to do with the greater involvement of the Estado Mayor Conjunto (Joint Chiefs of Staff [EMCO]) in peacekeeping operations and their leadership by a generation of servicemen interested in the *professionalisation* of the military component of national defence and in gaining public recognition. To this end, an analysis is performed here on the creation of the Operativo Integración Norte (Northern Integration Operation [OPINOR]) in 2018, which leveraged the legacy of the decade that Argentina had participated in the UN Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH) between 2004 and 2015.

What Did the Democratic Authorities Do with the Armed Forces During the Post-authoritarian Transition?

By their actions or omissions, the constitutionally elected political authorities governing the state as of 1983 decided to retain the FFAA, which had played a leading role in the most bloody and terrifying military dictatorship in the recent history of Argentina. Therefore, what to do with them and how to manage them to avoid coup plots was the most pressing issue for civil servants, legislators, politicians and scholars until well into the

twenty-first century. The truth is that the process that got underway at the time revolved around how to integrate—subordinately—the FFAA into a democratic state. The successive measures adopted plotted a very straight course, as will be seen below.

The first milestone in this process was the trial of the members of the military juntas who had governed during the military dictatorship (1976–1983). The historical sentence of life imprisonment to which a civil court condemned those guilty of state terrorism in 1985, during the presidency of Raúl Alfonsín (1985–1989), made it clear that, among other things, the moral and criminal authority to purge the military institution was in the hands of civil justice. This was the first historical step towards subordinating the military to the democratic regime.

This initial impulse stemming from the scope, size and depth of the human rights defence movement in Argentina, which advanced under the slogan of *'juicio y castigo'* (justice and punishment) for the guilty, was accompanied by a 50 per cent cut in military expenditure. But this swiftly led to the growing resistance of the generation of servicemen who, legitimised by the fact that they had seen active service during the Malvinas War, sought to put the brakes on the criminal proceedings, which, descending the chain of command, began to loom over them. They gradually imposed, within and outside of the FFAA, the argument that their participation in state terrorism was down to the fact that, as subalterns, they had 'duly obeyed' the orders of their superiors. A chain of seditious events, known as the *'alzamientos carapintadas'* (uprisings of the painted faces) simultaneously led to the passing of the Ley de Obediencia Debida (Due Obedience Act) in June 1987,¹ followed by that of the Ley de Defensa Nacional (National Defence Act [LDN]) in 1988.

The passing of this last act was another milestone in the reintegration of the FFAA into the democratic state, subsequently becoming the guiding principle of a state policy that has been implemented throughout the country's recent history down to the present day. The law restricted the scope of action of the FFAA to 'the aggression of an external enemy', prohibited them from intervening in matters relating to 'homeland security' and established a sharp distinction between the roles of defence and security when determining that 'homeland security shall be governed by a special law', which was ultimately enacted in 1992.

Unlike the armed forces of other South American countries, the FFAA experienced the post-Cold War period, not only as a post-state terrorism period (the 'Dirty War' for some members of the FFAA) but also the post-Malvinas War period. This was the reason why the union between national defence and homeland security, characteristic of the Cold War in Latin America, only fell apart in Argentina.² The 1992 Act stipulated that the federal forces making up the homeland security system should be the Argentine Federal Police (PFA), the Argentine National Gendarmerie (GNA) and the Argentine Naval Prefecture (PNA). Although there have been some who, every now and again,

have called for the participation of the FFAA in the fight against international terrorism and organised crime, that principle of division of the use of force still remains intact.

During the 1990s, coinciding with the presidency of Carlos Menem (1989–1999), the restrictions on personnel and troop numbers, established in the mid-1980s, were maintained, while budget cuts became a matter of course. This led to the gradual ageing of infrastructures, equipment and weaponry, a reduction in navy patrols and their scope of action, and a decline in military training in general, a phenomenon that has been dubbed the ‘dismantling’ of the FFAA.

Moreover, the abolishment of national service in 1995, precipitated by the murder of Private Carrasco belonging to an army regiment stationed in the city of Zapala (province of Neuquén), severed the former connection between the FFAA, on the one hand, and society and the state, on the other. The loss of legitimacy of this compulsory service, which all male citizens were obliged to provide to the state, led to its abolishment in Argentina practically at the same time as in France and even before other Western nations took this step, thus eliminating the age-old concept of mass armed forces. With the introduction of voluntary national service, access to the FFAA was swiftly opened to women.

On the other hand, in the 1990s the FFAA, as with the Argentine state as a whole, were affected by the neoliberal onslaught and the consequent dwindling of the welfare state. With regard to FFAA, personnel and troop numbers were frozen, outsourcing became more widespread, the majority of public services that were not privatised lacked funding and, at the same time, the developmentalist role of the FFAA in the extractive industry, promoted since the 1960s, was scaled down.

Likewise, during the initial years of the Menem administration to the *Leyes de Punto Final and Obediencia Debida* (Full Stop and Due Obedience Acts) passed during Alfonsín’s term in office were added the pardons granted to the military leaders condemned in 1985, also during the latter’s presidency. This situation of impunity was ultimately brought to a close when in 2003 Act 25.779, which repealed the Full Stop and Due Obedience Acts, was passed. Also known as the Anti-Impunity Act, it allowed the legal proceedings against those members of the dictatorial regime accused of committing crimes in the 1970s to run their course.

In 1998, Congress passed the *Ley de Reestructuración de las FFAA* (Armed Forces Reorganisation Act). This signified the further shrinking of the state in the military field, brought about by neoliberalism. It is important to highlight, among the provisions stipulated by this piece of legislation, those under which the proposed ‘reorganisation’ and ‘modernisation’ were achieved. One of them contained in Article 4, referred to ‘the high level of theoretical and, fundamentally, practical professional training in specific, joint and combined tactical and operational exercises’ of military personnel; while another alluded to ‘operational units of a reduced number but with efficient logistical support’. Further on, Article

8 established the criteria with which that maximum reduction of units, command corps and/or administrative areas, plus the military bureaucracy, should be achieved. With respect to military personnel, their number and training, the act was based on the principle of ‘efficiency’. Thus, Article 12 established the following:

As to personnel, priority shall be given to quality over quantity [...]. In each case, the personnel structures shall specify the number of troops by rank, ensuring a correct proportion between the staff of the command corps and that of the professional corps, reducing the latter to a minimum, while also avoiding the cost of training professionals who can be recruited from among the alumni of the general education system.

In the following two articles, ‘efficiency’ was replaced by ‘integration’ by determining the adaptation of the education systems of the FFAA to the national education system ‘in the quest for a mutual harnessing of available capabilities, eliminating overlaps and seeking a better integration of their members into the general educational cultural environment’, before finally establishing by law the equivalence between military training and civil education accredited by the Ministry of Education. Thus, one of its articles established a period of seven years as a requirement for obtaining a baccalaureate diploma, the same as that for obtaining a promotion to senior officer.

These legislative milestones, linked to both the criminal and political treatment of crimes committed by members of the FFAA and the establishment of their mission, organisation, scope, functioning and structuring with other state agencies, are, to our mind, key to the definition of the reintegration of the military institution into the democratic state.³

In the period that began in 2005, during the presidency of Nestor Kirchner (2003–2007), there was a proliferation of unusual measures aimed at the FFAA, which practically coincided with the commencement of the legal proceedings against military, police and civil offenders involved in the last military dictatorship for crimes against humanity. Two of those measures were legally significant: the drafting and approval of a presidential decree regulating the LDN and the drawing up of a military discipline code, with the subsequent revocation of the Military Justice Code, approved during the term in office of Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner (2007–2015).

The provisions of the LDN, approved in June 2006, stipulated the defensive role for regional peacekeeping, underscoring the importance of the interoperability of the armed forces at that level. The concept of ‘external aggression’ was thus restricted to that perpetrated by ‘another state’. In this way, it prevented the FFAA from taking action against the so-called new threats, associated with international terrorism and even the organised crime inherent to the post–Cold War period. Additionally, it highlighted the value of the coordination, as operational interdependence, between

the different wings of the FFAA and emphasised how urgent it was for the EMCO to elaborate a military strategic plan, which should define the human, material and doctrinal capabilities of the military instrument and its roles: ‘The forces making up the military instrument shall be devoted exclusively to enlisting, training and sustaining the resources made available to them, for the purpose of guaranteeing their efficient employment in the military planning context.’⁷⁴

Finally, the approval of the Código de Disciplina Militar (Military Discipline Code [CDM]) in 2008 and the derogation of the jurisdiction of military justice signified a substantial change in the granting of citizen rights to the military, insofar as the prosecution of the criminal offences committed by them was now the responsibility of the civil courts. It is doubtless an illustrative example of the nature of the FFAA’s democratisation during the period. The objective was to guarantee greater equality between civilians and servicemen as regards access to justice. This code was very deeply rooted in the process of civic engagement, as a way of integrating both civilians and servicemen into the legal realm of the rule of law. The new CDM abolished capital punishment and courts of honour, as well as excluding disciplinary regulations from the legal sphere.

In short, the new CDM granted military personnel citizen rights in the legal sphere and minimised the importance that the state of war had had in the previous regime, whose purpose had been to organise the ordinary professional experience of the military as if they were always on active service. So, military discipline was defined not as an end per se, but as a means at the service of the efficient fulfilment of the functions and tasks with which the constitution, the legislation and the orders of the commanders-in-chief entrusted military personnel.

The Transnational Influence on the Professionalisation of the FFAA

Since the end of the Cold War, the armed forces of the Western world have been gradually transformed as their position in relation to the nation-states to which they belong has changed. In order to understand the FFAA, it is essential to compare them with those of other Western nations. This comparison allows for perceiving the local effects of certain transnational processes that the Argentine state and its armed forces did not elude. There were several substantial changes resulting from the deflation of the values that the armed forces embodied in most of the Western world, the shrinking of the welfare state and the transformations brought about in the labour market by neoliberalism, to which, in the case of Argentina, should be added the aforementioned post-war periods.

In the Western and Eastern European nations, the post-Cold War period drove the armed forces towards a new stage in their professionalisation (Boëne 2003). The abolishment of national service was a key indicator in that process which converted all members, chiefly the rank and file—the

most numerous contingent—into volunteers. In turn, it gave rise to a completely different scenario. Once national service had been abolished, the armed forces were obliged to encourage young people to enlist and to adopt an attitude that was at least somewhat more hospitable than before, recognising their right to privacy and intimacy, which they had hitherto been denied. But when the vast majority of citizens were freed from their obligation to train and serve the state as combatants, the armed forces gradually lost the social recognition that they had enjoyed in the past.

In sum, the professionalisation of the armed forces, linked to the completely voluntary enlistment of their members, meant that the reorganisation of the labour market, the expectations of the young in the contemporary world, the social value of university degrees, the changing moral and social values and the class condition, among other aspects, now had an impact on military life. Since then, voluntary enlistment has been based on the convenience, interest and/or desire of each and every one of its members—rank and file, non-commissioned officers (NCOs) and commissioned officers (COs)—to pursue their careers or to develop their professional activity in this field.

Demilitarisation of Homeland Security as a State Policy and Peacekeeping Operations as a Horizon

The main answer to the question of what to do with the FFAA involved completely dissociating them from homeland security. This process, which got underway in the 1980s, has remained practically unchanged in the first two decades of the twenty-first century. All the attempts to cross the limits, to move from debate to action, to allow the military to intervene in the ‘war against drug trafficking’ have come to nothing. The refusal of almost the entire political spectrum to relink the FFAA to homeland or transnational security, as is the case with the trafficking of illegal drugs, owes much of its success to the memory of the state terrorism in the 1970s and the spread and consolidation of activism in defence of human rights in Argentina. As a matter of fact, the demilitarisation of homeland security has become one of the few state policies in Argentina that has been maintained, regardless of the political ideology of the incumbent government.

Having said that, the demilitarisation and democratisation of the FFAA have led to a certain amount of vagueness as to their role, far removed from their principal goal during most of the twentieth century. This was the reason why, around 1992, the participation of Argentine troops in UN peacekeeping operations was stepped up.⁵ Certain sectors of the FFAA had long resisted intervening in international military operations, since they were well aware of the fact that they were losing their capabilities and that their equipment was obsolete, while the matters in which they were called upon to intervene had little to do with the defence of national sovereignty. Finally, in the twenty-first century, peacekeeping operations began to be progressively accepted. The MINUSTAH was decisive for this acceptance.

In the MINUSTAH, Argentina deployed overseas the largest contingent in its history. Between 2004 and 2015, the FFAA dispatched a total of approximately 15,000 troops for six-month periods. The Argentine troops were placed in charge of the department of Gonaïves and the military hospital in Port-au-Prince. It was the first UN mission with a Latin American hallmark. The force commander was always Brazilian and the troops from countries in the region accounted for a large proportion of all those deployed, specifically, 70 per cent in 2004, 60 per cent in 2010 and 79 per cent in 2014. The cooperation with servicemen from Chile and Brazil—both nations, particularly the former, with which there had been the possibility of conflict in the past—in a different place during a decade, dispelled the previous feelings of mistrust and enmity.

That decade of participation in the MINUSTAH also allowed the military to gain expertise that progressively permeated the institution, to the point that some of the lieutenant colonels successively commanding the Batallón Argentino Conjunto (Argentine Joint Battalion [BCA]) became the most prominent officers, with several of them subsequently becoming commanders-in-chief of the army and the EMCO after being promoted to the rank of general.

That expertise consisted in performing duties considered as ‘civic’, which, included under the broad umbrella of humanitarian aid, brought the military into close contact with the Haitian population through social welfare, health care, the building of infrastructures and sports and cultural activities. These actions, known in the international peace-building doctrine as civic–military cooperation (CIMIC) offered them an explanation for what they conceived as an efficient performance of their duties.

The commanders of the Argentine contingent considered that an approach based on a close relationship with the local population was key to the mission’s success in a hostile and dangerous environment. The use of dissuasion and negotiation, instead of force, was crucial for preserving the operation’s legitimacy and for obtaining the recognition of the Haitian population and, above all, that of Argentine society. Providing the Haitian population with ‘humanitarian aid’ implied carrying out multiple non-military tasks, such as distributing food, providing health care services, repairing bridges, mediating and negotiating. After returning to Argentina at the end of their mission, each one of the commanders of the BCA drafted a report on the ‘lessons learnt’ and, in all cases, stressed the positive light under which the Haitian population saw the battalion. They underscored the relevance of the cooperative and trusting relationships established with the Haitians in order to ensure the effective and efficient implementation of the planned CIMIC activities. These activities were decisive for strengthening those ties. For example, as one of those reports indicated,

The close relationship between the BCA and the local population resulted in the following: (a) an improvement in the efficiency of

patrols and access to information; (b) a valuable knowledge of the areas of responsibility; (c) the efficient anticipation of conflicts and the positive implementation of counter-measures; and (d) the enhancement of the prestige of the BCA and the armed forces in general. To maintain this positive image, it is necessary to promote CIMIC and to carry out CIMIC activities with a view to forging and strengthening ties with the population. Both recreational activities and the organisation of festivals are very appropriate for promoting the cultural exchange between Haitian and Argentine music. Festivals have the ability to attract large audiences, thus making the ‘message’ efficient and immediate.

(Lecciones Aprendidas BCA)

But that accumulated experience was soon to be appropriated and employed in other operations and roles of the FFAA, once the MINUSTAH had ended, when those who had been lieutenant colonels at the beginning of the mission were now generals. By then, the operational status of the EMCO, which had overseen the mission, had also been consolidated.⁶ The strengthening of this organisational level was one of the top priorities of Nilda Garré, the minister of defence (2005–2010) most committed to the military agenda during the democratic period.

Some of the attempts to capitalise on the experience of Haiti in the *Fuerza de Paz Combinada ‘Cruz del Sur’* (‘Southern Cross’ Joint and Combined Peace Force), in which Argentina and Chile, after a long history of mutual mistrust, demonstrated the interoperability of their troops according to the principles of peacekeeping operations, did not prosper. The scenario to which it gave rise clashed with the Argentine Homeland Security Act, for it focused on the strategic interest of oil fields and mining sites and on social-labour conflicts.

At the same time, a new window of opportunity was opening for the FFAA in relation to the constant confirmation of the ‘northern border’ as a no-go area, where the most serious and dangerous crimes for Argentine sovereignty were being committed. The extreme surveillance of a diverse and long land border⁷ has become, as will be seen below, a government objective since the beginning of the new millennium.

The Northern Border and Sovereignty: the OPINOR

As of the 1990s, if not earlier, the news media and the country’s successive governments concurred in describing the border with Bolivia, Paraguay and Brazil as a place through which ‘illegal’ drugs entered and on associating it with other types of illegal trafficking. Thus, the ‘northern border’ was portrayed as an area in which the state revealed its limited ability to enforce law and order and to control the flow of people and goods, and even a place where drug trafficking, organised crime and international terrorism coincided.⁸

Since its creation in 1938, border surveillance and protection and the persecution of federal crimes in Argentina has been the task of the GNA, which throughout most of its history had formed part of the FFAA, until 1983 when it ceased to belong to them. Since then, albeit still playing a defence role in the event of war or a military regime, it has been tasked with homeland security.

With the exacerbation of the problems affecting the ‘northern border’ during the presidency of Nestor Kirchner, in 2006 the FFAA started to support the GNA, which, at the same time, began to be deployed in the urban centres of Buenos Aires and Rosario, due to the demand for greater security.⁹ The first operation, called ‘Fortín I’ (Blockhouse I), involved the deployment of air force and army radars and operators, without patrols. Four years later, in 2011, the Ministry of Defence launched the operations ‘Fortín II’ (Blockhouse II) and ‘Escudo Norte’ (North Shield), with the deployment of 4,500 troops on the northern border, who were rotated every 30 days.

Against this backdrop, the government of President Mauricio Macri (2015–2019) amplified the threat to the ‘northern border’, decreeing a ‘security emergency’, and, in 2018, amended the regulations of the LDN¹⁰ passed by the Kirchner administration, by virtue of which the FFAA are not only now expected to intervene against the ‘threat of a foreign state’ but also against any ‘foreign threat’.

The truth is that the sinking of the submarine ARA San Juan, with 44 crew members on board, in November 2017, put the question of what to do with the FFAA yet again on the agenda, but in another way, because their financial constraints seemed to be connected with the death of those young COs and NCOs. With that in mind, a sector of the Macri government was going to great lengths to push for assigning the FFAA security roles.

However, this was repealed with the creation of the OPINOR by the top brass of the EMCO themselves, who proposed and planned it. It was made up of the military authorities for whom the MINUSTAH had been their most important professional experience. In a conversation with General Duarte, one of their members, he differentiated between the MINUSTAH and the OPINOR: ‘There, it was a military operation, but here, it is only training. Here, you have a weak state, while in Haiti the state was non-existent. But it is the same idea. It served to “highlight the state” and you cannot imagine how much the people appreciated that.’ The generals in command of the EMCO managed to convince President Macri that the aim of the deployment should only be to undertake training tasks, which would be efficient, without compromising the strict demarcation between homeland security and defence established by the post-authoritarian Argentine state.

From the perspective of the generals of the EMCO, the OPINOR had to reoccupy that sphere, which, owing to its weakness, the Argentine state had allowed to be monopolised by drug trafficking. The objective was to recuperate that territory by gaining legitimacy among those living there

through ‘civic actions’, in a social environment of extreme poverty, lack of job opportunities and limited presence of state institutions. The tactical concept that they envisaged was based on ‘psychological operations’,¹¹ launched at the beginning of the MINUSTAH, or *Comunicación Social Asociada al Combate* (Social Communication Associated with Combat, COSACO). According to the doctrine, this tool allows for gaining the acceptance of the population and impedes any kind of cooperation or alliance with ‘enemy forces’. In Haiti, these were criminal gangs, while in Argentina they were organised crime groups and especially terrorists and drug traffickers.

The OPINOR deployed 500 troops in different border areas between 2018 and 2019. According to the data collected during my fieldwork (Frederic, 2019) performed at the beginning of 2019, they undertook the following tasks: repairing community buildings; constructing water outlets and extending irrigation channels; distributing educational materials at schools; carrying out maintenance work on roads and digging ditches; measuring the property of indigenous communities; repairing schools; and other actions whose aim was to help the military win the trust of the locals.

After the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent health emergency declared in March 2020, the FFAA, with the *Operación General Belgrano*, played a central role in the distribution of food, supporting the country’s health care workers and undertaking other kinds of logistical tasks. Meanwhile, the OPINOR continued to be involved in training tasks in support of the GNA only in the area of Orán in Salta, owing to the fact that the majority of the crossing points on the northern border were closed to the movement of people, while the presence of the FFAA in the neighbourhoods of Argentine cities, instead of being condemned, was appreciated by the citizenry since they were fulfilling their humanitarian role.

Conclusions

In Argentina, the democratisation and demilitarisation of the FFAA have been two sides of the same process deriving from the policymaking of the post-authoritarian state. In those more than three decades of profound changes in the country’s defence policy, the MINUSTAH became a window of opportunity for highlighting the doctrine and ability to forge more positive links between the FFAA and the citizenry in democracy. And all this despite the obsolescence of military equipment, the budget cuts and the lack of investments.

After its launching, the OPINOR leveraged the decade of experience gained in the MINUSTAH, at the service of the participation of the FFAA in the exercise of sovereignty in national territory, without them becoming involved in homeland security. That training would allow the FFAA to gain trust and legitimacy, as well as reinforcing the presence of the state on the ‘northern border’.

This scenario, certainly marked by the tragic sinking of the *ARA San Juan*, precipitated the passing of the act for creating a specific fund for increasing the budget devoted to modernising the FFAA's equipment during the presidency of Alberto Fernández (2019–present). All of which may indicate the end of an era, reinforced by the COVID-19 with the deployment, in 2020, along the entire national territory of 60,000 troops involved in the logistics and transport of humanitarian assistance.

During this era, it was possible to de-politicise the FFAA to the extent that their pretensions to establish an authoritarian government of the Argentine nation-state have been dismantled, the social demands that pushed the military towards this role have been dissolved, and the military taking on the role of policing internal security, as happened in other countries in the region, has been consistently blocked. As a result of the processes at play, analysed in this chapter, the first two decades of the twenty-first century finally brought the Argentine military to accept their role in peace missions, emergency relief and humanitarian assistance, thus ending four decades of disinvestment in military equipment.

Notes

- 1 Through a series of decrees signed between 1989 and 1990, the government of President Menem ordered that an amnesty should be granted to all the defendants in criminal proceedings.
- 2 Such a division of work between the armed forces and security forces is only also the case in Uruguay.
- 3 For a deeper analysis, see Frederic (2013).
- 4 Cited from Decree 727 approved in 2006, which regulates the Ley de Defensa Nacional (National Defense Law) of 1987.
- 5 With the concept of 'myth', Arturo Sotomayor (2013) questions the democratising character that the peacekeeping missions would have given the armed forces of Chile, the Argentine Republic and Brazil. Although he only considers overseas operations, without taking into account their combination with domestic processes. We have already shown that in Argentina it did indeed contribute to that process (Frederic 2019).
- 6 The defeat in the Malvinas War was followed by the creation of a commission (Comisión de Evaluación de Análisis y Responsabilidades del Conflicto del Atlántico Sur) whose task was to review, from a strategic and tactical perspective, the successes and failures. It was determined that, as to the latter, one of the major weaknesses had been the lack of an authentic joint operational command. The final report, named after Benjamín Rattenbach, the retired lieutenant colonel who presided the commission, can be consulted at: www.casarosada.gob.ar/pdf/InformeRattenbach/01-InformeFinal.pdf (accessed November 2021).
- 7 This border includes a stretch of 773 km with Bolivia, 1,669 km with Paraguay and 1,132 km with Brazil. These 3,574 km have very different landscapes, including the Andean area, subtropical woodland and forests, rivers of different sizes and even a dry borderland area.
- 8 This vision was never grounded in a precise diagnosis, as some specialists have already indicated (Tokatlian 2017; Souto, Delfino and Sarti 2019).

- 9 On the process of extending the scope of action of the GNA to include urban centres, as a consequence of the transformations of the state and the exercise of sovereignty, see (Frederic 2020).
- 10 An amendment that was overruled in 2019 during the presidency of Alberto Fernández.
- 11 Psychological operations, a tactical tool very frequently employed during the Cold War for counter-insurgency operations, were banned in 2006, after it was brought to light that the Almirante Zar Naval Base in Trelew was gathering information on politicians and social organisations for intelligence purposes, activities prohibited by the 2001 Ley de Inteligencia Nacional (National Intelligence Act). Since then, civic actions have been included in the doctrine under the designation of COSACO.

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6 Costa Rica—The Demilitarisation of Politics

An Exceptional Story

Luis Guillermo Solís

Introduction

On 15 September 2021, Central America commemorated the bicentennial of its independence. While not as heroic as the battles that brought political emancipation to the Andean region and the Southern Cone, this event was, nevertheless, significant in historical, political and economic terms. Since then, much has happened in the former provinces of the Kingdom of Guatemala (Woodward 1980). The most noteworthy aspect has been their incapacity—with only one exception—to create modern republics underpinned by robust civilian institutions under the rule of law, both capable of withstanding the pressures of lobbies pursuing their own vested interests and legitimised by free and fair elections. All of this has regrettably led to serious human rights violations, above all in relation to the social progress, political freedom and economic well-being of most of the population (Booth et al. 2020).

Militarism, and the process that perpetuates it, militarisation, are key components of Latin American history. Central America has not been an exception to the rule. Throughout its history, the region has been unable to free itself from its influence, posing obstacles either to the substitution of the role of the armed forces and their leaders or to the strengthening of the presence of civilian institutions in government and in their interactions with the rest of society (Koonings and Kruijt 2002).

There is one exception to this rule, however: Costa Rica. Unlike its neighbours, this small nation refrained from creating large and powerful armed forces. So much so that, even after having a well-equipped army for many decades, the country abolished it by a constitutional mandate, after the end of the country's last civil war in 1948. Since then, for Costa Rica demilitarisation has become much more than just a historical development. It represents the unilateral and voluntary adoption of a way of life and a form of political culture and of organising power that defies conventional wisdom.

This chapter explores four principal issues: (1) Why was the abolition of the armed forces possible in Costa Rica? (2) Why has it been successful? (3) What benefits has Costa Rica obtained by abolishing its armed forces?

(4) Can this policy be replicated in other countries and is it convenient or likely to happen?

A Brief History of the Armed Forces in Costa Rica Up until 1949

As was the case with the rest of the provinces of the Kingdom of Guatemala, up until its independence in 1821 Costa Rica had a colonial militia to protect itself against the attacks of foreign and domestic actors. These militias, originally formed by Spanish soldiers, were weak and ill-equipped, but, when reinforced, were sufficient to neutralise those threats or at least to impede major disruptions. The militias would eventually be locally recruited and maintained by the local administration.

With independence, this scheme was retained throughout the Central American Federal period (1821–1839) but became increasingly politicised amid the growing tensions and violent conflicts between the liberal and conservative factions in each of the five states. By 1839, when the Federation had been dissolved, these contingents became fledgling national armies that, albeit still informal and weak, would be capable of controlling public safety and national security for almost half a century.

A turning point in Costa Rican history was reached in the period between 1855 and 1860, during and after the military campaign against William Walker and his filibusters. Walker had been hired to fight on behalf of the liberals in one of Nicaragua's many civil wars. Yet, he soon realised that he could use the opportunity to annex Central America to the Confederate South in the United States. Coupled with the growing interest in building a transcontinental canal through Nicaragua, Walker's intentions enraged both the Central American republics and the tycoons already operating the so-called transit route in the country, a central part of the 'California trail' that prompted thousands to make for the West Coast after gold had been discovered there in 1848. Threatened directly by Walker's invasion of its territory, the Costa Rican government had to levy and mobilise, for the first time since independence, a significant military force, which was partially trained and armed by Great Britain, with the participation of other European advisors, in clear defiance of the Monroe Doctrine. This peasant army, however, was only mustered *in extremis*; neither was it a professional force nor would it become one, while remaining inactive after 1858.

The most concerted efforts to create modern armed forces were made after the advent of the liberal state in the last quarter of the nineteenth century (ca. 1870). Under the leadership of (civilian and military) strongmen, the Costa Rican government began to create a strong army and navy, investing in European weaponry and training. At the time, however, other Central American countries were following suit, under the same premises, bringing the region to the brink of war on several occasions, allegedly to recreate the Central American Federation.

In 1920, Costa Rica even fought a very brief war against Panama. But neither this conflict, which the former lost mostly owing to its military

weakness, nor the dictatorship that ruled the country from 1917 to 1919, buttressed the armed forces or placed the issue of militarisation on the political agenda of a country whose economy, at the time solely dependent on coffee exports, had been ravaged by the impact of the First World War on the European and U.S. markets (Muñoz 1990). By 1948, the year in which the last civil war was fought in Costa Rica, the national army continued to be very weak, poorly trained and ill-equipped by regional standards. The war was short and bloody, with the rebels using non-military weapons and others supplied by Guatemala. The national army was so deficient that it had to be reinforced by voluntary militias raised by its allies in the banana plantations (mostly communist cadres levied to defend the social guarantees that the rebels were said to oppose).

Once the internal conflict had ended, the victorious army (also mostly formed by non-military, voluntarily enlisted individuals) that marched into the capital city of San Jose, with a martial bearing and suitably uniformed and armed with light infantry weapons, still lacked the structure of a professional military institution. It was disbanded shortly afterwards by a *de facto* junta that ruled the country for 18 months. Jose Figueres, the president of the junta and the victorious general of the civil war, announced the abolition of the armed forces on 1 December 1948, after surviving an attempted coup perpetrated by reactionary elements of the rebel army but before two invasions launched with the support of the Nicaraguan dictator Anastasio Somoza (1949–1955). In both instances, the United States supported Costa Rica, providing it with a limited amount of military equipment under the aegis of the Rio Pact (1947), which was applied for the first time on this occasion.

The Constitutional Assembly of 1949 subsequently included the abolition of the armed forces as a constitutional mandate (Art. 12), the terms of which left no room for doubt:

Article 12. The armed forces are forbidden as a permanent institution. Police forces shall exist for the observance and maintenance of public order. The armed forces shall only be created by an international agreement or continental treaty and shall all be subject to civilian control. Neither should they be a deliberative body nor issue individual or collective statements.

This extraordinary development was possible for several reasons, some of which have already been mentioned, such as the first one: the historical weakness of the military institution since the colonial period, resulting from the country's relative poverty and the absence of any strategic assets to protect. Whatever defence needs Costa Rica may have had during most of its history were covered mostly by civilian militiamen. The existence of a 'professional' caste of servicemen was an oddity and short-lived, even during the years when generals (elected or not) ruled the country, particularly at the end of the nineteenth century.

The second reason was enlightened, visionary and courageous political leadership. While several Costa Ricans proposed the abolition of the armed forces during the twentieth century, most notably Fernando Lara and Alberto Martén, it was 'Don Pepe', as José Figueres was popularly known, who was the real driving force behind, and a determining factor in, their abolition. Indeed, the vision and strong leadership (he is the only Costa Rican president to have completed three consecutive terms in office) that were required to convince his own comrades of the excellence of his idea, and to subsequently push it through the Constitutional Assembly, cannot be emphasised enough.

The third reason was the existence of alternative civilian-led institutions with the ability to meet citizen demands at home (strong, credible and effective institutions, an aspect that will be addressed further on) and abroad (particularly the Organization of American States' Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance of 1947). The decision to abolish the armed forces would not have occurred in an institutional vacuum. Had it not been for the existence of solid domestic and regional legal frameworks, it would have been easy for the militaristic sectors of the victorious revolutionary forces and the country's rightist elites to undermine the constitutional reform or even to abolish the Constitutional Assembly altogether. The country's reliance on the emerging post-war international order was a critical factor for consolidating the reform. The Costa Rican argument was clever though. So as not to give the impression that disbanding the armed forces was a leftist scam, Figueres and his comrades took a fiery anti-communist stance before, during and after the civil war. This allowed them to engage the United States in support of their policies, thus neutralising the conservative opposition forces.

The fourth reason had to do with the gradual development of a civic, anti-militaristic culture. This characteristic is eloquently summarised by the famous remark made by the Japanese philanthropist Kenichi Sasakawa, reproduced on one of the plaques at the United Nations' University for Peace's 'Monument to Peace' in Costa Rica: 'Blessed is the Costa Rican mother who knows that her son at birth will never be a soldier.' This differentiating factor of the Costa Rican 'model' required several conditions: citizen support, the implementation of an adequate educational strategy (i.e. 'indoctrination' in the public education system as a whole), systemic success and time to mature into a 'national hallmark' – an authentic 'national icon' of which Costa Ricans could feel proud, confident and different from other nations.

The fifth was the resistance of the political authorities to suggestions and pressure to militarise during the Cold War, mostly made or exerted by U.S. agents supported by very powerful, local economic and political minorities. Demilitarisation was experimented with several times during the Cold War. The last attempt was made during the decade-long Central American crisis, when domestic wars in several of the countries in the isthmus facilitated the confrontation between the United States and its

allies, on the one hand, and the Soviet Union, Cuba and other Eastern Bloc countries, on the other. At the time, the Costa Rican opponents of demilitarisation were seconded by U.S. ambassador to the United Nations Jeanne Kirkpatrick (one of the ‘hawks’ in the Reagan administration), who suggested that Costa Rica needed an army to protect itself against communism. While her suggestion was rejected outright by the country’s citizenry and leadership, the fact that she had made it proved that the victory against militarism was not necessarily a foregone conclusion (Muñoz 2014).

Militarism Versus Institutionalisation

The success of the demilitarisation process in Costa Rica has gone hand in glove, and has depended on, the gradual institutionalisation of public affairs. In particular, without the creation and development of four sets of institutions—for the administration of justice (including the police), political and financial control, electoral management and social progress—it could not have been achieved. While the armed forces are generally not meant to meddle in home affairs, they usually interfere in national politics when the political system is incapable of maintaining the credibility of its fundamental institutions (most notably those of the judiciary or those relating to the electoral system). When this happens, the executive branch is powerless to withstand the growing social pressure and unrest or the inordinate demands of the so-called *de facto* powers. This transforms the military into agents of social discontent who, sooner rather than later, will take the plunge, becoming the perfect instrument for deposing the government (Rojas Aravena 2018).

Therefore, the only way to keep the forces of discontent from overstepping the boundaries of civilian politics is to construct a credible institutional framework capable of meeting their demands effectively. This is what Costa Rican leaders did during the two decades following the civil war. They gradually modernised the state apparatus, starting with strengthening the control capability of specialised bodies like the General Comptroller’s Office, under the authority of the Legislative Assembly (Congress) and the Supreme Electoral Tribunal, which is an autonomous organ of the judiciary against whose rulings there is no right to appeal. These efforts were later reinforced by the development of an exceedingly robust welfare state including social security (which was continued from the pre-war period) and national banking systems (to provide credit to the productive sectors), a nationalised and monopolistic national insurance company, the developmentalist Costa Rican Institute for Electricity, the Water and Sewerage Board and, most importantly, a strong Ministry of Transport and Public Works tasked with improving national and international connectivity, always a source of temptation for the military corps of engineers.

Administration of Justice

It would be impossible to imagine a country without armed forces if it had a seriously deficient legal system, a lack of credibility and legitimacy and were incapable of guaranteeing the rule of law or, at best, had difficulties in this regard owing to extra-judicial factors resulting in the judiciary's over politicisation. In particular, policing tasks are of capital importance, especially in light of the provisions of Article 12 of the constitution, pertaining to 'the necessary police forces for the observance and maintenance of public order'. Costa Rica thus created a 'triple defence ecosystem' formed by the police forces, the judiciary and international multilateral institutions, chiefly the International Court of Justice, the Organization of American States and the United Nations. In becoming a 'shield' protecting the country's domestic and international defence concerns and needs, this ecosystem ensured that any military attempt to change the status quo would be protected not only by one, but by several layers of civilian-dominated, domestic and international bodies.

Political and Financial Control

The 1949 Constitution and the successive reforms allowed for establishing new checks and balances for political and financial control. These included increasing the powers of the legislative branch of government, the creation of the General Comptroller's Office and its decentralisation and, subsequently, the Office of the Ombudsman and several superintendencies.

Electoral Management

The creation of the Supreme Electoral Tribunal, as a virtual 'fourth power' of the republic, was essential. The highest and one and only tribunal on electoral matters (with no right to appeal against its rulings), it is fully independent and handles everything pertaining to elections including the National Registry of Citizens. During three months before and after the presidential elections, the Supreme Tribunal is also in charge of all of the country's police forces.

Social Progress

The cornerstone of social harmony in Costa Rica is undoubtedly its welfare system, built around the national insurance system, incorporated into the 1942 Constitution, with the public health system at the apex. Without social justice and the vast social network that the country has developed since the 1940s, internal stability would not have been maintained. The lack of major social protests, even when at times the country has witnessed serious street clashes and even political extremism (in the early 1980s),

has been the ultimate reason for dispensing with the military institution. Indeed, the vast resources that would be required to maintain an army are mostly invested in these social programmes. They are also used in education, which has been one of Costa Rica's most important achievements and the channel through which the 'demilitarisation gospel' has been preached over the decades.

Benefits

For the Costa Ricans, the abolition of the armed forces as a permanent institution has been very beneficial. This opinion clearly is not unanimously shared in other countries where history and tradition have associated the armed forces with the essence of the national spirit. Furthermore, in many cases, the armed forces and the state blend to the point of becoming indistinguishable. The role played by the military in the wars of independence in Latin America, for example, and the heroic status that military leaders attained in the region's fledgling republics help to understand the political pre-eminence that they have acquired through the ages, even in countries where the armed forces (and their top brass) have been responsible for some of the most horrendous and heinous acts of state-sponsored terrorism.

Yet, in Costa Rica, the benefits of demilitarisation can be clearly observed in a variety of areas, all of which have contributed to make it a more stable, functional and even relatively prosperous country. The most important benefits include the following.

Financial

The country employs the resources, which would have otherwise been devoted to the maintenance of the armed forces, for human development purposes. According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (2021), for instance, Latin American and Caribbean countries devote—on the average—around 1.3 per cent of their gross domestic product (GDP) to military expenditure. As to public spending on education, in contrast, Costa Rica with 7 per cent of its GDP almost doubles the regional average of 4.5 per cent, while also surpassing many of the most developed countries in the world, including China, the United States and a considerable number of the OECD Member States (UNESCO, Institute for Statistics 2021). The same can be said of the provision of public and universal health services, drinking water outreach, the generation and supply of renewable electricity and expenditure on environmental protection – very recently, Costa Rica was awarded the prestigious Earthshot Prize 2021 for its reforestation efforts since 1997.

Political

The absence of an army has given Costa Rica added political stability, insofar as it has meant that decision-making has remained exclusively in the hands

of civilians and has prevented the appearance of hostile actors willing to use the army to circumvent legitimate democratic processes. The political stability of Costa Rican democracy, the oldest in Latin America, owes its longevity to the absence of armed forces and the institutionalisation process that their abolition triggered. Preventing radical social protests through the development of a pluralistic political culture, in which public policy is implemented by efficient institutions, has become the most effective tool for meeting social demands, while giving legitimacy to non-violent practices. It has also fostered a climate of civility in which the use of force is considered as the last resort.

Judicial

The lack of a military jurisdiction ensures the equality of all citizens before the law. Besides strengthening the rule of law, this special condition contributes to the transparent administration of justice. This is no trivial matter in Latin America and the Caribbean, where the armed forces have been responsible for heinous acts and human rights violations. Clearly, the Costa Rican judiciary has not been free from fierce criticism of its shrinking autonomy as lawfare takes hold, while the high courts have become increasingly more politicised. Yet, this phenomenon, which has become widespread in many countries in the world, could even be exacerbated by the predominance of a military jurisdiction and its special legal provisions.

Geopolitical

The absence of armed forces has allowed Costa Rica to develop the so-called doctrine of active, disarmed and perpetual neutrality in the face of foreign armed conflicts. Proclaimed in 1983 by the government of President Luis Alberto Monge, Costa Rican neutrality was leveraged to resist U.S. pressures to become militarily embroiled in the Nicaraguan conflict—and all this without abandoning the country's adherence to liberal democracy and, during the Cold War, its unequivocal ideological stance against the Soviet Bloc. A second direct benefit of demilitarisation in the geopolitical arena was that it gave Costa Rica legitimacy to resort to the instruments of international law to guarantee its rights and security needs. It allowed the country to 'take the moral high ground' in tribunals such as the Inter-American Court of Justice and the International Court of Justice at The Hague. It also provided the country with a solid case for requesting the application of the Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance (TIAR 1947) for the first time, after being invaded by Nicaraguan and Costa Rican anti-Figueroes troops attempting to reverse the results of the 1949 civil war. In all these instances, the stance of Costa Rica was successfully upheld.

Civic

Costa Rica defends the primacy of peace, pluralism, the rule of law, democracy and democratic values, plus the respect for all human rights,

as the principal tenets of international law. The absence of armed forces has paved the way for a full array of principles of civility and democratic rule. It recalls the proposals of Immanuel Kant (2003 [1795], 3, original emphasis), one of whose Preliminary Articles states, ‘3. *Standing armies (miles perpetuus) will be gradually abolished*’. Interestingly, abolishing the armed forces, in this sense, has become the foundation on which the Costa Rican republican order rests and is maintained. The vision of a nation’s political system stemming from disarmament is completely alien to the prevailing approaches, which, in fact, suggest quite the contrary. Indeed, those approaches insist on making the armed forces the cornerstone of the political order. The Costa Rican example is, therefore, relevant precisely because it proves that another development model is indeed possible, building up a Leviathan whose legitimacy and power to organise society lies not in its claws but in its brain.

Symbolic

Some countries are proud of their armed forces and what they represent, but for the vast majority of Costa Ricans not having them is a source of enormous national pride and satisfaction. It has become a rather unique ‘national hallmark’ from which the country has benefitted. Demilitarisation has thus become one of the central elements of a holistic concept, which is incorporated into the country’s self-description as ‘*pura vida*’ (pure life), an expression that implies a feeling of well-being and utter contentment. In fact, not having armed forces has become a symbol as powerful as the national flag or anthem. As before, this feeling is not shared by most countries, for which their armed forces embody the quintessence of national spirit.

Can Demilitarisation Be Replicated?

Several contemporary attempts have been made to ‘replicate’ the Costa Rican ‘model’, mostly in small nations that have experienced traumatic political upheavals. Haiti and Panama figure among the most recent examples in the Caribbean Basin. Even considering the particularities of both countries and their formal abolitionist discourse, their attempts in this respect have been mostly unsuccessful in practice. In both cases, there has been resistance from the political elites who have expressed all sorts of misgivings about the idea of effective demilitarisation.

External threats and internal weaknesses are usually invoked to prevent effective constitutional compliance. The armed forces are ‘technically’ non-existent, but the security forces that have been created to substitute them are, in practice, a new military institution that behaves as such. It has become a ‘hybrid’ model, which can be implemented, when needed, by the executive branch of a government with enough power and resources to eradicate any threat to the state.

It would be wonderful to be able to answer this question in the affirmative. The benefits are obvious and the ‘downside’ of the alternative is highly questionable in most cases. Yet, it warrants noting that there are many—sometimes insurmountable—challenges facing the idea of abolishing the armed forces. These challenges are posed by security, historical, economic and geopolitical issues, among many others. They also represent the perspective of people whose daily lives have been deeply influenced by the long-standing presence of the military institution.

As already observed, even after having experienced moments of harsh military repression and state-sponsored terrorism, countries like, for example, Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Guatemala and Mexico would never consider this option. Their armed forces are too deeply ingrained in the idea of the nation-state, after having played a particularly important role in creating or safeguarding it in specific situations. The military also form part of the power clique and, as such, benefit from the political influence and business liaisons that military sales and procurement contracts entail.

Nor would other countries that perceive internal or external threats, a state of affairs that could be used to justify dictatorships, rogue states or even fully democratic nations. As to fully democratic nations, they might be convinced of their ability to keep their armed forces under civilian control with adequate legislation. This is the case of the United States, the European Union, Japan and the Scandinavian countries, which consider that the military can be subject to civilian control and should only be employed to defend and protect national interests in the event of the aggression of an external enemy. Typically, these countries would not resort to the armed forces to neutralise domestic disaffection or conflicts (usually handled by the police force or semi-military units, such as the National Guard in the United States), which is not the case in Latin America or the Caribbean. There, the armed forces are commonly called on to protect the state from domestic and foreign ‘enemies’, which has been an open invitation (many times constitutionally extended) to intervene in domestic politics, under civilian leadership or, more often than not, without it.

Finally, one huge obstacle to demilitarisation is the ‘market of war and fear’, which is still highly profitable. According to the most recent figures (Stockholm International Peace Research Institute 2021), in 2020 global military expenditure reached \$1,981 billion, a 2.6 per cent increase in real terms since 2019. The five countries with the highest military expenditure in 2020, accounting for 62 per cent of the total, were the United States, China, India, Russia and the United Kingdom in that order.

Demilitarisation, if it were to become widespread, would affect the interests of what U.S. president Dwight Eisenhower called the ‘military–industrial complex’. But, in reality, its impact would be minimal and would not hamper the development of many strategic assets, including weapons of mass destruction. But the ‘bad example’ that demilitarisation sets is a luxury that many countries cannot and will never be able to afford.

In Conclusion

Demilitarisation has been positive for Costa Rica. It has benefitted the country for over 70 years and will continue to do so in the future. Undoubtedly controversial for many countries, though, it cannot be touted as a universally valid model, above all because it was developed under specific and probably unrepeatable geopolitical and national conditions. Yet, just as Kant proposed in the eighteenth century, demilitarisation is still a possibility worth considering even in countries affected by prolonged conflicts in which vulnerability—more than the military balance between the warring parties—could foster otherwise elusive agreements. Whether this is viable remains to be seen.

Demilitarisation has also been a decisive factor in Costa Rica's democratic development and stability. It has given civilian leadership the monopoly over state administration and, coupled with progressive public policies, has created, strengthened and made the middle classes an enduring political actor, preventing the rise of radical alternatives. Hence the paradox of Costa Rican demilitarisation: contrary to what other nations may consider, in this small Central American republic it is regarded as the ultimate and most effective instrument for guaranteeing national security.

With time, demilitarisation has become a cultural factor deeply rooted in the Costa Rican political and socio-economic systems. It is no longer a 'tactical' issue, but a strategic asset, a pillar on which its prosperity rests. Not having an army has allowed the country to invest in social progress, rather than in human annihilation. At the same time, it has incorporated international law into its own national defence ecosystem, providing investors and local businesses, alike, with added security, while always being wary of systemic disruptions and unexpected internal strife. Hence, demilitarisation is much more than a simple footnote in Costa Rican history. It is a perspective that has led the country down an avenue seldom explored by other nations.

Demilitarisation is also a symbolic asset of secular unity: Costa Rica's hallmark, a feature of national identity after the flag, the national anthem and the cult of Our Lady of the Angels, Costa Rica's Roman Catholic patron saint. In Costa Rica, demilitarisation has thus played the same role as national armed forces have in many—if not all—other Latin American republics. The age-old and controversial phrase that 'Costa Rica is a country with more teachers than soldiers', nevertheless, captures the spirit of such boundless pride.

The increase in transnational organised crime in the Caribbean Basin in the last two decades has not spared Costa Rica. In the country there has been a notable escalation of drug-related violent crime, possibly accounting for as much as 60 per cent of all homicides, which have reached double figures in the past 10 years, an unusual and troubling state of affairs. The

changing dynamics of drug trafficking in the region, which is no longer only a transit route, but also a market for petty but extremely violent local gangs that terrorise many neighbourhoods, has also become a major source of concern (Morales Gamboa 2015). In view of the foregoing, some have begun to suggest the need for strengthening the Costa Rican police force, even at the risk of ‘militarising’ it.

This idea should be rejected. Clearly, the Costa Rican police force could benefit from significant reforms, allowing it to become more specialised, better trained, equipped and paid and adequately vetted, as well as from access to relevant intelligence and, most importantly, more effective coordination with the judicial (investigative) police. This does not imply, by any means, its ‘militarisation’. The improvement of the structural, legal, financial, logistical and operational capabilities of police institutions, which in Costa Rica have been traditionally fragmented (under different institutional jurisdictions, presumably to avoid a centralised command that could eventually evolve into a military structure) can be achieved within a completely civilian framework. Furthermore, updating and modernising the public force (as the main police force is called in Costa Rica) would not require any constitutional amendments, either. Although it is true that the process would entail reaching agreements with different institutional and political stakeholders, not an easy task in a political universe as polarised and fragmented as that of Costa Rica today. Yet, it can be achieved without having to jettison one of the most valuable aspects of the 1949 Constitution.

In sum, Costa Rica provides an experience that, unique in its kind, should be analysed and pondered on in a rapidly changing world. A world in which uncertainty is the only certainty, and in which oddities become trends in the blink of an eye.

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Part 2

Regional Powers under Siege



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7 Brazil—The Military and Politics at the End of the ‘New Republic’

Celso Castro

Prologue

In Rio de Janeiro, on the sunny Sunday morning of 23 May 2021, the president of Brazil, Jair Bolsonaro, participated in a political protest: a massive motorcycle cavalcade convened by his supporters. Departing from the Barra da Tijuca neighbourhood, before passing by the beaches on the southern side of the city, Bolsonaro stood before the ‘Monumento dos Pracinhas’, erected in honour of the Brazilian soldiers who had died in the Second World War, located in the Aterro do Flamengo, in the city centre. Perched on top of a sturdy vehicle, at the most dire moment since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, he delivered a short speech, without wearing a facemask. Bolsonaro praised conservative values—‘We have to thank our Right, those who defend the family, the nation and have God in their hearts’—and attacked the governors and mayors who had imposed social distancing measures, including lockdowns and quarantines, to combat the pandemic. As he had done on other occasions, the president called the Brazilian Army ‘my Army’, before claiming that the military ‘will never take to the streets to keep you indoors’.

Next to Bolsonaro on top of the sturdy vehicle, and also without a facemask, was active-duty General Eduardo Pazuello, the former minister of health (from May 2020 to March 2021). Pazuello had been questioned for two consecutive days by the parliamentary committee of enquiry created by the Federal Senate to determine the extent to which the government had failed to combat the pandemic. Photos of Pazuello alongside Bolsonaro on the top of the sturdy vehicle made the headlines because in Brazil both the Military Statutes and the Army Disciplinary Code categorically prohibit active-duty servicemen from taking part in political events or rallies without prior authorisation from their superiors.

In the days that followed, observers expected the commander-in-chief of the army to take punitive action against Pazuello for violating the rules governing active-duty personnel. Several journalists reported that members of the army top brass, who had asked to remain anonymous, had criticised Pazuello in no uncertain terms, while stressing that it was essential that he be punished in order to avoid jeopardising the principles of hierarchy and

discipline underpinning the armed forces. Similarly, a number of retired generals expressed their criticism in public. General Santos Cruz, for example, a former minister of the Secretariat of Government at the beginning of Bolsonaro's term in office, tweeted that the fact that the president and Pazuello had 'immersed the army in politics is irresponsible and dangerous. They disrespect the institution. This is a bad example that shouldn't be followed. It's terrible for Brazil'. For his part, Vice President General Hamilton Mourão acknowledged in an interview that Pazuello had made a mistake. On 19 May, four days before Bolsonaro's speech, the chief minister of the presidency's Institutional Security Cabinet (GSI), the retired general Augusto Heleno, had declared, however, that, unlike those on active duty, there was nothing preventing retired military personnel from participating in political protests: 'Servicemen [on active duty] cannot participate in political protests and, if they do, should be duly punished.'

Be that as it may, neither the military high command, nor the Ministry of Defence issued any statement during the 10 long days following the protest. Bolsonaro, the newspapers reported, refused to comment on Pazuello's conduct and would veto any official statements. It was speculated that some conciliatory solution was being sought, such as Pazuello's request to join the reserve, plus a mild punishment such as a simple verbal warning. Following the prescribed procedure, the commander-in-chief of the army, General Paulo Sérgio, requested the general to submit a written report in his defence. Although its precise content was not publicly disclosed, according to the press, he had claimed that he had not participated in any political event, as President Bolsonaro was not affiliated to any political party at that moment, and that he had only been invited to participate in a 'motorcycle cavalcade'.

His excuse, albeit absurd, was publicly endorsed by Bolsonaro. Moreover, Pazuello's appointment—still as a general on active duty—as the secretary for strategic studies of the *Secretário de Estudos Estratégicos da Secretaria Especial de Assuntos Estratégicos* (Special Secretariat for Strategic Affairs [SAE]), a body directly linked to the Presidency of the Republic, was published in the *Official State Gazette* on 1 June. With this gesture, Bolsonaro clearly demonstrated his unwavering support for Pazuello, while reinforcing the fear that an eventual punishment might be vetoed by him, thus undermining the commander-in-chief's authority. The following day, on 2 June, the commander-in-chief of the army discussed the matter at a meeting of the military top brass. Then, on 3 June, a national holiday, he finally made his decision public, 11 days after the episode. In a short statement, the army's Social Communication Centre declared that the commander-in-chief had

[...] analysed and accepted the arguments presented in writing and defended in person by the aforementioned general. It was thus decided that there had been no breach of discipline on the part of General PAZUELLO. Accordingly, the administrative proceedings that had been instituted were dismissed.

In other words, the commander-in-chief had finally submitted to the will of the president, thus holding in contempt the principles of hierarchy and discipline that should prevail in a state institution such as the armed forces.

To understand the historical relevance of this decision, it needs to be placed in broader context. A little more than three years before, on the night of 3 April 2018, on the eve of the decision on the writ of habeas corpus filed by the former president Lula with the Supremo Tribunal Federal (Federal Supreme Court [STF]), the then commander-in-chief of the army, General Eduardo Villas Bôas, posted two tweets. In the first, he stated, ‘In Brazil’s current situation, the institutions and the citizenry might well wonder who’s really thinking about the good of the country and the future generations and who’s only concerned with their own personal interests.’ In the second, he declared, ‘I assure the nation that the Brazilian army believes it shares the desire of the citizenry as a whole to repudiate impunity and respect the constitution, social peace and democracy, as well as fulfilling its institutional obligations.’ In the following day’s session, which concluded as dawn broke on 5 April, the STF rejected the writ of habeas corpus by six votes to five. On 7 April, Lula was arrested after turning himself in to the federal police.

General Villas Bôas’ Tweets

Between August and September 2019, I conducted a long life history interview with General Villas Bôas, who had commanded the army from February 2015 to January 2019. The interview led to the publication of the book *Conversa com o comandante (A Conversation with the Commander-in-Chief)* (Castro 2021), which had a huge impact in the media. This was mainly due to the fact that the general revealed that he had previously discussed the content of the two tweets with high-ranking colleagues. Taken as a threat to one of the branches of government—although, in the words of Villas Bôas, it was merely a wakeup call—they represented the military institution’s (rather than an individual serviceman’s) first explicit political intervention in several decades, thus marking the beginning of a new phase of political influence for the military in Brazil. The likes of it had not been seen since the transition from the long military dictatorship (1964–1985) to a civilian government, which had given rise to the so-called ‘New Republic’.¹

In the 10 years leading up to Villas Bôas’ tweets, officers on active service had occasionally expressed their political views. None of these episodes, however, could be compared to the historical importance of the commander-in-chief of the army’s tweets in 2018, crossing the red line between the military institution and politics, which had been respected since the restoration of democracy. In 33 years, no serviceman had issued such an explicit political statement, which is indeed a record in the history of republican Brazil, marked by many military coups, insubordinations,

manifestos and interventions of a political nature. What led to this change? To answer, even tentatively, this question, it is necessary to go back in time.

Since the beginning of the government of Dilma Rousseff in January 2011, and with greater intensity since the mass public protests (*jornadas*) in 2013, the country's far-right groups had been loudly demanding the return of the military to the political arena, claiming that the armed forces should play the role of a 'moderating power'. In 2014, with the launching of *Operação Lava Jato* (Operation Car Wash), investigating crimes of corruption, political polarisation intensified in Brazil. Rousseff's second term in office, which began in January 2015 and ended with her impeachment in May 2016, would reveal more clearly the military's dissatisfaction, greatly exacerbated by the creation of the National Truth Commission in May 2012. In the words of Villas Bôas, 'The commission took us by surprise, fostering the feeling that the Government had betrayed us. *It was a stab in the back*, even considering that it was the result of President Dilma's former commitments' (Castro 2021, 179, emphasis added).

According to Villas Bôas, the work of the commission led to 'inverse revanchism' on the part of the military. During the New Republic, 'revanchism' was the term usually used by the military to refer to the thirst for revenge of left-wing individuals, strategically positioned in the leftist parties, the media or the academic world, against the members of the armed forces for their actions during the military dictatorship. These leftist activists, so the argument goes, had been defeated in the 'struggle against subversion' but had won the 'memory war' after the restoration of democracy. The vanquished thus became the victors in the dispute over historical memory (Castro and D'Araujo 2001).

The most striking example of this 'inverse revanchism'—namely, the military's reaction to the 'revanchism of the Left'—would be *ORVIL*, *LIVRO* (book) spelt backwards in Portuguese. It was designed as a response of servicemen linked to the repressive apparatus of the military dictatorship to publications such as *Brasil: Nunca Mais* (*Brazil: Never Again*). Published in 1985, this book decried, in light of an analysis of the legal proceedings brought against political prisoners, the institutional practice of torture and other serious human rights violations occurring during the military dictatorship. *ORVIL*, which was secretly drafted during the José Sarney government, with the tacit authorisation of the minister of the army, General Leônidas Pires Gonçalves, attempted to dismantle the version of events disseminated by the Left, which for the military was false or 'distorted'. When the book was ready, however, the minister refused to authorise its publication. The true nature of *ORVIL* was only publicly revealed in 2009, while the book finally saw the light of day in 2012, albeit not as an 'official' military publication. Even so, it had circulated informally among extreme right-wing groups, including many retired servicemen who had pursued their careers during the military dictatorship.

The fervent desire of these groups to reveal the 'true story' was expressed yet again with the launching of the TERNUMA group (acronym in Portuguese for Terrorism Never Again) in 1998, whose intention was to counter the Tortura Nunca Mais (Torture Never Again) Group, founded by victims of the political repression in 1985. This initiative was followed by books such as *A Grande Mentira (The Great Lie)*, by General Agnaldo Del Nero, a veteran of the repressive apparatus, published by the Editora Biblioteca do Exército, Bibliex (Army Publishing House) in 2001, and *A Verdade Sufocada: a história que a esquerda não quer que o Brasil conheça (The Stifled Truth: The History that the Left Does Not Want Brazil to Know)* (2007), by Colonel Carlos Alberto Brilhante Ustra, an acknowledged torturer who had commanded the II Army's infamous Departamento de Operações de Informações-Centro de Operações de Defesa Interna (Centre of Information Operations-Centre for Internal Defence Operations [DOI-CODI]) in São Paulo between September 1970 and January 1974, and who had died in 2015. It warrants noting that, in 2016, the then federal deputy Bolsonaro, when voting in favour of the impeachment of President Rousseff, declared in the plenary of the Chamber of Deputies, which was broadcast live, that he did so 'in memory of Colonel Carlos Alberto Brilhante Ustra, the bogeyman of Dilma Rousseff'. Three years later, Bolsonaro, who had become president in 2019, would define Ustra as a 'national hero'.

These examples illustrate the survival, over many decades, of a 'covert' anti-communist collective memory, largely maintained by retired officers linked to the repressive apparatus of the military dictatorship. According to the analysis performed by the sociologist Michel Pollak (1989, 5), it is an example of the preservation of 'clandestine' memories, marked by 'resentments accumulated over time and a memory of domination and suffering that could never be publicly expressed'. As such, they were transmitted through more or less informal channels. When they occasionally burst onto the public scene, at times like the annual commemoration of the 1964 coup (or 'the Revolution', as the military call it), they were lambasted by the media, politicians, intellectuals and other sectors of organised civil society. This memory was often discredited as a 'remnant' of the past, a character trait of a generation that had been 'defeated' in the battle over the historical memory of the period, now powerless and on the path to extinction, insofar as its proponents were now in their dotage. Regardless of whether this interpretation is correct or not, it can be observed how this memory, which has re-emerged in earnest in recent years, coinciding with Bolsonaro's rise to power, publicly professes to be the 'correct' version.

Anti-communist feeling in the armed forces, which predates the event known as the 'Communist Uprising' of 1935, remained strong even following the establishment of the New Republic. It seems to have lost intensity with the training of new generations of officers under civilian governments (Castro 2002). That anti-communist feeling, however, did not

disappear and was still strong among the generation of officers who were involved in Bolsonaro's presidential campaign, a large number of whom are currently participating in his government. In the interview with Villas Bôas, he admitted that although anti-communism had been instilled in him at home by his father, also an army officer, he had also come into contact with it when attending the Academia Militar das Agulhas Negras (Agulhas Negras Military Academy [AMAN]), between 1970 and 1973:

[...] some instructors who had participated in the armed struggle shared their experiences with us, arousing our curiosity. The infantry course included tactics for combating urban and rural guerrillas. We hoped to have the opportunity to participate in missions of that type in the future. But it was not to be, because, by the time we had received our commissions, the guerrillas had all but disappeared.

(Castro 2021, 51)

But it would be a mistake to put the military's aversion towards the National Truth Commission, whose work was concluded and made public in December 2014, only down to the older, traditional anti-communism deeply rooted in those generations now in the reserve forces, but who still influence servicemen on active duty. This 'old' anti-communism was exacerbated by a more recent scathing criticism against political correctness. This expression—which, it should be noted, appeared seven times in the interview with Villas Bôas—refers to the criticism of different types of policies—on identity, gender, the environment, indigenous people, human rights and so forth—and is prominent in the conservative discourse of the Right, in general, and that of Bolsonaro, in particular. For Villas Bôas, 'Bolsonaro put the accent on the fight against political correctness, of which the population was tired. Rede Globo [Brazil's leading media company], the realm of political correctness, was the most important electoral propagandist for the president elect' (Castro 2021, 215).

In this revamped version of military anti-communism, the 'red peril', the 'internal enemy' and the 'revolutionary war' doctrine have been joined by criticism of 'political correctness', a dimension of the 'cultural war' resulting from the Marxist thought of Antonio Gramsci. An example of this *aggiornamento* can be found in General Sergio Augusto de Avellar Coutinho's (1932–2011) *A Revolução Gramscista no Ocidente: a concepção revolucionária de Antonio Gramsci em Os Cadernos do Cárcere* (*The Gramscist Revolution in the West: Antonio Gramsci's Revolutionary Conception in Quaderni del Carcere*) (2002) (Costa Pinto 2021). The big change would be in the strategy for seizing power. Instead of directly attacking the state, as Lenin had intended, it was now a question of dominating society through cultural penetration, in a struggle for hegemony that would make the subordinate and bourgeois classes accept (willingly or not) the transition to socialism as something natural, evolutionary and

democratic. ‘Political correctness’ would be a fundamental weapon in this cultural war. In the words of the author,

1) The concept of free opinion (intellectual independence) is being replaced by that of ‘*political correctness*’. The legitimate and frank individual opinion is being ‘socialised’ by substituting it with the politically correct (‘ethical’) ‘collective opinion’. This result is mainly achieved by ‘ideological patrolling’ (intellectual control, stigmatisation and censorship) and by ‘orchestration’ (repetition)

(Avellar Coutinho 2002, 68)

The ‘Military Family’

The reaction provoked by the work of the National Truth Commission, therefore, is the result of the confluence between a traditional military anti-communism, the ‘covert’ memory casting the role of the military in the political repression in a favourable light and the emergence of a vision of ‘cultural Marxism’ or the ‘Gramscian revolution’ (Chirio 2021). These elements have survived the restoration of democracy, the more permissive customs, the progressive advances in human rights legislation and the greater respect for cultural diversity in Brazil, albeit in an imperfect and not always linear fashion, during the New Republic.

What was behind this conservative regression? Specifically, the reason perhaps lies, in part, in the sociological makeup of the most recent generation of army generals, many of whom were involved in the election campaign and are currently participating in the Bolsonaro government.

Bolsonaro attended the AMAN between 1974 and 1977. Reaching the rank of captain, his short military career ended abruptly in 1988, when he decided to retire after having been tried and convicted by a court martial.² He then ran in the local elections of Rio de Janeiro. Once elected, he took office as councillor in 1989 and, at the end of 1990, was elected as a federal deputy, successfully managing to be re-elected until the end of 2018, when he won the presidential elections. Despite the fact that he has much more political than military experience—in this sense, he is much more a politician than a military man—he has repeatedly made a point of underscoring his close ties with the institution—‘my Army’, in his words, as he reaffirmed in the protest, alongside General Pazuello, with which this chapter has begun.

Several cadets who graduated from the AMAN at about the same time as Bolsonaro have been members of the army top brass and have occupied important positions in the governments of Dilma Rousseff and Michel Temer, or are currently doing so in that of Bolsonaro. Some examples include (year of graduation in parentheses) Generals Augusto Heleno (1969), Eduardo Villas Bôas (1973), Sérgio Etchegoyen (1974), Hamilton Mourão (1975), Fernando Azevedo e Silva (1976) and Luiz Eduardo

Ramos (1979). All of them are the sons of soldiers. For their part, Carlos Alberto dos Santos Cruz (1974) and Edson Pujol (1977) are the sons of officers of the Rio Grande do Sul Military Brigade, a state police force that is also heavily militarised. Of the 17 army generals who participated in the 304th Meeting of the Army High Command on 5 February 2016, by mid-2020 all of them had already retired, although 14 occupied top political or administrative positions: one was the vice president, four were ministers of state, one was an ambassador, three were the chairmen of state enterprises, one was the chairman of a state pension fund, one was the secretary of public security, and three were top executives or occupied similar positions (Pimentel Jorge de Souza 2021).

There was a great deal of ‘in-house’ recruitment as regards the officers of this generation. Data obtained from the AMAN show that, in 1984 and 1985, of the total number of cadets entering the military academy, 51.9 per cent were sons of the servicemen, while 48.1 per cent were sons of the civilians. Approached from a historically broader perspective, it can be observed how this bias has increased at least since the beginning of the 1940s, when the sons of servicemen accounted for approximately 20 per cent of the cadets, before peaking at 60.4 per cent in 1993 (Castro and Medeiros 2018, 107–121).³ Furthermore, an analysis of the educational background of the first-year cadets at the AMAN between 1976 and 1985 reveals that no less than 91.3 per cent of them had already studied at military establishments—including military colleges, the Escola Preparatória de Cadetes do Exército (Army Cadet Preparatory School [EsPCEX]) or similar navy or air force establishments—before entering the academy. From a sociological point of view, it would be an exaggeration to talk about a military caste, but their socialisation in the ‘military family’, as a result of attending military education establishments since childhood and the intensity of the course at the AMAN, where the cadets entered a boarding school regime and were mixed with a group of peers who had already been ‘militarised’ to a large extent, has had a strong cumulative effect on them. Against this backdrop, for these officers, ‘civilian life’ runs the risk of becoming almost a sort of fiction.

Four decades later, what effect has the aforementioned sociological factors had on this generation? How has the endogenous recruitment model, associated with their professional socialisation in an institution like the AMAN and their resulting isolation, affected the social trajectories and worldviews of these military officers?

Once again, the interview with Villas Bôas illustrates how he and his generation are all products of the aforementioned socialisation in the ‘military family’. Villas Bôas graduated from the AMAN in 1973. The son of an army officer, he had previously studied for three years at the EsPCEX, which he had begun to attend at the age of 15. The result of this total immersion in the ‘military family’ into which he was born, and which he would later reproduce, is evident: His mother ‘was always the part-time mother of her husband’s subordinates’ (Castro 2021, 24); subsequently, his

wife would always behave like 'the perfect military wife, as she participated very actively in military life. She helped me in my job and my career' (Castro 2021, 61).

Villas Bôas also mentions 'the *chalk circle* that we [the military] sometimes draw around us' (Castro 2021, 200, emphasis added). The former commander-in-chief of the army recalls that the first time he interacted more continuously with civilians was when, at the age of 49, he took the Escola Superior de Guerra (Higher War College [ESG]) course in the year 2000. Referring to this experience, he states:

At the beginning, dealing with civilians on a daily basis was an exercise in patience and intellectual flexibility. We, servicemen, all have the same mind-set, which leads us collectively to react in a standard way to any impulse. Not [so] the civilians: each one sees the problem from a different angle.

(Castro 2021, 116)

The military institution and fraternity have had a decisive impact on Villas Bôas' life. He describes the army as 'the solid castle that shelters us, protects us, teaches us, educates us, provides for our needs, forges our character, shapes our personality and forces us to surpass ourselves'. More importantly, however, 'It concerns the daily practice of the profession's values, to the point of becoming the main trait distinguishing servicemen from civilians' (Castro 2021, 29).

The Chalk Circle

How is this 'distinction' expressed on a daily basis? What does this 'chalk circle' consist of? Above all, it should be understood that military identity-building in Brazil, of officers in particular, takes place through the symbolic opposition between military and civilian life: 'in here' as opposed to an 'out there'. On entering a military academy, cadets undergo a rite of passage from the status of 'civilians' to that of 'servicemen'. They undergo a process of military identity-building that presupposes and requires the deconstruction of their previous 'civilian' identity. The aim is to mark the entry into a social world that is qualitatively different—and seen as superior—to that of civilians. The construction of a symbolic military/civilian dichotomy structures and sustains the entire military universe, giving rise not only to the social identity of the 'serviceman', but also, by opposition and contrast, to that of the 'civilian'—or the '*paisano*', as the military sarcastically refer to that status among themselves. In this sense, building the identity of the serviceman also necessarily implies *the invention of the civilian* (Castro 2004).

Becoming a serviceman means, above all, *ceasing to be a civilian*. Even when transitioning through the so-called civilian world, the military man retains his identity—he can, at most, dress in civilian clothes (*à paisana*).

‘Military world’ and ‘civilian world’ are what anthropologists call ‘native categories’, structuring the military’s worldview, and not descriptive terms. The contrasting and permanently reaffirmed relationship between an ‘in here’ and an ‘out there’, while being duly aware of their differences, is the fundamental aspect of the military identity-building to which the AMAN cadets are exposed. They consider themselves to be members of a military ‘world’ that is superior to the civilian ‘world’: they profess to be more organised, more honest, better prepared, more devoted to the common good and more patriotic.

Throughout a military career, there are also many interactions within the same ‘social circle’, evoking the sociology of Simmel (1908).⁴ In addition to the work environment, on the whole, the military also live, relax and study together. This also goes for spouses and children, thus encompassing the entire ‘military family’. Endogenous social interaction is strongly encouraged, both formally, through fraternity events organised by the institution, and informally, through social gatherings organised by colleagues belonging to the ‘military family’. The role of wives (and, to some extent, children) is fundamental to underpinning the foundations of this ‘world’. In an article published in 1993, I wrote about the cumulative effect of this isolated life, plus the fact that army officers were coming in increasingly larger numbers from military families and being educated from a very early age in military schools, on military identity-building:

[...] the frontier between the military and civilian worlds is now more evident than ever in the contemporary history of Brazil. The most obvious danger posed by this situation is, in my view, the development (or persistence) in the army of values differing from those defended by civil society.

(Castro 1993, 231)

Three decades later, this issue is still pertinent. Seen from the perspective of this chapter, it allows for understanding how a ‘covert’ memory of the military dictatorship and the discomfort caused by ‘political correctness’ could persist and develop more easily in this ‘military world’, thus swelling the ranks of the movement that would help Bolsonaro to become president.

The Rise of the Military in Brazilian Politics

During the politically weak government of Michel Temer, who assumed the presidency in May 2016 after the impeachment of Dilma Rousseff, and especially after the revelation of a recording of a conversation with the president secretly made by the businessman Joesley Batista in March 2017,⁵ two army generals stepped into the limelight: Sérgio Etchegoyen and his childhood friend and ‘cousin’ by affinity, the commander-in-chief of the army, Villas Bôas. The Gabinete de Segurança Institucional da Presidência da República (Institutional Security Cabinet [GSI]), with ministerial status,

was then re-established with Etchegoyen in charge. Between February and December 2018, there was a security-related federal intervention in the state of Rio de Janeiro under military leadership. Public spending on the armed forces also increased, even in a context of important budget cuts.

By that time, Bolsonaro was already running for president in the October 2018 elections. After having been re-elected as a federal deputy in October 2014—the most voted in Rio de Janeiro, with 464,000 of the ballots cast—he had announced that he would be the ‘representative of the Right’: ‘I am from the Right and I am not ashamed to say so. I am going to run for the Planalto [the presidential palace]’ (Do G1 2016). Notwithstanding the fact that he had been a federal deputy since 1991 and had been re-elected on seven occasions, in Congress he was best known for his many controversial sallies. He was generally regarded as part of a ‘folklore quota’, inasmuch as he was the only politician to express far-right and politically incorrect views, such as defending the closure of Congress in favour of a military government, advocating for the re-establishment of capital punishment and lambasting the LGBT community and other minorities, not to mention his frequent outbursts against other politicians (Equipe Lupa 2019).

Throughout his political career, Bolsonaro has not been well regarded by many military leaders. On 25 February 1988, the *Noticiário do Exército* (*Army Bulletin*) published the editorial piece, ‘A verdade: um símbolo da honra militar’ (‘The Truth: A Symbol of Military Honour’), in which Bolsonaro was accused of not telling the truth and tarnishing military dignity. In 1993, in the long interview given to Maria Celina D’Araujo and myself, subsequently published in a book, the former president Ernesto Geisel called Bolsonaro a ‘bad serviceman’, who had called for a new coup and a return to a military government (D’Araujo and Castro 1997, 113). For many years, Bolsonaro was banned from entering military establishments. In November 2014, however, shortly after being re-elected as a federal deputy, Bolsonaro attended the graduation ceremony at the AMAN. Addressing the graduates informally, he delivered a brief improvised speech—just over a minute long—in which he announced that he would be running for president in 2018. To the graduate’s applause and cries of ‘leader!’, he declared,

We have to change this Brazil, okay? Some will fall along the way, but I am prepared, in 2018, God willing, to try to turn this Brazil to the Right. Our commitment is to lay down our lives for the country and so be it until we die.

(Alessi 2017)⁶

What has changed in the military top brass’ attitude towards Bolsonaro? There is no simple answer to this question. First and foremost, it is important to stress the historical coincidence that the military of his generation are now at the pinnacle of their careers. But other factors are also

involved: disillusionment with politics and corruption; the fact that, despite being considered as an ‘exaggeration’, Bolsonaro has always denied the ‘official’ memory of the repression during the military dictatorship; his defence of some specific aspects of the military institution (such as wage and budget increases and the specificity of the military career); and the fact that he has openly expressed his anti-communist leanings and publicly spoken out against ‘political correctness’. In this sense, there were many ‘elective affinities’. As the 2018 elections drew near, moreover, he increasingly professed to be the only candidate capable of defeating the Partido dos Trabalhadores (Workers’ Party [PT]) candidate—former President Lula who, before his imprisonment, had led the opinion polls.⁷ All considered, these are the defining traits of the charismatic leadership that candidate Bolsonaro exercised in the ‘military world’. Charisma is understood here as the

[...] sociologically relevant characteristics of a particular biography. The aim in this context is to explain why a particular individual finds himself socially predisposed to live out and express with particular cogency and coherence, ethical or political predispositions that are already present in a latent state amongst all the members of the class of group of his addressees.

(Bourdieu 2006, 131)

There was neither anything in Bolsonaro’s particular biography to suggest that he was ‘predestined’ for the role that he would play, nor had he possessed an earlier essential charisma that the military would discover sooner or later. His *actions* were decisive, his *performance* was in playing a role. On attending events, delivering speeches and expressing his feelings, he was able to slip into that charismatic role that he had been assigned. His charisma was only ‘recognised’ by his military supporters after several seductive encounters and after receiving gifts and other compensations. The ‘military Messianism’ that Bolsonaro revived—his middle name, by the way, is Messias (Messiah)—also leveraged the idea of ‘mission’, very dear to the military. He used symbolically powerful elements, such as the official campaign slogan of the Partido Social Liberal/ Partido Renovador Trabalhista Brasileiro (Liberal Social Party/Brazilian Labour Renewal Party [PSL/PRTB]), ‘*Brasil acima de tudo, Deus acima de todos!*’ (‘Brazil above all, God above all!’), the coalition behind his candidacy, which subsequently became the official slogan of his government. It had its origins in the slogan ‘*Brasil acima de tudo*’ (‘Brazil above all!’) adopted by the army’s Parachute Infantry Brigade in the late 1960s, during the ‘years of lead’ of the military dictatorship (Tavares Casali n/d). It is worth noting that both Bolsonaro and his vice-president, General Mourão, as well as several Cabinet ministers, have all been paratroopers. During a brigade ceremony in 2020, he declared, ‘Today, the paratrooper does not just jump off the ramp; today, he climbs the ramp of the Planalto Central, to

show everyone in Brazil that we are honoured to manage public affairs’ (Boeckel 2020).

More than turning out in force, only several high-ranking officers, including some on active duty, became actively involved in Bolsonaro’s campaign. Nonetheless, social media more than made up for that. The journalist Marcelo Godoy analysed the impact of Villas Bôas’ Twitter account on officers on active duty (in theory, prohibited from expressing themselves politically). After the general’s tweets on 3 April 2018, dozens of them became ‘social media influencers’, endorsing Bolsonaro’s candidacy. Thus, what Alain Rouquié (1980) had previously termed the ‘military party’ clearly began to take shape: a political force that acted *as if it were a political party*, bringing together retired and active servicemen around the same ideological base and corporate interests, in addition to adopting an internal hierarchy and discipline and political action strategies to achieve its objectives (Pimentel Jorge de Souza 2021; Penido, Rodrigues and Kalil Mathias 2020). This ‘military party’ is not a faithful reflection of the military institution, which is not monolithic: it corresponds to *part of it*, and since its advent there has been yet unresolved tension between the two.

The ‘Military Party’

The ‘military party’ came to power following the victory of the Bolsonaro–Mourão ticket in October 2018, with 55.13 per cent of the ballots cast in the run-off. It was a surprising victory for journalists and political analysts, as in a few months Bolsonaro had surged ahead in the electoral race, before ultimately benefitting from an ‘electoral tsunami’. In addition to the military, he united large, more conservative sectors of the Brazilian population, driven by an anti-corruption, anti-leftist discourse and feeling.

From the very beginning of the new government, the ‘military party’ received significant rewards. In July 2020, a survey carried out by the Federal Court of Accounts (TCU) on the presence of military personnel in government positions revealed that the number had more than doubled in the Bolsonaro government. In 2018, at the end of the Temer administration, there were 2,765 servicemen occupying civilian positions in the federal government, but, by 2020, the number had reached 6,157. Furthermore, a report published in the daily *Folha de S. Paulo* that same month revealed that, after just 18 months in office, Bolsonaro had increased the number of servicemen from the three wings of the armed forces in official positions by 33 per cent, amounting to 2,558 in 18 agencies. In relation to the previous two decades, this represented an increase of 125 per cent, despite the fact that the number of directors and senior advisers, representing the federal government elite, had dropped by 36 per cent during the same period (Bragon and Mattoso 2020; Penido, Rodrigues and Kalil 2020). In addition to the personal gains from occupying these positions (such as bonuses and additional salaries), the armed forces as an institution also benefited

from corporate measures, such as a larger budget, wage increases and the national insurance perks of civil servants.

The ‘military party’ occupied prominent positions in the government and benefited from them. But at what price? Returning to the episode that opened this chapter—the failure to punish a general on active duty who had participated in a political act—it can be seen how the politicisation of part of the armed forces, above all the army, increased the tension between the state institutions and the Bolsonaro government. On several occasions, the president sought to reaffirm his constitutional status as the ‘Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces’, in reference to Article 142 of the 1988 Constitution, addressing the mission of the Brazilian armed forces:

The armed forces, comprising the navy, the army and the air force, are permanent and regular national institutions, organised on the basis of hierarchy and discipline, under the supreme authority of the president of the republic, and are intended for the defence of the nation, the guarantee of constitutional powers and, on the initiative of any of these, of law and order.

Bolsonaro and his supporters have often made their own interpretation of this article: (1) the president can exercise direct authority over the armed forces even regarding their daily running (like, for example, vetoing any punishment meted out to General Pazuello); and (2) he can request the military to intervene, under his command, as a kind of ‘moderating power’, in an eventual crisis between the three branches of government (executive, legislative and judicial). Despite the absurdity of this interpretation—as if the constitution foresaw the possibility of its own schism—these references to Article 142 prompted the STF to take the matter into its own hands. On 12 June 2020, Judge Luiz Fux of the STF delimited the interpretation of the article, stating that the president’s prerogative to authorise the intervention of the armed forces could not be used against the other two branches of government or the constitutional order.

Beyond the legal interpretation, the fact is that in the Bolsonaro government the distinction between the state and the government, and between the public and private spheres, has been far less clear-cut than before—as exemplified by the president referring to ‘my army’. If at the beginning of Bolsonaro’s term in office some had the impression that the military occupying lofty positions in the government would constitute a more moderate and rational ‘military wing’, as opposed to a more radical ‘ideological wing’, and that they would somehow manage to keep the lid on the president’s ‘hyperbole’, they were soon disabused.

The servicemen occupying government positions openly began to take a strong political stance in favour of the government and, in particular, to demonstrate their personal loyalty to the president come what may; those who have refrained from doing so have fallen foul of him. Perhaps the most striking example is that of General Santos Cruz, one of the most prestigious

high-ranking officers in the army who, among other things, was the United Nations Stabilisation Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH) force commander from 2006 to 2009, before commanding the Stabilisation Mission of the United Nations in the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUSCO) in 2013. Appointed as the minister of the Government Secretariat, in less than six months he was fired by Bolsonaro, after being the target of enraged and offensive personal attacks launched by the government’s ‘ideological wing’ and the president’s ‘guru’, the far-right writer Olavo de Carvalho, without having received any support from his erstwhile employer. In March 2021, it was Defence Minister General Fernando Azevedo’s turn to be fired for refusing to demonstrate publicly his complete loyalty to the president. In a note about his dismissal, he said that as the minister of defence he had sought to preserve the armed forces ‘as state institutions’. Immediately afterwards, Bolsonaro replaced the commanders-in-chief of the three wings of the armed forces, an unprecedented step in the history of Brazil.

Bolsonaro and several of his military ministers or top officers are very like-minded. But, if some of them thought that they could control the ‘sorcerer’s apprentice’, this has so far proved to be a pipedream.

Where Is This All Leading?

It is not an easy task to analyse the current political situation, for it poses the challenge of the fluidity of scenarios and the uncertainty of facts. Historians analysing the history of this period still do not have a ‘crystal ball’ that enables them to look into the future. Furthermore, there is no solid empirical evidence, based on documents, interviews or other sources, allowing researchers to perform more consistent analyses. It is necessary to be careful with conspiracy theories and generalisations such as ‘the military’ or ‘the armed forces’, and to consider them as if they were homogeneous or monolithic, despite the ideological esprit-de-corps and the corporate interests that they seek to maintain.

As I write these words (on 10 June 2021), I still have many more questions than answers. I have attempted, however, to single out some aspects that I believe are clearer. The main one has been the breaking of the military’s pledge to stay out of politics, maintained since the beginning of the New Republic. The transition from the military dictatorship to a democratic regime in 1985 was long and negotiated between the military and the civilian elite. It safeguarded the former from being prosecuted for acts committed in the past and guaranteed some of their prerogatives or spheres of autonomy, as a reward for ‘returning to the barracks’. Brazil experienced several economic, political and social crises in the 30 years that followed, without any military intervention. The cyclic repetition of free elections and the alternation in power (including the coming to power of the PT with Lula) banished the military from the headlines. In recent years, this state of affairs has changed. The military have yet again grabbed the headlines, usually in a very negative way, the top brass have been

increasingly brought into the public eye, and in the academic world the debate on concepts that were seemingly water under the bridge has been rekindled: ‘military tutelage’, ‘military party’, ‘moderating power’

With the developments in 2018—namely, the commander-in-chief of the army’s tweets, which marked the institution’s explicit return to the political scene, and the surprising election of Bolsonaro, a far-right politician—the curtain was brought down on the New Republic, after 34 years of existence (1985–2018). The politically liberal and culturally progressive discourse, characteristic of the restoration of democracy and the New Republic, notwithstanding its ups and downs, has been replaced by another agenda, not only conservative but potentially authoritarian.

If this characterisation is correct, it is worth asking what has happened since 2019. For many military officers (and civilians) Bolsonaro’s victory was an opportunity to ‘refound’ the Federative Republic of Brazil on a conservative and authoritarian basis and, better still, through free and competitive elections. Furthermore, it was also an opportunity to triumph in the open war being waged against ‘cultural Marxism’. For the military who crossed the line separating the institution and the government, entering politics was a ‘mission’, embodied by the motto ‘Brazil, above all! God above all!’

A typology proposed by Kees Koonings and Dirk Kruijt (2003) for analysing Latin American political militarism allows for observing how the situation in Brazil went from the ‘back to the barracks’ political model with the transition to the New Republic in 1985, to that of a ‘armoured democracy’, with the New Republic’s ending in 2018. One of the many unanswered questions is whether it will now move towards a third model, to wit, that of ‘civil–military strongmen’. Pandora’s box has been opened. It is easy for the military to cross the red line and enter politics, but it will not be so straightforward for them to figure out how to abandon that sphere, if they ever wish to. General Peri Bevilacqua, a former STM minister impeached in 1969 by virtue of the Ato Institucional No. 5 (Institutional Act No. 5, AI-5), the most repressive act of the military dictatorship, once remarked, ‘When politics enters the barracks through one door, discipline exits through another.’ The military’s involvement in Brazilian politics now poses a huge risk.

Notes

- 1 In the interview, Villas Bôas also declared, ‘We were aware that we were really stretching the limits of the institutional responsibility of the army. I repeat that this was not a threat, but a warning. There was also no mention of any specific individual or institution’ (Castro 2021, 191).
- 2 Bolsonaro wrote the article, ‘O salário está baixo’ (‘The Salary Is Low’), published in the magazine *Veja* on 9 March 1986. As a result, he was sentenced to 15 days in prison by the then minister of the army, General Leônidas, as the result of a ‘serious transgression’ for ‘having breached ethical standards, creating a climate

of unrest in the military institution’ and ‘for being indiscreet when addressing matters of an official nature’. The following year, the 25 October 1987 edition of *Vêja* published a report by the journalist Cássia Maria, ‘Pôr bombas nos quartéis, um plano na EsAO’ (‘Putting Bombs in the Barracks, a Plan at EsAO’), claiming that Bolsonaro and another captain had planned to detonate bombs in military barracks located in Rio to express their dissatisfaction with army wages and to bring pressure to bear on the army top brass. Even though Bolsonaro denied any involvement in this plan, a new article published in the same magazine on 4 November included sketches allegedly made by him, indicating where the bombs would be detonated. Moreover, the journalist referred to witnesses to the conversation that she had had at Bolsonaro’s home. Tried by three colonels in a court martial, Bolsonaro was found guilty in January 1988. In June 1988, however, the judges of the Supremo Tribunal Militar (Supreme Military Court [STM]) found Bolsonaro ‘not guilty’ of the charges by nine votes to four. A recent book investigating this process is *O cadete e o capitão: a vida de Jair Bolsonaro no quartel (The Cadet and the Captain: Jair Bolsonaro’s Life in the Barracks)*, by the journalist Luiz Maklouf Carvalho, published by Todavia in 2019.

- 3 In the following two decades, this percentage decreased, although, on average, it always continued to be above 30 per cent. Between 2008 and 2014, it ranged from 40 to 47 per cent.
- 4 See Chapter 10 of Georg Simmel’s *Soziologie Untersuchungen über die Formen der Vergesellschaftung* (1908), on the expansion of groups and the formation of individuality.
- 5 The recording allegedly demonstrated Temer’s interference in *Operação Lava Jato*.
- 6 A video of his address is available at: <https://youtu.be/MW8ME9S87SI> [Accessed on 2 September 2021].
- 7 Bolsonaro was formally nominated as his party’s presidential candidate at a national convention of the PSL in July 2018. The choice of running mate was only made official in August 2018, when General Hamilton Mourão was nominated during a convention of the Brazilian Labour Renewal Party (PRTB).

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8 Mexico—The Armed Forces

Revolution, One-Party Rule and the Uncertainties of Democratisation and Insecurity

Wil G. Pansters

A key outcome of the Mexican Revolution (1910–1917) was the consolidation of civil–military relations in which the armed forces were effectively subordinated to civilian rule, which set Mexico apart from experiences elsewhere in Latin America. This chapter examines the main features of this unique arrangement in the context of stable one-party rule. It then enquires into how, from the late 1970s onwards, a range of social, economic and political forces undermined the one-party system and prompted significant social and political (armed) conflicts—eventually culminating in a democratic transition—a historical shift profoundly transforming civil–military relations. The new roles, responsibilities and challenges of Mexico’s armed forces since the 1990s are then examined against the backdrop of the dramatic escalation of drug trafficking, violence and insecurity. Lastly, the unprecedented process of militarisation that has gone beyond security matters in recent years is critically appraised.

Revolution and One-Party Rule

On 13 August 1914, near the village of Teoloyucan—close to Mexico City—representatives of the revolutionary forces and the federal army unceremoniously decided on the unconditional surrender of the latter. The dissolution of the federal army, which had served the interests of the Porfirio Díaz dictatorship, paved the way for the consolidation of Victoriano Carranza’s Constitucionalista forces as a new professional army that would honour ‘its revolutionary and popular origins’ (Lozoya 1970: 41). ‘Teoloyucan’ signalled the arrival to power of a generation of men whose political decisions and military operations would shape Mexico’s social, political and cultural development for the remainder of the twentieth century and, as will be seen, beyond. They achieved this without formal military training. Social and political grievances had prompted them to play a role in the Mexican Revolution (1910–1917). The most prominent of these *generales revolucionarios* would, without a traditional ‘militarist spirit’, shape and dominate Mexican politics and society for decades (Lozoya 1970: 38–39).¹

Designing and creating new armed forces, political institutions, legal frameworks, social organisations and narratives consistent with the claims

of the world's first major popular revolution was, however, no easy task. The arrangement and management of civil–military relations posed several critical problems for Mexico's new political order. After Teoloyucan, rival revolutionary forces and armies battled it out, until Carranza ultimately triumphed, thus bringing the civil war to an end. In 1917, a new constitution, which echoed the social and political origins of the revolution, was adopted. Even so, for years to come, the construction of a new post-revolutionary order resulted in political instability, social unrest and military rebellions, particularly as regards the transfer of power. For years, revolutionaries-turned-officeholders continued to resort to their Winchesters and Colts when expressing their political ambitions and resolving their disputes.

The identities of these leaders were far from being unambiguous: albeit prestigious generals, President Obregón (1920–1924) had been a rancher, President Calles (1924–1928), a schoolteacher, while President Cárdenas (1934–1940) had wanted to become one. They and their troops formed a 'strange hybrid of diverse citizens in arms' (Gillingham 2021: 245). Their 'civilian' roots were consistent with the constitutional principle opposing the participation of the military institution in politics. Combating attempts to the contrary resulted in the repression of military rebellions during the 1920s and the elimination of generals unwilling to accept the emerging order (Lieuwen 1968). Alternatively, Obregón and Calles, and especially Cárdenas, strengthened ties with key worker and peasant constituencies and championed reformist social policies, creating a critical civil counterweight to military power. Whenever need be, they mobilised armed peasant forces (*defensas sociales*) that outnumbered and defeated military dissidents (Serrano 1995: 432; Lieuwen 1968: 88, 91). They also slashed troop numbers by half, introduced new regulations governing the armed forces and supported professionalisation with the creation of new military colleges and training programmes.

The stabilisation of civil–military relations culminated in a pact negotiated between the different factions of the *familia revolucionaria* in 1928–1929, which led to the founding of the Partido Nacional Revolucionario (National Revolutionary Party [PNR]).² This development was critical for the emergence of the dominant party regime that would remain in place, relatively unchallenged, for many decades. For a time, the armed forces were a sector within the revolutionary party, albeit one numerically and politically subordinated to civilian labour, peasant and popular sectors. In 1939, Cárdenas curbed military power by separating the navy from the rest of the armed forces and by creating a new ministry. In 1940, the military sector was abolished and in 1946 the last military president left office.

The evolution of Mexico's peculiar civil–military relations is explained by the confluence of several factors. The legacies of the revolution not only included the common ideological ground between civilian and military actors but also the experience of revolutionary violence that 'inoculated

the population against armed struggle' and favoured 'efforts to keep the military at bay' (Serrano 1995: 430). In addition, the professionalisation of the armed forces and the policies deliberately implemented to consolidate civilian supremacy helped to construct a stable order. The armed forces built an identity based on loyalty, discipline and (political) subordination. The Mexican army 'changed from a body of politically inclined revolutionary amateurs in 1920 into a truly professional military organisation by 1940' (Lieuwen 1984: 55). Finally, Mexico's particular international geopolitical context also contributed to stable civil–military relations.

Writing about the mission of the Mexican armed forces after the Second World War, the political scientist Needler declared, 'To prepare for the defense of the national borders seemed neither feasible nor sensible: against Mexico's northern neighbour, the United States, defense is hardly possible; against her southern neighbour, Guatemala, defense is hardly necessary' (Needler 1971: 66). Mexican military doctrine therefore prioritised maintaining internal public order (known as DN-II) over the defence of national territory (DN-I). By the early 1950s, the Mexican army's basic internal orientation had been decisively confirmed (Rath 2013: 171). Overwhelming U.S. military power also allowed the civilian elites to keep the size and budget of the armed forces to a minimum. In 1966, Mexico had one of the lowest soldier–population ratios in the region, while Argentina doubled, Peru tripled and Brazil nearly quadrupled its military expenditure as a share of GDP (Needler 1971: 67–69). That same year, the government adopted the DN-III plan, which tasked the army with supporting the civilian population in the event of natural disasters and emergency situations, such as earthquakes and epidemics (Villalpando 2014: 329).

Just as it is fair to say that after 1946 Mexico's military institution 'had not only been unified and disciplined, but ... also ... subordinated to civilian power', so too it is also true that the armed forces were never entirely *depoliticised*, nor was the political system *demilitarised* (Serrano 1995: 433–434). Versus the view that by 1960 the political role of the army had 'all but disappeared', Ronfeldt correctly stressed the significance of the army's 'residual political roles' (Ronfeldt 1984: 66–67). During the crucial period between 1946 and 1980, the military's role was more than 'residual'. There were three essential aspects in this respect.

Firstly, senior members of the armed forces occupied significant positions of political and administrative power, thus allowing them to shape policymaking. Between 1946 and 1964, four prominent politician-generals led the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (Institutional Revolutionary Party [PRI]), Mexico's 'civilian' political apparatus par excellence. The military also had a generous number of PRI senate seats at their disposal. Moreover, since their establishment in the 1920s, the commanders of military zones—whose boundaries mostly coincided with those of the modern-day federal states—exercised considerable *de facto* political power, while acting as counterweights to ambitious civilian governors often on behalf of the federal government. Disgruntled with the drift of national politics,

some generals considered more drastic steps. In the aftermath of the 1948 peso devaluation, they openly challenged the president and the country 'teetered on the brink of a coup d'état' (Gillingham 2021: 262). During the 1952 federal elections, the presidential candidate General Henríquez Guzmán opposed the PRI but attracted broad military support. Both states of affairs ended up buttressing civilian rule, while at the same time also demonstrating the myth of military de-politicisation.

Secondly, the armed forces played a critical role in resolving political and social conflicts, repressing unruly movements and hunting down their leaders. As civilian police forces were mostly politicised, the army was called upon to maintain law and order before and during elections or to quell (post-)electoral disturbances (Gillingham 2014). The most notorious case occurred in January 1946, when the army killed 27 Catholic activists who were protesting in León against electoral fraud. Troops were also ordered to suppress industrial conflicts, such as the 1959 railroad strike. In the countryside, with characteristic Cold War heavy-handedness the army was ordered to 'pacify' social conflicts, particularly those involving radical peasant organisations (Padilla 2008: 1, 208). An unapologetically candid 1967 CIA report noted that while 'a model institution compared with the rest of Latin America', the Mexican army 'is both brutally effective and politically astute' in maintaining peace in the countryside.³

During the late 1960s and 1970s, the army was regularly deployed to quell student protests, culminating in the involvement of the Estado Mayor Presidencial (Presidential Guard [EMP]) in the 1968 Tlatelolco massacre on the eve of Mexico's Olympic Games, which put a brutal end to the country's enduring mass student movement⁴—an event that continues to tarnish the armed forces' reputation. Subsequently, the army became involved in full-blown Cold War counterinsurgency operations, especially in Guerrero and Chihuahua, up until the early 1980s. The 'dirty war' being fought in Mexico was cloaked by a civilian regime.

Thirdly, Mexico's regional elites depended on the armed forces for maintaining law and order and for performing diverse police tasks. Due to the fact that local and state police forces were often embroiled in faction fighting, underfunded and poorly trained, the authorities requested army commanders to carry out public security chores. These included guarding prisons, protecting tax collectors in hostile *sierra* communities, combating cattle rustling and resolving inter-village and agrarian disputes. The army also played a prominent role in a national gun control campaign (*despistolización*) and in enforcing quarantine rules to contain a massive outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease during the late 1940s.

If the army's missions were already being gradually expanded, its role in policing drug cultivation, production and trafficking added an entirely new dimension, one that, as will be seen, would increase dramatically in the following decades. A brief look at the historical precedents is useful. Back in 1959, President López Mateos had dispatched an infantry battalion to the *tierra caliente* in Michoacán to round up marijuana and

poppy cultivators and traffickers, while simultaneously seeking to undermine the regional fiefdom of the former president Cárdenas. The military operation in Michoacán served to showcase the armed forces' multiple roles in Mexico's one-party regime: overtly an anti-narcotics intervention, covertly it was about political power and state making. The blending of military counter-narcotic and counterinsurgency operations would subsequently become a hallmark of Guerrero, the heartland of Mexico's dirty war, during the 1970s.

Mexico's '*gran campaña*' against drugs gathered steam as of the mid-1960s (Craig 1978). Coordinated by the federal Attorney General's Office (with the federal police), the army provided most of the men on the ground. Mexico's spectacular increase in heroin and marijuana production and trafficking in the early 1970s, and its growing importance as a transit country for Andean cocaine, led to an intensification of anti-narcotics operations. Launched in the Sinaloa, Chihuahua and Durango sierras in early 1977, the Condor Operation involved hundreds of federal judicial police officers and thousands of soldiers, in addition to Mexican secret agents, local police forces and DEA agents, while employing new technologies (Craig 1980). Deemed a success by the Mexican and U.S. authorities, with the destruction of tens of thousands of opium and marijuana plantations, the dismantling of laboratories and the subsequent drop in Mexican heroin reaching the United States, it came at a price. The army became embroiled in armed confrontations with peasants. Soldiers were reportedly involved in extortion and atrocities, including the torture, rape, beating and murder of peasant families. Since then, four features of anti-drug interventions have persisted: the elasticity of the drug business (and organised crime in general), militarisation, violence and human rights abuses.

Before returning to the recent history of the Mexican army and its role in broader social and political transformations, what follows is a brief digression to describe the main features of civil–military relations in Mexico between 1930 and 1980. After Mexico's revolutionary generals had 'demilitarised' the political system during the 1920s and 1930s (often with considerable violence), the creation of the 'party of the revolution' (PNR, PRM, PRI) enabled the subordinated integration of the armed forces into an effective and lasting one-party system. It had comparatively stable institutions, generally peaceful transfers of power, the support of major corporatist institutions and sustained economic development, as well as an inclusive ideology. However, violence and coercion—at the hands of the armed forces, the police, the secret service and informal specialists, such as *pistoleros* and *guardias blancas*—played a critical role in maintaining this system. Both components were inextricably linked: Mexico's celebrated golden age of the dominant civilian party regime (ca. 1945–1965) was also sustained by a repertoire of repression, even though it differed from the centralised, overt and draconian despotism of the Southern Cone military regimes (Pansters 1999: 118).

There was enough in it for the armed forces themselves. The specificity of civil–military relations in Mexico after the Second World War was largely a product of the ruling party system: it ‘protected the armed forces from the risk of becoming an arena for political competition’ and prevented alliances with opposition forces (Serrano 1995: 443–444). As long as the PRI won elections, partly due to the armed forces’ essential roles, the latter enjoyed ample political, material and cultural benefits. In exchange for national obedience and loyalty—above all to the presidency—the military top brass were given considerable autonomy, which provided them with profitable political and (il)legal business opportunities. In addition, the upper echelons of the military enjoyed lavish salaries and fringe benefits (Needler 1971: 69). And while the rank and file diminished in size (certainly in relative terms), the elite of the Mexican armed forces swelled, creating a top-heavy institution. Raúl Castro allegedly once observed that ‘to become a general in the Mexican army it is sufficient not to die!’ (Veledíaz 2017: 72; translation by author).

Political Transition and the Armed Forces

During the 1980s, many Latin American countries experienced the end of military regimes and a return to democracy. To rebuild democratic institutions and to restore the rule of law, post-dictatorship and post-civil war public debates revolved around accountability, transitional justice and the politics of truth and memory. In Mexico, meanwhile, the 1980s witnessed the erosion of the civilian-led, soft-authoritarian one-party regime and the start of an arduous political transition. The 1988 presidential elections were the most closely run in decades (the candidate opposing the PRI was in fact illegitimately deprived of his victory). A deep economic recession, structural adjustments, the entrenchment of neoliberal reforms and a major disaster—the massive 1985 Mexico City earthquake—sparked major popular protests demanding broader and more reliable political and electoral spaces. At local and state levels, the country’s opposition parties made inroads. The boisterous Salinas de Gortari government (1988–1994) was unable to reverse the trend. Instead, it exacerbated social contradictions and political conflicts and ended in disaster in 1994, with the Zapatista rebellion in Chiapas in January, the assassination of the PRI’s presidential candidate (Colosio) in March and the party president (Ruiz Massieu) in September, plus the severe peso crisis in December. The latter caused an ‘epidemic of delinquency’: between 1993 and 1997, reported crimes in Mexico City increased by over 140 per cent (Pansters and Castillo Berthier 2007: 40–43). Ever since, insecurity and violence have been key concerns for state and societal actors alike. The only thing that went the ruling party’s way in 1994 was its victory in the federal elections: struck by fear and uncertainty, voters decided to stick with the ‘devil they knew’.

During the 1980s and 1990s, key political, societal and scholarly disputes did not focus on the curtailment of the military or the restoration of the

constitutional order, but on legitimate and fair elections. Significantly, none of the 20 chapters of a major 1989 academic publication dealt with the military, dubbed a 'silent partner' of the political class (Cornelius et al. 1989: 10). It would take another 15 years or so before the role of the armed forces would become an essential topic in reflections on the Mexican political transition.⁵ For the time being, the 'silent' or 'silenced' partner of the PRI's civilian rulers was under no pressure to account for the repression carried out in support of the authoritarian one-party system. In 1988, Tlatelolco had occurred only 20 years before, but what mattered were free, fair and trustworthy elections.⁶ It was not until after the Partido Acción Nacional (National Action Party [PAN]) won the presidential elections in the year 2000 that the Fiscalía Especial para Movimientos Sociales y Políticos del Pasado (Special Prosecutor for Social and Political Movements of the Past [FEMOSPP]), Mexico's version of a truth commission, was created. Unfortunately, the project ended in failure and ratified 'Mexico's reputation as a paradise of impunity' (Aguayo Quezada and Treviño Rangel 2007: 739).

Meanwhile, since the beginning of the 2000s, the armed forces have conformed to political alternation. The civilian federal authorities of diverse partisan affiliations have shaped their relations with the armed forces in markedly similar ways. Two features have stood out: the responsibilities assigned to the armed forces have increased notably, as has their visibility in the state and society. Several scholars have noted the 'remilitarisation' of the Mexican state (Díez and Nichols 2005: 172). How and why have civil–military relations in Mexico changed during the last two or three decades and how has this affected the roles and functions of the armed forces?

In the main, the accumulated effects of a range of social, economic and political forces weakened the institutional architecture and the political legitimacy of the PRI system, while undermining the levers of presidential and state power. This historical trend affected the relationship between the civilian authorities and the armed forces. In addition, a series of domestic and international developments destabilised and transformed civil–military relations. Three processes should be mentioned: shifting international contexts, deepening social and political domestic (armed) conflicts and a dramatic escalation of the war on drugs. After a succinct examination of the first two, greater attention will be paid here to drug trafficking, violence and insecurity, which constitute by far the most important drivers of the new roles, responsibilities and challenges of Mexico's armed forces.

Several international developments affected Mexico's security situation, thus reshaping the role of the armed forces: regional geopolitical conflicts, economic developments, post 9/11-securitisation and shifts in the international organisation of drug trafficking. Although Mexico never deemed it necessary to defend its southern borders against its Central American neighbour(s), the civil wars in the region during the 1980s raised concerns about a possible spill-over into Mexico's poor and conflict-ridden southern

states. They also gave rise to foreign policy initiatives aimed at resolving the armed conflicts, restoring stability and minimising external influences in the region. Mexico played a key role in the Grupo Contadora and in the Guatemalan peace negotiations, while its generals became involved in discussions on foreign policymaking revolving around national security. The government dispatched additional troops to Chiapas, where the 1982 'election' of general Castellanos Domínguez as governor reinforced the perception of 'increased disorder' in the region and an incipient militarisation process. As a result, the defence budget increased significantly in the early 1980s (Serrano 1995: 441).

The launching of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA; 1994) raised concerns about (national) security in relation to critical resources and the movement of goods and capital. In the context of the post-9/11 war on terror, the Security and Prosperity Partnership (SPP) was established between the United States, Canada and Mexico (2005). The SPP developed plans to remove the remaining barriers to capital flows, to ensure access to key natural resources (oil) and to design a tri-national security strategy for combating terrorism, organised crime, illegal drugs, migrant and contraband smuggling and trafficking.⁷ During the 2010s, migration from Central America to the United States, by way of Mexico, increased spectacularly, further accentuating the role of the Mexican armed forces in this field. The SPP also led to the 2007 Mérida Initiative, which included the transfer of U.S. military and intelligence equipment and training to Mexican law enforcement agencies engaged in the war on drugs, as will be seen below.

When an indigenous rebellion broke out in Chiapas at the beginning of 1994, Mexican conservatives immediately pointed the finger at 'foreign meddling' (i.e. Central American guerrillas). Nevertheless, it soon became clear that it was a home-grown uprising triggered by social, political and cultural grievances that resonated across Mexico. When armed members of the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (Zapatista Army of National Liberation [EZLN]) occupied several towns in Chiapas and declared war on the Mexican state, they caught the establishment unawares, even though it was subsequently reported that the federal government had ignored relevant military intelligence to avoid perturbing the NAFTA negotiations and the 1994 presidential elections (Sierra Guzmán 2003: 117–118). After less than two weeks, a ceasefire put an end to the armed clashes between the Zapatistas and the army and the peace negotiations got underway. Despite being the focus of international press coverage, a year later the recently elected president Zedillo ordered a large-scale military operation to capture the EZLN leadership and shatter its grassroots support. By mid-1995, 40,000 troops were stationed in the region. This siege isolated the EZLN but did not lead to its military defeat, nor did the authorities succeed in arresting its leaders.

One year later, in mid-1996, the Ejército Popular Revolucionario (Popular Revolutionary Army [EPR]) emerged in both rural and urban areas of the

southern states of Guerrero and Oaxaca. While the EPR attacked army barracks, navy installations and police precincts, Guerrero experienced intense social and political unrest. With 40,000 soldiers stationed there as well in 1997, Guerrero had also become a target of the military 'strategy of total saturation' (Piñeyro 2005: 87). Guerrero and neighbouring Michoacán also bore the brunt of political violence perpetrated by PRI elites and caciques against local leaders of the left-wing Partido de la Revolución Democrática (Party of the Democratic Revolution [PRD]).⁸ To clean up the mess after the fiercely disputed elections, the army was sent in to patrol the streets of Acapulco, Chilpancingo and several towns in Michoacán. The involvement of the armed forces in bitter partisan rivalries raised concerns within the military institution itself and among the civilian population. Some generals started to criticise the regime, while others publicly expressed their sympathy for Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas's PRD. In 1998, two PRD senators marched with officers and soldiers to protest against the arbitrariness of military justice (Díez and Nichols 2005: 43; Camp 2004: 364).

There was another side to the new politicisation of the army. After the ceasefire in Chiapas, due to the harsh public condemnation of the killing of poorly armed Zapatistas, the armed forces felt abandoned and forced to pay the consequences of the civilian authorities' actions, which was tantamount to 'a slap in the face', according to a confidential U.S. embassy cable.⁹ The critical question was whether or not those PRI hardliners unwilling to relinquish power would attempt to employ the military to hang on to it at all costs. In 1990, Cárdenas had already called upon the armed forces to protect the democratic process and to promise to remain neutral. In 1994, an influential citizens' initiative urged the military to respect election results and to ensure stability, while in Congress the opposition parties demanded a greater oversight of military appointments and expenditures. In the year 2000, the Ministers of Defence and the Navy were summoned to appear before congressional committees for the first time ever. The days of the armed forces shielded by an unchallenged one-party regime, enjoying substantial autonomy in exchange for loyalty to the presidency, were over. However, political pluralism also created options 'for the military to seek out allies among ... political parties other than the PRI' (Camp 2004: 368). At a time of pressing security concerns, political rivalries were pulling the armed forces in different directions.

These general circumstances and developments, but especially the fallout of the Chiapas Rebellion, set in motion the rapid transformation of the roles and functions of Mexico's armed forces, a process that deepened after 2006 with the all-out war on drugs (see below). A 1995 internal army memorandum addressed concerns and outlined reform proposals, which contributed to improve military professionalism and educational options and to a substantial increase in troop numbers from 178,000 in 1988 to 239,000 in the year 2000.¹⁰ It also led to territorial reorganisation, the upgrading of equipment and training, greater strategic agility with the

introduction of airborne special forces—the so-called Grupos Aeromóviles de Fuerzas Especiales GAFES Grupos Aeromóviles de Fuerzas Especiales (Air Mobility Groups of Special Forces, Mexico [GAFES])—and the armed forces' greater involvement in civil policing, public security and intelligence gathering.¹¹ During the 1990s, military budgets increased exponentially (Díez and Nichols 2005: 39). At the same time, from being an 'isolated, self-absorbed institution'—'the most insular of all armed forces in Latin America', according to Camp (2004: 355)—the Mexican armed forces started to open up, or, better said, were forced to open up by an increasingly inquisitive public sphere—Congress, the media, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and so forth.¹² The Chiapas Rebellion, in particular, turned the armed forces into an object of human rights scrutiny. Civil-military relations intensified, especially in military educational institutions, which now allowed civilians to teach and attend classes. An interesting expression of this trend has been the strengthening of institutional, professional and personal relations with the U.S. military and other agencies, which has contributed to change the armed forces' worldview.

This last trend has been partial at best, as the armed forces are still reluctant to come clean about their alleged involvement in a number of recent massacres. During the 1990s, moreover, there were growing concerns about the armed forces' implication in the 'grey zone', characterised by shady networks involving violent (criminal) entrepreneurs, political actors and law enforcement agencies. Emerging paramilitary forces played critical ('dirty war') roles in the repression of armed political groups, such as the Zapatistas. It is widely accepted that military personnel provided these groups with material support, training and protection (Mazzei 2009: 53–60; Sierra Guzmán 2003: 170–179).

Finally, around the turn of the century, the armed forces became increasingly more involved in civil policing, public security and intelligence gathering. Above all a by-product of their role in combating drug cultivation, production and trafficking since the mid-1980s, which was then expanded during the second half of the 1990s, it was a sort of 'hidden' militarisation, with successive administrations putting military officers in charge of federal agencies, as well as state and local police forces. Despite campaign promises to the contrary, Vicente Fox (PAN, 2000–2006), the president of the 'transition', continued the militarisation of civil policing. For the first time in history, he also appointed a general as the head of the Procuraduría General de la República (Attorney General's Office [PGR]) (Díez and Nichols 2005: 37–38; Camp 2004:369). Despite the risks for the armed forces, in particular, and for democratic institutions, in general, these trends have prevailed almost unchallenged for at least four presidential terms.

The 'War on Drugs' and the Military

Drug trafficking and organised crime are global phenomena par excellence. As U.S. counter-narcotic efforts became increasingly effective in closing

down the Caribbean routes from the Andean countries to the United States, the Pacific routes gained importance, turning Mexico into a key transshipment region. The crackdown on Colombian drug organisations also allowed Mexican criminal organisations to gradually penetrate and take over cocaine trafficking. This shift coincided with the explosion of the U.S. cocaine market in the 1980s. It has been estimated that the amount of cocaine consumed in the United States reaching the country by way of Mexico increased from 20 per cent in 1984, to 30 per cent in 1989, to 50 per cent in 1998 and to 80 per cent at the turn of the century (Serrano 2012: 140). The cocaine boom massively raised the stakes of the Mexican drug economy and profoundly affected the organisation of its drug trafficking business and security landscape.

The army has been involved in combating drug cultivation, production and trafficking since the 1947 *gran campaña* and Operation Condor in the second half of the 1970s, both of which focused on the Mexican northwest. During the 1990s, drug trafficking was classified as a matter of national security, the armed forces increasingly assumed policing roles and numerous specialised agencies were created. The political alternation in the year 2000 did not alter but rather reinforced already existing drug policies and trends. As has been seen, by that time, the Mexican armed forces had become larger, more mobile and better trained, with a more complex organisation and more sophisticated weaponry. Above all, their public visibility and political prominence had increased noticeably. And yet, all the parameters of this phase of Mexico's re-militarisation would be dwarfed by the war on drugs launched by President Calderón (PAN) in December 2006. That decision transformed the dynamic interplay between drug trafficking, violence, public insecurity and militarisation.

When Calderón unexpectedly announced an all-out war on drugs and placed the armed forces in charge, the government publicly acknowledged that the aim was to 'recover territory' from criminal control. Furthermore, the war's main strategic objectives included eradicating illegal crops, destroying drug production facilities, intercepting drug shipments and dismantling criminal organisations. As to the last objective, the military would cooperate with the Attorney General's police, intelligence and justice departments. As drug eradication had become their exclusive responsibility, all the resources and funds for undertaking this task, previously assigned to the Attorney General's Office, were transferred to the armed forces (Mendoza Cortés 2016: 35). Meanwhile, the army transferred 7,500 soldiers and equipment to the Ministry of Public Security.

Shortly after coming to power, Calderón launched a joint operation—involving the army, the navy and the federal police—in his home state of Michoacán. By January 2007, operations had got underway in Guerrero, Sinaloa and Durango, and a few months later they were extended to Oaxaca, Jalisco and Nayarit. At the beginning of 2008, large federal intervention forces were deployed in the major cities along the U.S.–Mexican border. In all these states and the entire Sierra Madre region, the armed forces (and

other federal agencies) would maintain their presence during President Calderón's term in office (2006–2012).¹³ In addition, a high-impact task force was deployed in north-eastern Tamaulipas and Nuevo León, the territorial stronghold of the Gulf Cartel and Los Zetas. In the south, a joint army, air force and navy taskforce was sent to the Yucatán Peninsula. After 2006, the war on drugs thus evolved from counter-narcotics operations launched in the traditional drug cultivation and trafficking regions in northern Mexico to a nationwide conflict.

Since then, the trend has persisted. In recent years, central Mexico has become the hub of organised crime, violence and military operations. It is the traditional sphere of influence of major criminal organisations, such as the *Cartél de Jalisco Nueva Generación* (CJNG), several Michoacán-based organisations, as well as a region highly contested by the Sinaloa, Gulf and Los Zetas organisations.

While during the Fox administration the size of the armed forces remained stable with approximately 240,000 servicemen, by the end of the Calderón administration (2012) the number had increased to almost 260,000 and by 2018, to 270,000 (Grayson 2013: 55; Programa de Seguridad Ciudadana 2019: 53). The troops actually deployed in the war on drugs steadily increased (except for the period from 2013 to 2016). In 2006, the monthly average was 43,000 and in 2011, nearly 60,000. During the last three years of the Peña Nieto (PRI) administration, this was around 70,000, and in August 2020 Peña Nieto's successor, López Obrador (representing the recently created left-wing party MORENA) declared that 80,000 troops had been assigned to 'internal peacekeeping operations' (Programa de Seguridad Ciudadana 2019: 69–70; Benítez Manaut and Deare 2021: 41). Finally, between 2006 and 2018, expenditure on the armed forces increased by 219 per cent. During López Obrador's first year in office (2019), the budget of the Ministry of Defence (hereinafter SEDENA) increased yet again by more than 20 per cent (Intersecta 2020: 19).

This higher expenditure—to which U.S. funding should also be added—did not only serve to increase troop numbers, but also to improve labour conditions (salaries) and to modernise military equipment. Indeed, it was a key aspect of the pact in which the armed forces agreed to play a leading role in combating drug trafficking (Programa de Seguridad Ciudadana 2019: 59). Concerns about organised crime and the escalation of violence south of the border led to the closest bilateral military cooperation between the United States and Mexico since the Second World War.¹⁴ In 2007, Presidents Calderón and Bush negotiated the Mérida Initiative. Between 2008 and 2012, almost \$2 billion of Mérida Initiative resources were spent on helicopters, surveillance airplanes, scanning and communication technology, technical assistance and training. This initiative was continued during the Obama and Peña Nieto administrations, thus deepening the trend towards the Mexican armed forces' opening and international engagement (Benítez Manaut 2014: 441–446). In sum, since 2006, the militarisation of public security in Mexico has persisted, deepened and

broadened (territorially), a transformation sustained by more troops on the ground, increased national expenditure and international assistance.

There were two essential reasons behind the militarised and repressive approach to drug trafficking and organised crime: the growing fragmentation and disorder of Mexican organised crime and police corruption, both forming part of the complex relations between (drug related) organised crime and the state.

Firstly, by the year 2000 Mexico had become a linchpin in the international drug economy, resulting in domestic drug cartels with a much greater organisational, financial and coercive capacity. Just as the weakening of the country's centralised political and social institutions and the leakage of power to subnational levels were reshaping civil–military relations, so too did they transform the relationship between the state and organised crime. The previous informal arrangements were now insufficient for the new generation of powerful drug cartels, which sometimes became *de facto* criminal sovereignties. With so much at stake, territorial competition and fragmentation caused waves of intra-criminal violence, turning states such as Michoacán, Guerrero and Veracruz into 'no-go areas'. Owing to the increasingly more ineffective protection pacts between state agencies and organised crime, a market of private or 'privatised' public protection emerged. In the late 1990s, the most notorious case occurred when the GAFES, a group of U.S.-trained airborne special forces defected to the Gulf Cartel to become its armed wing, dubbed 'Los Zetas'. The incorporation of specialised military operational capabilities in organised crime led to its 'para-militarisation'. With Los Zetas, violence escalated as never before, while their subsequent separation from the Gulf Cartel in 2010, together with the major rift in the Sinaloa Cartel two years before, evinced the fragmentation, disorganisation and violence of Mexico's criminal world. That fragmentation soon degenerated into internecine war. Moreover, Los Zetas built a territorially oriented criminal organisation (later replicated elsewhere), which engaged in drug trafficking but which was above all based on the violent 'control of taxable territory': the populations and economies of communities and entire regions were subjected to extortion, protection rackets, human trafficking, oil theft and massacres. Differing from 'transactional' or trafficking-oriented criminal organisations (such as the Sinaloa Cartel), 'territorial' organisations pose a direct threat to state sovereignty. Calderón's militarisation was driven by an escalation of (brutal) violence and the threats of territorially oriented organised crime.¹⁵

Secondly, the fragmentation of criminal organisations and the escalation of violence also impacted a fractured public law enforcement landscape. Through corruption and their (partially) subordinated incorporation into criminal organisations, municipal and state police forces and federal agencies were caught up in mounting rivalries. Since the 1990s, the Mexican authorities have attempted to reform the country's feudalised policing and criminal justice systems, which were easy prey to corrupting and coercive criminal organisations. Successive federal administrations ascertained

the inability of the country's municipal and state police forces to protect society (and themselves), often without acknowledging the vulnerability of its federal agencies.¹⁶ The repeated attempts to professionalise local police forces have failed, not least because of political complicities, as have those to establish a strong national police force (Sabet 2012). Moreover, the citizenry's support for and trust in their police forces have been at a minimum for some time now. As a result, the Zedillo, Fox, Calderón, Peña Nieto and López Obrador administrations have all turned to the armed forces as the only national institution with sufficient coercive means and popular legitimacy to confront the threats that organised crime poses to national security and public security.

As already noted, the employment of the armed forces in combating drug trafficking was not limited to plant eradication, border surveillance or the manning of checkpoints along trafficking corridors. It also included the destruction of criminal networks through intelligence work and, above all, operations aimed at locating and arresting drug traffickers. According to the Ministry of National Defence, more than 41,000 people were arrested and over 2,300 alleged criminals were killed during the first five years of the Calderón administration. More specifically, the armed forces were tasked with arresting or eliminating the leaders of criminal organisations. This was part of the Mexican administration's trumpeted, but DEA prescribed, 'kingpin' strategy, based on the idea that organised crime is best combated by eliminating top members. As of 2007, the armed forces apprehended or killed dozens of them, including the high-profile arrests of Héctor Beltrán Leyva and Eduardo Arrellano Félix in 2008, and Vicente Zambada Niebla in 2009, and the elimination of Ignacio Coronel in Guadalajara in 2010. That same year, the Mexican marines eliminated Arturo Beltrán Leyva in an upper-class Cuernavaca neighbourhood, while in 2012 they captured Los Zetas commander Heriberto Lazcano. Even more significantly, they hunted down El Chapo Guzmán, capturing him in 2014 and, after a spectacular prison break, again in January 2016. The Mexican marines cooperated closely with the DEA, which provided them with intelligence and logistical support. It is worth mentioning that the relative role of the navy (and the marines) in the Mexican administration's militarised anti-narcotics policies increased over time. This is undoubtedly related to the trust that the U.S. drugs and intelligence agencies placed, and still place, in them.¹⁷ The kingpin strategy continued during the Peña Nieto government, which drew up a list of 122 primary targets (Dittmar 2018).

The militarisation of counter-narcotics operations was never only about putting more boots on the ground or about capturing top capos and staging photo-ops. A critical but hidden form of militarisation has also occurred through the growing influence of the armed forces on civil law enforcement. Over the past two decades, this process has developed in two basic ways: the incorporation of servicemen in the country's (federal) police forces, on the one hand, and the occupation of top civil law enforcement positions by high-ranking military officers, on the other. In the year

2000, servicemen, especially former military police, accounted for 50 per cent of the *Policía Federal Preventiva* (Federal Preventive Police [PFP])—11,000 officers (Programa de Seguridad Ciudadana 2019: 44). After many of the latter had abandoned the new PFP, the armed forces refused to send it any more soldiers.

As the cycle of police reform continued with each new administration, in 2012 Peña Nieto announced the creation of the *Gendarmería Nacional* (National Gendarmerie), with 40,000 civil officers, albeit with military training. Although many soldiers and marines refused to join, some 3,000 servicemen were transferred to the new institution. As the *Gendarmería* project was quietly dropped, the military pushed for the expansion of the military police, hoping that it would prevent ‘ordinary’ servicemen from undertaking public security tasks. The number of military police increased from 6,000 in 2012 to over 26,000 in 2018 (Programa de Seguridad Ciudadana 2019: 51).

As of 2018, López Obrador followed suit with the creation of the *Guardia Nacional* (National Guard [GN]). The idea was to put an end to the involvement of the armed forces in federal policing and to transfer these tasks to the new institution. In theory, a civilian body, the GN is actually a highly militarised force: in May 2020, more than half of its 90,000 members were former servicemen, the basic training that GN members undergo is military, they wear military-style uniforms and are equipped with rifles produced by the country’s arms industry (Lopez Portillo Vargas and Storr 2020: 17).¹⁸ Tellingly, the GN’s operative command is in the hands of (retired) military officers. In July 2021, President López Obrador declared that the GN’s budget would be increased by \$2.5 billion until the end of 2023.¹⁹ Subsequently, it was announced that the reorganisation of the armed forces would involve, among other things, the transfer of the GN to the SEDENA.²⁰ If approved by Congress, the GN will become a militarised police force not only in terms of personnel, training and de facto operative control but also institutionally and legally. All this has reinforced the militarisation of public security and law enforcement initiated in the 1990s.

As of 2010, an increasingly larger number of states, major cities and even small towns recruited (retired) members of the armed forces as police chiefs or appointed them to senior management positions in the realm of public security. The appointments of secretaries of public security in key states such as Morelos (2009), Tamaulipas (2010), Michoacán (2010) and Veracruz (2011) would have all been approved by the Secretary of National Defence. At the time, the public security heads of nearly half of the states had a military background (Moloznik and Suárez de Garay 2012: 134). In January 2011, a coordinated effort put retired military officers in charge of public security in nine municipalities in Tamaulipas (Grayson 2013: 17–25). Lieutenant Colonel Julián Leyzoala became something of a ‘super-cop’ when he cleaned up Tijuana’s police force, until he was hired to do the same in Ciudad Juárez in 2011. His ruthless methods led to accusations of serious human rights violations.²¹

The military's ever greater control over 'civil' institutions, of which the GN seems to be the current capstone, is also significant because there has been a particularly sharp increase in expenditure on (civil) public security and law enforcement. One study of the Calderón administration has shown that spending on civil public security increased by more than 330 per cent, while that on SEDENA rose by 76 per cent (Morales Rosas and Pérez Ricart 2014). This points to a process of indirect militarisation: the adoption of military principles and practices by the country's police forces, as well the military's control over formally non-military expenditure.

As the militarisation of Mexico's strategy for combating drug trafficking and organised crime has continued and evolved over the past 15 years, how should the consequences for society, the armed forces themselves and the country's democratic institutions be assessed? Calderón's war on drugs (narrative) had 'totalising' effects. It dominated government rhetoric and the public sphere. Images and stories of arrests, drug seizures, shoot-outs, killings and maimed bodies saturated the media. The president and his hardnosed Secretary of Public Safety Security—now jailed in the United States—boasted about their 'tough on crime' accomplishments. An entire 'narco-lexicon' developed. It also shaped foreign policy. Although Peña Nieto did away with his predecessor's boisterous anti-narcotics media presence, little changed in terms of policies and on-the-ground operations. In recent years, López Obrador's initial plea for pacification and demilitarisation has morphed into a greater reliance on the armed forces in relation to public security and national security and beyond (see below). In the summer of 2020, the government employed more than 60 per cent of its combat-ready forces in the war on drugs and in support of public security (Benítez Manaut 2021: 15). Most importantly, the protracted and expansive militarisation of public security has triggered an unprecedented escalation of violence and insecurity in the nation as a whole.

The militarised counter-narcotics strategy, grounded in the 'kingpin principle', had serious consequences (Serrano 2018: 66). All-out militarisation fanned the flames of violence across the country and enhanced and accelerated the fragmentation of criminal organisations and turf wars, thus sucking in local, regional and federal law enforcement agencies. Criminal fragmentation and militarisation reinforced each other and set in motion a spiral of brutal violence, accompanied by a generalised sensation and experience of insecurity. The blind application of military deployments in combination with the kingpin strategy disregarded the violent dynamics that they generated. They may have been accepted as inevitable, certainly during the initial years, but instead of protecting ordinary people, the opposite occurred. By failing to understand that drug trafficking organisations were usually embedded in the territories that they controlled, government policies ended up playing a substantial role in manufacturing a 'criminal nightmare'.²² It caused untold harm to hundreds of thousands of human beings, damaged the fabric of society and weakened the country's political and law enforcement institutions. A study of the entire 2006–2018 period

concluded that the militarisation strategy had not only exacerbated the violence but had also extended it across the country (Programa de Seguridad Ciudadana 2019: 109). A fascinating study of nearly 5,000 armed clashes between the armed forces and alleged criminals (2007–2018) demonstrates that they fail to contain or reduce violence but rather lead to an increase of lethal violence (Intersecta 2020: 65–79). Militarisation is a ‘direct cause of the unprecedented human crisis in Mexico’ (Carlsen 2018: 82).

The figures speak for themselves. Since December 2006 until the end of 2020, approximately 350,000 people have been murdered in Mexico.²³ At the peak of the first wave (2011), there were over 27,000 homicides (homicide rate of 23.6), whereas the second wave has plateaued at about 36,600 homicides in 2018–2020 (homicide rate of ca. 29).²⁴ In addition, around 80,000 people have disappeared. The enforced disappearances committed by the armed and other security forces constitute serious human rights violations. Arbitrary detentions and torture complete the picture of a society torn by violence, fear, insecurity and impunity. Brutal massacres perpetrated by members of criminal organisations and security forces, alike, have recurrently shocked Mexican society.²⁵ The aggrieved citizenry have attempted to come to grips with the fallout of the perverse interplay between organised crime, militarisation, corruption and impunity, by creating community police forces, becoming politically involved and unearthing clandestine graves, among other things.

The armed forces themselves have paid the consequences for their massive deployment in national security and public security. Hundreds of their members have lost their lives while on active duty.²⁶ The presence of tens of thousands of servicemen throughout the country has greatly increased their visibility and direct contact with the civilian population. Unsurprisingly, their deployment on the streets of major cities, on highways and in the countryside to carry out police work for which they are not trained, has led to human rights violations, including several infamous massacres, as well as their alleged involvement in the disappearance of the 43 Ayotzinapa students in September 2014 (Hernández 2016). The Ministry of National Defence has received thousands of complaints through the National Human Rights Commission (Mendoza Cortés 2016: 40). In response, the armed forces have created a human rights office and incorporated the topic in training programmes. It warrants noting that despite the shadows cast by human rights violations, the armed forces continue to enjoy a high level of popularity (above any political institution), a paradoxical feature of Mexico’s current militarisation.

In July 2021, the Navy Secretary regretted Mexico’s shortage of honest public servants and the problem of corruption. Fortunately, he added, in military academies ‘we forge women and men with values and principles, personnel with professional ethics’, who avoid trouble and become true ‘public servants for Mexican society’. By emphasising the moral superiority of military over civil culture, the general may have intended to assure the president that he can continue to rely on the armed forces in

the broadest sense, but his remarks also underscored a lack of institutional memory and a realistic assessment of the risks of militarisation. In February 1997, just a few months after he had become the commissioner of the National Institute to Combat Drugs, effectively Mexico's drug tsar, General Gutiérrez Rebollo was arrested for betraying the military and threatening national security for having protected one of the country's leading drug barons (Amado Carrillo Fuentes). He had been involved with senior drug traffickers since the time when he was in Guadalajara as the all-powerful commander of the Fifth Military Region.²⁷ Around the same time, at the presidential residence of Los Pinos, a top drug trafficker's son discussed the harassment of his family with the general in charge of the EMP, who was on the former's payroll (Hernández 2016: 71–75). A few years later, an elite special forces unit defected to the Gulf Cartel. More generally, the persistent and prominent involvement of the armed forces in counter-narcotics operations increasingly exposes them to corruption and intimidation. In the long run, this is bound to undermine the reputation of the armed forces.

'Pueblo Uniformado' and Militarisation Beyond Public Security?

In 2012, in his second bid for the presidency, Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO) advocated for the return of the military to the barracks, while distancing himself from the aggressive approach of his nemesis Felipe Calderón. This should come as no surprise, since AMLO's relationship with the armed forces had been strained for many years. He had portrayed them as part of the 'neoliberal mafia' and as the repressive arm of the country's corrupt administrations. In 2017, he hinted at the involvement of the army in the Ayotzinapa tragedy.²⁸ After his third and successful bid for the presidency in 2018, he launched the project of the GN, which would be in charge of anti-narcotics operations, offer the armed forces a way out and facilitate a 'pacification' policy, renouncing the belligerent logic of fighting fire with fire.

AMLO's resounding electoral victory ushered in a new period of civil–military relations, cautiously at first, but one that soon acquired a tendency that has raised the eyebrows of many observers. Although this is not the place to speculate about the ulterior motives behind the change in policies and hearts, a different perspective of the role of the armed forces in coping with Mexico's security crisis emerged. In AMLO's view, ordering the military to police the streets and to combat organised crime had been an irresponsible strategy, but withdrawing them immediately would be disastrous. A few days before assuming office, in front of 30,000 soldiers and navy personnel, he stressed the popular roots of the armed forces, their discipline and professionalism and their unconditional respect for the civil authorities. The notion of the army as the '*pueblo uniformado*', nationalistic, popular and anti-oligarchic purposefully conjured up images of the revolutionary army founded in Teoloyucan in 1914, while befitting the new

president's anti-establishment and populist discourse and style. AMLO's request to the armed forces to help the Mexican people to resolve the security crisis jumpstarted an unprecedented process of militarisation that went beyond security matters.²⁹

For years, the legal regulation of the large-scale involvement of the armed forces in public security matters had been deficient, until in May 2020 a presidential decree formalised and expanded such power until 2024. Thenceforth, the policing tasks performed by soldiers would be undertaken exclusively by the GN. However, with the planned transfer of the GN to the armed forces, the militarisation of public security will become permanent. In addition, the 2020 decree tellingly said very little about expanding the external oversight of the armed forces. Considering their disturbing human rights track record, this has been a wake-up call for (inter)national NGOs and concerned citizens (Suárez-Enríquez 2017).

The expansion of the Mexican military's roles and tasks, especially in the field of policing, and their legal and organisational institutionalisation, have paved the way for their incursion into adjoining fields of public security. In July 2020, for example, the civilian control of the nation's ports and customs facilities was handed over to the navy and the army. The decision was motivated by concerns about the corruption of the country's port authorities, who were turning a blind eye to the large-scale importation of drugs and chemical precursors, especially on the Pacific coast. The army was also put in charge of the country's terrestrial customs offices, a controversial decision that led to the resignation of the Minister of Communications and Transportation.³⁰ In a similar vein, the armed forces were tasked with guarding oil pipelines and immigration control, the latter mostly by the GN and to please the U.S. authorities.

Six months after announcing the militarisation of Mexico's ports and customs, the armed forces were placed in control of a new state company that will run a large section of AMLO's most important tourism development project, the so-called Maya Train in the Yucatán Peninsula. The military will manage the company that operates the trains, guarantee the safety (of visitors) in the region and use the profits to top up military pension funds. This also applies to the construction and management of Mexico City's new international airport. After AMLO cancelled the \$14 billion airport project of the Peña Nieto administration, he decided to convert an existing air force base into the commercial Felipe Ángeles Airport. By placing these major public works in the hands of military-run state-owned companies, the current administration wants to prevent their future privatisation.³¹

The armed forces' expansion into the administration of ports, customs and public works is supplemented by their involvement in the government's flagship social programmes. Beyond natural disaster relief, stipulated in the military DN-III plan, including combating the COVID-19 pandemic, the current administration has reinforced the armed forces' role in critical areas of social development. In August 2021, AMLO declared that without

military support ‘we would not have been able to reconstruct or complete the hospitals which the corrupt neoliberal governments had abandoned’.³² The Ministry of National Defence is currently building 2,700 branches of the Banco del Bienestar, which will be used to channel federal social benefits. The army is also participating in ‘Sembrando Vida’, a social assistance programme for rural communities.³³

There can be little doubt that the armed forces’ tried and tested roles in disaster relief, the COVID-19 pandemic and social programmes, as well as in combating insecurity and violence, have contributed to their lasting popular legitimacy. In a 2020 national opinion poll, they topped the list of the ‘most trustworthy’ public institutions, followed by the GN, with 23 and 21 per cent, respectively. In contrast, the country’s police forces were considered to be trustworthy by only 4 per cent of the respondents, while senators and federal deputies fared even worse (2.7 per cent).³⁴ In May 2020, another poll revealed that 78 per cent of Mexicans favoured the continuation of the armed forces in public security during the next five years (Benítez Manaut 2021: 20). In the meantime, AMLO’s popularity has stabilised at around 60 per cent. It may well be that this elemental political reality has motivated a pragmatic restructuring of civil–military relations that may have far-reaching consequences (Benítez Manaut 2021: 20). When the current Minister of National Defence observed that the armed forces were adequately ‘fulfilling the missions assigned to them to serve the Mexican people’, he echoed the language of the current president and evoked the ethos of the popular, nationalistic and socially engaged army of the early twentieth century.

Notes

- 1 Generals Carranza, Obregón, Calles, Cárdenas and Ávila Camacho governed the country between 1916 and 1946.
- 2 The pact was a result of the crisis triggered by the assassination of Obregón in July 1928, shortly after his re-election. The PNR subsequently became the Partido de la Revolución Mexicana (Party of the Mexican Revolution [PRM]) in 1938, and the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (Institutional Revolutionary Party [PRI]) in 1946.
- 3 National Security Archives, ‘Mexico: The Problems of Progress’, 20 October 1967, pp. 1, 2, available at www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB92/mexelect_1.pdf [consulted November 2021].
- 4 The then Minister of Defense, García Barragán, held special forces under the president’s orders, and not the regular armed forces, responsible for initiating the massacre, see Velez (2017: 188).
- 5 A good example is Middlebrook (2004).
- 6 In the contested 1988 elections, the opposition candidate Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas had the sympathy of the armed forces; see Serrano (1995: 446).
- 7 For a critical review of the SPP, see Carlsen (2007).
- 8 The PRD was founded by Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas after he had ‘lost’ the 1988 presidential elections. The persecution of PRD members is widely seen in this context; see Schatz (2001).

- 9 U.S. Embassy cable to the Secretary of State, 11 May 1995, ‘The Mexican military—Still passive, isolated, and above that fray?’ available at <https://nsarchi ve2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB120/doc2.pdf>. [consulted November 2021].
- 10 See Sierra Guzmán (2003: 279). Between 1996 and 2003, the budget of the armed forces increased from ca. Mex\$13 to 31 billion; see Arzt (2007: 155).
- 11 For an analysis of this document, see Camp (1999).
- 12 U.S. Embassy cable to the Secretary of State, 11 May 1995, ‘The Mexican military’—Still passive, isolated, and above that fray?, available at <https://nsarchi ve2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB120/doc2.pdf>. [consulted November 2021].
- 13 Mendoza (2016: 51-53) documented 91 ‘high impact’ operations during the Calderón administration.
- 14 In comparative terms, military cooperation between Mexico and the United States had been modest for quite a while.
- 15 For territorial and transactional criminal organisations, see Jones (2016). Apart from Los Zetas, La Familia Michoacana and Los Caballeros Templarios are also examples of the first type.
- 16 In 2008, for instance, 35 investigators of the federal anti-crime-unit SIEDO were found to be on the payroll of the Beltrán Leyva organisation. See Jones (2016).
- 17 For a top-ranking DEA agent, the Mexican marines were ‘the only Mexican law enforcement unit I could trust ...’, (quoted by Riley 2019: 213).
- 18 Many former federal policemen refused to be transferred to the new institution.
- 19 In 2021, the GN budget was \$1.78 billion. See *La Jornada*, 26 July 2021.
- 20 *La Jornada*, 14 August 2021, ‘AMLO niega militarización’.
- 21 In 2015, he was seriously injured in an assassination attempt in Ciudad Juárez.
- 22 On embeddedness, see Pansters (2018). On ‘nightmare’, see Serrano (2018: 68).
- 23 Around half is generally attributed to organised crime violence.
- 24 See www.inegi.org.mx/contenidos/saladeprensa/boletines/2021/EstSociodemograficas/DefuncionesRegistradas2020_Pre_07.pdf. [consulted November 2021].
- 25 Some examples: San Fernando, 2010 (72 victims); Ciudad Juárez (Villas de Salvárcar), 2010 (15 victims); Allende, 2011 (ca. 300 victims); Cadereyta, 2012 (49 victims), Tlatlaya, 2014 (22 victims), Ayotzinapa, 2014 (6 killed, 43 disappeared); Toluca, 2015 (43 victims); and Salamanca, 2019 (15 victims).
- 26 *El Economista*, 7 January 2019.
- 27 More details about Gutiérrez Rebollo can be found in Fazio (1979).
- 28 Benítez Manaut (2021: 13–15) argues that a substantial part of the military elite was actively involved in a social media campaign to discredit López Obrador.
- 29 *La Jornada*, 3 December 2018, ‘Militares, lejos de negocios a la sombra del poder y la oligarquía, reitera AMLO’.
- 30 *La Jornada*, 18 July 2020, ‘AMLO militariza aduanas y puertos para abatir narco, corrupción e inseguridad’.
- 31 *La Jornada*, 21 December 2020, ‘Busca López Obrador que fuerzas armadas operen el Tren Maya’. This argument also applies to another major project, namely, the interoceanic railway and development corridor, to be managed by the navy and four state governments.
- 32 *La Jornada*, 14 August 2021, ‘AMLO niega’.
- 33 David Brooks, ‘Sembrando vida’, BBC Mundo, 23 April 2021, available at www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-america-latina-56853807 [consulted November 2021].

- 34 INEGI, *Encuesta Nacional de Cultural Cívica 2020*, p. 78, at www.inegi.org.mx/contenidos/programas/encuci/2020/doc/ENCUCI_2020_Presentacion_Ejecutiva.pdf [consulted November 2021].

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Part 3

Violent Pluralism



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9 Guatemala—The Sword of Damocles

Deficient Civilian Control and Relative Military Autonomy

Bernardo Arévalo de León

Background: Dismantling the Political Army

The signing of the peace accords between the national government and the Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca (Guatemalan National Revolutionary Union [URNG-MAIZ]) in 1996 paved the way for a redefinition of civil–military relations, far removed from the historical legacy of militarisation and political violence. Ever since its colonial origins, the Guatemalan political order had depended on the coercive capacity of the state institutions. Relatively exempt from external menaces, the armed forces developed as an instrument for domestic political control, rather than for defending the country against foreign military threats. The modern military was established in 1870, as part of the ‘liberal’ phase of state development in the isthmus but amounted to little more than a ragtag militia at the service of the ruling caudillo.

It was not until the democratic revolutionary governments of 1944–1954 that the armed forces underwent a process of professionalisation and modernisation that provided the necessary elements for developing a strong and autonomous institutional ethos. At the same time, they were assigned a constitutional role ‘in defence of the revolution’, which not only legitimised their participation in politics but also led to their politicisation. Their participation in the 1954 counter-revolution, one of the first salvos of the Cold War on the continent, strengthened their role as an autonomous political actor, to the point that by the early 1960s they had acquired all the features of what Koonings and Kruijt (2002a) have defined as a ‘political army’: a professional corps with a well-defined identity within the state bureaucracy, convinced of its responsibility for state development and defence, and with the capacity for political action, whenever need be.

Between 1963 and 1996, the Guatemalan armed forces—Ejército de Guatemala, as the military institution is officially called—became the most powerful determining factor in the political alliance underpinning the counter-insurgent and anti-communist state, organised to crush ‘internal enemies’ swiftly and effectively (Torres Rivas and Aguilera 1998; Torres Rivas 2001). Institutionally strong and cohesive, with a clear sense of mission and a politico-military doctrine justifying military rule and

violent repression, modelled on the National Security Doctrine, the armed forces controlled social and political life in the country through authoritarian structures behind a democratic façade. According to the Historical Clarification Commission, set up as part of the peace accords, there were an unprecedented number of human rights violations against the civilian population during anti-insurgency operations: more than 200,000 casualties—83 per cent of them indigenous peoples—more than 600 hamlets razed to the ground and cases of genocide against the Ixil indigenous group, 96 per cent of which were perpetrated by state forces and 3 per cent by the insurgents (Comisión para el Esclarecimiento Histórico 1999). By the time peace negotiations between an elected civilian government and the guerrilla had got underway, the military not only controlled the country's political institutions but were also omnipresent in society, particularly in rural areas where they were the only institutional representatives of the national state. It was evident that any attempt to establish a functional democratic polity would require a thorough transformation of civil–military relations and a redefinition of the role of the armed forces in the state and society (Arévalo de León 1997).

The peace accords included a blueprint for transforming the military, with the clear intention of establishing a legal-institutional framework that guaranteed democratic political rule and pre-empting any pretension of continuing in their role as guarantors of Guatemala's 'national institutions', as prescribed by the National Security Doctrine. This involved the de-construction of the 'political army' existing since 1963, in order to ensure that the military renounced positions of political power and effectively obeyed the democratically elected civilian authorities (Aguilera Peralta 1994).

The political elites who negotiated the peace accords clearly understood that without effective subordination, the military's retreat from politics would become a sort of '*repos du guerrier*', namely, returning to their barracks from where they would continue to monitor the political scene, while waiting for the next political crisis requiring their intervention to 'rescue' the nation. Therefore, a partial agreement on transforming the military, titled 'Acuerdo sobre el Fortalecimiento del Poder Civil y Función del Ejército en una Democracia' ('Agreement on the Strengthening of Civilian Power and the Role of the Military in Democracy' [AFPC]), was included, which expressly pursued the effective subordination of the Guatemalan armed forces to the civilian authorities on the basis of legal and institutional reforms. These were aimed at converting a political and counter-insurgent military force into an apolitical institution with an organisation, policies, doctrine and professional culture conducive to its subordination to the legitimate civil authorities. In a wider state context, it implied developing a legal framework, policies, civilian security institutions and professional cadres enabling the elected authorities to exercise political control over a military institution now without domestic security responsibilities.

The first problems arose in both realms during the transition to democracy in the mid-1980s when ‘institutional’ military officers foiled attempts by military hardliners—and their civilian allies—to topple the first freely elected civilian government since 1963, that of President Vinicio Cerezo (1986–1991). The transition to civilian rule was not due to the successful political mobilisation of citizens and political parties demanding democracy, as in the Southern Cone, but from a pre-emptive political decision adopted by a faction of the military, which understood that the recent shifts in international politics—the global ‘third wave’ of democratisation, the growing importance of human rights on the international agenda, the United States’ dwindling support of authoritarian regimes and so forth—made it advisable to encounter a pragmatic solution to the ‘chaotic violence’ being deployed by an authoritarian state against the guerrilla. A coup d’état in 1982 brought to power an ‘institutional’ faction of the military, which implemented a two-pronged counter-insurgency strategy: a democratic liberalisation that led to the first free elections in decades and a military campaign in which some of the worst human rights violations witnessed during the 36-year conflict were committed. Democratisation was therefore the result of a calculated move by the military to restore the authoritarian state’s international and national legitimacy, allowing the armed forces to focus on the military campaign against the guerrilla, while the civilian authorities, with limited political control, devoted their time to administering the state institutions (Gramajo 1995; Rosada Granados 1999; Schirmer 1999).

Indeed, in an interview that he gave years after leaving office, the ex-president Cerezo admitted that he had only held ‘30 per cent of the power’ during his term in office, clearly evidenced by the fact that the military had vetoed political negotiations with the guerrilla. But the complex civil–military relations characterising the transitional decade between 1986 and 1996 led to a gradual shift in power. During that decade, the ‘institutional’ faction of the military realised that its original intention of wielding political control over the civilian authorities clashed with the democratisation process’ need for legitimacy and with the decision, by ever more confident elected political authorities, to find a negotiated solution to the conflict.

At the same time, with its gradual consolidation, the ‘institutional’ faction within the armed forces managed to marginalise ‘recalcitrant’ officers, to the point that they could no longer control the institution or challenge the civilian authorities. Two coups led by disgruntled military hardliners during Cerezo’s presidency, and President Serrano Elías’ (1991–1993) failed self-coup, supported by his military high command, were foiled by institutional officers defending constitutional rule. And as the transitional period progressed, the successive elected governments gradually managed to overcome the armed forces’ initial veto over opening, sustaining and concluding political negotiations with the guerrilla, to the point of signing comprehensive peace accords that included a specific partial agreement with a blueprint for transforming the military institution,

in order to adapt it to post-authoritarian, post-conflict defence roles: the AFPC (Arévalo de León 1997; Rosada Granados 2007).

Initial Obstacles to Transformation: Implementing the AFPC

Military resistance continued to be expressed in the implementation of the provisions of the AFPC, such as defining a new military doctrine, in replacement of the National Security Doctrine, and reorganising military units so as to adapt them to a post-conflict defence scenario. The political mishandling of military continuity by the same administration that had signed the peace accords prevented the consolidation of the 'institutional' military top brass who had supported the democratisation process and the peace negotiations during the previous decade, resulting in a situation in which competing factions vied for control over the armed forces by leveraging their personal ties with politicians. Subsequent administrations continued to appoint military officers to key positions on the basis of personal and political allegiances, with little consideration for personal merit, job performance or institutional transformation goals. As a result, during the Arzú (1996–2000), Portillo (2000–2004), Berger (2004–2008) and Colom (2008–2012) administrations, the AFPC was implemented in fits and starts that reflected the differences of opinion between the 'institutional' and 'recalcitrant' factions of the military clique in power, the varying level of attention that the civilian authorities paid to military issues and the calls for its implementation by civil society and international actors (Arévalo de León and Jiménez 2017).

In its final report, the United Nations Verification Mission in Guatemala (MINUGUA) confirmed that the military legal-institutional framework for state control, developed by the military for their political and counter-insurgency roles, had already been dismantled. Essential transformations in the Guatemalan armed forces, such as a new military doctrine and their reorganisation so as to adapt them to their new national defence roles, a reduction in military personnel and expenditure in consonance with the new situation and the demobilisation of military units linked to the counter-insurgency operations, had already been achieved. But at the same time, attitudes such as the refusal to submit military expenditure to the scrutiny of parliamentary commissions and the unsuccessful attempts to end the jurisdiction of the civil courts over military personnel involved in non-military incidents, highlighted the fact that their subordination to the civil authorities was not identically or sufficiently understood by the military: accepting their doctrinal and organisational adaptation to the new, post-conflict defence scenario and their subordination to the president, as enshrined in the national constitution, had not prevented their resistance to other institutionalised forms of democratic civilian control, such as effective parliamentary supervision or the jurisdiction of the civil courts.

Their energetic resistance only partially explains the military's irregular and incomplete accommodation to democratic political power. Whenever the civil authorities resolutely adopted decisions affecting fundamental military interests—either those of the institution itself or those of the incumbent military top brass—the armed forces could only voice their opposition. Presidents Arzú and Portillo partially or totally dismissed the military top brass at the time, sending them into retirement, in order to appoint officers to their liking, regardless of the institutional impact; Presidents Arzú and Berger both slashed military expenditure, the latter beyond the goals established in the peace accords, which resulted in a drastic reduction in the armed forces' size and budget.

In each of these cases, when political will was clearly expressed in a presidential decision, the only option for the military institution was to obey, albeit reluctantly. But in the absence of a comprehensive legal-institutional framework and a respective military policy for developing a democratic security system, presidential authority was no longer the expression of democratic constitutionalism, but a reflection of individual 'Caesarist' powers, which did not necessarily contribute to consolidate democracy. To the fluctuations in political determination to promote an effective transformation of the armed forces during successive governments should be added the dearth of civil servants with experience in defence and security matters and a state that was generally too weak to design and implement public policies. These factors constantly combined during the critical decade following the signing of the peace accords. The greater or lesser political will did not only have to do with the arrival of a new government, but also depended on the changing balance of power in each government. Consequently, sometimes the wind was favourable to change—civilian politicians committed to transforming the armed forces and with political authority, and reformist military officers who understood the need to adapt the institution to the new circumstances—and sometimes not—a lack of civilian leadership at the highest political level to carry out that much-needed transformation, and stubborn sectors of the military who succeeded in regaining positions of power in the armed forces.

In point of fact, the civil authorities neglected their responsibility to design and implement a military policy explicitly aimed at guaranteeing the armed forces' complete institutional subordination to the democratic civil authorities, clearly defining military missions in the framework of national security and defence policies, establishing effective guidelines for their doctrinal and organisational adaptation to these missions, and providing a training and education that would guarantee that the new generations of officers would internalise democratic values and rules. Their intention was, at best, to ensure the implementation of the commitments established in the AFPC, as formal milestones of compliance with a bureaucratic schedule, rather than an effective structural transformation of civil-military relations.

This was sufficient to allow those state and civil society actors with an understanding of the big picture to push for the AFPC's implementation, placing the accent on essential issues such as creating a national security advisory board—thus establishing a direct channel between civil society and the presidency for discussing such issues—reinforcing the new national civilian police force, so as to enable it to assume public security responsibilities, and facilitating the passing of the *Ley Marco del Sistema Nacional de Seguridad* (Framework Act on the National Security System, DL No. 18-.2008—15 April 2008), enshrining conceptual and operational notions of democratic (post-authoritarian) security. But it was not enough to foster the development of a 'national' military policy pursuing sustainable structural changes. Moreover, the failure to approve a package of constitutional reforms deriving from the peace accords in 1999, early in the post-conflict period, meant that it was impossible to introduce key ones, such as the 'civilianisation' of the Ministry of Defence (Arévalo de León and Jiménez 2017).

These discrepancies evince the main impediment to effective civilian control over the Guatemalan armed forces: the absence of a coherent state policy. Even though the AFPC provided a 'road map' for transforming the security apparatus and developing civilian control mechanisms, it never became a sustained and coherent public policy for developing democratic civil–military relations. Civil society efforts to place the issue on the national political agenda had a limited impact, due to the lack of understanding and disinterest of most of the political class (Arévalo de León and Täger 2016a, 2016b). As a result, the military institution retained a relative level of autonomy, characterised by its partial transformation and an incomplete development of civilian control mechanisms, in the context of an escalation of crime and violence.

The Escalation of Crime and Violence and the Failure of the Police Reform

Since 1997, Guatemala has been affected by a combination of factors that has led to the explosion and transformation of violence in the post-conflict period. Its geographical location makes it a natural bridge for the international smuggling of people, vehicles and drugs, all of which emerged in the years immediately after the signing of the peace accords, with the violence affecting rural and urban communities, rich and poor neighbourhoods and all facets of social life. Back in the 1980s, Colombian and Mexican drug cartels had already started to exploit Guatemala's weak security forces and legal institutions to use it as a stopover on their trafficking routes to the U.S. drug market, engaging local criminal groups for muscle, which, in the context of the post-conflict security transition, developed into powerful and violent cartels with *de facto* control over broad swaths of the country.

Local criminals also took advantage of this state of affairs to carry out violent bank robberies and burglaries—mainly in the capital—as well as

kidnapping for ransom and extortion—all over the country. And against a backdrop of unemployment, poverty, family disintegration and chronic violence, criminal youth gangs—‘*Maras*’—vied for the control of the urban slums, terrorising and subjecting the population to horrific violence in the absence of—and sometimes in cahoots with—the police. Homicide rates rocketed to the point that during the first decade of the twenty-first century, Guatemala was ranked among the most violent countries in the world, with 48 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants in 2009, and the chronic presence of violence in all facets of social life. And while the sustained decline in homicide rates over the past decade suggests that the level of violence is falling, the citizenry’s perception of insecurity and their demands for state action to address the problem remain very high (Argueta 2016; Mendoza 2019).

In parallel, the commitments established in the AFPC to downsize the armed forces and to disband the notoriously corrupt National Police led to the demobilisation of military and police personnel, without programmes for their complete reintegration into civilian life. Many of these former soldiers and policemen were recruited by an expanding private security industry—much of it monopolised by retired military officers—which, thanks to the traditionally vague line separating public/private and formal/informal strategies for the provision of authoritarian security services, became more of a problem than a solution to the development of a new (democratic) security framework (Argueta 2013).

More worryingly, many disbanded servicemen and policemen immediately joined criminal networks, sometimes as foot soldiers, sometimes as bosses. Experience in the use of lethal violence, illegal methods and corrupt practices—all ubiquitous in counter-insurgency operations—became marketable skills that opened the door for careers in organised and common crime. Demobilised military officers who found their way into the new *Policía Nacional Civil* (Civil National Police [PNC]), groups of retired officers who provided security services on demand to legal and illegal bodies or who engaged in their own criminal activities, collectively referred to as *Cuerpos Ilegales y Aparatos Clandestinos de Seguridad* (Illegal Groups and Clandestine Security Apparatuses [CIACS]), established, together with civilian partners, a loose network that, so as to operate with impunity, infiltrated the country’s security forces and judiciary. The scope of the resulting co-optation of state institutions led the government of President Berger, with the support of civil society organisations, to request international assistance for developing a strategy to strengthen the country’s legal institutions in order to prevent them from being infiltrated by criminal organisations. This led to the creation of the *Comisión Internacional contra la Impunidad en Guatemala* (International Commission against Impunity in Guatemala [CICIG]), an unprecedented UN body designed to supplement national efforts to address crime and corruption through supporting and developing the capabilities of the State Prosecutor’s Office, which subsequently fell victim to its own success (Call and Hallock 2020).

In the recently created PNC, the implementation of a ‘light’ vetting process allowed many of the members of the disbanded National Police to find their way back, a problem compounded by hasty training programmes—three months for former policemen and six for new recruits—and political meddling in the appointment of the members of the senior management team. Although the reform and modernisation of the PNC had been on the public security agenda of every government since 1997, with considerable support from international cooperation agencies, the Guatemalan authorities did not possess sufficient political will to maintain an effective and sustained effort in this regard. Every new administration declared its intention to strengthen the PNC’s capabilities in order to address the escalation of crime and violence, but the lack of clear political will, beyond electoral rhetoric, meant that it was impossible to maintain a coherent strategy not only from one government to the next, but from one minister to the following one in the same government.

During the Portillo government, an already challenged professionalisation process was undermined by political interference and systematised corruption, to the point that by the end of the period, although its budget had increased significantly, the PNC was already undergoing a process of institutional deterioration and de-professionalisation. In 2004, the MINUGUA’s final report underscored this situation and stressed the need to make a sustained effort to improve the police force, increasing its budget and purging it of criminal elements (MINUGUA, 2004). During his four-year term in office President Colom named five ministers of the interior and five director generals of the PNC, each of them with their own strategies and approaches to the problem. Both the Colom and Pérez (2012–2015) governments appointed high-level commissioners for police reform, civil society leaders tasked with drafting and implementing coherent strategies and plans, boosted by international technical and financial support and a direct line to the minister of the interior and the president, who saw their efforts hindered by a string of constant and arbitrary changes in the leadership of the PNC and the Ministry of the Interior. At the same time as he was paying lip service to police reform, President Pérez appointed a greater number of retired military officers to posts in the Ministry of the Interior and beefed up military units undertaking public security tasks. After the first minister of the interior of President Morales (2016–2020) had strived to modernise and professionalise the PNC, his successor dismissed all the members of the senior management team who had risen through the ranks during their professional careers, substituting them with his cronies and other people so as to protect his shady interests.

Years and decades of investment in training a professional senior management have been wasted time and again owing to decisions seemingly deriving from a combination of political meddling and ignorance. Mishandled owing to the fickle political interests of subsequent governments and politicians, the PNC has remained an ‘understaffed, badly managed and insufficiently trained’ body down to the present day, characterised by

its limited operational capabilities, its weak corporate identity and the little trust that it enjoys among the population (Matute 2021).

Giving a Public Security Role to the Military

The combination of rampant crime, escalating violence and the citizenry's lack of trust in the PNC is at the root of the call for military involvement in public security. In contradiction with the clear separation between public security and defence roles established in the peace accords—and only a few months before their signing—the country's civil authorities ordered the military to provide troops for supporting public security operations led by civilians of the Ministry of the Interior. Adopted between 1996 and the year 2000, this could be explained as a temporary measure to improve public security at a moment when the new post-conflict security forces were being set up. But in the year 2000, in the context of a mounting public security crisis, military participation in street patrolling was not only confirmed by the Portillo government but also expanded to include roles relating to prison security.

The military's participation in public security operations under civilian command and their role in supporting the PNC continued until 2018, in circumstances that changed depending on the security situation and political factors at any given time. While depending on military participation in support of public security, the Arzú, Portillo, Berger and Colom governments continued implementing the AFPC's provisions, strengthening public security capabilities and continuing with the military reform. The demobilisation of counter-insurgency military units, the slashing of military expenditure and personnel, the creation of a new 'democratic security' framework, including the development of the aforementioned Framework Act on the National Security System and the establishment of a national security council clearly distinguishing between the spheres of public security and defence, plus their respective responsibilities, were some of milestones of the 'civilianisation' of public security that was taking place, notwithstanding the participation of military forces in related functions (Jiménez 2019; WOLA-FMM 2020).

This ambiguous trend changed with the government of Pérez,¹ a retired 'institutional' military officer and a signatory of the peace accords, elected on an 'iron fist' ("*mano dura*") tough on crime ticket. President Pérez increased military participation in public security functions and the number of retired military officers occupying posts in the Ministry of the Interior, formalising military participation with the integration of the new Reserve Corps for Public Security into the armed forces and the creation of combined police–military 'taskforces' for territorial missions ranging from street patrolling in Guatemala City to combating drug trafficking on the eastern border. At the same time, the Ministry of the Interior and the Presidency became more adverse to civil society actors, resulting in the dissolution of the Civil Society Advisory Board

of the Presidency, created under President Berger, and the closing of the institutional communication channel with civil society organisations specialising in security, which had been open since the Arzú administration (WOLA-FMM 2020).

But the domestic conditions favouring a return to more top-down, military-oriented public security strategies were mitigated by international factors: the Plan Alianza para la Prosperidad del Triángulo Norte de Centroamérica (Plan of the Alliance for Prosperity in the Northern Triangle of Central America), a regional initiative aimed at getting to the root of crime and migration launched by the U.S., Salvadorian, Guatemalan and Honduran governments, with significant funding, access to which was contingent on the elimination of military participation in public security roles. Consequently, the new Morales government (2016–2020) approved—after some initial procrastination—a plan in this regard, which led to the effective demobilisation of the Reserve Corps for Public Security in 2018, which spelt the end of military street patrols and limited the armed forces to participating in joint police–military taskforces for border control and combating drug trafficking (WOLA-FMM 2020).

But with the same ambiguity characterising public security since 1996, President Morales decided to appoint a new (civilian) minister of the interior with a thoroughly authoritarian approach, who intentionally frustrated all attempts to professionalise the PNC and contradicted every existing legal and policy framework for democratic public security. In the context of the political crisis resulting from the fight against corruption that led to the dismantling of the CICIG, the civil authorities resorted to authoritarian practices with the intention of intimidating their opponents: heavily armed convoys using military equipment donated by the United States drove through the city, passing by embassies and the offices of the CICIG and international organisations, while President Morales decided to address the nation surrounded by the military top brass dressed in combat fatigues, the likes of which had not been seen since the heyday of the armed conflict (Arévalo de León 2019; Jiménez 2019).

The current Giammatei government (2020–2024) has increased military participation in the realm of public security through the extensive use of the state of emergency provisions of the Ley de Orden Público (Law Enforcement Act, 1965), an outdated piece of legislation suspending normal laws and constitutional rights so as to enable the authorities to deploy a combination of military and civilian security personnel in emergencies. Until 2019, the country's successive governments had resorted to these provisions in emergency situations once a year on average. But in the 15 months since taking office, President Giammatei has already decreed four states of alert for launching regular anti-crime operations in urban neighbourhoods, and two states of siege, one for dealing with intercommunal land disputes in the Western Highlands and the other for launching anti-narcotics operations on the Caribbean coast. None of these situations actually justified the suspension of constitutional rights,

requiring only well-planned and professional operations, supported by effective police intelligence work. Moreover, their meagre results have not warranted the vast amount of military and police resources employed in them. But invoking emergency laws has allowed the government to be seen to be ‘doing something’ about crime and violence, in consonance with its ‘tough on crime’ electoral discourse and authoritarian vein.

As already noted, homicide rates have gradually fallen over the past decade, thus suggesting a general reduction in violence. Analysts indicate that this can be best explained by the combined effect of the legal and institutional changes that have been introduced in order to enhance public security—the reform of the PNC, the development of civilian intelligence capabilities, the new legislation for combating organised crime, the judicial reform, the strengthening of the Public Prosecutor’s Office and so forth—while having had little to do with military participation in the realm of public security, which has actually been associated with greater levels of violence in recent research (Flores-Macías and Zarkin 2021). But notwithstanding the fact that homicide rates have dropped, the citizenry’s perception of the prevalence of violence remains high (Mendoza 2019).

This state of affairs is mainly due to the mentality of certain sectors of the population which assume that the military are more effective and responsible than civilians. When faced with a mounting public security crisis, the country’s political class, supported by a citizenry terrified by criminal violence, has repeatedly turned to the military for help under the impression that bigger guns imply a bigger impact—‘iron fist’ is a popular notion. While a new democratic military doctrine was developed and used to train new generations of officers, no parallel effort was ever made to transform the citizenry’s perception of military roles, based on a collective historical experience of militarised public security and pervasive notions relating to the National Security Doctrine, which permeated society during the counter-insurgency years.

Political culture in Guatemala has a strong authoritarian streak reflected in the dwindling support for democracy and a strong endorsement of military intervention in politics (Azpuru, Rodríguez and Zechmeister 2018; Mendoza 2019). This is fuelled by what a retired officer called ‘military arrogance cultivated by the subservience of less-qualified civilians’ who call for their intervention in support of inefficient institutions, and by the incentive of greater military expenditure justified by the need to engage in the realm of public security. But it is not only about public security: the Engineer Corps has a programme for the maintenance of provincial roads; desks manufactured in military workshops are used at state schools; government lawyers are trained in cybercrime by the military intelligence agency; military battalions are used for reforestation programmes, delivering government assistance (and not only in emergencies) and monitoring river levels during the rainy season, among other things. In other words, whatever needs that an embattled civilian government finds it easier to address by resorting to its compliant armed forces.

The De-institutionalisation of Military Power

It seems evident that this ebb and flow of military participation in public security roles over the past 25 years can be explained more by civilian inconsistency and incoherence than by sustained institutional pressure brought to bear by the armed forces. As a matter of fact, their participation in street patrols, the critical indicator of the military's adoption of non-defence roles, has not been accepted by one and all. Commanding officers have held different views on the matter at different times, from the reluctance shown by the top brass in Cabinet meetings towards Portillo's plans for increasing the military's participation in the realm of public security, to their enthusiastic support for Pérez's creation of a specialist 'reserve' military unit. But what is referred to as evidence of military influence on government has not been limited to the opinions voiced by commanding officers in active service through institutional channels: one of the characteristics of the new century has been the prominence of retired military officers in the political scene.

Over the years, retired military officers have created political parties, have run as candidates in presidential, congressional and local elections, have been appointed to public office at every level of the bureaucratic system and have acted as influence-peddlers in formal and informal corridors of power. Initially, this only involved senior officers who, after prominent military careers during the years of conflict, decided to leverage their public image to enter into the political fray, either joining a political party or creating their own. Others established themselves as 'technical advisors' on security and strategic issues, collaborating with political organisations and government officials, gaining—and flaunting—considerable political influence in the process. But, later on, it ceased to be limited to the top brass with successful counter-insurgency track records to involve more junior and less prominent—sometimes completely obscure and meritless—officers engaged in the political networks that thrived in the context of Guatemala's clientelist and patrimonial political system.

This has resulted in the constant presence of retired military officers, with different levels of prominence—sometimes leading, sometimes influencing, sometimes just struggling to get a look in—engaging in different and often competing political networks, as well as vying for power and influence within those same networks. Needless to say, they do not act on behalf of the armed forces or formally represent institutional interests on the political stage. Quite the opposite, for once these retired officers have achieved positions of powers in the political system through their affiliation to one of these clientelist networks, they use them to further their – legal or illegal – personal and political interests in the military institution. Successful military careers depend increasingly on the capacity of officers in active service to drum up political support from the civil authorities, making retired military officers *de facto* powerbrokers. They offer civilian politicians, with no interest in or knowledge of defence

or security issues, to decipher the inscrutable world of the military and ensure their alignment with the political powers that be, and officers in active service angling for promotion to prestigious positions access to the decision-makers that can make things happen, regardless of their professional track record or merit.

This is a far cry from the pattern of the highly institutionalised and de-personalised military power arrangements in place during the counter-insurgency period, when crucial political decisions were arrived at after consulting the board of commanders-in-chief (*juntas de comandantes*) or officers graduating from their cadet year groups (*promociones*). Strictly regulated terms of engagement, with mandatory retirement after 33 years of service in the case of top-ranking officers or when reaching 57 for generals and 55 for colonels, ensured a quick turnover and prevented the emergence of military ‘caudillos’ who accumulated and wielded power and influence, irrespective of their positions in the armed forces and beyond active service. Military power was thus defined by their position in the institutional chain of command and not by their personal charisma or influence, and promotions were decided on within the institution, without interference from civilian political actors.

This started to change during the transitional decade between the return to of democratically elected governments and the signing of the peace accords. Between 1985 and 1996, appointments to top-level, senior positions, such as minister of defence, chief of staff of the armed forces and chief of the presidential staff (a position since abolished in compliance with the AFPC), were made by civilian presidents from among the most senior officers in the chain of command. This tradition was broken in 1996 when President Arzú started appointing ministers of defence and chiefs of the presidential staff not on the basis of military merit or seniority but on his personal whim. President Portillo followed in his footsteps four years later, when he appointed a friend of his, an army colonel, as a minister, which meant sending all the generals in active service into retirement.

Today, the most powerful military officers—those with the ability to influence military and political decision-making—are not in active service but retired. It is these actors, rather than the military institution per se, who press for military involvement in the realm of public security, as this underscores their own value as experts and advisors and allows them to exercise their influence on the armed forces. But, as already observed, they are not representing the interests of the military institution with the aim of controlling political life but act as political entrepreneurs who often employ their transient political power (subject to electoral periods) to exercise their own influence over the military institution. Those personal interests are often related to the illegal activities of politico-criminal networks in which members of the traditional economic elites and new economic actors, civilian politicians and bureaucrats, and retired and active military officers co-opt state institutions to pursue them and to guarantee their impunity (Waxenecker 2016; IPNUSAC 2016; Zamora 2019).

To military participation in clientelist political networks should be added the public prominence of an association of hardliner military veterans, which, ever since the last stages of the peace process, has become a haven for those against the institution's subordination to the civil authorities. Established in 1995, one year before the signing of the peace accords, the *Asociación de Veteranos Militares de Guatemala* (Association of Guatemalan Military Veterans [AVEMILGUA]) became the political mouthpiece of those officers who were opposed to negotiating with the guerrilla, to the post-conflict institutional changes in the military institution and to transitional justice. Even though the armed forces made it quite clear from the outset that the AVEMILGUA did not represent them, the association's activism and its purported embodiment of military values brought it into the public eye as a representative of military interests and principles, and certainly as a source of nostalgia for the National Security Doctrine and its militarised politics, with some of its members actively engaging in politics through the aforementioned clientelist political networks.

But this enhanced 'military' presence on the public stage for more than two decades has not benefitted the institution. Clientelism has weakened it and has led to rifts as officers have aligned with extra-institutional actors to pursue their own interests and career paths, above and beyond official interests and goals. Corruption has corroded the military to a similar extent as other state institutions, such as the PNC and the judiciary. Officers of all ranks have been involved in different sorts of criminal activities, from pocketing the salaries of inexistent personnel to purchasing material at inflated prices, though participating in the activities of criminal networks, such as selling arms to criminals, laundering money for the 'Maras' and protecting drug trafficking routes (Rubio 2017; Zamora 2019).

It is not a question of deficient training: the officers interviewed for this chapter stress that the military academy goes to great lengths to instil in cadets a code of honour—a set of principles known as 'the Eight Words'—but that in the absence of incentives for ethical and professional conduct and the evidence of corruption among high-ranking officers, refraining from becoming involved in corrupt practices is more a matter of personal choice than the result of the effective institutional enforcement of principles and regulations. Small wonder then that the results of different professionalisation and systematisation initiatives, often implemented under the umbrella of U.S. military cooperation, have been ambiguous and unpredictable. A case in point: the implementation of the *Sistema Integrado de Planificación y Gestión de la Defensa* (Integrated System for Defence Planning and Management [SIPLAGDE]), a computerised platform for enhancing efficiency and transparency in military acquisition and procurement, was met with passive resistance that delayed its adoption and allegedly continues to hamper its development.

Without a shadow of doubt, the armed forces' professionalism has improved since the signing of the peace accords and, owing to the fact that

the civil authorities have neglected their duty to supervise and orientate them, currently enjoy a relative level of autonomy. Moreover, the current crisis of crime and violence—a combination of facts and perceptions—has allowed the military to expand their presence beyond the defence roles and functions established in the AFPC and the Framework Act on the National Security System, including their vicarious presence in the political system through retired military officers. And yet, in the context of the co-optation of state institutions by politico-criminal networks and the subordination of the institutional interests of the armed forces to—retired and active—military entrepreneurs, it is an autonomy that has not led to a stronger political position. The recent increases in military expenditure have not brought about improvements in the military's operational capabilities: equipment remains rudimentary and service conditions precarious, particularly in remote parts of the country. All in all, the military institution is being weakened by its subordination to a corrupt political power incapable of providing a strategic vision for its future development.

Conclusion: The Mirage of Civilian Control in Unconsolidated Democracies

Nowadays, the Guatemalan armed forces are not a political army, as defined by Koonings and Kruijt (2002a, 2002b). While retaining an unmistakable professional identity within the state bureaucracy, they are no longer driven by a doctrine by virtue of which they are the 'guardians of the state', supervising civilian institutions and politicians to ensure compliance with the nation's real interests. But their subordination to the civil authorities occurs in the context of what has been called 'the political class' neglect of its responsibility to provide effective, institutionalised and democratic civilian control. This is not a Guatemalan peculiarity: the subordination of the armed forces in other Latin American countries has been hindered more by the lack of civilian control than by any active military resistance, a situation defined as Latin America's 'New Militarism' (Diamint 2015). It is a situation in which any gains achieved through objective civilian control are then undermined by perverse forms of subjective civilian control (Pion-Berlin 2008; Fischer 2019; Scharpf 2020).

Beyond the sociological characteristics of the military or the specific circumstances of a given political situation, the fundamental causes behind their intervention in politics have always been structural: the 'infrastructural' weakness of a state makes it depend on coercive power as a tool for governance. The Guatemalan state's incapacity to guarantee basic levels of social welfare and public security, minimally satisfying the expectations of the citizenry, has given rise to a precarious legitimacy exacerbated by the dysfunctionality of the mechanisms of political representation and the persistence of a political culture strongly marked by authoritarian values. In the context of a weak state and a fragile democracy, a situation of relative military autonomy becomes a sword of Damocles hanging over

democratic civil–military relations and the sustainability of democracy itself.

It is not a question of an ‘incomplete transition’. Unconsolidated democracies are characterised by a combination of authoritarian and democratic values, laws and institutions in varying degrees, resulting in what have been called ‘flawed’ democracies or ‘hybrid’ regimes (Economist Intelligence Unit 2020), among other designations. In many cases, this hybridity is not a symptom of an ‘incomplete’ transition but the intentional outcome of political strategies in which democratic institutions and mechanisms (elections, courts, parliaments, etc.) are used to subvert democratic values and principles, leading to the creation of states that, far from being functional democracies, are authoritarian polities, which Scheppele (2013) have been dubbed as ‘Frankenstates’. Under a sheen of formal democratic legality, there is always the risk that their complete subordination might lead the military to obey the orders of an authoritarian civil government. Any progress made in the development of democratic security doctrines and frameworks during processes of democratisation can easily be undone during such periods of ‘de-democratisation’.

Guatemala is currently experiencing a period of de-democratisation, with the democratic changes brought about since 1996 now being threatened by the restoration of an authoritarian regime through the co-optation of state institutions at their highest level. Through corruption and intimidation, a wary alliance between drug barons, corrupt politicians and bureaucrats, time-honoured and emerging economic actors has managed to infiltrate the executive, legislative and judicial branches to guarantee impunity from legal prosecution for any type of offence: crime cartels involved in transnational crime, politicians violating electoral laws or milking state resources through corrupt schemes, entrepreneurs evading taxes or polluting the environment and so forth. Alas, today's civilian control entails military alignment to politico-criminal networks (Arévalo de León 2018, 2019; Zamora 2019).

This has shaped a military institution that is still a political actor not because it aims to exercise political control over the civil authorities, but because of the mere fact that it operates in an unconsolidated democracy. The fact that doctrinal changes have hitherto prevented the country's partially transformed, relatively autonomous armed forces to flex their muscles to intervene as an institution in the political scene, should not lead to any complacency about the future of civil–military relations in Guatemala. Until the structural conditions for effective civilian control are developed at a state level, the military's complete subordination to political power will continue to pose a major challenge.

Different times, different problems, but a constant echo: whether as a weak force serving military or civilian caudillos in the first part of the past century, as a progressively more professional institution that was politicised due to its participation in a democratic revolution, or as a counter-insurgency force aligned with oligarchic and U.S. interests during

the Cold War, the armed forces have remained a constant presence in the Guatemalan political scene since their emergence as a national institution (Arévalo de León de León 2018; Argueta and Walter 2020).

Paraphrasing the shortest of the short stories by the Guatemalan writer Augusto Monterroso (1990), ‘When it woke up, the military was still there.’

Note

- 1 A civic protest against rampant corruption led to the resignation and indictment of Vice President Roxana Baldetti in May 2015, followed by President Pérez Molina in September. Alejandro Maldonado Aguirre, appointed by Congress as Baldetti’s substitute, assumed the presidency upon Pérez Molina’s resignation, until 14 January 2016, when President Jimmy Morales, elected in October 2015, took office.

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10 El Salvador—The Armed Forces in Politics

Support and Tutelage

Alberto Martín Álvarez

Background: Legacies of Military Rule

In El Salvador, the repression of the peasant uprising ('The Massacre') in January 1932 paved the way for the political domination of the military until 1979. The despotic-reactionary regime (Baloyra 1982: 36) established back in 1932 was based on a 'bifurcation of power', as Parkman (2006: 52) claims. The military became the political elite during nearly 50 years, while the major landholders all but monopolised economic power. In the framework of an economic structure that depended on the exportation of labour-intensive agricultural products, established in turn by coercive means, recourse to repression became a structural need for the major producers who competed in the international market by offering lower wages. In order to respond to the constant danger posed by social unrest, the army and the security forces provided the economic elites with protection in exchange for the control of the state institutions (Stanley 1996).

Throughout the twentieth century, the Armed Forces of El Salvador (FAES) achieved a considerable autonomy from the economic elites, consolidating a series of privileges to whose defence they would be devoted throughout that period. Such levels of autonomy gave rise to sectors within the FAES with contradictory objectives, which reacted in different ways to the successive political crises into which the regime was plunged. Thus, versus the powerful revolutionary mobilisation in the country during the 1970s, chiefly spearheaded by peasants, teachers, students, workers and the inhabitants of marginal areas, the most hard-line sectors of the FAES reacted by implementing a strategy of indiscriminate repression. Far from detaining the protests, this wave of repression contributed to radicalise a vigorous social movement (Almeida 2004), identified increasingly more with the objectives of the politico-military organisations that appeared and developed in El Salvador as part of this same mobilisation.¹ In light of the possibility of a revolutionary triumph, a moderate group of young army officers, in alliance with opposition political parties and sectors of civil society, staged a coup d'état on 15 October 1979. However, this attempt at warding off that triumph and at making the transition to a pluralist regime was opposed by the most uncompromising sectors of

the FAES, which subsequently led to an escalation of violence against representatives of the opposition, activists of the revolutionary movement and civil society and members of the progressive clergy. Against this backdrop, the revolutionary movement stepped up its actions and increased its coordination capacity with the founding of the Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional (Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front [FMLN]) in October 1980.

The failure of the offensive launched by the FMLN in January 1981, for the purpose of defeating the FAES and seizing power, led to the outbreak of a civil war, which would last until 1992. The war reinforced the institutional autonomy and position of the military within the state. The expansion of the FAES in terms of both manpower and equipment, in addition to the threat that the guerrilla would emerge victorious, converted the army into a key player in guaranteeing the continued existence of the state. The military retained a series of important prerogatives throughout the 1980s, which were even enshrined in the 1983 Constitution. These included the control of the security forces² and intelligence agencies, almost total budgetary freedom, military promotions (the *tanda* system),³ the management of the war and the existence of an exceptionally broad military jurisdiction. Constitutionally speaking, the FAES were tasked with the defence of public order and the democratic regime (Walter and Williams 1993: 56).

This military autonomy in the running of the war meant that, especially between 1981 and 1984,⁴ the FAES could develop a counter-insurgency strategy, practically without restrictions, which considered the civilians in the areas under the control of the FMLN as military objectives. The use of enforced disappearances, extrajudicial executions and the assassination of dissidents and, in general, those sectors of the civil population suspected of supporting the guerrilla, were all a matter of course during those years. The Truth Commission for El Salvador⁵ and the Chapultepec Peace Accords established that 85 per cent of the near on 22,000 cases of human rights violations documented during the conflict⁶ were committed by the army and the security forces, plus the death squads linked to the latter⁷ (UN Truth Commission 1993: 45).

By the end of the 1980s, the war had become a virtual military stalemate between the warring parties, which, together with the growing détente at a regional level, facilitated a negotiated solution to the conflict through the peace accords, which were signed by the government and the FMLN on 16 January 1992.

It also warrants noting that the end of the war was possible because, in the context of the economic transformations brought about by the conflict itself and by the changes in capitalism at a global level (Robinson 2003: 99–100), the role played by the military as a ‘protection racket’ of the economic elites had become unnecessary. The peace accords demilitarised the state but preserved the institutional order created by the 1983 Constitution and, above all, left the social order intact. The FMLN was obliged to renounce its political project and to accept the existing power arrangements, in

exchange for participating in a political contest that in reality excluded any questioning of the rules of the game.

The peace accords managed to demilitarise the Salvadorian state and politics, while subjecting the FAES to civil power and, at least in theory, assigning them a new role equivalent to that which the armed forces play in any democratic society. The FAES' mission was redefined, restricting it to the defence of the country's sovereignty and territorial integrity, thus depriving the military of the role of maintaining public order, which they had been assigned in Article 211 of the 1983 Constitution, except in emergency situations and under the authorisation of the president of the republic.

The peace accords also envisaged the dismantling of the former Cuerpos de Seguridad Pública (Security Institutions [CUSEP]) Security and their substitution by a sole force, the Policía Nacional Civil (National Civil Police [PNC]) made up of ex-guerrilleros, former members of the National Police and newly recruited personnel. By the same token, the Dirección Nacional de Inteligencia (National Intelligence Directorate) was disbanded and the new Órgano de Inteligencia del Estado (State Intelligence Organisation [OIE]) was created under civilian management. Military personnel were also slashed by half,⁸ the civil defence system and the Batallones de Reacción Inmediata (Rapid-Response Battalions [BIRI])⁹ were disbanded and the foundations were laid for the reform of the educational system of the armed forces.

As regards redressing the cases of human rights violations identified by the Truth Commission, an ad-hoc commission was created for purging the officer corps of the FAES. This commission singled out 106 high-ranking officers, who were discharged from military service or redeployed between 1992 and 1993. Be that as it may, and notwithstanding the Truth Commission's recommendation that those responsible for human rights violations committed during the war be put on trial, the Legislative Assembly, under the control of the ARENA at the time, passed the Ley de Amnistía General para la Consolidación de la Paz (General Amnesty Act for the Consolidation of Peace) in March 1993. This piece of legislation, which contradicted the provisions of the peace accords with respect to putting an end to impunity, prevented the servicemen responsible for crimes against humanity or war crimes from being tried for the next 23 years.¹⁰

This situation of virtual impunity for serious crimes committed during the conflict was brought to an end on 13 July 2016, when the Constitutional Chamber of the Supreme Court of Justice declared the Amnesty Act unconstitutional. Since then, this has allowed for judicial enquiries into some of the most serious cases of mass human rights violations.¹¹ The Constitutional Chamber also ordered the Legislative Assembly to draft a law that guaranteed justice and redress for the victims. In February 2020, the right-wing parties ARENA, the Partido de Conciliación Nacional (National Conciliation Party [PCN]) and the Partido Demócrata Cristiano (Christian Democratic Party [PDC]), passed the Ley Especial de Justicia Transicional, Reparación y Reconciliación Nacional (Special Act on

Transitional Justice, Redress and National Reconciliation), which was met with the widespread rejection of the families of the victims, plus the national and international non-governmental organisations (NGOs) supporting them, because it left the door open for the commutation of prison sentences, or exemption from them, of those responsible on the grounds of age or health. This act was never enforced as it was vetoed by the Salvadorian president Nayib Bukele a few days later.

Context: In Search of ‘Democratic’ Military Operations after the Peace Accords

Throughout the second half of the 1990s and in the context of the neo-liberal policies aimed at reducing the state apparatus and privatising public enterprises adopted by the ARENA, the military were ousted from their last positions in the civil administration of the state. These positions, which they had monopolised since the 1960s, included the communications, public banking and electricity generation sectors (Aguilar 2018: 66).

However, this demilitarisation of the state did not affect, to all intents and purposes, one of the essential spheres envisaged in the peace accords: public security. Despite the fact that the reform of the 1983 Constitution, as a result of the accords, stipulated that the military could only undertake public security tasks in emergency situations and for a limited time, their involvement in them, thanks to the legal mechanism of the executive decrees signed by the president of the republic, has been a constant over the past three decades and has been stepped up over time.

Since the beginning of the post-war period, violence and insecurity have become permanent problems in the country, resulting in turn from a profoundly unequal society and an economy characterised by high rates of underemployment and informal employment, in which immigration to the United States is one of the few options open to the citizenry for escaping from poverty.¹² On the other hand, the PNC has suffered from chronic institutional weakness, with badly paid and insufficient personnel for the huge challenges that it has to meet.¹³

Immediately after the signing of the accords, the FAES started to undertake surveillance tasks in the country’s coffee-growing areas, in the context of the disbanding of the CUSEP. In 1997, in light of the increase in high-impact crimes¹⁴ and in the context of the PNC’s still incomplete deployment, the military were integrated, along with police officers, into the Grupos de Tarea Conjunta (Joint Task Forces [GTC]), as part of the so-called Plan Guardianes (Amaya Cóbar 2012: 76).

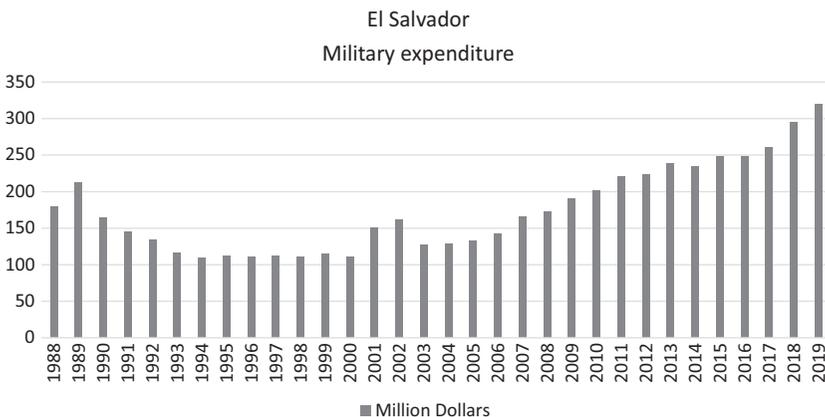
At the beginning of the new millennium, public insecurity above all as a result of the activities of the Maras¹⁵ became a key issue on the political agenda. Against this backdrop, the ARENA resorted to a strategy of punitive populism to capitalise politically on the increasingly more widespread fear of crime. The presidents Francisco Flores (1999–2004) and Elías Antonio Saca (2004–2009) both introduced plans for combating juvenile violence (‘Mano Dura’ and ‘Súper Mano Dura’), based on stiffer penalties

and on the launching of spectacular police operations that led to the arrest of dozens of young gang members (De la Torre and Martín Álvarez 2011: 44–46). In these circumstances, the military were called upon not only to intervene in support of the PNC but also to launch independent operations aimed at arresting gang members.

These two plans came under harsh criticism from both the opposition of the FMLN and different Salvadorian and international NGOs, inasmuch as they involved making arrests that were not based on investigations, but on the physical aspect of suspects, and therefore the violation of the human rights of detainees. And also because they implied a flagrant breach of the peace accords, as the emergency situation, envisaged in the constitution as a requirement for military intervention, was never justified. As Aguilar (2018: 73) asserts, the institutional position of the army was reinforced after its involvement in the operations launched between 2003 and 2009. Thenceforth, military expenditure gradually increased, as did its permanent involvement in tasks relating to the maintenance of public order (see Table 10.1).

In spite of being harshly criticised by the FMLN while it was in the opposition, the tendency towards the militarisation of public security accelerated once it had managed to form a government in alliance with an independent candidate, the journalist Mauricio Funes. During his term in office (2009–2014), the FAES undertook all types of police tasks—patrols, drug and arms seizures and house searches, among others—surveillance in prisons, at schools and on public transport, in addition to border monitoring. Likewise, Funes gave General Munguía Payés, appointed as Minister of Justice and Public Security,¹⁶ full responsibility for homeland security. In this context, the strength of the FAES increased dramatically from 8,862 to 24,799 active servicemen between 2009 and 2014, according

Table 10.1 El Salvador Military expenditure



Source: SIPRI Military Expenditure Database 2020.

to the figures provided by Aguilar (2018: 77). It must be said that the militarisation of public security did not lead to a drop in the murder rate or gang activity. In view of this, from the moment when he was placed in charge of public security, Munguía Payés came up with the idea of establishing a truce with the country's principal gangs as an alternative strategy for reducing urban violence and insecurity. Nevertheless, he was removed from office in the first months of 2013—although continuing as National Defence Minister—after the Supreme Court of Justice had ruled that it was unconstitutional for a serviceman to be in charge of public security. This marked the beginning of the end of this failed attempt at pacification, which led to a new escalation of violence in the country throughout 2014.

During his presidency (2014–2019), the ex-comandante of the FMLN, Salvador Sánchez Cerén, who maintained General Munguía Payés as National Defence Minister, tried to tackle the escalation of violence with the El Salvador Seguro Plan. This plan, which took a more comprehensive approach to public security, included the prevention of violence while placing the spotlight on problems such as youth unemployment, attention to crime victims and the reintegration of ex-convicts. In practice, nonetheless, his government continued to depend heavily on the army for carrying out police tasks. In view of the fact that public security went from bad to worse during 2015,¹⁷ in April 2016 the government was even obliged to adopt extraordinary measures in order to combat crime. The core aspects of these measures, which were extended until 2018, mainly involved toughening the conditions of imprisonment and stepping up the military presence, to such a degree that it was necessary to call up reservists of the FAES to cover the lack of personnel.

Between 2009 and 2019, the period during which the FMLN was in power, the social presence, power and autonomy of the FAES increased within the state. On several occasions, General Munguía Payés, the FAES' most visible representative, made a show of this power and autonomy when, for example, refusing to make the institution's arms purchases more transparent, withholding access to military archives for investigating crimes committed during the civil war and continuing to permit the army to pay tribute to its members accused of human rights violations during the conflict.¹⁸ In this respect, a prominent leader of the FMLN declared that these issues continued to be red lines that its government could not cross without running the risk of provoking a coup d'état.¹⁹

On a separate issue, since the beginning of the new millennium, the FAES began to be involved in overseas peacekeeping operations. Their first major commitment was their participation in the invasion of Iraq at the behest of the U.S. government, although their involvement between 2003 and 2009 was under the aegis of the United Nations. Although this has probably been the FAES' most important overseas operation, since then they have collaborated in a large number of operations under a UN mandate in Asia, Africa and the Middle East, where they have chiefly been deployed in Afghanistan, Sudan, Lebanon, Mali, Liberia, the Congo and

the Ivory Coast. The participation of Salvadorian troops in UN peacekeeping operations was initially down to the country's desire to maintain good relations with the George W. Bush administration in the wake of the 9/11 terrorist attacks. However, the proliferation of international commitments of this type and the creation of the Centro de Entrenamiento de Operaciones de Mantenimiento de la Paz (Training Centre for Peacekeeping Missions [CEOPAZ]) in 2011,²⁰ evince the importance that both the FAES and the different Salvadorian administrations attach to missions of this kind, whether as foreign policy tools or as opportunities for gaining experience in theatres of war.

On the other hand, over the years the FAES have been involved in a large number of emergency operations—in the wake of natural catastrophes such as hurricanes and earthquakes—as well as in civic actions ranging from the building of schools to undertaking support tasks relating to fumigation against dengue fever, through the extinction of forest fires. The lack of resources at different levels of the civil administration of the state, plus the extreme vulnerability of broad sectors of the population, explain why, over the past decades, all the country's governments have had a chronic need to resort to the army in order to cope with these situations. But, at the same time, their civic actions and relief operations have also served as a vehicle for rebuilding the image of the FAES throughout the period following the peace accords, by allowing them to present themselves before society as a professional collective devoted to protecting the population.

Recent Developments and Prospects

The inability of the two parties that have governed El Salvador since the signing of the Chapultepec Peace Accords to reduce violence and insecurity or to resolve other deep-rooted problems in the country, such as under-employment and informal employment, are some of the reasons behind their defeat and the victory of Nayib Bukele in the presidential elections held in February 2019.²¹ Bukele's victory, obtaining the absolute majority, was corroborated in the legislative and local elections held in February 2021, when his party *Nuevas Ideas* (New Ideas) obtained yet again the absolute majority in the Legislative Assembly and in a large proportion of the country's local governments (50.78 per cent).

In the two years since gaining power, the Bukele government has reinforced the militarisation of public security, with the launching of the Territorial Control Plan involving the permanent presence of troops on the streets in those areas with the highest number of gangs. In this period, through his actions and statements Bukele has presented the FAES, commanded by Defence Minister René Francis Merino Monroy, as the only truly trustworthy institution in the country, giving it a greater number of responsibilities in different spheres. On the 9 February 2020, owing to the fact that the Legislative Assembly—controlled by the opposition—was

blocking the funds necessary for developing his public security plan, the president ordered a military contingent to enter the assembly as a way of bringing pressure to bear on the deputies in order that they should release those funds. Merino Monroy justified this clearly unconstitutional action by declaring that the military should obey the president, who is also constitutionally the commander-in-chief of the FAES. On the other hand, in the context of the COVID-19 health emergency the president has assigned a key role to the army, which has deployed 12,000 troops to distribute food aid, to control lockdown and to undertake tasks relating to public security.

The citizenry's discontent with the state's inability to guarantee a life free from violence explains why they have withdrawn their support for the traditional parties and have given it to a populist leader who has promised to crack down on the illicit activities of the country's gangs. However that may be, what is of greater concern is that the collapse of the party system emerging from the peace accords, President Bukele's disdain for the system of checks and balances and the support that he seems to enjoy among the army are all symptoms of a possible process of de-democratisation. The dismissal of the judges of the Supreme Court of Justice by the Legislative Assembly, controlled by the official party *Nuevas Ideas*, at the beginning of May 2021, points precisely in this direction. Bukele had accused the Supreme Court of Justice of violating the separation of powers and defrauding the constitution in the rulings that it had handed down during the COVID-19 lockdown.²² Their dismissal was plainly unconstitutional because it did not comply with any of the provisions set out in the law, as indicated by the judges themselves. The assembly also dismissed the attorney general Raúl Melara, on the grounds that he was linked to the ARENA, before swearing in the new judges of the Supreme Court of Justice and the new attorney general.

In this way, Bukele has guaranteed the control of the three powers of the state, dangerously undermining their division. Although a return to military authoritarianism does not appear to be on the cards in the short term, it does indeed seem clear that there is currently a regression towards a new form of autocracy under a civil leadership and with the support of the FAES.

The Salvadorian case underscores the limits of pluralist regimes constructed in the context of profoundly unequal and exclusive societies. The policies of force that have been implemented for decades so as to cope with a problem whose causes are essentially social and political—relating to the distribution of the social product—have given the FAES new political relevance and social prestige as the only institution capable of controlling the problem of violence.²³ That violence has made the citizenry less willing to support democracy and its procedures and guarantees.²⁴ The peace accords spawned a democracy constrained by structures of power that imposed strict limitations on the redistribution of wealth and on the reduction of inequalities. Those same original constraints might lead to a new form of despotism in the more or less near future.

Notes

- 1 Namely, the Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo (People's Revolutionary Army [ERP]), emerging in 1972, the Fuerzas Populares de Liberación Farabundo Martí (Farabundo Martí Popular Liberation Front [FPL]), founded in 1970, the Fuerzas Armadas de la Resistencia Nacional (National Resistance Armed Forces [FARN]), created in 1975, the Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores Centroamericanos (Revolutionary Party of Central American Workers [PRTC]), appearing in 1976 and the Fuerzas Armadas de Liberación (Armed Liberation Forces [FAL]), the armed wing of the Communist Party of El Salvador (hereinafter PCS), founded in 1979.
- 2 The CUSEP included the Inland Revenue Police, the National Police and the National Guard. During the war, they were supported by the civil defence system, made up of paramilitary forces organised at a local level.
- 3 A rigid system of 'turn-taking' that regulated the relationships of power within the officer corps.
- 4 As of 1984 and with the ascension to power of the Christian democratic president José Napoleón Duarte and the growing intervention of the United States in the design and supervision of the counter-insurgency strategy, state repression became more selective. The Reagan administration needed to prove to Congress and U.S. public opinion that its support for the Salvadorian military was contributing to improve the situation with respect to human rights. Certainly, as of 1984 there was no repeat performance of episodes like the massacres of the river Sumpul (1980), El Mozote (1981), El Calabozo (1982) and Tenango and Guadalupe (1983), in which the FAES slaughtered hundreds of people. As from the mid-1980s, however, human rights organisations began to report an increase in enforced disappearances perpetrated by the death squads (Amnesty International, 1988), which would demonstrate that, in light of the impossibility of openly taking action against the grassroots supporters of the guerrilla, the FAES resorted more frequently to covert operations for the selective elimination of activists of the popular movement linked to the guerrilla. As to massacres, during this period, they were more sporadic and on a smaller scale than during the initial years of the war but were still carried out practically until the end of the conflict (Americas Watch, 1990).
- 5 During the negotiation of the peace accords, the government of El Salvador and the FMLN agreed to create a truth commission as an instrument for putting an end to impunity in serious cases of human rights violations.
- 6 The figure was probably much higher since the commission only had three months to perform its enquiries. Furthermore, it should be noted that the commission's mandate did not allow for investigating violations occurring during the 1970s, when the counter-insurgency strategy was implemented most, above all in the repression of activists of the popular movements, and which was carried out by death squads linked to the Agencia Nacional de Seguridad Salvadoreña (National Security Agency of El Salvador [ANSESAL]). One of those responsible for designing this strategy during that period was Major Roberto D'Aubuisson, who would subsequently become one of the founders and leaders of the Alianza Republicana Nacionalista (Nationalist Republican Alliance [ARENA]).
- 7 According to that report, the FMLN was responsible for 5 per cent of the cases of human rights violations. Nonetheless, at the beginning of the

- twenty-first century other cases of executions of activists belonging to the front's organisations, carried out under the orders of middle-ranking members of the guerrilla groups themselves, came to light.
- 8 According to the figures provided by Aguilar (2018: 64), from 63,175 to 31,000, a reduction that was gradually implemented up until the end of the 2010s.
 - 9 The BIRI were five special anti-guerrilla units created as of 1980 and trained by U.S. military personnel. Their involvement in human rights violations and abuses was a constant throughout the war.
 - 10 Those responsible for political crimes during the war had already been granted an amnesty under the Ley de Reconciliación Nacional (National Reconciliation Act), passed in January 1992.
 - 11 Like, for instance, the massacres perpetrated by military forces in El Mozote (Morazán) between 10 and 12 December 1981.
 - 12 Of a population of approximately 6.5 million, 1.5 million Salvadorians currently live abroad. In 2020, remittances accounted for 20.93 per cent of the Salvadorian GDP, according to the World Bank. Further information at: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/BX.TRF.PWKR.DT.GD.ZS?locations=SV>
 - 13 In 2008, the PNC had a little over 23,000 members.
 - 14 Between 1995 and 1998, the murder rate reached record levels, with over 138 murders per 100,000 inhabitants (Martín Álvarez 2015: 156).
 - 15 Violent gang members originating from the United States, who are mostly involved in extortion and drug trafficking. Organised in federations of local groups of sorts, those with the greatest presence in El Salvador include the Mara Salvatrucha, the Barrio 18-Sureños and the Barrio 18-Revolucionarios. According to some estimates, there are around 60,000 gang members in a country with only 6.8 million inhabitants.
 - 16 Munguía Payés formally took charge of public security after the dismissal of his predecessor in the post Manuel Melgar in November 2011. Melgar was probably replaced both because of his failure to obtain results and owing to the pressure brought to bear by the United States, which believed that he had been the mastermind behind an FMLN action against U.S. military personnel during the civil war. Together with Munguía Payés, Coronel Simón Alberto Molina Montoya was appointed to the position of subdirector of the OEI, and Francisco Ramón Salinas, a general in the reserve, to that of director of the PNC.
 - 17 During this year, there were 103 murders per 100,000 inhabitants.
 - 18 The most well-known case is that of Coronel Domingo Monterrosa, accused of ordering the massacre of El Mozote.
 - 19 A statement made by Roberto Lorenzana to the Salvadorian newspaper *El Faro* on 21 May 2019. Lorenzana, a former member of the PCS, was the communications secretary of El Salvador's presidency during the term in office of President Sánchez Cerén and a key member of the FMLN's leadership. Further information at: https://elfaro.net/es/201905/el_salvador/23318/%E2%80%9CEI-FMLN-temi%C3%B3-un-golpe-de-Estado%E2%80%9D.htm
 - 20 The CEOPAZ served as an umbrella institution for other bodies relating to the training of troops for peacekeeping operations which had been created since 2004.
 - 21 Bukele was an activist of the FMLN and the mayor of Nuevo Cuscatlán (2012–2015) and the capital San Salvador (2015–2018), positions in which he

- managed to build himself a reputation as an efficient politician. After breaking with the FMLN, he was the presidential candidate of the right-wing Gran Alianza Nacional (Grand Alliance for National Unity [GANAN]) in the 2019 elections, while creating his own party Nuevas Ideas, which participated for the first time in the 2021 elections.
- 22 The Supreme Court of Justice declared unconstitutional numerous decrees issued by President Bukele during lockdown, which practically lasted the first six months of 2020.
 - 23 The studies performed by the Instituto Universitario de Opinión Pública (University Institute of Public Opinion [IUDOP]) revealed that already back in 2016 the most trustworthy institution for the Salvadorians were the FAES, way in front of the Legislative Assembly, the president of the republic and the courts. www.uca.edu.sv/iudop/wp-content/uploads/Legitimidad-y-confianza.pdf
 - 24 The citizenry's support for democracy in El Salvador fell from 67.8 per cent in 2004 to 54.6 per cent in 2016. That same year, only 19.15 per cent of the population claimed that they trusted the country's political parties, according to a survey published by Vanderbilt University: www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/es/AB2016-17_El_Salvador_Country_Report_V9_W_07.18.18.pdf

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11 Honduras—The Militarisation of Politics or the Politicisation of the Military?

The Armed Forces in Times of Political Crisis, Corruption, Drug Trafficking and the COVID-19 Pandemic

Leticia Salomón

According to the 1980 Constitution, the essential role of the Honduran armed forces is the defence of the republic's sovereignty and territorial integrity. However, it envisages the possibility that the military institution may play additional roles 'in support of' other state institutions, including those relating to public security, health, education and transport, among others. Since then, the military have assumed those roles as part of their daily activity, above all in times of peace when there is much less need for such an institution. Although it warrants noting that when a government asks them for that support, the armed forces passes the bill, which tends to be very expensive, for they allege that those roles distract them from fulfilling their basic mission. During the past 10 years, the successive presidents have promoted, by leveraging first the legislative and then the executive branch of government, the militarisation of public security and, more recently, that of the state, which has two main characteristics: (1) the substitution of civilians by servicemen in specific institutions and (2) the introduction of management roles for the military, when, as enshrined in the constitution, these should only be of a supportive nature.¹

The 2009 coup d'état invoked old ideological spectres and re-established the military's prominence in the country's political life. They yet again left the barracks, but more on the initiative of the country's political parties than on their own accord, as in time gone by. This led to the remilitarisation of public security and, subsequently, in a very carefully designed process, that of the state. Accordingly, the military became the armed wing of a political project initiated by the legislative branch and continued by the executive branch of the government presided by Juan Orlando Hernández (2014–2018, 2018–2022), sometimes legally and sometimes illegally. Unlike in the previous coups, which had enabled the military to occupy the centre of the political stage, this time they acted more in a support than in a leadership capacity, committed to presidents with personal projects in which

they played an important but subordinate role, in exchange for institutional and personal perks.

The COVID-19 pandemic triggered several crises, which ended up affecting the party system in general (primaries and general elections in 2021) in a context of a weak rule of law, corruption scandals with those involved being protected by the legislative branch of government and evidence of the involvement of the president and his family, plus servicemen, policemen and members of parliament in drug trafficking activities in a complex web of relations, which evinced the national legal system's inability to cope with this sort of phenomenon. In order to gain a better understanding of the developments over the past few years, especially the role played by the military in this sort of multiple crisis, it is necessary to consider their context, processes and triggering mechanisms.

The Political Management of Public Security

The democratic transition in Honduras, which began in 1980, was consolidated in 1982 with the first civil administration following 19 years of military governments. After so many years of military rule, the country's politicians had arrived at a mistaken conclusion: that defence and public security were issues pertaining to servicemen or ex-servicemen in which they should not meddle. The transition to democracy was so strongly marked by this perception that it is still held, notwithstanding the democratic advances in other Latin American countries where there is talk about the democratic management of defence and public security, after referring to civil management and before alluding to civil control over the military institution or the police.

Defence and public security are two issues that are so sensitive that they cannot be left in the hands of the military or the police. Nevertheless, this has not been the case in Honduras, despite the 2009 coup d'état, the violent military and police repression and the fact that it is impossible to reform any state institution, and much less the army or the security forces if there is a lack of political will and social pressure. But the country's politicians are not overly enthusiastic about this idea for a number of reasons. On the one hand, they are incapable of putting forward any feasible proposals because their knowledge of these two institutions is very limited—and nor are they interested in broadening it—and, on the other, they continue to believe that it is important to please them, because it is they who have the power to use their weapons and because the constitution gives them the astonishing role of ensuring political alternation and the rule of law.

The Cold War Context

The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 marked the end of the Cold War on a global scale and led to an unexpected shift in the Central American war affecting above all Nicaragua and El Salvador, and to a lesser extent

Guatemala, with Honduras and, to a certain degree, Costa Rica at its epicentre, although without playing an active role in the conflict. Until then, there had been an international division of tasks, according to which the defence of the—Western and Christian—system had fallen to the United States, whereas coping with the threat posed by the ‘insurgency’ had corresponded to the armed forces of each country.

During the Cold War, that explicit or tacit agreement signified that the armed forces took centre stage in the national political system, while the political parties, when they were allowed to govern, orbited around them with a sort of relative autonomy that respected the limits of this functional division. The armed forces thus became central and, additionally, had the power of veto. It was the military who put forward the names of the principal secretaries of state, discrediting some and favouring others, and informally passed the presidents-elect a list of the names and offices of their candidates. For their part, the politicians of the two main traditional parties, namely the Partido Nacional de Honduras (National Party of Honduras [PNH]) and the Partido Liberal de Honduras (Liberal Party of Honduras [PLH]), became accustomed to letting the armed forces have their way.

In the context of the Cold War, characterised by ideological enemies and internal political-partisan conflicts, the absorption of the police by the military and their inclusion as a fourth wing of the armed forces (known at the time as the Public Security Force) seemed like a natural step. It was a military decision which the country’s politicians accepted without further ado.

The Transition to Democracy

The situation of the police remained practically unchanged during the first decade of the transition to democracy. They were still subordinated to the armed forces almost by inertia because the Cold War continued until the fall of the Berlin Wall and the military institution itself was plunged into a crisis of legitimacy that favoured the conditions for the restoration of civilian control over them. With the end of the Cold War, the armed forces were thrown into disarray: shaped and deformed by that influence, they did not recognise themselves in a context of democracy, pluralism and tolerance, consequently suffering a sort of identity crisis.

These circumstances, plus others that time and again singled out the armed forces as an institution that did not respect human life or dignity, allowed the PLH (with Carlos Roberto Reina as the president, 1994–1998) to take the initiative in countering their power within the state and society by eliminating obligatory national service, their control over important civil institutions, which they had assumed under the pretext of national security, the military jurisdiction and, finally, their influence on the police.

This was an important step forward in the transition to democracy and the ‘civilianisation’ of the police. Their formal decoupling from the

armed forces and subsequent annexation to a new civil institution offered them the opportunity to assume their real constitutional role. In the meantime, the armed forces underwent reforms that eliminated their central role in the political system, undermined their power of veto and obliged them return to their barracks to devote themselves exclusively to their constitutional mission of defending the country's sovereignty and territorial integrity. The visionary role of a president was enough to contain the armed forces and to impel them to abandon the political arena, which was not within their purview. Despite the progress made in this respect, the central issue of repealing the constitutional articles enabling the armed forces to assume police and political roles was not addressed, something that would be evidenced by the coup d'état on 28 June 2009.

In a Context of Insecurity

The arrival of a PNH government (with Ricardo Maduro occupying the presidency, 2002–2006) laid the foundations for what would subsequently be the clear remilitarisation of public security in Honduras. As a result of the accelerated growth of the Maras or gangs, together with an increase in common crime and a certain degree of partisan manipulation of the issue of public security, the military yet again left their barracks to undertake public security activities in an operation called 'Honduras segura' ('Safe Honduras'), in which they played a support role, limiting themselves to 'dissuading' criminals with their presence, while the security tasks per se were performed by the police.

The reason why the armed forces took to the streets to undertake police tasks was more political than military, although for them the opportunity to regain part of their lost influence undoubtedly outweighed the importance of respecting the separation between defence and public security. The mere fact of appointing an ex-serviceman as secretary of public security in such circumstances paved the way for the remilitarisation process and for placing the issue of the Maras on the public security (and more specifically the defence) agenda, rather than on the social agenda as befitted it. The intention behind this initiative was to call the attention of the U.S. administration, artificially creating a connection between the Maras, migrants, drug trafficking and security threats to the United States.

Allowing the military to undertake police tasks was an additional financial burden for the Honduran state, because giving them these additional roles that had nothing to do with their traditional mission meant—and still means—that it had to defray the cost in order to give the impression that it was fulfilling its duty to guarantee public security. This situation was maintained without major changes by the following PLH government (with Manuel Zelaya Rosales as the president, 2006–2009), while the police seemed to be having their work cut out to combat crime and the armed forces were also struggling to keep drug trafficking in check. Thus,

almost by inertia, the military's continued involvement in police tasks was ensured, a phenomenon that was subsequently exacerbated by the 2009 coup and, above all, by the PNH government (led by Porfirio Lobo Sosa, 2010–2014) tasked with restoring constitutional normality. Zelaya had chosen for an agenda of social reform leading to growing proximity to Chavez' Venezuela and Zelaya's ambition to join the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America (ALBA). This mobilised a conservative alliance of economic elites, Roman Catholic Church leaders and the military high command. The result was a civil–military coup, executed by the army and legitimised by the Supreme Court.

Further progress was made in the remilitarisation of public security. This took a different form under the government of Porfirio Lobo but more specifically due to the role assumed during his term in office by the then president of the legislative branch Orlando Hernández, also of the PNH, who later became the constitutional (2014–2018) and anti-constitutional president (2018–2022). This led to a new phase of remilitarisation underpinned by legislative decrees, amendments to the constitution and the creation of a new structure for remilitarising public security, with the aim of ensuring its constitutional continuity, something that ultimately was not achieved when the opposition voted against it in Congress.

In order to gain a better understanding of the evolution of this militarisation–demilitarisation–militarisation process in Honduras, it is important to clarify the meaning of the two phases running from institutional militarisation to the functional sort.

Institutional Militarisation

As its name implies, this first phase of militarisation refers to the police force and mechanisms employed by the armed forces to control it. This period ran from 1963 to 1998, the year in which the control of the police passed from the armed forces to the Secretariat of Public Security, an institution created specifically to this end. This process was initiated due to the explicit intention of eliminating the civil guard of the period, conceived as a sort of political police force of the PLH government ousted by the 1963 coup d'état. The military's intention was to remove the police force from the political scene and 'to protect it' from partisan interference, ensuring its adaptation to the structure of the armed forces, which, at the time, attempted to honour their constitutional status as an apolitical, obedient and impartial institution.

The Police Force Subordinated to the Armed Forces

In 1963, the police force as a whole was first annexed to the armed forces as the *Cuerpo Especial de Seguridad* (Special Security Corps [CES]) and then, in 1975, as its fourth wing, under the designation of the *Fuerza de Seguridad*

Pública (Public Security Force [FUSEP]). It became totally dependent on the military top brass, personified at the time by the commander-in-chief of the armed forces, and was subordinated to all the military bodies, in a similar way to the army, the navy and the air force, including the military jurisdiction governing them and the higher council of the armed forces as the supreme collegial management body.

In its traditional conception, the police force fell within the scope of a military force and underwent all the derivative transformations—deformations characterising its activities during so many years. The training that its members received hardly differed from that of servicemen, which was one of the reasons why it made little progress in building its own institutional identity. Converted into a security force, the police as a corps now depended directly on the armed forces.

Institutional Military Management

The police force's institutional subordination to the armed forces also meant that the latter occupied top and middle management positions, with a serviceman as the overall chief and several others as the heads of the police regions—which by and large coincided with their military counterparts—and the crime investigation and intelligence departments, which maintained close ties with the military intelligence corps. It is important to stress that the servicemen appointed to top positions in the police force saw their new tasks as a sort of punishment or as a bastardisation of their military training, evidenced by the scant respect that they had for police duties. Moreover, these servicemen began to run the police only with their military training, which went a long way to contributing to the lack of professionalism of the police force and an image that differed hardly or not at all from that of the armed forces.

The Relative Operational Autonomy of the Police

Besides the management of the police by servicemen, each police unit maintained a certain degree of operational autonomy deriving from the basic training received by its members at the Centro de Instrucción Policial (Police Training Centre [CIP]), created in 1982, and, later on, at the Escuela de Capacitación para Oficiales de la Policía (Police Officer Training Academy [ECOP]), created in 1984, which would subsequently become the Instituto Superior de Educación Policial (Higher Institute of Police Training [ISEP]), before being converted into an academy and, finally, a university in the following years. During this initial stage, future policemen received a mixture of military/police training which, over time, gave way to a more specific police training, thus laying the foundations for the building of a specific identity differing from that of the military and enabling them to directly assume the fulfilment of police duties.

Functional Militarisation

The stage of institutional militarisation ended with the police force's annexation to the Secretariat of Public Security in 1998. Thenceforth, there were five periods characterised by the personality and stance of the incumbent presidents, regardless of whether they belonged to the PLH or the PNH.

The most important milestone during the first period, from 1998 to 2002 (with Carlos Flores Facussé of the PLH as the president), was the annexation of the police force to the Secretariat of Public Security in a context of relatively low levels of insecurity and violence.

The second period, from 2002 to 2006 (with Ricardo Maduro of the PNH occupying the presidency), was characterised by an increase in the violent activities of the Maras or gangs and the laying of the groundwork for what would progressively become the remilitarisation of public security, specifically as regards police duties.

The third period, from 2006 to 2010 (with Manuel Zelaya of the PLH as the president), had two very marked characteristics: on the one hand, the slower pace of remilitarisation and, on the other, the military's recuperation of their power and control over the police force following the 2009 coup d'état.

In the fourth period, encompassing two PNH governments from 2010 to 2014 (with Porfirio Lobo Sosa occupying the presidency) and from 2014 to 2018 (with Orlando Hernández as the president), there was a clearer tendency towards the remilitarisation of public security. Nevertheless, unlike the first stage of the process in which the police force was militarised, with all that this entailed, in the second stage police roles were militarised, which was the most striking aspect of this backslide in the democratic management of public security.

During the fifth period, covering the last PNH government, from 2018 to 2022 (with Orlando Hernández being re-elected in a process censured as unconstitutional), in continuity with the previous one, the armed forces were more politically aligned with a president discredited abroad because of his links with drug trafficking and at home because of corruption at the highest levels, with the consequent undermining of his institutional image.

At the beginning of the Lobo Sosa government, what was apparently a tendency to continue with the militarisation of public security, initiated by the PNH government led by the ex-president Maduro, acquired other connotations as Lobo Sosa's executive power diminished, while the president of the legislative branch Orlando Hernández consolidated his power and reinforced his presidential candidacy. This brought about a change in the public security model, resulting from an escalation of common crime, including the criminal activities of the Maras or gang members, and of organised crime, which together gave rise to a serious situation of insecurity and impotence.

The focus on combating insecurity during the 2013 general election campaign was accompanied by the implementation of a very well-planned process by Congress, consisting in the creation of military/police corps, the broadening of military prerogatives as to public security, budget allocations and the passing or amendment of laws for combating insecurity.

The beginning of the first government of the current president Orlando Hernández took up from where its predecessor had left off, with traits inherent to the executive-legislative duality as to public security policies. These were then specified in the months of transition between the caretaker government and the newly elected government, and implemented during the first year of the new administration.

In light of the foregoing, it can be claimed that between 2010 and 2014, the following number of amendments to the country's public security legislation were passed or tabled: structure and functioning (11), organised crime (7), police militarisation (3) and operational roles (13). Similarly, 14 new police/military units were created, thus evincing an institutional atomisation—which seems to be the most distinctive trait of this stage of the militarisation of the police force—four of which depend directly on the chief of police, six are answerable to specialised bodies of the police force, two depend on other external bodies and another two are police/military bodies.

The Political Control of the Military

When reflecting on how the current situation should be understood, there is no doubt that the role that the military and the police have played, and are still playing, in Honduras is worthy of special attention insofar as both have become the strong arm guaranteeing the continuity in power of the current president. The military–police control that he exerts over the country's institutions is reinforced by his political control over the main institutions of the legal system, particularly the Supreme Court of Justice and the Public Prosecutor's Office. His inertia is thus understandable, despite a number of specific developments involving the functions that the constitution assigns to both institutions. These include the violation of the constitution with the legal manipulation that led to his re-election; the fact that he was declared president despite the alleged fraud in the 2017 elections, an ignominious development with a huge national and international echo; the many public accusations of corruption aimed at him and his family, kin and subordinates, before and during the pandemic, which have been understood by public opinion as the blatant, cynical and reprehensible plundering of the state coffers; the evidence presented against him during the trial of his brother in the Court of the Southern District of New York as a co-conspirator and the recipient of vast sums of money from acknowledged drug traffickers, for funding his election campaigns at different moments; and the violation of Honduras' territorial integrity and national sovereignty with the introduction of the *Zonas de Empleo y*

Desarrollo Económico (Employment and Economic Development Zones [ZEDEs]).

It should be stressed that this control is not exercised in a vertical, menacing or administrative fashion or on the basis of the rule of law. It is much more subtle and perverse, for thanks to its calculated approach and co-optation it has managed to neutralise both forces, converting them into its staunch supporters and transforming them into subservient accomplices by making them feel that they form an important part of the president's personal and lucrative control of power. Although this has been presented as a strong tendency in Honduras, it is important to establish a number of differences that make it impossible to generalise.

The military top brass are not the same as their police counterparts. The former assume their importance in terms of the political-electoral attributions that the constitution assigns to them, magnified by political and military interests (maintaining constitutional rule, the principles of the right to vote, political alternation and the conveyance and surveillance of ballot boxes). In contrast, the latter feel, and have been made to feel, inferior and subordinated, for which reason their role is more operational, with a greater presence on the streets to repress and pursue and to protect the interests of their chiefs.

The highly politicised and conniving military top brass are not the same as the middle-ranking officers who accept their subordinate role, although they have been known to challenge the partisan commitments of their chiefs, evincing a certain degree of respect for military professionalism and their public image. A lot of the rank and file, including the military police, is to receive and carry out the orders of their chiefs, without questioning their commitments. They have a role to play and do so efficiently, above all when called upon to repress social protests or to pursue environmental activists claiming their rights over territories or defending nature and its water sources.

Against this backdrop, four basic tendencies can be observed. Firstly, the state has been increasingly more militarised, as a result of the particular vision of the current president, which has led him to distrust specialists and technicians, including the members of his own party. In parallel, this has also prompted him to place active and ex-servicemen in positions and roles that correspond to civilians, such as combating common and organised crime, performing agricultural tasks, managing public investments and installing mobile hospitals (which are really nothing of the sort), among others.

Secondly, the remilitarisation of public security has gathered pace with the creation of the military police tasked with keeping law and order and with the military's greater involvement in the management of the Secretariat of Public Security and the most important police operations.

Thirdly, with the passing of Act 2011 specifying the functions of the National Defence and Security Council, presided over by the president and with the subordinate participation of the other two branches of

government, the Public Prosecutor's Office and the Secretariats of Defence and Public Security, their independence has been undermined.

And, fourthly, the armed forces and the police have been singled out for their involvement, by action or by omission, in drug trafficking. This is what has transpired in the trial and conviction of the brother of the current president for drug trafficking. It has also shown the world that both forces are either aiders and abettors or completely inefficient because they never got wind of the crimes of the accused/convicted or the activities of major and middling drug barons in Honduras.

This context and the aforementioned tendencies pose an enormous challenge to the country's politicians in the elections that will lead to the forming of a new government and national congress and, as a result, a new supreme court of justice, supreme court of auditors, public prosecutor's office and other very sensitive offices in the pursuit of justice and in the fight against corruption, impunity and drug trafficking. Perhaps the greatest challenges of all are how the mechanisms for assigning the military roles that do not correspond to them should be dismantled, how the state and public security should be demilitarised, how the authentic independence of the three branches of government should be restored and how the two institutions singled out for their involvement in corrupt practices and drug trafficking should be purged.

Together with the current president, the PNH is responsible for the institutional deformation of the armed forces and the police, whether by action or by omission. So, should it win the following elections, this would rule out any possibility of change or of re-establishing civilian supremacy over the military and the police. However, the victory of any one of the opposition parties in the presidential elections or of all of them in the congressional elections would offer some prospects of change. Nevertheless, this would depend on whether or not their leaders are aware of the problem, interested in the issue or have the democratic commitment to put the military and the police in their rightful place.

The Military in a Context of Multiple Crises

Honduras is facing a situation of multiple crises that have been exacerbated by the pandemic and its economic, health and educational impact, and also by the fact that it has coincided with serious accusations of corruption and drug trafficking at the highest levels of the executive and legislative branches of government, above all involving the party in power. In this context, the role that the current president has given the armed forces as the strong arm of his personal political project, based on direct control at a repressive (the military/police), judicial (the Supreme Court of Justice and the Public Prosecutor's Office) and ideological (the upper echelons of the Church, especially the Evangelical Church, and the corporate media) level, becomes much clearer.

In view of the foregoing, the remilitarisation of the state and, consequently, that of the government's management of the pandemic are for all to see. In most countries, the military and the police are playing a very active role in supporting government initiatives for combating the pandemic, whereas in Honduras their leading role in its management is being expressed in different ways: offering the president direct advice; substituting health care workers in decision-making; the military bias in procurement (provisional 'hospitals' that look more like the sort of tents used in military manoeuvres); and the military bias in the repression in which they are always prepared to quell social protests, in this case for food and government aid, with teargas and live rounds, as is now customary in the recent history of Honduras.

A leader who resorts more to repression than to consensus to govern, and more to the force of arms than to political negotiation, is basically promoting an authoritarian government with scant legitimacy in the eyes of the citizenry. When the military play such a leading role as in the current crisis, which has to do with health and not with the armed aggression of another country, this evinces the president's fear of being incapable of obtaining the results expected by society, thus compelling him to resort to force to quell the growing social protests. The leading role played by the military highlights something that is even more worrying: the fact that the president is very much on his own. A president who has been internationally accused of having links to organised crime, who has been socially challenged and condemned for corruption, who has been discredited for having violated the constitution to be re-elected, with hard evidence of electoral fraud, and who has been blamed for having rode roughshod over the rule of law by exerting direct control over key institutions and other branches of government. For such an isolated president, there is a great temptation to govern in an authoritarian manner and, in order to feel safe and secure, he has already resorted to the military.

As tends to occur in authoritarian governments, the military stand to gain from this crisis. They are not only obtaining medical supplies and equipment before the country's doctors and health care personnel, namely, those in the front line, but are also upgrading their own hospital with highly specialised equipment purchased with funds for combating the pandemic, as well as having persuaded the government to purchase allegedly temporary hospitals which are then used as tents for their military manoeuvres.

When a president decides to give priority to defence and public security over his country's development and thus begins to invest more in the military and the police and less in health care, education, employment and social welfare, the result becomes crystal clear with the outbreak of crises like those in which Honduras is currently immersed, highlighting the country's vulnerability and the shortage of basic supplies in hospitals and health centres. The abundance of resources devoted to the military, as never before in the country's history, is absolutely grotesque when the desperate and indignant citizenry are demanding food from the government and

condemning the fact that the lion's share of public aid is being channelled towards the members of the governing party. The fact that the armed forces have been given the role of agricultural engineers for which they are surely being paid vast sums of money (and which will certainly be a fiasco insofar as they have been trained to handle weapons and not to fund and manage the country's agricultural development) is proof of all but total isolation of a president who does not now even trust his own people or fellow party members to run a civil administration in which the armed forces have no say.

The role played by the military during the pandemic is logical and congruent in Honduras' present context and in view of the serious indications that it is a narco-state, a failed state, a militarised state, with a government that has given much greater priority to defence and public security than to health care, education and the other basic needs of the population and the country. Nowadays, the armed forces are the de facto strong arm of a president discredited at home and abroad, which has weakened them as an institution and has made them highly politicised and contaminated by the political, rather than health, scourges that have affected the country for a decade.

Reversing the remilitarisation of the state occurring during the past 10 years will be a complex and difficult process, which poses a huge challenge to society and the party system, especially with the victory of Xiomara Castro, spouse of ex-president Manuel Zelaya (deposed in 2009) in 2022. Her challenge will be particularly thorny owing to the fact that the country's politicians are unaware of the problems posed by defence and public security in a democracy, to the fear of triggering a coup d'état that ejects her from the political arena, as in 2009, and to the fact that the military are delighted with the political power that they currently wield and with the personal and institutional results obtained to date. It is now urgent to reopen the cycle (of militarisation, demilitarisation and remilitarisation) so as to initiate a process of demilitarisation that limits the military to their basic functions, thus preventing them from meddling in politics, something which continues to pose a real threat to Honduran democracy.

Note

- 1 This chapter, written in essay format, is based on a process of personal reflection over many years, published in several papers and books, including Salomón (2012, 2014, 2015, 2020). Walter and Argueta (2020) have been used as a secondary source.

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12 Colombia—Civil–Military Relations in the Twenty-First Century

Armando Borrero Mansilla

Background

An analysis of civil–military relations in Colombia requires a previous knowledge of the country’s distinctive traits. The first is the low incidence of coups and military governments—only one in the nineteenth century and another in the twentieth century. After gaining independence, Colombia was administered by military governments for no more than five years, with the second period of dictatorship taking place nearly a century later. This discrepancy with the South American pattern can be explained by several historical phenomena.

Firstly, there is the historical separation between the political and military elites, whose origins can be traced back to the Bourbon military reforms coinciding with the Revolt of the Comuneros in 1781, which was exacerbated by the irreverence of the ruling classes of the Vice-Royalty of Nueva Granada (Colombia, Venezuela, Ecuador and present-day Panama) and the Liberation Army of Bolívar.¹ In the nineteenth century, nation-building had been the exclusive preserve of the traditional political parties. In contrast to the situation in many Latin American countries, the Military Forces of Colombia, professionalised only in more recent times, did not serve to integrate the country’s territory or population.

A second historical characteristic of Colombia is the fragmentation of power. There was never a dominant region or hegemonic socio-economic sector. A plausible explanation for this was that the realm of power was divided into impervious blocs, all of which had a say and were thus obliged to negotiate important decisions. According to this theory, the armed forces were never strong enough to impose themselves on that realm of power as a whole. It should be noted that the Colombian military institution was relatively modest in size and equipment, a situation that has only changed in the last 30 years due to the escalation of the internal armed conflict. Although this theory calls for further research, the continuous necessity to strike the right balance between the power blocs explains why there have not been any political volte-faces in Colombia, as has indeed occurred in other countries in the region.

Finally, the bipartisan pact of the Frente Nacional (National Front [FN], 1958–1974), a unique, very inflexible experiment, which, after a constitutional amendment, formally established a system of government in which the presidency was to alternate between the representatives of the two traditional liberal and conservative parties, which would also equally divide seats in the Cabinet, the national legislative, provincial assemblies and local councils. The system was not a perfect co-dictatorship insofar as dissidents were not barred from participating in elections, which prevented the leadership of the two parties from fielding puppet candidates. Under the terms and conditions of this negotiated pact, the military achieved autonomy for managing public order, but this implied the institution's dissociation from all other state organisations. Their autonomy turned out to be counterproductive in the long run, because as a result the civilian authorities shirked their responsibility for security issues. This situation remained unchanged until President César Gaviria came to power at the beginning of 1990.

There is another reason behind the difference between the situation in Colombia and that in most other countries in the region, namely, the heavy burden of the decades-long 'internal armed conflict', instigated by an insurgency that created the largest guerrilla armies in Latin America in the final years of the twentieth century and in the early twenty-first century. Domestic wars throw state and military institutions into disarray, while leading to social unrest and lawlessness. Under these conditions, the clash between the armed forces and their fellow citizens can only give rise to anomalies and contradictions.

First of all, the armed forces find themselves in a situation for which they are unprepared. Although they gradually manage to adapt to the new situation, their discomfort does not disappear and their dysfunctional, if not frankly anomalous, relationship with their fellow citizens and with the state apparatus to which they belong goes from bad to worse.

Secondly, domestic conflicts increase the distance between the armed forces, an institution per se, and the rest of the state institutions.² This dissociation is aggravated in turn by the security requirements of the military and by the territorial scope of counterinsurgency operations involving fragmentation, dispersion and nomadic behaviour. As a result, the members of the armed forces become gradually more estranged from society and, consequently, interact almost exclusively with their peers, a situation that reinforces the character of introspective groups.

Thirdly, counterinsurgency operations undermine frameworks of values and distort the notion of the 'enemy' in a context of 'existential trance'. The 'other' is the epitome of evil and each enemy is its incarnation. Hatred is intense and personal. 'Regular' troops are placed in the predicament of having to fight as 'irregulars' to uphold law and order. While there is little or no respect for human rights when the enemy is regarded as 'illegitimate' and the confrontation goes beyond purely military affairs.

Fourthly, when the military are obliged to wage war within their own society, the relationship between the state and other forces vying for power leads to the strengthening of bonds of solidarity and the establishment of undesirable alliances, outside the legal order, and to the loss of legitimacy of the state that they are expected to defend.

Lastly, as counterinsurgency operations usually become very politicised—being characterised by a Cold War anti-communism in the most extreme cases—the military tend to resort to conspiracy theories to explain their political aspects.

The relationship between governments, society and the military is an intensely political game. In this triangle, powerful, not always harmonious, forces operate: the state, an ineffectual actor for establishing objectives and conducting strategic planning, proposes plans and makes demands on the military; each sector of society has its own aspirations and expectations and also makes its demands on the military; and, finally, the military have their own objectives and perception of the role that they should play vis-à-vis the state and society. The tensions arising from this triangle of interests influence the most sensitive issues of civil–military relations and explain the ambivalences that the military display in the governmental and social spheres.

The Military in Colombia: The Quest for an Institutional Niche

Throughout the twentieth century and even at present, albeit under different conditions, continuous efforts have been made to establish a clear-cut, constitutional, legal and institutional niche for the Military Forces of Colombia and the National Police. The key to this problem lies in the difficulties in constructing the Colombian state. On the one hand, this seems to have been successful, when compared with others countries in the region, because the rule of law has prevailed. But, on the other, it is an unfinished task in some of the country's regions and there are still social sectors that vie with the state for the basic monopolies of a modern nation-state, namely, those of force, justice and taxation.

In the second half of the twentieth century, new phenomena exacerbating the problem emerged: the revolutionary guerrillas, paramilitary groups and organised crime with financial clout, an international scope and the capacity to challenge the state, especially relating to drug trafficking, ubiquitous in the last 50 years.

During the so-called *La Violencia*, a period running from 1948 to 1958 (its ambiguity is reflected in the absence of a more precise designation), the military and the police were tasked with law enforcement and even to this day are engaged in counterinsurgency operations. Since 1948 there has been a succession of domestic conflicts, starting with the clashes between the country's two parties, followed by a lingering violence after the relative pacification of the governments of Rojas Pinilla and Alberto Lleras,

conceptualised as 'social banditry', and finally the guerrillas, which, as of 1964, acquired the character of a 'revolutionary insurgency'.³

During 'La Violencia' and the FN period, the military were tasked with different missions. There were military commanders who were appointed as *Jefes Civiles y Militares* (Civil and Military Chiefs) of trouble spots, whose limits surpassed departmental or municipal borders, who as the name suggests played both roles. Many junior and non-commissioned officers (NCOs) were appointed as military mayors in areas where there was unrest. The 'state of siege' regime, established in the constitution (a state of emergency that allowed for governing through executive orders and which was all but permanently decreed from the 1940s to the 1980s) placed all armed groups under the jurisdiction of military justice, until a Supreme Court ruling abolished it in 1985.

These roles were most confused in the political sphere. In the famous speech that he delivered in 1958, President Alberto Lleras redefined civil-military relations in terms of 'military non-partisanship' and the non-intervention of politicians in military affairs, but, at the same time, embroiled the institution in politics. The Minister of War (now that of Defence) had traditionally been a civilian. But as of 1953 (during the presidency of General Rojas Pinilla), the position was occupied by a general, almost always belonging to the army, a state of affairs that continued during the governments of the FN until 1992, when, following the promulgation of the 1991 Constitution, the Gaviria government appointed a civilian again.⁴

For four decades, the military played an ambiguous political role: they were guarantors of FN parity in the Cabinet (six liberal ministers, six conservative ones and one unpartisan military minister). In practice, this minister, a high-ranking officer, was a military commander with a political role. When participating in debates in Congress, he was a minister without party support. The defence of the military institution remained in the hands of the president who could only go about this indirectly in Congress. During the FN period, the coalition parties almost always backed the military, but the stipulated non-partisanship was unrealistic.

'Apolitical' ministers were expected to participate in political decisions and debates. If they were the object of criticism, this was not aimed at the political party represented by them but at the Military Forces of Colombia and the National Police. In other words, they guaranteed impartiality but were not political arbiters. In a sense, the position of minister was a 'Greek gift', which reinforced the vision of an autonomy that in practice was tantamount to abandonment.

During that period, the military wielded much, albeit sectoral, power. When there were important differences of opinion with the presidents of the republic, civilian power prevailed. Thus, in 1965 President Valencia dismissed General Alberto Ruiz Novoa due to political differences. In 1969, President Carlos Lleras Restrepo removed the commander of the army, General Guillermo Pinzón, after he had publicly expressed his

opposition to any modifications in the rules governing the budget control of the armed forces. In 1975, President López Michelsen dismissed the army's most popular general, Álvaro Valencia Tovar, when there were disagreements between him and the commander-in-chief of the armed forces. Later on, in 1984, when a watered-down version of the FN was in force, President Betancourt sent General Fernando Landazábal packing after his statements against the initial stages of the peace process with the guerrilla leadership of the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia [FARC]), the Movimiento 19 de Abril (19th of April Movement [M-19]) and the Ejército Popular de Liberación (Popular Liberation Army [EPL]). Except in the case of Ruiz Novoa, these measures were received by the military with subdued indignation, but presidential power was never challenged.

In the bipartisan period, the concessions made to the military with regard to their relatively autonomous management of public order should be understood in the context of the implicit negotiations with the guerrilla organisations that were entered into just for 'being there', typical of Colombian accommodations at the pinnacle of power.⁵

Strictly speaking, nevertheless, there was a qualitative difference between the FN period (1958–1974) and that of the 'prolongation of the National Front spirit' between 1978 and 1991. Disagreements between the civilian and military powers had a personal character in the first period. But at the end of the government of President López (1974–1978)—which served as a bridge between the previous two-party system and its liberalisation—the corps of generals and admirals sent a public letter to the president. They demanded strong measures for enforcing law and order and presented him with what would later be approved as the Security Statute. Lopez refused to sign it, but his successor President Julio César Turbay, who had fewer civic scruples and stronger personal ties to the military top brass, endorsed it.

Military interference increased during the subsequent term in office of President Belisario Betancourt, when Minister of Defence Fernando Landazábal voiced his disagreement with the ongoing peace process in a very influential media outlet, remarking, '[...] without beating about the bush, we disagree with the government's peace policies and the country should now become accustomed to listening to its generals'. The minister was dismissed, but the situation had become tense and, under these conditions, the government had to perform a balancing act to continue the dialogue with the guerrillas. The tragedy of the assault of the Palace of Justice (1985) buried all hope. The subsequent government of President Virgilio Barco was in a more comfortable position for achieving the demobilisation of the M-19 and the EPL. Abandoning the voluntarism of the previous administration, institutional peace negotiations got underway.⁶

In the period following the promulgation of the new 1991 Constitution, there were also disagreements, but presidential power always prevailed. President Samper was obliged to substitute the army commander and President Pastrana had to cope with a more complex impasse when the

improvisation accompanying the peace process led to the bewilderment and collective resignation of the generals, which was settled with emergency negotiations. The military respected the demilitarised zone of El Caguán authorised by the Pastrana administration to negotiate a peace process with the FARC, but they were compensated with political support for additional units and equipment.

The backdrop to this conflictive situation was the aforementioned politicisation, a burdensome legacy that still rested heavily on the shoulders of the Military Forces of Colombia 30 years after the end of the Cold War and the bipolar world system. With respect to the design of a well-defined institutional niche for the military, not much progress was made. It was not until 1990s that the Ministry of Defence began a slow modernisation, not without its setbacks, characterised by a greater civilian presence in the management of the country's defence and security forces, a process that still has long way to go.

The Twenty-First-Century Reforms

The first changes that got underway in the 1990s would not be brought to fruition until the twenty-first century. In Colombia, there has not been a sole 'reform' with a clear chronology that has brought about a radical change in some sense or another. Over the past two decades, several 'reforms' have been implemented in the army and the security forces, but it has been more of an evolutionary process greatly influenced by the needs and emergencies resulting from the internal armed conflict (with the guerrilla movements) and the fight against drug trafficking. Nonetheless, special mention should go to the reinstatement of civilians in the Ministry of Defence in 1992, the reform of the National Police in 1993 and the military reform, which was more of an accumulative than a one-off process, as of 1998.

In addition to these three reforms, there were further changes in other aspects such as military justice, whose jurisdiction was reduced, that of the relations between the Military Forces of Colombia and the National Police, the protection of human rights and the participation of the army and the police in all those state agencies seeking to carry out comprehensive actions in the areas most affected by violence. The purpose of all these changes was to strengthen and consolidate the presence of the state, the credibility and legitimacy of its institutions and the link between peripheral communities and the national market and the institutions central to society.

All in all, a number of partial reforms, one-off adjustments and reassignments of roles have shaped a process of changes that have not always pointed in the same direction. There have also been obstacles and setbacks in some processes and partial counter-reforms, all of which have marked the evolution of the defence and security sectors, which has been particularly intense since 1991. As already noted—but it is a good idea to stress this point given the peculiarities of the Colombian case—the driving force behind the changes has been the persistence of an armed insurgency,

the appearance of powerful paramilitary groups and the presence of both drug trafficking and narcoterrorism. Drug trafficking plays a transversal role, for it is behind all the different types of violence that have plagued Colombia in the contemporary age, for which reason the following section is devoted to this phenomenon.

Other still ongoing reforms include changes in the recruitment systems of the Military Forces of Colombia and the National Police, with the incorporation of women, their participation in international missions and operations and far-reaching changes in training such as a greater emphasis on human rights and the development and application of operational law.

The aforementioned issues have to do with legitimacy, a basic concept in civil–military relations. Previously dependent on national service (undemocratic in social terms), recruitment is now based on a mixed system of national service and voluntary enlistment, resulting in the professionalisation of approximately 50 per cent of the military personnel, which, in addition to commissioned officers (COs) and NCOs, means that the professional model now prevails. The incorporation of women, who had previously only assumed administrative and service roles, before being trained and incorporated as combatants, has been a constant.

Colombia's status as one of NATO's nine 'partners across the globe' has given its armed forces a modern and cosmopolitan touch. In turn, U.S. pressure for human rights training has led to advances in schooling and training. The Modelo Unitario Pedagógico (Single Training Methodology [MUP]), as a human rights instruction manual, establishes competence levels ranging from the basic skills that all troops should acquire to more complex ones for military leaders. Specifically, the MUP includes a course designed for the rank and file, which familiarises them with possible combat scenarios, to the post-graduate course for senior officers and generals, through increasingly more complex courses for NCOs and junior officers.⁷

As to this last point, stress should be placed on the contradictory nature of the process: the introduction of the MUP was hailed as an important development, while at the same time it was the most critical period as to human rights and international humanitarian law violations. With respect to U.S. military advice and material support for the war effort, it was an important issue for legitimising both, given the reluctance of the political leaders in Washington to become embroiled in domestic conflicts abroad. Although Colombian public opinion has wavered between support and repudiation, given the fact that the vast majority of the population rejects the insurgent groups, the military have by and large achieved a high level of recognition.

With respect to the modernisation of the three wings of the Military Forces of Colombia, it is important to highlight their partnering with the civil, corporate and academic sectors when setting up military industries and new technology ventures, which has gone a long way to achieving that goal.

Drug Trafficking and the Military

Drug trafficking has been a constant cause of violence since its beginnings with marijuana in the 1960s, followed by the introduction of cocaine in the 1970s and its conversion into the dominant product down to the present day. There was also a period of poppy cultivation and heroin production in the Andes, for climatic reasons, where the presence of the state in the region and its accessibility and demographic density meant that its almost complete elimination was relatively easy.

Initially, the army was hardly involved at all in controlling the problem, this being up to the police. The military believed that it was prudent to avoid the possibility of corruption and the attrition resulting from undertaking further tasks, in addition to their primary mission to combat the guerrillas. But there was an additional factor in the domestic conflict that only served to complicate the missions assigned to the military, which progressively led them to intervene. Due to the ability of the drug cartels to organise armed groups in defence of their illicit activities, the military were soon obliged to support the efforts of the police. The aerial fumigation of drug crops made it necessary to secure those areas in order to protect the participating aircraft and helicopters and their crews. In response, the drug cartels began to apply their terrorist methods and practices in the cities, thus bringing the violence to the doorstep of Colombia's political and social elites, who hitherto had lived aloof from the problem.

With their resources, the military began to form part of the 'search blocks', special military and police units whose mission was to hunt down the 'capos' of the drug cartels. But the creation of special units against drug trafficking was a step that was only taken after U.S. pressure led to the implementation of the Colombia Plan. By then, military intervention had become inevitable, for the guerrilla movements had become involved in the drugs business at an early stage. The stricter control of Colombian airspace during the period when the cartels preferred the air transport of drugs, which led them to a switch to sea transport, involved the air force and navy, respectively, the latter also playing the role of coastguards—nowadays, most of the drug seizures are made by the navy. Drug trafficking was another factor souring relations between the military and the peasant communities linked to coca cultivation.

The general perception is that the corruption feared by the military did not occur in the drug trafficking business itself but indirectly in collusion with the paramilitary groups. Although there were indeed cases of military personnel linked to drug cartels, whose job was to facilitate drug shipments and, to a lesser extent, to transport the drugs themselves on aircraft or ships, they always acted off their own bat. In contrast, there were frequent alliances between military personnel and paramilitary groups, which profoundly affected the institution.

The emergence of a new type of armed organisation at the service of the drug barons (thus no longer the gangs of hired killers in the style of

Escobar and Rodríguez Gacha in Medellín), with permanent territories and paramilitary-style structures, which had to be combated using military force, made the possible collaboration between the military and the cartels much more difficult: after all, they were now sworn enemies.

Encounter with Society in the Midst of War

The most marked differences between Colombia and other Latin American countries include the relationship with rural communities, the domestic conflict and the impact of drug trafficking.

In 1964, during the second government of the FN, led by President Guillermo León Valencia, a different stage in the Colombian conflict got underway. The guerrilla movements of the period were operating in a new political environment, namely, that of the revolutionary wars. For their part, the Military Forces of Colombia entered a stage marked by the first counterinsurgency operations and, therefore, by a new relationship with the peasantry. It warrants noting that this relationship was not influenced by ideological factors, as is often believed. There was an objective element (which does mean to say that it was acceptable for being so) in the encounter between the armed forces and the population. In view of the different social classes in the countryside, a practical knowledge of that reality made it quite clear from which direction the bullets would fly. Obviously not from the large and medium landowners, for it was among the poorest sectors of the population that the armed enemy thrived.

This signified that an anomalous contact between the armed forces and the peasant communities was inevitable. A contradiction resulting from the need to use military force to confront a military threat, which, nonetheless, was not backed by a responsible state as in regular interstate warfare, but by peasants who, out of conviction or because of the terror that the guerrilla struck into their hearts, supported that subversive activity or, at least, gave that impression.

In that general context, there emerged legal contradictions. Since the challenge was clearly beyond the capabilities of the police, the armed forces, governed by the norms of international humanitarian law, were obliged to act. According to Protocol II of 1977, an amendment to the Geneva Conventions, the insurgents were also required to comply with that law, something which they could not do completely without jeopardising their survival. So, as those insurgents did not have formal belligerent status, the Colombian state was obliged to apply national criminal law to them. Just as the armed forces had to undertake police tasks, so too did the police have to assume combat roles in many places (as least to protect themselves), while the civilian population was caught between a rock and a hard place.

During those counterinsurgency missions, which became more frequent and exhaustive as of 1964, the military interacted with rural society in different ways. For example, the major landowners whose interests—first and foremost that of suppressing the rebels—coincided with the mission

assigned to the military and, moreover, who had the resources to support them. At the time, the state was in serious financial straits and the support of private groups was more than welcome. Favours great and small were understood as the desire of law-abiding citizens to collaborate with the sanctimonious forces of the state, as an example of civic duty, in other words.⁸

On the other hand, there were the peasant communities made up of settlers, tenants, small landowners and labourers. In this case, civil–military relations were characterised by mutual distrust. Preventive measures taken against social groups that might harbour guerrilla fighters or their grassroots supporters were a matter of course, as is usually the case in irregular warfare. Even though they did not sympathise with the guerrilla groups, these could resort to terror tactics to force the impoverished peasantry to collaborate with them. Although it is hard to imagine a different solution in the midst of a civil conflict, it had negative consequences for the state's moral standing.

There was another aspect that served to whip up hatred for the Colombian guerrillas, thus justifying the use of all types of methods to eradicate them, to wit, their thorough criminalisation. During the conflict, they resorted to methods, such as the kidnapping of tens of thousands of people and indiscriminate terrorist attacks which, owing to their social impact, led to the out-and-out repudiation of most of Colombian society.

Against this backdrop, the military and the police established alliances, some stronger than others, with non-state actors, which also undermined the Colombian state's image as to its moral and ethical values. Although those unspeakable alliances established by some members of the armed forces and the police had nothing to do with government policy, they certainly affected the image, credibility and legitimacy of the state.

In conclusion, a robust, deeply entrenched ideology is not the only factor that explains the military alliances with reactionary sectors of society and their criminal expression, to wit, the paramilitary organisations. Although ideology plays a role, in civil conflicts there are specific situations that determine behaviours. In the case at hand, that the combatants sought to guarantee their own safety is an objective fact, which leads us to discriminate between who can be an enemy and who cannot, whether as a combatant or as a collaborator, either willingly or out of fear. In that universe, surveillance and control measures will be more burdensome for some than for others. Since the military have to cope with dilemmas that require 'urgent' action to guarantee their self-protection, the legal norms governing that action take second place to realistic decisions on which their lives depend in a lethal confrontation.

This gives rise to a problem that cannot be ignored. The Colombian military require political education, but the prejudices on their purported 'non-partisanship' hinder a thorough understanding of the difference between political education, political practice and partisan stance-taking. An adequate political education would enable them to understand the

damage that they cause themselves and the state in general when they weaken its fundamental monopoly on violence. And also to recognise that the homeland security role differs from that of external security and, therefore, alliances have different meanings and purposes. It would also allow them to see peace accords under a more positive light by understanding that domestic peace strengthens the capacity of the state for designing and implementing foreign policy, an area that has become increasingly more complex in recent years owing to the geopolitical dynamics of the Caribbean and the politico-ideological divides in the region as a whole.

The Colombian military have not overstepped the general limits established by civil power but have indeed had sufficient negotiating power and political clout to achieve relative autonomies in the management of the institution itself and that of public order. As to this last aspect, recognition must be given to the fact that progress has been made in subordinating military action to civil control, especially since the promulgation of the 1991 Constitution. Judicial power has also been respected. As regards parliamentary control, there is a pressing need to strengthen Congress and to pursue a greater level of specialisation in the secondary commissions of the Senate and Parliament, in order to develop a more expert and continuous work relating to national security and the Colombian Military Forces and the National Police.

On the downside, the military still have the tendency to close in on themselves and to maintain a lack of transparency that works against their own interests, because in open societies the complex information flows and the development of civil society institutions mean that transparency is the best policy. The historical moment demands that they become more open in order to bring the curtain down once and for all on a very long cycle of violence which has been debilitating for the Colombian state and society, alike.

Notes

- 1 For the historical divide between the elites and the armed forces, see Kuethe (1993).
- 2 As conceptualised by Goffman (1961).
- 3 In their research performed on the bandit phenomenon in the Colombian Coffee Triangle in the 1950s and 1960s, Sánchez and Meertens (1983) coined the term ‘social banditry’ to distinguish it from other forms of banditry.
- 4 Colombia’s civil–military relations were defined in a speech delivered by the then president-elect Alberto Lleras to the army officers of the garrison of Bogota in 1958, in which he established a sharp distinction between political and military affairs (Lleras 1976).
- 5 The reference here to ‘institutional negotiations’ contrasts with the voluntarism of the previous government of President Betancourt, during which a peace commission formed by eminent persons was created, but without sufficient political power to represent society as a whole. The government of President Barco carried on from where the previous administration had left off.

- 6 The military's encounter with society reveals their varying attitudes towards different sectors. It is based on Migdal's (1988) study of the state and his criticism of the Weberian conception of it.
- 7 See, for instance, *Manual Único Pedagógico DDHH y DIH para las FFMM* (2014).
- 8 This thesis was first developed in Borrero (2017: 150–158).

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Part 4

Armoured Bolivarianism



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13 Venezuela—The Osmosis Between the Dominant Political Party, the Military and the Public Administration

*Dirk Kruijt**

Oil Revenues, Public Spending and the Military in the Twentieth Century

After the end of the Jiménez dictatorship in 1958, Venezuela experienced four decades of civilian democracy based on a pact between the two principal political parties Acción Democrática (Democratic Action [AD]) and Social-Christian Comité de Organización Política Electoral Independiente (Political Electoral Independent Organisation Committee [COPEI]) and bankrolled by revenues from the country's huge oil reserves. Venezuela has the second largest oil reserves in the world, as well as huge gas reserves. It also has the second largest hydroelectric facilities in Latin America. Extensive oil reservoirs were discovered in the 1920s and, in the first three decades following the Second World War, the booming oil prices made Venezuela a wealthy country. As of the 1950s, its economy experienced a steady growth, which attracted many migrants, converting it into a country with one of the highest standards of living in Latin America. One of the founding members of the Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), Venezuela's oil industry was nationalised in 1976 and, by 1980, the new conglomerate *Petróleos de Venezuela S.A. (PDVSA)* had become the third largest oil company in the world, after purchasing refineries in the United States and Europe.

Venezuela's oil reserves and revenues made it a typical case of rentier-capitalism. Oil rents were distributed through subsidies and an overvalued currency (Bull and Rosales 2020, 108). But its structural dependency on oil revenues has made it extremely vulnerable to the fluctuating prices on the world market during the past five decades. Sharp cuts in national expenditure due to the fall in prices had far-reaching domestic political consequences in the 1980s and the 2020s.

* With the permission of the publishing house and the co-editors of the book, this chapter is an updated version of Kruijt (2020), *Venezuela's Defence Diplomacy under Chávez and Maduro, 1999–2018*. In: I. Liebenberg, D. Kruijt and S. Paranjpe, eds., *Defence Diplomacy and National Security Strategy: Views from the Global South*. Stellenbosch: African Sun Media, 2020, pp. 87–100.

Of the 54 Venezuelan presidencies between the country's independence in 1811 and 2021, 22 were military dictatorships (Petit Primera 2016). After the long de facto government of General Pérez Jiménez (1951–1958), popular protests and unrest ended in a coup staged by disgruntled officers, supported by the leaders of the most important political parties. They appointed a provisional government, a civil–military junta led by leftist Vice-Admiral Larrazábal, which then laid the groundwork for democratic elections.

Three parties participated in the 1958 presidential elections: Rómulo Betancourt's social-democratic *Acción Democrática* (Democratic Action [AD]), which won; Wolfgang Larrazábal's leftist *Unión Republicana Democrática* (Democratic Republican Union [URD]), which came second; and Rafael Caldera's Christian socialist *Comité de Organización Política Electoral Independiente* (Political Electoral Independent Organisation Committee [COPEI]), which brought up the rear. The three parties had previously sealed the 'Puntofijo' Pact, which established a basic national unity action plan from which the Communist Party of Venezuela (PCV) was excluded.

The pact also envisaged counterinsurgency and civil–military actions against the small guerrilla groups emerging at the time, as a way of keeping the military happy and sustaining their loyalty (Norden 2021, 7–10).¹ Especially in the 1960s and 1970s, Venezuela's oil revenues allowed for lavish public expenditure on welfare programmes, health care and education, and for the granting of generous food and transport subsidies. The military also benefitted from the bonanza with the purchase of modern equipment, higher salaries and successive U.S. military aid programmes. The long period between 1958 and 1999 was characterised by democratically elected civilian governments led by AD or COPEI presidents. Moreover, the new 1961 Constitution (Art. 132) established not only the political neutrality of the military, but also tasked the four armed institutions— army, navy, air force and National Guard— with 'ensuring the stability of the democratic institutions and respect for the constitution and laws', thus giving them a great deal of autonomy.²

But in the late 1980s, the political situation began to deteriorate, with internal leadership disputes and widespread corruption among public officials taking their toll. This was accompanied by a slump in global oil prices, a process of devaluation and two-digit inflation (from 84 per cent in 1989 to 99 per cent in 1996). An International Monetary Fund (IMF)-assisted adjustment programme launched as a shock therapy by government technocrats prompted spontaneous mass uprising and riots in the country's capital Caracas, which were repressed by the armed forces. The so-called *Caracazo*, with a death toll of at least 500 citizens (some sources mention 3,000 casualties), was a watershed event.³

The Rise of Chávez

Venezuelan mid-career officers began to conspire against the government, planning a reformist coup. Lieutenant-Colonel Hugo Chávez,

leading a clandestine movement (MBR-200), staged a failed coup in 1992. Notwithstanding this, he remained a very popular figure and, after serving a two-year prison sentence, founded his own political movement based on an agenda of social and economic reforms.⁴ This won him the support of the rural poor and the urban slum dwellers, the working classes and the impoverished middle classes. He visited Cuba, where Fidel Castro received him as if he were already a head of state, thus marking the beginning of a special relationship between them, with Fidel playing the role of the wise old mentor and Chávez that of his young revolutionary successor, colleague and financier.

Chávez, a life-long devotee of Simon Bolívar and an admirer of the leftist military reforms pursued by Velasco Alvarado (Peru, 1968–1975) and Torrijos (Panama, 1968–1981), also built on their legacy. The three of them identified themselves as military reformers called upon to leverage the armed forces to break the power of the economic and political oligarchy, to restore national control over the economy and to implement social reforms. Chávez, the most outspoken of the three, underscored the role of the military as the vanguard of his future revolutionary process. In his own words, ‘We can say that it is like the formula of water: H₂O. If we say that the people are the oxygen, the armed force are the hydrogen. Water does not exist without hydrogen’ (Bilbao 2002, 28–29). The new president placed his trust in loyal comrades-in-arms and other senior military officers.

When taking office early in 1999, after winning the presidential elections the year before, approximately half of the population was living below the poverty line.⁵ In the same year, Chávez organised a constituent assembly in which he obtained a large majority. He would subsequently win three consecutive presidential elections: in 2000 (with 60 per cent of the ballots cast), in 2006 (with 63 per cent) and in 2012 (with 55 per cent). Before his presidency, neither had the Venezuelan military been allowed to vote in elections, nor had they been expected to participate in public debates. Chávez’s new ‘Bolivarian’ Constitution drastically changed the role of the armed forces, converting them into an instrument of national development and a service provider to the poor and the underprivileged. His initial political movement and, subsequently, the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV) were built on the sympathy and loyalty of the poor sectors of society, grassroots organisations emerging during his presidency and more than 30,000 ‘*consejos comunales*’ (communal councils), elected by the residents of local neighbourhoods, whose job was to start up and oversee local activities and policies.

But there was also growing opposition from the (former) economic elites and sectors of the affluent middle classes. In 2002, Chávez survived an attempted military coup and a failed general strike, organised by a motley alliance of military and political leaders, which left the already divided political opposition discredited during a couple of years. Accordingly, he thoroughly purged the military top brass, with loyalty to the president and the ‘Bolivarian Revolution’ becoming a career requirement.

The Venezuelan Armed Forces under Chávez

The wings of the armed forces were now renamed the Fuerza Armada Nacional Bolivariana (National Bolivarian Armed Force [FANB]). The FANB gradually became the executive instrument of the charismatic president-comandante who had organised his sympathisers in a political party, militias, trade unions and neighbourhood associations. The higher echelons of the military and middle-ranking officers became part of an army transformed into a public works institution and the right hand of the president. The nationalist-leftist ideology of the ‘military as guardians of the nation’, acting for the benefit of the entire nation, especially the poor, contributed to enhance their institutional pride. Already responsible for undertaking social tasks since the beginning of the Chávez’s presidency, the armed forces were now assigned additional missions, including the management of large-scale housing projects and other public works.

The appointment of the military to top management positions in the new missions, the public administration and the nationalised economy certainly made them more loyal to the patriotic president who was following in the footsteps of Bolívar. It also helped that military salaries were increased and that access to the military and the newly created militias was broadened. After removing his adversaries in the armed forces, following the failed coup attempt in 2002, Chávez rapidly promoted loyal non-commissioned officers (NCOs) to commissioned officer (CO) rank, while appointing trustworthy mid-career officers to top jobs. Promotions of this sort, together with the purges, gave rise to an officer corps with extremely loyal flag and middle-ranking officers eager to demonstrate their patriotic zeal. Junior officers received military and ideological training at the newly founded Academia Militar del Ejército Bolivariano (Military Academy of the Bolivarian Army [AMEB]) (Fonseca, Polga-Hecimovich and Trinkunas 2016, 13). And, last but not least, the members of the armed forces were permitted to vote in elections.

Between 2008 and 2015, the FANB’s budget increased from 1.06 to 4.61 per cent of the gross domestic product (GDP), while troop numbers nearly doubled from 117,400 in 2010 to 197,744 in 2014. In 2015, there were 365,046 militiamen organised in 100 ‘Zonas de Defensa Integral’ (Integral Defence Zones [ZODI]).⁶ Chávez called these popular auxiliary forces ‘Pueblo en Armas’ (People-in-Arms) to stress the concord between the armed forces and the civilian population. The militias, directly answerable to the president, nominally became the fifth wing of the FANB.

Chávez’s strategic conception of the external enemy changed over time. At first, he tried to offset the much larger armed forces of Colombia (with around 400,000 troops due to its ‘internal armed conflict’) by buying sophisticated Russian equipment, especially for the Venezuelan air force and navy, supplemented later on by Chinese multi-purpose airplanes. He also tried to acquire Brazilian and Spanish aircraft and French submarines, but U.S. pressure (in the case of Brazil and Spain it was because some of

the aircraft parts were made in the United States) prevented them from being delivered (IISS 2009, 57–58). In 2005, Chávez also signed a contract with the Russians for the assembly of Kalashnikov assault rifles, ammunition and drones for popular defence in the event of a U.S. invasion. While global oil prices were high, the Venezuelan government heavily invested in weaponry.

Twenty-First-Century Socialism

During the first 10 years of Chávez's presidency, global oil prices were at an all-time high. In the early 2000s, he began to expand his reach, placing the accent on his own brand of 'twenty-first century socialism'. Venezuela's oil revenues were the basis for a far-reaching wealth redistribution programme. His socialism took the shape of comprehensive nationalisations and expropriations, more than 20 major social and economic reforms, new political structures, the incorporation of the army as an executive body and a charismatic president-comandante who was hailed in popular neighbourhoods. He also launched a long series of domestic social and economic 'missions', task forces led by trusted servicemen and loyal civilians with the status of ministers.

According to the estimates of the non-profit association *Transparencia Venezuela*, in 2017 of the 526 state-owned enterprises, 390 (74 per cent) were nationalised or expropriated during the presidencies of Chávez and Maduro. The oil giant PDVSA, which had been converted into a conglomerate of interlinked corporations since its nationalisation back in 1975, became the (financial) driving force behind the reforms. The government tightened its grip on the economy by nationalising the country's banks and, in 2003, further reinforced its control over it with the implementation of its policy on foreign exchange and consumer prices (*Transparencia Venezuela* 2017, 3–4, 12, 32).

After 2002, Castro provided Chávez, as he had done with Allende in the early 1970s, with Cuban bodyguards. In later years, the Cuban and Venezuelan security apparatuses signed a mutual cooperation agreement, allowing them to operate in each other's territory. Chávez and Castro cemented their relationship as equal partners, but with Venezuela as the banker. In 2013, the year of Chávez's death, around 50,000 Cuban teachers, literacy experts, university professors, doctors, dentists, paramedical personnel and other experts were employed in Venezuela. Chávez also bankrolled the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America–Peoples' Trade Treaty (ALBA-TCP), a network of like-minded Latin American countries including Bolivia (2006), Nicaragua (2007), Ecuador (2009) and six Caribbean island-states. The Cuban–Venezuelan health programme and the many other missions of the first years were a great success and made Chávez hugely popular. Undeniably, the quality of life of the poor in Venezuela greatly improved during his first 10 years in office,⁷ with the poverty rate falling from 44 per cent in 1999 to 27 per cent in 2010 (INE 2015).

Chávez's foreign policy was aimed at achieving anti-imperialist Latin American integration. He was one of the main architects of a new hemispheric integration model, with the ALBA-TCP (2004), the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR, 2008) and the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC, 2012). These new bodies were created to counter the political and military influence of the United States and the Organisation of American States (OAS) and were funded by Venezuelan oil revenues or through very favourable oil supply programmes like PetroCaribe, PetroSur and PetroAndina.

With respect to Chávez's domestic policy, while poverty and income inequality declined, urban crime escalated. Between 1999 and 2010, the number of murders per 100.000 inhabitants increased from 25 to 57. This spike in crime was partly due to the radical changes in the institutional order. The new government encouraged land invasions and the establishment of a new social order, which destabilised the existing institutions of law and order: a new criminal legislation that curtailed the role of the police, the public clashes between the president and the armed forces during the failed coup in 2002, the conflicts with the country's former political class and the half-hearted government action against armed (youth) gangs in popular neighbourhoods.⁸

Political opposition proliferated. A dissimilar and divided sector of the two former power blocs AD and COPEI, as well as 18 smaller opposition parties of all political leanings formed the Mesa de la Unidad Democrática (Democratic Unity Roundtable [MUD]) in 2009. In June that same year, the former AD politician Antonio Ledezma was elected as mayor of Caracas; he was re-elected in 2013. During his final years in power, the onset of an economic recession, two-digit inflation, increasing levels of poverty and insecurity and reports of corruption affected Chávez's popularity but did not prevent him from winning the presidential elections yet again just before his death. But under the presidency of his successor Nicolás Maduro, the problems multiplied exponentially.

Maduro's Venezuela

Maduro attended cadre courses in Cuba and was a 'Chavista' from the word go. He pursued his political career under Chávez as the president of the National Assembly (2005–2006), Minister of Foreign Affairs (2006–2012), the executive vice-president (2012–2013) and, following Chávez's death, interim president. Shortly after winning the 2013 presidential elections with a narrow majority, he had to deal with a profound economic crisis, conflicting power blocs in the PSUV and the growing popularity of his political opponents.

As of the last quarter of 2013, Venezuela's economy entered into recession. In 2014, global oil prices plummeted. The government resorted to monetary financing and, as a result, inflation spiralled out of control and the country became heavily indebted to Russia and China. Indeed, the

Central Bank has not published inflation statistics since 2015. According to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the country's GDP contracted 6 per cent in 2015 and by between 10 and 20 per cent in 2016 and, the following year, the country registered the world's highest inflation rate. In 2018, Venezuela's fiscal deficit was around 20 per cent of the GDP and its international reserves were at their lowest level for the past 20 years (less than \$ 8.5 billion). The value of the parallel dollar (the currency used to set the price of nearly all consumer goods) had increased by more than 9,900 per cent.⁹ Despite the introduction of a new 'Bolívar Fuerte' currency, Venezuelan hyperinflation is still rampant and its economy is in fact dollarised.

Under Maduro (2013–to date), the social and political divide in Venezuela, already visible during Chávez's final years in power, widened catastrophically, resulting in opposition marches and widespread discontent. The members of the MUD remained at odds, with some of their number committed to guaranteeing clean elections and to the release of political prisoners, while others advocated for a military coup or even a U.S. invasion. In early 2015, the mayor of Caracas, Ledezma, was arrested on charges of supporting an attempted coup (in November 2017, he fled to Spain). In December 2015, the MUD won the parliamentary elections with the support of 56 per cent of the electorate. In retaliation, Maduro issued a decree for the purpose of electing a constituent assembly in June 2017. As the MUD boycotted the elections, the governing party PSUV won a landslide victory. The Constituent Assembly 'coexisted' alongside the democratically elected parliament but assumed *de facto* all legislative functions.

In 2018, Maduro was re-elected with the support of 68 per cent of the electorate, although the elections were highly contested.¹⁰ In January 2019, the opposition majority in the National Assembly declared Maduro's re-election invalid and named its then president, Juan Guaidó, acting president, a function hitherto unknown. The majority of Western and Latin American countries supported Guaidó, but after a failed invitation to the military to stage a coup (April 2019), his influence waned. Meanwhile, Russia, China, Iran and Turkey have been acting as Venezuela's geopolitical allies and financial and trade partners, while Venezuelan–Cuban relations remain as cordial as ever, notwithstanding continuing U.S. sanctions. As well as supplying Venezuela with weapons and military training, Russia, together with China, has also provided the country with vaccines during the COVID-19 pandemic (Rendon and Fernandez 2020; Gratius 2021). Moreover, in April 2021, Cuba and Venezuela signed an agreement for the production of two million Cuban vaccines (SWI 2021; Aljazeera 2021).

When the crisis started to affect the citizenry's pockets, the Maduro government organised a new clientelist instrument, the *Comités Locales de Abastecimiento y Producción* (Local Committees for Supply and Production [CLAP]), with a view to providing households with food packages every three weeks, a measure designed to retain the loyalty of the regime's hard-core supporters. In 2014, a mere 8 per cent of Venezuelan

households received such packages—delivered by the military or local party representatives (López Maya 2018, 69)—but by 2016 this had risen to 28 per cent. While structural (chronic) poverty affected 38 per cent of population in 2016 (ENCOVI 2017), it is generally assumed that by August 2018 the poverty rate had reached the same level as when Chávez took office (around 50 per cent). Judging by the statistics for 2019, the country is all but completely impoverished: 96 per cent of the households are below the poverty line and 79 per cent are classified as extremely poor (ENCOVI 2020).

Since 2014, a growing number of citizens have emigrated from Venezuela. The first wave corresponded to the academic brain drain in 2014: engineers, doctors, architects and other professionals. Subsequently, the mass exodus has become a serious phenomenon. According to the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), by January 2021 5.4 million Venezuelan had migrated to or sought refugee status in other countries, of which 4.6 million are currently living in the Americas: 1.7 million in Colombia, 1 million in Peru and others in Chile, Brazil, Central America, Mexico, the Southern Cone and the Caribbean (UNHCR 2021).

Poverty is not the only reason behind the mass exodus of Venezuelans, since the growing levels of corruption and crime are also determinants. The problem is particularly serious in Caracas, in the country's larger cities and on the long border region with Colombia, where extremely violent non-state actors, ranging from former guerrilla units to drug gangs, through armed criminals, operate. For several years, Caracas topped the list of the world's 50 most dangerous cities with over 300,000 inhabitants.

In 2015 and 2016, a number of academic works dealing with the structural character of corruption in Venezuela saw the light of day. They drew attention to the existence of large Colombian and Venezuelan criminal and drug networks. Journalists and academic researchers can only speculate about the real extent of the illegal movement of drugs, valuables, gold and capital. Be that as it may, there are strong indications that Rampa 4, the government airfield, is also being used to transfer gold, monetary instruments and cash stockpiles to accounts at foreign banks in Europe and Panama (Meza 2016). Analysts have also called attention to the corruption rife in the oil giant PDVSA and other state-owned enterprises, such as the food production and distribution consortium PDVAL (Tablante and Tarre 2016, 104–ff., 168–ff.).

The Venezuelan Armed Forces under Maduro

In 2018, Maduro won the heavily contested presidential elections and since the beginning of his second term in office (2019–2025), he has governed by decree, with the unflagging unconditional support of the military top brass.

Already under Chávez, the FANB was a powerful institution, acting as both the president's right (defence and internal security) and left

(responsible for ministries, ‘missions’ and economic management) hand.¹¹ But Chávez’s charisma was largely undisputed and he also maintained control over the FANB by annually appointing new senior commanders, thus advancing the careers of more junior officers.¹² To reinforce that control, he rewarded loyalty with promotion, thus creating a top-heavy military. According to retired high-ranking commanding officers, there were approximately 700 generals (and their equivalent in the navy, air force and National Guard) in 2017.¹³ They also expressed their concern about the combat readiness of the FANB and the upkeep of its equipment.

During Maduro’s first term in office (2013–2018), civilian ministries and management functions were already being transferred to the military. Active or retired military officers occupied key cabinet positions. Important sectors and strategic areas of governance, including tax collection, budgeting, government procurement, public banking and bank supervision are also now managed by military officers (Ramos Pismarato 2018). In 2017, of the 526 state-owned or nationalised companies only 21 per cent disclosed their shareholder structure, 6 per cent the names of their board members and 24 per cent the names of their chief executive officers. Of the identified chief executive officers, 30 were active or retired servicemen (Transparencia Venezuela 2017, 8). Through their overseeing and administration of the CLAP, the military control the national food production, import and distribution systems. They also manage the entire power and hydroelectric sector, the Metro of Caracas and the Corporación Venezolana de Guyana, the source of practically all national mineral and natural resources. Additionally, they are in charge of the entrepreneurial industrial complex associated with the Ministry of Defence (Ramos Pismarato 2018, 271–ff.).

Under Maduro, the armed forces are both the right (defence, management) and the left (control, repression) hand of the ruling government. The president also developed a new loyalty programme for the military: mass promotion. On 5 July 2018, Independence Day of Venezuela, he promoted 183 officers to the rank of general or admiral (Castro 2018). He also offered the officer corps generous wage increases. In terms of the salary scale in the public sector, an army colonel earns 15 times more than a university professor. During the entire twentieth century, Venezuelan ministers of defence could be civilians or high-ranking military officers. Under President Chávez, 12 loyal senior military officers were appointed first as commanders-in-chief of the armed forces and then as ministers of defence (‘minister of people’s power for defence’), while the military also entered the realm of essentially civilian administration. Maduro extended this system of selecting only fiercely loyal ‘Chavista’ servicemen.

General Vladimir Padrino, the commander-in-chief of the FANB in 2013, was appointed as the minister of defence in 2014, a position he still occupies. Faced with political mayhem and economic calamity, Maduro issued an ‘economic emergency decree’ in July 2016, creating a

super-mission for ‘sovereign and safe supply’, to be led by his loyal minister of defence.¹⁴ Padrino appointed 24 flag officers as section heads: for rice, fruit, chicken, beans and so forth. According to information published in *El País*, via special credit lines, the budget of the Ministry of Defence was 35 per cent larger than that of the Ministry of Education and 17 times larger than that of the Ministry of Agriculture in the first half of 2018 (Castro 2018). The integrity of the Venezuelan military is under their own supervision.

General Padrino is now in charge of ‘national defence and sovereignty’, a task that also includes civilian protection during elections,¹⁵ while also overseeing all other social missions as a kind of super-minister. In November 2017, Maduro appointed General Manuel Quevedo as the commander of the National Guard, while Asdrúbal Chávez, another loyal ‘Chavista’, was appointed as the minister of oil and as the president of the PDVSA, the state-owned conglomerate of oil enterprises on which the Venezuelan economy is extremely dependent.¹⁶ Consequently, the military top brass are deeply embedded in the government. In September 2018, for example, of the 32 cabinet members 12 (37 per cent) were military, controlling the most strategic ministries: Defence, Interior, Justice, Food, Housing, Public Works, Transport and Electricity.

The close collaboration between Cuba and Venezuela in terms of intelligence and state security has been consolidated.¹⁷ Cuban assistance and training have had a strong influence on Venezuela’s military defence strategy, on the ideology of the FANB’s top brass and, probably even more, on the intelligence and especially counterintelligence services in their task of ‘controlling external and internal threats’ (Jácome 2011). The civilian, military and political intelligence services tend to overlap and the distinction between the roles and operations of the Servicio Bolivariano de Inteligencia Nacional (Bolivarian National Intelligence Service [SEBIN]), the Dirección General de Inteligencia Militar (Directorate General of Military Intelligence [DGIM]) and the Dirección General de Contrainteligencia Militar (Directorate General of Military Counterintelligence [DGCIM]) is vague in practice (Ramos Pismataro 2018, 268).

Concluding Remarks

On 3 May 2018, President Maduro published a page-long article in *El País*, the Spanish daily considered as one of the most well-informed about Latin America. Maduro argued that Venezuela’s democracy is quite different from the rest, ‘Because all the others—in practically all other countries of the world—are democracies created by and for the elites [...] class based democracies [...]. For us, the essence of our democracy is that the economy serves the people and not [that] the people are at the service of the economy [...]. For us [...], the economy is justice and democracy, protection’ (Maduro 2018).

This statement oozes wishful thinking. Despite these high-minded objectives, there is an ongoing process of autocracy and militarisation of the economy, society and political structures. Hyperinflation and mass emigration seem to have become structural problems. Day after day, poverty-stricken Venezuelan refugees and migrants arrive at refugee camps and bivouacs or at the homes of distant family members or former Venezuelan refugees in other Latin American countries, whose governments are desperate to stem their flow.

Indeed, Maduro's government is based on an alliance between the elite of a political party and the military establishment, probably only supported by between 25 and 30 per cent of the electorate who depend on remittances, the CLAP system and other presidential dispensations.

In the main, military institutions have a longer life expectancy than political parties, careers and leaders. After eight years in power, the political fate of the president largely depends on the unwavering loyalty of his military supporters. But Venezuela, however, is a house divided, economically and politically. The military sustain the president, while being mainly responsible for governing the country and managing the economy. But what if the Venezuelan economic and political crisis deepens, the protest movements become more desperate and the FANB, instead of a loyal supporter, feels the need to become a national arbiter?

Notes

- 1 About the multiple guerrilla movements in the 1960s, see Cortina Orero (2020).
- 2 For the implications, see Castillo (1998).
- 3 Regarding the deepening crisis, see Levine (2002).
- 4 Chávez founded three consecutive political movements: the Movimiento Bolivariano Revolucionario 200 (Revolutionary Bolivarian Movement-200 [MBR-200]) in 1982, followed by the Movimiento Quinta República (Fifth Republic Movement [MQV]) in 1998, which became the basis of the creation of the Partido Socialista Unido de Venezuela (United Socialist Party of Venezuela [PSUV]), resulting from its merger with other left-wing parties and movements, in 2007.
- 5 Forty-nine per cent according to the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) (2001, 44).
- 6 According to RESDAL (2016, 210–215), these ZODI and the Regiones Estratégicas de Defensa Militar (Strategic Regions of Military Defence [REDI]) were created by Chávez (Jácome 2018). There are important differences of opinion among analysts as to the real number of militiamen, their training and their weapons. See also Norden (2021, 13).
- 7 In 2015, the Gini coefficients of Venezuela and Uruguay were the lowest (around 0.40) in Latin American as a whole (ECLAC 2017, 47, 50).
- 8 For further details, see Briceño-León, Camardiel and Perdomo (2019).
- 9 Data published by Sutherland (2018) for 1 July 2018.
- 10 His closest rival, the 'Chavista' candidate Henri José Falcón, obtained 21 per cent of the ballots cast.

- 11 The intelligence services (Servicio Bolivariano de Inteligencia Nacional [SEBIN]) and the National Guard.
- 12 Traditionally, the commanders-in-chief of the four wings have the highest seniority. If a more junior commander is appointed, all higher-ranking officers are invited to retire.
- 13 The author's interviews in Caracas in November 2017.
- 14 Of the 11 ministers of food appointed after 2004, 10 were servicemen.
- 15 By invitation of the president of the National Electoral Council in 2020. [online] Available at: www.vtv.gob.ve/garantizara-soberania-territorial-proteccion-pueblo/ [Accessed on 21 July 2021].
- 16 In 2020, he was succeeded by former the vice-president Tareck El Aissami. The same presidential decree appointed Asdrúbal Chávez, cousin of the late president Hugo Chávez, as the president of the PVDSA.
- 17 On the internal developments of the Venezuelan armed forces and the intelligence apparatus, see Trinkunas (2005), Kruijt (2017) and Ramos Pismarato (2018).

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14 Cuba—The Cuban Armed Forces

From Revolutionaries to Entrepreneurs

Rut Diamint and Laura Tedesco

Introduction

What type of political regime does Cuba have? What role do the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias (Revolutionary Armed Forces [FAR]) play in that regime? China and Vietnam are assumedly following the state capitalism model: they have capitalist economies controlled by authoritarian governments led by communist parties. But Cuba does not fall into that category. Since its revolutionary beginnings, it has been a system in which neither private ownership nor a market economy has existed. The state controls and manages the economy, social relations and politics, while the few private initiatives are strictly regulated.

Marxist theory predicted a dictatorship of the proletariat, thus paving the way for a classless society. In reality, Cuba has never had a proletariat. At best, it can be defined as a dictatorship of the peasantry. On the other hand, no Marxist work has foreseen such a long dictatorship—62 years. Lastly, besides that dictatorship's surprising longevity, Cuban society has indeed two classes. So, this brings us back to the question of how the Cuban regime should be conceptualised. It could be regarded as a stable hybrid socialist regime that is symbolically autocratic, insofar as power is wielded by a sole person and a sole political and tacitly militarised party.

Accordingly, the intention here is to qualify this classification by contrasting it with several others put forward in previous studies of political regimes. The third section is devoted to the constitutional framework, namely the amendments introduced in the new 2019 Constitution. This is followed by an explanation of the sources of real power in Cuba and the economic role played by the FAR, which has given them de facto political and economic power. The fifth section delves deeper into the symbolism and power of the FAR, as a reservoir and source of the Cuban Revolution. Lastly, in the final comments the FAR, the political regime and their role in the government are further discussed, before concluding that they are not a political army but the ideological and economic guarantee of an abortive revolution.

The Cuban Political System

A political regime is the set of institutions through which a state organises its exercise of power over society. A regime is a system with a variable geometry in which tools for co-option, negotiation and imposition converge in order to govern the citizenry. It is the way in which a government exercises power. A political regime is set of institutions that regulate the interaction between the rulers and the ruled. A political regime allows for determining access to power and the uses to which the authorities can put their powers. So, it establishes the form of government, the regulation of conflicts and the accepted framework for collective action. Levitsky and Way (2010) have described hybrid regimes as those that maintain formal elements of democracy, fictional competitive elections, a legitimate constitution, some basic civil and political rights and a relative opposition, together with an excessive institutional control of the media. Here, it has been decided to call them electoral or competitive authoritarianisms. This conceptualisation dovetails perfectly with the cases of Venezuela and Nicaragua. The former, it is held here, is a political-military system, an alliance of mutual controls and benefits. This model, however, does not adapt to that of the Cuban regime. In Cuba there is no opposition, since it is a one-party—the Communist Party of Cuba (hereinafter, PCC)—regime in which political and social rights are very restricted. The elections held on the island are not competitive. Freedom of expression is also exceedingly limited. Rhetoric—the discourse—is central to the messages of the Cuban government. There is talk about rectifications or amendments but never about reforms. Improvements or modifications are proposed but never changes.

In light of the foregoing, is the Cuban regime hybrid or plainly dictatorial? Chaguaceda and Viera Cañive (2021) have very recently defined it as a post-totalitarian autocratic regime. This type of regime is characterised by having a bureaucratic leadership, less ideological weight as a control mechanism and social diversity, but without political pluralism.

The government keeps a tight grip on society through labour, financial activity and the *Comités de Defensa de la Revolución* (Committees for the Defence of the Revolution [CDRs]), a network of neighbourhood committees across Cuba. As the FAR pull the political and economic strings, it is essential to explore their role. Following the main question of this book, are the FAR a ‘political army’ (Koonings and Kruijt 2002)? Are the FAR ‘a military institution that considers its involvement in—or control over—domestic government and the business of politics to be a central part of its legitimate function’?

Is Cuba a military regime in which the FAR control the government and politics? As Perlmutter (1980, 113) contended, ‘The answer is that it is a special kind of military regime.’ This same author (Perlmutter 1980, 97) explained that ‘military regimes are no longer regarded simply as regimes that are dominated by the military’. They also involve civilian bureaucrats and like-minded politicians. They are fusionist regimes that

resort to the support of technicians and military elites, as well as corporate and bureaucratic technocrats. In Cuba, they do not guide the political process, despite being omnipresent in the Political Bureau, the Assembly and the PCC.

An army-party regime can be defined as one whose composition, structure and orientation give rise to a symbiosis of military elites and political parties. This classification does not exemplify so precisely those dominating the regime. Cuba's revolutionary beginnings confirm Perlmutter's (1980, 113) claim: 'The military is either the creator and innovator of the single party [...].' But in subsequent developments, in which the FAR continued to play a leading role, the bureaucratic and party apparatuses expanded, institutionally limiting the military's decision-making powers. Certainly, 'The military is the protector of the party; it guards its legitimacy and primary values' (Perlmutter 1980, 113), but real power remains in the hands of the PCC.

Cuban reality shows that the PCC is central and that there is, at least legally, a control over the FAR similar to that existing in the Soviet model. The FAR are loyal to the party. In a case study of Eastern Europe, the existence of a—even partisan—control over the armed forces obliged them to adapt to the new circumstances arising during the transition. Elsewhere in Latin America, in comparison, subordinating the armed forces was a more arduous task, for they enjoyed much greater autonomy. So, in Cuba this might have led to the swifter and less conflictive adaptation of the FAR than in a number of Latin American countries.

Assumedly, that is what happened. The Cuban military top brass have strong ideological convictions and a tradition of perceiving threats shaped by their prolonged subordination to the PCC. Furthermore, there are no appealing reasons for change, as occurred in Eastern Europe wooed by the European Union and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Quite to the contrary, the members of the FAR stand to lose many of their privileges in a hypothetical political and economic transition, since, as will be seen below, they have taken over the most profitable economic sector.

So, how should the Cuban regime be defined? The definition that probably best fits this system is that of a stable hybrid socialist regime. In the past, the peculiar Cuban communism was ridiculed as a regime established on an island which interpreted the Russian and Chinese recipes but seasoning them with Caribbean condiments. In a context in which the survival of pure Marxism was historically questioned, Cuba did not incorporate the modifications that Russia, China and Vietnam imposed on their economies.

Be that as it may, the revolutionary pretence and the control over society, far removed from the freedoms allowed in those other communist regimes, have been maintained down to the present day. To this should be added that it is a 'symbolically autocratic and tacitly militarised' political regime—power is concentrated in the hands of a sole individual and a sole political party. However, the FAR cannot be regarded as a 'political army'.

They are a military institution that, since the special period of the 1990s, has taken charge of the economy, particularly the sector that generates essential foreign exchange. But, notwithstanding the fact that they control key sectors of the economy, the members of the FAR are unknown to the public at large.

Levitsky and Way (2010) analyse the reasons behind the duration of some revolutionary regimes. In the case of Cuba, they stress that the destruction of the centres of power of the old regime, such as the dominant social classes in the economic structure, the Church, the political parties and the armed forces, helps to understand the permanence of the model of the Castro brothers. By the same token, the authors note that liberation struggles give rise to a generation of leaders with an unquestionable authority and legitimacy (Levitsky and Way 2010, 9). They also place the accent on the fact that the governments emerging from these liberation struggles create a very powerful coercive apparatus that, in the Cuban case, is marked by an almost complete overlapping of the political and military spheres. This explains, in part, why the Cuban regime survived the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the death of Fidel and the economic meltdown of Venezuela.

The Constitutional Framework

During 2013, the Political Bureau created a working group, chaired by General Raúl Castro Ruz, the first secretary of the PCC, for the purpose of studying possible amendments to the constitution. Raúl Castro sensed that certain changes were necessary for the continued viability of the revolutionary project. A commission, formed by 33 unelected members, was tasked with drafting the new constitution behind closed doors.

In a referendum, based on a broad system of popular consultations on the constitution approved in 2019, administered by the local intermediaries of the government, the ‘yes’ vote won. It is important to stress, however, that 22 per cent of the census (approximately 1,900,000 voters) did not support the new constitution: some did not cast their ballots, others voted ‘no’ and yet others cast blank ballots (Chaguaceda and Viera Cañive 2021, 68). It is also essential to emphasise the fact that the turnout in these popular consultations was unprecedented on the island. There were issues, like, for example, the legalisation of homosexual marriage, which led to a broad debate in which it was possible to perceive the influence of the Evangelical Churches in Cuba (interview in Havana, 2019).¹

The constitution includes several political developments. For instance, even though the PCC continues to be ‘the supreme leading force of society and the state’, it is no longer the ‘organised Marxist-Leninist working class vanguard’ (as enshrined in the 1976 Constitution), but ‘the organised vanguard of the Cuban nation’, even recognising for the first time the validity of the Charter of the United Nations and other international treaties

(Domínguez 2020a, 20). Furthermore, it establishes that the figure of the prime minister and presidents are limited to two terms in office.

The constitution also envisages for the first time the concept of private ownership, the market and foreign investment, all significant amendments that have ‘liberalised’ the economic model of the state to a certain extent. It also employs the term ‘human rights’, but, be that as it may, ‘economic, cultural and social rights are not differentiated from the civil and political kind’ (Fernández and Fernández 2016, 97). As to politics, it guarantees the perpetuity of the socialist system and introduces the figure of the president of the republic with government leadership roles (Chaguaceda and Viera Cañive 2021, 71).

In reality, these constitutional amendments have not modified the political regime or the daily lives of the Cubans. One of the criticisms is that the rights enshrined in the constitution cannot be exercised, since there are no mechanisms for such an exercise or for taking action against the state in the event of their constitutional violation. The PCC continues to be omnipotent, socialism is still irrevocable and the rights granted can easily be ignored by the government.

There is an intrinsic contradiction between transparency and accountability and the social exercise of rights. As Chaguaceda and Viera Cañive (2021, 61) explain, constitutions limit state powers and underpin the legal system, while being inherent to modern conceptions of democracy. The process of reforming the Cuban constitution did not faithfully reflect that democratic model. There was much debate. The people were convened to discuss its articles and the amendments to the original constitution reflected their demands. The drafting commission introduced 760 changes, but the new constitution does not limit executive power.

The new constitution was ratified by 86.85 per cent of the electorate. In this regard, it is the most ‘democratic’ of all in Latin America. However, many activists are aware of the fallacy. The opposition candidates were not free to express their ideas. Due to the pressure brought to bear by the leaders of the CDRs, the citizenry were prevented from not voting or from voting ‘no’ to the new constitution, under the threat of losing the few resources provided by the state. The results of the debates were never published. The constitution did not limit political power, but, quite to the contrary, it was that very power that established the limits of the constitutional reform and safeguarded the autocratic decision-making powers of the Political Bureau. In other words, the revolutionary fable was consolidated yet again thanks to democratic rhetoric.

The pretence that democracy really exists in Cuba is reproduced in many print media to which the population has easy access. Both the official press and the numerous provincial media outlets allied to the regime echo that model of democracy vilified by the United States. The long list also includes provincial newspapers and magazines, such as *Cuba Periodistas*, *CubaSí.cu*, *Ecured*, *Revista Tino*, *El Heraldo Cubano*, *Visión desde Cuba*,

Cubadebate and *Chicha a la Cubana*, to name just a few, as well as blogs and the state television channels and radio stations. The Cuban government supplies a large amount of information, as can be seen on Juriscuba, which, as underscored on its website, disseminates legal knowledge in Cuba.² At any rate, it is striking that such a level of legal transparency does not reveal anything whatsoever about the FAR. A search run on the website yields countless laws, decrees and resolutions governing public life. However, when a search is run on the keyword ‘FAR’, only the four articles (Arts. 714–717) of the new constitution pertaining to the Armed Institutions of the State appear. There is absolutely no information available on the legal provisions of the FAR.³ Given the central role that they play in the design of the political system, Decree No. 11-2020, in which it is stated that the Ministry of the Revolutionary Armed Forces is participating in the National Committee of Geoparks, seems to be of little importance. And the same can be said about Executive Order No. 8, GOC-2020-613-O66, on Normalisation, Metrology, Quality and Certification, Resolution No. 168/2010 and Executive Order No. 370, which all refer to the FAR’s participation in economic and disciplinary affairs. In short, Juriscuba does not contain any legislation on the omnipotent power of the FAR.

The state continues to be a key economic actor, although since 2014 there have been modifications that have strengthened the ties of socialist-managed state enterprises with foreign capital. This is an attempt to make the island’s economic activity more efficient and dynamic, but, at the same time, the state maintains its control over those companies thanks to the military’s presence in the business fabric.

The Real Power

In December 2019, the president of Cuba, Miguel Díaz-Canel, appointed the ex-coronel Manuel Marrero as the prime minister. Judging by his curriculum vitae—head of the technical investment group, subdirector and director general of the Río de Luna Hotel and sub-delegate of the military enterprise Gaviota for the eastern provinces—Marrero has not had a particularly noteworthy military career. But this ex-colonel combines the economic and political strength of post-Castroism, for he has worked in the military network that controls the key tourism industry. In 1999, he became the vice-chairman of the Gaviota tourism group and in 2001 its chairman. Tourism is a key economic activity and the FAR, which have a great deal of political clout, control this highly profitable business.

Similarly, Díaz-Canel appointed Brigadier-General José Amado Ricardo Guerra as the Cabinet secretary, virtually a cabinet chief, one of the right-hand men of Raúl Castro who assigned him those roles in 2009. Other servicemen also currently sit on the Cabinet, together with members of the Central Committee of the PCC, including Army General Álvaro López Miera, who is also the first vice minister of the FAR and Chief of the General Staff, Major General Lázaro A. Álvarez Casas, also the

interior minister and Luis Alberto Rodríguez López-Calleja, the executive chairman of the Grupo de Administración Empresarial (Business Management Group [GAESA]) and the chief of Department V of the FAR. All of which evinces the weight that the military carry in political decision-making.

The FAR are formed by the Revolutionary Army, the Revolutionary Navy, the Air Defence and the Revolutionary Air Force, the Youth Labour Army, the Territorial Militias and the Production and Defence Brigades. There are three territorial armies: western, central and eastern. According to figures published on the website of the Spanish Ministry of Defence, in the 1980s Cuba had 200 MiG fighters of Russian provenance, which made it the best equipped air force in Latin America (Defensa.com 2020). The same source considered that the acquisition of two combat submarines and a Koni-class frigate meant that Cuba was now a threat to its neighbours. This analysis performed in 1982 contrasts starkly with current reality, in which the FAR are not only undertrained but also all the weaponry that formerly made them a force to contend with is nowadays obsolete.

Once the Cold War had ended, the FAR had to meet new challenges. They no longer embarked on international missions aimed at establishing socialist regimes all over the world. When they began to be involved in political, economic and social activities, their professionalism suffered as a consequence. 'In December 1994, the National Assembly passed Law 75, the first comprehensive piece of military legislation in Cuba' (Domínguez 2020b, 21). But their profile changed drastically in the 1990s. 'The priority of foodstuffs over artillery pieces was one of the main reasons why the military were given wider and greater economic responsibilities' (Domínguez 2020b, 23). 'The business dimension of the military contributed to their denaturalisation and cast doubt on the training and combat readiness of the military institution for national defence' (Moloeznik Gruer 2015, 26).

Once the aid coming from the ex-Soviet Union had ceased, the government of Fidel Castro realigned the FAR's functions. Back in the so-called Special Period in Time of Peace, the military were already being trained in business management through the Sistema de Perfeccionamiento Empresarial (Business Improvement System [SPE]).⁴ The improvement principles applied in the business system of the Ministry of Defence (MINFAR) and the 'Rectification Process' gradually substituted the economic management and planning system. In 1989, the new Sistema de Dirección y Gestión Empresarial (Business Governance and Management System [SDGE]) was applied to military construction companies, a hospital, an agribusiness company, the Cuban Institute of Geodesy and Cartography, three tourism centres and a car repair workshop.

As of 1990, the SDGE began to be applied to all the production units and services of the MINFAR. In the Economic Resolution of the 5th Party Congress,⁵ it was decided to extend the SPE to the state economy as a whole, something that would occur as of 1998 (Ibáñez López 2006, 84–86).

With the reversion to tourism and finance, the Cuban economy was placed in the hands of the FAR.

The SPE was based on a systematic control that enabled the PCC and the state to keep abreast of everything that occurred in all the branches of the Cuban economy. Despite all these modifications, the United States was still proclaimed as the island's main enemy. According to the information available, however, the last military manoeuvres in which Cuban troops participated took place from 16 to 18 November 2016, namely, the FAR have largely been involved in the economy and politics for the past five years.

With over 300,000 troops at the end of the 1980s, by the mid-1990s this figure had fallen to 100,000. In 2019, the FAR had 50,000 troops—38,000–40,000 in the army, 8,000 in the air force and 3,000 in the navy—with a much reduced operational capability and combat readiness, according to reliable estimates, since Cuba does not publish figures in this respect (Domínguez 2021). Following the crisis triggered by the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the relations between the security forces, the rest of the government and the PCC were rebuilt, with the imposition of the 'civic soldier' concept, which, on the one hand, led to the participation of the FAR in economic affairs and the management of the Ministry of the Interior (MININT) and, on the other, reinforced the foundational revolutionary symbols, ideology and traditions (Domínguez 2021): 'This hybrid approach, "the civic soldier", included military officers who governed many facets of military and civilian life, presented as model soldiers and civilians in their role as bearers of Cuba's revolutionary traditions and ideology' (Domínguez 2020b, 6).

These Cuban servicemen symbolise the union between the state's political and defence dimensions. They are not agents of modernisation or change, but of control of that revolutionary ideology and practice, which Domínguez (2021) defines in the following terms: 'The USSR now extinct, they [the FAR] depend less on communist ideology and more on a steely nationalism in the face of the United States.'

The FAR's Symbolism and Power

Unlike what occurred in the transitional periods in Latin America, the Cuban political authorities are not afraid of the military's autonomy. There is no perceived danger that the FAR will someday turn on the elite to seize direct control of the government (Acemoglu, Ticchi and Vindigni 2008, 4). Quite to the contrary, their corporate interests coincide with those of the PCC. This was already observed by Rouquié (1981, 8), when explaining the role of the military in Latin American dictatorships: 'The military in power, however central the position they occupy in the political system and however much autonomy they enjoy, are dependent on the political culture of the domestic and foreign dominant classes.' The FAR's commitment to revolutionary transformation, in which they originally participated, and the support that they enjoy among the population, ensure the perpetuation

of their symbiosis with the PCC. They are not dependent on the system but equal partners.

Regardless of whether it is down to ideological reasons or, as some hold, to benefits and prerogatives, the wave of remilitarisation sweeping across Latin America will surely reach Cuba, albeit for another purpose: to maintain the fiction of the revolution. According to the Defence Act—passed in 1994 with the aim of defending the socialist nation—the War of the Entire Nation

is an exceptional situation which is established throughout the country in order to ensure, gradually and progressively, its full combat readiness and to create the right conditions for it to maintain its territorial integrity and sovereignty, through the implementation of a series of measures and activities involving the state bodies and agencies, economic entities, social institutions and the citizenry.⁶

Over the past 24 years, the Cuban government has not seen fit to modify it. The continuing U.S. commercial, economic and financial embargo would indicate that successive U.S. administrations have attempted to weaken the Cuban Revolution by undermining the island's economy, discarding the idea of a military invasion. Be that as it may, both Fidel and Raúl Castro fanned the flames of the military threat, inasmuch as it has always served to justify sacrifices, shortages and the power of the FAR.

The role of the FAR was modified when Fidel and Raúl Castro finally understood that the disappearance of the Soviet Union and the U.S. embargo were more genuine and dangerous threats for the Cuban Revolution than an invasion. During the Special Period, the FAR were gradually transformed into an economic cornerstone. Part of the island's agricultural production and the economic sectors that guaranteed the inflow of foreign currency were transferred to the FAR, while the military budget was slashed by 60 per cent. As of the Special Period, they began to manage the tourism industry, the domestic foreign exchange market (the foreign currency recuperation stores and exchange offices), air transport, mining, biomedicine and tobacco exports.

On the date of writing this chapter (June 2021), it is estimated that the FAR control 844 companies (Aznarez 2007). In 2017, the online news outlet Cubanet (2017) published a list of the hotels and companies banned by the United States for being considered as military enterprises.⁷ At the time, the GAESA, which included tourism companies, shops, foreign currency recuperation stores, communications and agribusiness production, controlled between 50 and 80 per cent of business revenues (Aznarez 2015). The FAR's growing economic role involved their demilitarisation, with military training being relegated to second place in order to undertake economic tasks. 'The GAESA is not a department of the MINFAR and its profits in freely convertible currency are contributions to the state budget, although priority is given to satisfying the needs of the FAR' (Domínguez 2021).

As of 2017, the Trump administration imposed a series of sanctions aimed at undermining the economic power of the FAR. The objective was to prevent the Cuban armed forces, intelligence agencies and security forces from benefitting from the economic activities of U.S. citizens. On the other hand, with the sanctions an attempt was made to offer U.S. citizens the opportunity to make authorised trips to Cuba and to contribute to its small private sector.

Some examples of authorised activities included renting rooms in private homes (*casas particulares*), eating at private restaurants (*paladares*) and purchasing goods at privately owned shops run by Cubans self-employed (*cuentapropistas*). In parallel, the U.S. administration drew up a list of 100 companies that the country's citizens were prohibited from using (Cubanet 2017 and Annex 1), including hotels, restaurants, travel agencies and so forth. According to the U.S. administration, all of these companies were run by the FAR.

Analysing the powers and prerogatives of the FAR is a very complicated business due to the lack of transparency with respect to everything relating to them. A veil of silence has been drawn over the institution's economic activities. There is some information, but no one knows whether it is reliable or not (González Maderos 2013; Celaya 2016). Secrecy is a constant that is always justified by the U.S. threat. Active servicemen are prohibited from speaking to foreigners or giving interviews.

In both their military and economic roles, the members of the FAR have been the Cuban Revolution's guardian angels. As such, they have remained invisible, loyal to the Castro brothers and the revolutionary imaginary, and willing to serve on international missions, in the Cuban agricultural industry or behind desks in tourism enterprises.

The territorial nature of the FAR has guaranteed their presence in the length and breadth of the island, for which reason they are regarded as a central state institution. Disciplined and loyal, they have historically been assigned the most important tasks in the construction and maintenance of the revolutionary government. Some of the regime's opponents interviewed expressed that, in light of the appearance of the oligarchs in post-Soviet Russia, Fidel and Raúl Castro attempted to avoid a repeat performance in Cuba by giving the members of the FAR economic power and access to foreign currency. In many of the interviews conducted, it was stressed that the members of the FAR, in addition to their efficiency and commitment, are not a burden on the state. After retiring from the military, they then work in their companies or at universities.

There is a contradiction that is worth highlighting. The very servicemen whose worldview continues to be rooted in the logic of the Cold War have reinvented themselves as businessmen who negotiate with foreigners. Their role of defending the Cuban Revolution currently involves guaranteeing the inflow of foreign currency. They have accepted a controlled liberalisation of the economy, but as to political and military affairs they still think

as before. The FAR are still immersed in the Cold War as regards their doctrines, weaponry and way of understanding the world.

Final Comments

Year after year, the anniversary of the landing of the *Grandma* and the Day of the Revolutionary Armed Forces is celebrated on 2 December. This epic revolutionary narrative has consolidated the founding role of the FAR. The ceremony, presided over by Army General Raúl Castro Ruz and the president of the republic Miguel Díaz-Canel Bermúdez, tends to place the accent on the troops: ‘To refer to the Revolutionary Armed Forces is to refer to the people, the Cuban Revolution, sovereignty and freedom; is also refers to upright men and women, capable of the most high-minded gestures and feats in favour of a cause and an ideal’ (CubaSí.cu 2017).

Each time that we have discussed the characteristics of Latin American transitions to democracy with Cuban citizens, they have reacted vehemently, claiming that the FAR are not repressive. There is no comparison.

It is true that a repressive ministry of the interior under the command of a high-ranking officer cannot be compared with the systematic practices of the military in other countries in the region. Elsewhere, we have contended that in Cuba there are low-intensity human rights violations (Tedesco and Diamint 2020). In the words of Domínguez (2021),

Fine-tuned, systematic and persistent personal intimidation is an efficient and harsh tool of repression that does not require arrests or prison sentences. It acts through unbearable pressure against people officially identified as adversaries; this intimidation, as the case may be, is extended to their families, work colleagues and friends.

One of the young interviewees summarised this brilliantly: ‘They don’t kill you, but they don’t let you live.’

The FAR have been, and will continue to be, fundamental to the permanence and viability of the Cuban Revolution. Suárez Salazar (2019, 144), a relevant thinker of Cuban political culture, expresses something that, in the eyes of Latin Americans, is confusing and even offensive. He argues that Cuba backed all the governments that embarked on processes of reform without distinguishing between ‘civilians, military or civic-soldiers of what is now called “the political South of the American continent”, who, in the past 60 years have embarked on [...] processes of reformist change [...] favourable to the national and popular interests of their respective countries’.

It was those servicemen, who Suárez Salazar considers to be redeemable, who have supported coups, like that staged in Bolivia in 2020, who have ousted presidents, as has occurred time and again in Ecuador, or who have been involved in terrible cases of corruption, as has been demonstrated in

Venezuela. The involvement of the military as privileged political actors has been the most fatal experience in Latin America and is still a sad reality in African countries.

The most important question is the role that the FAR will play in a hypothetical process of change and political and economic transition. Will they accept losing their privileges and the defeat of the Cuban Revolution? Will it be possible to change their ideology? Will the military top brass be willing to lose control over that part of the economy that brings in foreign currency?

The brilliant destiny that the Cuban Revolution offered has been tarnished by the daily hardships of the population. The island's autocratic, militarised, hybrid socialist political regime has not found the way of engaging an important sector of society for whom the discourse of sacrifice for attaining an equal society is an insult when, on a daily basis, they see the products on sale in those shops that only accept freely convertible currency.

Notes

- 1 In the framework of the research project 'Diálogos sobre Cuba', we conducted 64 interviews in Havana, Cienfuegos and Santa Clara between 2016 and 2019. The interviewees always asked to remain anonymous.
- 2 Further information is available at: <http://juriscuba.com/> [Accessed on 21 August 2021].
- 3 Further information is available at: <http://juriscuba.com/organismos-estatales-2/fuerzas-armadas/> [Accessed on 21 August 2021].
- 4 The special period ran from 1990 to 1993, during which the Cuban gross national product (GDP) plummeted by 36 per cent following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the island's main trading partner. In 1994, the GDP recovered slightly, but it was Hugo Chávez's election victory in Venezuela that really breathed new life into the Cuban Revolution.
- 5 Bases Generales del Perfeccionamiento Empresarial, Decreto Ley No. 187/1997.
- 6 The Defence Act, which was passed in 1994, is available at: www.cubadefensa.cu/?q=ley75 [Accessed on 21 August 2021].
- 7 The list includes a large number of hotels that belong to Spanish chains which have agreements with the company Gaviota, under the aegis of the FAR.

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15 Nicaragua—The Changing Ethos of the Nicaraguan Army

From a Revolutionary Army to an Advocate of Democracy and, Finally, a Financial Emporium and a Silent Accomplice to the New Dictatorship

Roberto Cajina

Two of the most relevant dates in the recent history of Nicaragua are 19 July 1979 and 25 February 1990: the former, the date of the armed insurrection led by the Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional (Sandinista National Liberation Front [FSLN]), which brought the curtain down on the 40-year dictatorship of the Somoza family; and, the latter, the date when, against all the odds, a motely political alliance defeated the left-wing regime of the FSLN in the presidential elections. As an immediate consequence of this last development, 27 March 1990 represented a third milestone: the signing of the *Protocolo de Procedimiento de la Transferencia del Poder Ejecutivo de la República de Nicaragua* (Protocol of Procedure for the Transfer of Presidential Authority of the Republic of Nicaragua), better known as the Transition Accords, between representatives of the incoming and outgoing governments, exactly a month after the presidential elections and a month before the swearing in of the new democratically elected authorities (Cajina 1997, 68–71).

Following this transition, there was a long period from 25 April 1990, when the new democratically elected government was formed, and 9 January 2007, the day before Daniel Ortega returned to power. In these four moments and subsequent periods, the military played a key role: in the first, as a victorious guerrilla army; in the second, as the main logistical support for those presidential elections; and in the third, as a key factor in the negotiations that sealed the accorded transition. In the fourth, the army was, relatively speaking, subordinated to the civil authorities, supporting the successive democratically elected governments of the period.

Four decades after its advent, nothing remains of the army of which Augusto C. Sandino and his struggle against the second large-scale U.S. military intervention in Nicaragua were the main sources of its identity and pride. In less than half a century, the military have converted Sandino into a vague memory and his ethical legacy—that of a man who did not even own a plot of land for his own burial—lies concealed under

the opulence in which those who once claimed to be his children, his heirs, currently live.

Since its creation, the Nicaraguan army has gone through three clearly defined and differentiated stages, each one with its own characteristics, but without any continuity or similarities between them. The one and only constant has been the formality of the institution per se, which has experienced successive metamorphoses, being transformed each time into something differing from both its predecessor and successor. These mutations have not been the result of its own development or institutional evolution but of the changes in the fickle political and economic circumstances with which it has openly merged. It could be said that it is an institution that, as with a chameleon, has blended in with its surroundings to survive. These three stages are as follows: the revolutionary stage (1979–1990); the stage of survival and adjustment (1990–2007); and the stage of financial emporium and silent accomplice to the new dictatorship (2007–to date).

Revolutionary Stage: An Imaginary Armageddon and an Unexpected Enemy

After the dismantling of the dictatorship, the guerrilla army that had triumphed over the National Guard of the Somoza family began its gradual transformation into a strong regular army, a sort of Central American mini-juggernaut, a mighty military force that no one would be capable of detaining because in the astonishingly messianic collective imaginary of the Sandinista leadership, the U.S. invasion of Nicaragua was inevitable, only a matter of time, for which reason it was essential to stand prepared.¹

An imaginary Armageddon, from which it was naïvely believed that Nicaragua would emerge victorious, was anxiously awaited. It was to be the ultimate battle between good and evil, between the Revolution and the Empire. Accordingly, the plan was to prepare for the clash with the world's foremost military superpower and to defeat it. It was soon clear to all, however, that the powerful army under construction would, at the same time, have to deal with another conflict: a new civil war. Creating a new army and waging a new war was a difficult and complex task with its pros and cons. For the Sandinista leadership, the Contras, or the Nicaraguan Resistance, was never the main enemy but only 'a tool of imperialism'.

For this reason, the Ejército Popular Sandinista (Sandinista Popular Army [EPS]) began to arm itself on the basis of the mistaken conception of the inevitability of a U.S. invasion. So, when the Contras gained momentum as of 1984, notwithstanding its guerrilla origins, the Revolution paradoxically had an army prepared for a conventional war. Furthermore, all the weapons that it had received from the Warsaw Pact countries and the Soviet Union (tanks, field guns, radars, anti-aircraft artillery, etc.) and the training of its officer corps, whose preparation for the Armageddon was based on the ideas and principles of conventional warfare filling the minds of the leaders of the FSLN, were useless for combating that unexpected

enemy: the thousands of Nicaraguan peasants who swelled the ranks of the Contras or Nicaraguan Resistance.²

The EPS was grounded in the erroneous idea of an enemy that never showed up, namely a U.S. invasion (Cajina 2017). Its top brass never imagined that they would soon be fighting in the mountains against a peasant army funded, organised and armed by the Reagan administration. The blood of brothers was once again spilt on Nicaraguan soil, with more than 50,000 casualties on both sides. This was a very high cost for a wrong decision that had led to a war that could have been avoided if the Sandinista Revolution had refrained from supporting the Salvadoran guerrilla and had not coupled itself to the Soviet Union, the Warsaw Pact countries and Cuba, as the end carriage in the train of the Cold War. Lasting more than a decade, the civil war was not brought to an end by a military victory but by political negotiation.

The original identity of the EPS was not military but political, shaped by the legacy of national heroes like Benjamín Zeledón and Augusto C. Sandino, as well as the Frente Sandinista (Sandinista Front) and its founder Carlos Fonseca. Those were its paradigms, its main sources of revolution and political, more than military, pride. It should come as no surprise then that the top brass and officer corps of the EPS considered themselves, and were, activists of the FSLN, rather than servicemen, none of whom had received any previous military training and who had undertaken a task with which they had been entrusted by the Revolution. Just as they were prouder of their party membership cards than their military ranks, so too did their esprit de corps result more from their partisan than from their military status. The bloody civil war not only ruined the economy but also left the country divided. Neither of the warring parties had emerged victorious, but the EPS had managed to survive and the peasant army of the Nicaraguan Resistance was disarmed and disbanded.

The Stage of Survival and Adjustment

In the presidential elections held in February 1990, against all the odds Violeta Barrios de Chamorro, at the head of a motely political alliance, the Unión Nacional Opositora (National Opposition Union [UNO]), defeated Daniel Ortega, the FSLN candidate. For the EPS, an institution that, in the heat of the civil war, had developed in fits and starts, it was a crushing blow. From a strictly military perspective, the EPS had made important progress in its organisation, while it had ideologically developed around the paradigms recovered from the history of popular struggles in Nicaragua. But there were huge shortcomings in its legal framework, for it had never been governed by a specific organic statute.

The victory of the UNO plunged the EPS into a triple crisis, affecting its identity, mission and legitimacy. Following the defeat of the FSLN, its ideological wellspring, there were quite a few questions plaguing the military leaders: What are we now? Who is the enemy that should now be

combated and defeated? Will society accept us after the excesses committed in such a bloody civil war? These questions were not explicitly voiced, but it was clear that now the umbilical cord between the EPS and the FSLN had been cut, it was vital to find answers to them so as to ensure the institution's survival.

The EPS' de-politicisation or 'de-Sandinisation', severing the organic-functional links between its leaders and officer corps and the FSLN, was one of the central aspects of the Transition Accords. By subscribing to them on behalf of the outgoing government, General Humberto Ortega was also officially signing the death certificate of the EPS. So, he suggested a name change in order to distance it from its popular and Sandinista character. On doing so, he left it without an identity (Cajina 2017).

The commander-in-chief defended and safeguarded the fragile democratic regime whose construction began amid the crossfire of right- and left-wing extremists. Notwithstanding the huge differences of opinion between General Ortega and President Chamorro, they both needed each other. For his part, General Ortega needed the Chamorro government in order to remain in his post and guarantee the army's survival and continuity in a highly polarised and completely adverse scenario. Whereas the president required Ortega's support so as to achieve a minimum level of stability for her weak administration and for the country as a whole (Pestana and Latell 2017, 20). This mutual dependence lasted until September 1993, when she expressed her desire to replace him.

The EPS struck its revolutionary flags, casting the defining traits of its revolutionary identity and its sources of pride into oblivion, although they were not necessarily forgotten by the top brass, namely, its founders. But no new paradigms were found. The reason behind this lies in the fact that it was a stage in which the EPS was forced to adapt to the new circumstances and there was simply nothing remotely heroic to recover. As part of the response to the triple crisis in pursuit of its survival, it was in this stage, however, that the EPS underwent a process of institutionalisation and professionalisation, the most important aspects of which included the passing of the *Ley de Organización, Jurisdicción y Previsión Social Militar* (Military Organisation, Jurisdiction and Social Benefits Act), better known as the Military Code, enforced on 2 September 1994, the first piece of legislation in this respect in the twentieth-century history of Nicaragua, by virtue of which its name was changed to the National Army of Nicaragua (Pestana and Latell 2017, 20). The principle of subordination of the military to the legitimate civil authorities was also explicitly stipulated; the president of the republic was recognised as the supreme commander of the army and, as such, was assigned functions and powers, including that of appointing the commander-in-chief and dismissing him from the post according to the grounds established; the nature, mission and roles of the National Army of Nicaragua were defined, as well as aspects pertaining to its internal organisation, and a distinction was drawn between the military and civil jurisdictions; the basic elements of military social benefits were

determined; and its national, apolitical, unpartisan, obedient and impartial character was established (Cajina and Orozco 2015, 48).

In compliance with the provisions of the Military Code, and after tough political negotiations, General Ortega ceased to be the commander-in-chief of the army in February 1995, being succeeded in the post by Generals Joaquín Cuadra (1995–2000), Javier Carrión (2000–2005), Omar Halleslevens (2005–2010) and Julio César Avilés (2010–to date). But between theory and practice there was a wide grey zone: To what extent were the official and actual transformations really embraced by the officer corps to convert the army into a truly professional military body capable of sensibly managing its political preferences and institutional commitments with society and the state that had armed it so as to guarantee its survival and continuity? During the first two military mandates, everything seemed to indicate that the army as a whole, from the commander-in-chief to the lowest-ranking officer had taken to heart that they were no longer, as in the immediate past, the ‘armed wing of the Revolution’, but that they were now at the service of the nation, an army representing all the Nicaraguans, which respected the constitution and democratic principles.

The fledgling democracy of President Chamorro did not immediately address military relations between Nicaragua and the United States, which continued to be tense or non-existent. It was in the last four months of 1998, during the government of President Arnaldo Alemán, when a window of opportunity opened for the commencement of a new cycle. It was a natural disaster, Hurricane Mitch, that triggered a thaw in the military relations between the two countries. U.S. troops were deployed in Nicaragua to provide humanitarian aid, with their Nicaraguan counterparts working shoulder to shoulder with them. They recognised each other as comrades-in-arms and discovered that they undertook the same tasks and had more in common than things that divided them. The military relations between both countries gradually improved, thus putting the years of confrontation behind them, although obviously there were still doubts and suspicions, albeit not important enough to prevent them from becoming stronger, as indeed occurred until at least 2007.

Perhaps it was possible that both armies began to see themselves and treat each other as partners. Be that as it may, some of the military leaders continued to harbour doubts and suspicions, which for Daniel Ortega and his inner circle were convictions. After all, it was not easy to forget 10 years of out-and-out civil war in which Washington had played a leading role. That resentment, emerging since the civil war and exacerbated by the defeat in the February 1990 presidential elections, can still be felt, although not explicitly so. The anti-American feeling that became engrained in the collective consciousness of the Nicaraguan military leaders in the 1980s still persists, albeit in a rather distorted fashion and without the past intensity, rather as a rhetorical nationalism. They should now be fully aware that the possibility of a U.S. military invasion was light years away.

The Transition Accords envisaged, in addition to the de-politicisation of the army, the reduction in its personnel numbers and budget, which, in both cases, was drastic and swiftly implemented and which involved its reorganisation and the redefinition of its missions. In the mid-1980s, Nicaragua had the largest army in Central American history. The EPS' troop strength increased from 10,000 in 1980 to 134,400 in 1986, including career servicemen, national service recruits, reservists and militiamen. The number was reduced to 87,000 between 1986 and 1990 (Cajina 1997, 253–276). The downsizing envisaged in the Transition Accords involved the demobilisation of all the national service recruits, reservists and militiamen, as well as the discharge of 14,000 career servicemen (Cajina 1997, 253–276). Three discharge plans were ultimately implemented (Cajina 1997, 253–316). At present (June 2021), the National Army of Nicaragua has a troop strength of 15,042.³

But the downsizing of the army between 1990 and 1994 and the evolution of expenditure do not coincide when contrasting them with the defence budget. In 1989, the last year of the Sandinista administration and the armed conflict, the defence budget amounted to \$180 million, while in December of that same year the National Assembly—still controlled by the FSLN—approved a budget of \$177 million for the EPS for the following year (Meléndez Quiñónez 2000, 17). In 1998, expenditure on the National Army of Nicaragua amounted to \$35.4 million, its lowest level, but thenceforth this trend was reversed, with defence expenditure increasingly slowly but surely until reaching \$86.2 million in 2019, a figure slightly higher than that in 1991 (\$80.9 million). During the first four years of the Ortega administration (2007–2011) the budget fluctuated in the \$40 million range. However, as of 2012 it began to increase steadily, a trend that has continued to this day (June 2021). Between 2008 and 2019, the army budget increased by 86.87 per cent, but neither is there any logical explanation for that increase, which in 2015 reached the record figure of \$93.6 million (SIPRI 2020), nor is it known on what those resources have been spent.

The Stage of Financial Emporium and Silent Accomplice to the New Dictatorship

Financial Emporium

The Instituto de Previsión Social Militar (Institute for Military Social Benefits [IPSM]) was created by virtue of Ley 181, Código de Organización Jurisdicción y Previsión Social Militar (Law 181, Code of Military Organisation, Jurisdiction and Social Benefits) (Art. 48), for administering 'the social benefits and improvement of the members of the army and their families by establishing and implementing: supplementary savings and pensions plans; residential mortgage loan programmes; personal loan programmes; and any other social benefit and improvement programme authorised by the administration' (Art. 50) (RESDAL 1994).⁴

The capital of the IPSM consists of the following: the initial contribution of the army to the pension fund (part of the \$24 million resulting from the government-to-government sale of Mi-24 helicopters to Peru and a radar system to Ecuador); the contributions that the state may make through the general budget of the republic; the voluntary donations, quotas and contributions to the plans managed by the institute, plus the inheritances and legacies that it receives and accepts; and the revenues and income generated by its own assets. By August 2004, the IPSM's foreign investments totalled \$8.5 million, accounting for 28 per cent of the total of the pension fund, namely \$29.8 million (RESDAL 2005, 200–201). An audit performed by Deloitte & Touche revealed that, in 2009, the IPSM had a capital of \$72.3 million. In 2012, this varied between \$90 million and \$100 million, of which at least 35 per cent was invested in the New York Stock Exchange (NYSE). An audit performed by PricewaterhouseCoopers in 2011 revealed that, in Nicaragua, the IPSM had made substantial investments in the financial, real estate, industrial and commercial sectors, as well as owning valuable real estate and having important loans receivable (Bow 2019). To date (June 2021), the IPSM's—local, regional and international—investments have increased exponentially, as with its profits. Apart from the foregoing, nothing is known about the IPSM's real assets, a detail that is shrouded in secrecy and is not subject to public scrutiny.

Silent Accomplice to the New Dictatorship

The 1989 pact with Arnaldo Alemán, the former president and leader of the Partido Liberal Constitucionalista (Constitutionalist Liberal Party [PLC]), allowed Daniel Ortega to win the 2006 presidential elections with 38.7 per cent of the ballots cast. In each official act since being sworn in on 10 January 2007,⁵ Ortega has reminded the military of 'their Sandinista origins', but not as one of the values of their initial identity, but in order to ensure their loyalty to his political project. In this period, there has been an imaginary return to the beginnings of the EPS, in completely different circumstances because neither does the Revolution form part of the government agenda, as his wife Rosario Murillo has claimed, nor was the army the same in 2007 as in 1979.

In contrast, the identity of the military institution has an important political element: its identification with the regime of Daniel Ortega, which, in fact, is not ideological as in the revolutionary stage, but the result of a combination of business interests and political coincidences. The corporate business character of the army and its identification—embodied by General Julio César Avilés, who was sanctioned by the U.S. Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) on 22 May 2020—with the continuist political project of Daniel Ortega, in which the business interests of the army and its leaders merge with those of the consortium Ortega–Rosario Murillo, the president's wife and vice-president since 2016, but with unlimited power since 2007, are clear to all (U.S. Department of State 2020).

The continuity of General Avilés as commander-in-chief of the army since 2010 has serious implications for its institutional development and the Nicaraguan citizenry. In the first place, because it is a clear demonstration of the political trust that Ortega has placed in Avilés and, in turn, of the latter's submission to the former. Secondly, owing to the fact that he has become an obstacle who, although he has not completely frozen promotions, has packed the upper ranks to such an extent with brigadier generals and coronels as to deform the command hierarchy, which will inevitably have consequences for the army in the mid and long term.

The Military Code establishes the procedure for appointing the commander-in-chief of the army. The Military Council proposes the name of the officer who it considers suitable for the post to the president of the republic, who can accept or reject the proposal. This procedure forms part of the little known Estrategia de Desarrollo Institucional (Institutional Development Strategy [EDI]), conceived by General Humberto Ortega and agreed upon with the army, even before the enactment of Law 181. The aim of the EDI was to ensure the army's continuity over time and to consolidate its institutional development, to guarantee it a relative level of institutional autonomy when appointing a new commander-in-chief and to avoid the politicisation of this appointment due to the overlap between the term in office of president of the republic and that of the commander-in-chief of the army. The intention was to prevent the president from appointing a politically likeminded commander-in-chief, thus precluding the army's politicisation. So, the president of the republic has to work with a commander-in-chief who he has not appointed himself and, in turn, appoints another general to the post who his successor has not chosen.

The key aspect of the EDI as regards this appointment was that the chief of the general staff was a natural substitute for the commander-in-chief and the general in charge of the Dirección de Operaciones y Planes (Military Operation and Planning Unit [DOP]) for the outgoing chief of general staff (Cajina 2019). The EDI was strictly complied with until, in December 2014, Daniel Ortega confirmed the appointment of General Avilés as the commander-in-chief of the army, which basically meant that he would occupy the post for a further five years.⁶ In 2019, he again kept him in the post. In other words, when his third term in office ends in 2024, General Avilés will have been commanding the army for 15 years. Something quite extraordinary, only comparable to Daniel Ortega's three consecutive presidencies (2007–2022). This was not envisaged in the EDI and, although it has not triggered an institutional crisis in the army, it has indeed accelerated the dismantling of its institutionality, as well as giving rise to its political contamination and the citizenry's disapproval.

Complicit Silence

The political crisis provoked by the Ortega regime after the brutal suppression of the unarmed civil uprising against a reform of the pension

system, which broke out on 18 April 2018, has had devastating economic and social repercussions: more than 300 casualties, hundreds of people imprisoned, dozens of missing persons and tens of thousands of exiles and job losses. The crisis placed the army in a dilemma, with its members deciding to remain on the side-lines, believing that this would safeguard the institution and their lucrative business interests. Their objective was very simple: to weather the storm without falling victim to it. At first, it seemed like a rational and even sensible decision. However, and despite the fact that they had not been involved in the bloodshed, as the crisis deepened their silence as regards the bloody repression gradually became collusion. And in the maelstrom of the mass human rights violations, the army began to lose the little social legitimacy that it still possessed.

Before April 2018, the army had been an institution that enjoyed a high level of legitimacy and social acceptance. But the ‘Latinobarómetro Public Opinion Survey Nicaragua #9’ in September 2018 revealed that public trust in the army had plummeted to 22 per cent, compared with the Latin American average of 44 per cent. The army’s silence throughout the crisis, especially as regards the massacre and crimes against humanity documented by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) of the Organisation of American States (OAS), is the factor that has exacerbated the institution’s loss of legitimacy in the eyes of the citizenry, which they consider to be a silent accomplice to the regime. This is undoubtedly one of the political costs of that silence. I am not sure whether the military were aware of that possibility at the time, since it has caused more than collateral damage to the institution. It is still rather unclear—in fact, impossible to predict—the extent to which these two perceptions of the citizenry will influence the role played by the army in an eventual transition to democracy.

Conclusion

Since 1990, the Nicaraguan army has had three strategic objectives: to survive as an institution over time, to defend the multi-million-dollar fortune that it has amassed over the years and to fulfil its constitutional missions, namely, the defence of the country’s sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity. This last point is crucial because the existence of the army as an institution depends on that of Nicaragua as a nation. And since April 2018, the military have not had many options open to them, since the crisis into which the country had been plunged only has two solutions: dialogue (a negotiated solution) or the precipice. Even though the army has timidly called for dialogue on at least three occasions, the Ortega–Murillo regime has turned a deaf ear. Initially, the future of the army was inextricably linked to a resolution of the political crisis triggered in April 2018, but President Ortega has prolonged it, deferring its denouement, by imposing a de facto police state of siege, which has curbed all civil liberties and political rights while the army continues to maintain its complicit silence. Amid

this unresolved crisis, Ortega emerged ‘victorious’ from the November 2021 presidential elections. President Ortega had organised them in such a way as to make it all but impossible for the opposition to field candidates in them, while the government held all the trump cards.

So, the November elections offered the army two plausible alternatives. With Ortega re-elected for the fourth time running, the military might feel comfortable and safer; however, that comfort and safety will be at stake if the international community refuses to recognise the results of those elections, which would keep him in power for another five years. It is to be expected that the United States, the European Union, the United Kingdom, Canada and possibly the OAS will impose sanctions on Nicaragua, from which in all likelihood some of the military leaders and the army itself—including the IPSM—will not be able to escape. In view of how the elections have been planned (Ramírez 2021),⁷ the opposition had little chance. But even in the event of an opposition victory, it would not have been hard for the army, as already noted, to adapt to the new circumstances in order to survive as an institution and to retain its huge capital, most of which has been invested in the NYSE.

Notes

- 1 The inevitability of a US invasion is comprehensively developed and substantiated in Miranda and Ratliff (1993).
- 2 For the most detailed inventory of the EPS’ arsenal of Soviet weapons and equipment in 1990, see Montes (2021).
- 3 According to figures released by the Ministry of Inland Revenue and Public Credit. Available at: www.hacienda.gob.ni/hacienda/presupuesto2021/pg/13.MinisterioDefensa.pdf.
- 4 Available at: www.resdal.org/Archivo/nicaragua-ffaa.htm.
- 5 Political Database of the Americas. Available at: <https://pdba.georgetown.edu/Elecdata/Nica/nica06.html>.
- 6 ‘General Julio César Avilés continuará al frente del Ejército’. *La Voz del Sandinismo*, 22 December 2014. Available at: www.lavozdelsandinismo.com/nicaragua/2014-12-22/general-julio-cesar-aviles-continuara-al-frente-del-ejercito.
- 7 ‘El plan maestro de Daniel Ortega’. *The New York Times*, 21 May 2021. Available at: www.nytimes.com/es/2021/05/21/espanol/opinion/nicaragua-elecciones-2021.html.

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16 **Bolivia—The Armed Forces and the Crisis of the Plurinational State of Bolivia**

Neo-Conservatism Versus the Popular Movement in the Twenty-First Century

Jhohan Oporto

In Bolivia, the recent political crisis rekindled the popular fear of the historical identity of the armed forces and their clear link to the powers that be. The ‘suggestion’ made by Williams Kaliman, the commander-in-chief of the armed forces (in 2019), that Evo Morales, the constitutional president of Bolivia, should step down, was a discordant note in the apparently smooth relations between the military and the plurinational government led by Morales since 2006.

The so-called pacification implemented by the de facto neo-conservative government involved following the soft coup model when resorting to state terrorism against the popular bloc in the localities of Sacaba and Senkata on 15 and 19 November 2019, respectively. The police and the armed forces, following the pattern of national security at the service of the state in its feudal, classist, racist and religious version, converted that fear into reality.

The subsequent democratic change in October 2020, marked by the victory of Movement to Socialism (MAS) candidate Luis Arce in the presidential elections, was a balm for the triple political, economic and health crisis. In this context, the reform of the armed forces is a necessary but complex issue. It remains to be seen whether or not the state administration’s need to address the most urgent matters on the agenda will mean that issues like this will have to be postponed in a new stage of the political contest between the multinational popular movement and neo-conservatism, up until 2025, in which the military will continue to be the subject and object of fear and power.

The aim of this chapter is to characterise the relationship between the armed forces and the government of the Movimiento al Socialismo—Instrumento Político por la Soberanía de los Pueblos (Movement for Socialism—Political Instrument for the Sovereignty of Peoples [MAS-IPSP]) and the de facto irregular government that took power in 2019. It draws from the premise that the armed forces are a key factor in the

reproduction of a traditional democracy, thus preventing the transformation of the state into a plurinational popular one.

Accordingly, this chapter is divided into four sections. The first offers an overview of the defining traits of the Fuerzas Armadas del Estado Plurinacional de Bolivia (Armed Forces of the Plurinational State of Bolivia, hereinafter ‘armed forces’) from a historical perspective. The second describes the main aspects of the relationship between the military and the Morales government from 2006 to 2019. The third addresses the role of the armed forces in the 2019 coup d’état and their relationship with the irregular government in 2020. And the last offers an assessment of the new MAS-IPSP government and the challenges that it faces, including its relationship with the armed forces and their reform, with its sights set on the bicentenary of the Plurinational State of Bolivia.

The Identity of the Armed Forces

Following the Latin American revolutions, the continent’s armies were created with the aim of consolidating the recently gained independence around the beginning of the nineteenth century. In parallel with the historical social process, they adapted to the state transformations brought about by circumstantial power groups, sometimes abiding by the constitution as part of the state apparatus, sometimes acting autonomously as political subjects.

These contradictory traits define the ideological and political identity of the armed forces, which emerged from the historical social process in a materially violent and symbolic way. Since being created nearly two centuries ago, they have been called to arms sometimes unwittingly, sometimes intentionally. They have had their internecine conflicts and have also been linked to foreign states and forces.

There are four historical circumstances that, to our mind, allow for characterising the armed forces: their reactionary nature since their creation; the emergence and suppression of a nationalist ‘socialist’ current within them; their links to imperialism, grounded in indoctrination and repression; and their constant prominence.

As to their reactionary nature, this refers to the fact that the originally diverse composition of the armed forces adapted to the constitution of a nation responsive to transforming the structures of colonial domination. On the one hand, after the final defeat of the royalist army at the Battle of Ayacucho (1824), there was a ‘posthumous defection of the Spanish regime’ whose supporters would subsequently swell the ranks of the Upper-Peruvian army (Arze 1997). And, on the other, in the process of organising the republic, the defence of the privileges of landowners (including the Church), mine-owners and noble merchants imposed itself on a more enlightened approach inherent to the modern bourgeois project imported from Europe (Domich 1997).

The nationalist ‘socialist’ current was the result of the fundamental combination of two processes in the years before 1932: the influence of an European ideological and political system that challenged the dominant structures; and the disenchantment of the masses (workers, peasants and indigenous peoples) and the military due to the use of the Chaco War (1932–1935) as a way of controlling social protests and demands for change. In the following decades, this combination would be swept away by the coercive measures implemented by the oligarchic and imperialist elites, according to their ideological, political and military programme, aimed at restoring the previous status quo.

The relationship between the armed forces and imperialism was characterised by the former’s adoption of the ‘national security doctrine’ to control the state in order to guarantee the security and safety of Bolivian society. This doctrine was deemed to be necessary insofar as offering society that security and safety meant combating communism and all other types of subversion bent on transforming the capitalist order. Under the logic of this doctrine, moreover, the army justified its *raison d’être* and the means that it employed—including espionage, torture and coups d’état—as systems of political action, of ‘state terrorism’ that ‘does not only manage to identify and destroy the current enemy, and to dissuade potential enemies, but also to convince the man on the street that his personal safety is an inevitable and obligatory result of his unconditional support for the regime’ (Tapia 1988).

The constant presence of members of the armed forces throughout the republic’s history is due to their self-conception as ‘a moderating power that contributes to national greatness’ (Prado 1987). This characteristic, expressed in the armed forces’s wrangling over state power or in its dispute with the police over the monopoly on violence, is due to the ‘weak [historical] construction of the Bolivian state, the common denominator of whose internal cohesion is the continuous use of public force, rather than other forms of legitimising political power. This enabled the armed bureaucracy to play a central role in the exercise of that power’ (Quintana 2004).

The Armed Forces and the Process of Change: 2006–2019

The neoliberal governments between 1982 and 2005 left national development to the whim of their neo-developmental agendas dependent on imperialism. The neoliberal structural reforms led to a short-lived social and political stability. Even though many of the left-wing political intellectuals, who had been active in the 1970s and the 1980s, abandoned the revolutionary cause and embraced the so-called accorded democracy, this was not the case with those at the bottom of the pecking order. Miners and peasants converted into urban pariahs, indigenous peoples exploited by the international legal reforms, day labourers, and freelance and wage-earning

professionals, among others, would create popular movements that, notwithstanding their lack of doctrinal cohesion and traditional political organisation, would give rise to foci of resistance on the streets. The coca (1990), water (2000) and gas (2003) wars were expressions of this insurreccional mobilisation and also of the traditional and new techniques of repression.

The 2005 election victory of MAS-IPSP, with 53.7 per cent of the ballots cast, converted Morales and Álvaro García Linera¹ into symbols of an alternative political, nation-building and social development project, that is, a ‘process of change’. Although the party’s acronym suggests a socialist political bent, its specific identity was, and still is, characterised by a combination of nationalism, anti-imperialism, indigenism, peasantism and neo-developmentalism. Although its administration was not run along socialist lines, it significantly improved the welfare of the popular classes.

The Reformist Discourse of the Government and the Armed Forces

In 2004, in view of the popular protests against the violent repression in ‘black October’ 2003,² some of the military top brass expressed the need for institutional change. This stance was presented as a prudent measure and even as a way of encouraging the central government to make an about-face in this respect.

For Juan Ramón Quintana, the minister of the presidency of the Morales government from 2006 to November 2019, the modernisation of the armed forces should revolve around the design of a national defence and public safety policy that was internally coherent and consistent with its foreign policy based on the ‘process of change’, which called for a new social contract between the state, society and the armed forces. To this end, the military institution had to be redefined (organisation, technical-scientific characteristics, new moral values, a modern educational and democratic ethics) and open up to society (access to information, human rights, social control and transparency, as well as maintaining an obedient and impartial attitude, as priorities). And in parallel with this there was also the need for a non-partisan agreement to avoid the armed forces’s contingent and erratic management by the political class.

Together with these criteria, the legislative and conceptual instruments of the government and the armed forces (Plan Nacional de Desarrollo 2006–2011 [2006–2011 National Development Plan], Constitución Política del Estado de 2009 [2009 State Political Constitution], Plan de Reforma de las FFAA 2010–2025 [2010–2025 Armed Forces Reform Plan], Sistema y Doctrina de Seguridad y Defensa del Estado Plurinacional [Security and Defence System and Doctrine of the Plurinational State], among others) were employed to design a reform that was rhetorically robust but ineffective in practice.

Actions for and Reactions to Change

Beyond this formal convergence, characterised by a utilitarian relationship—for instance, the cooperation of the military in distributing vouchers among the country's vulnerable sectors, including children, students, pregnant women and the elderly—several contradictions arising between 2006 and 2019 would have an influence on the historical identity of the armed forces.

The creation of the 'Juan José Torres' Anti-Imperialist School in 2016 pursued the objective of re-orientating military doctrine towards a nationalism based on the contributions of Bolivians—including Germán Bush, Gualberto Villarroel and Torres himself, among others³—to military strategy. This state of affairs, influenced by the Chavista model of military reform, resulted from the need to create armed cadres in line with the 'process of change'. This was a tardy reaction as the leaders of the MAS-IPSP had long been aware that the officers trained at the School of the Americas were strongly influenced by imperialism, for which reason they were untrustworthy. There were two precedents to this measure.

Firstly, in 2006 28 servicemen were discharged for their involvement in the irregular delivery of 25 Chinese missiles to the U.S. army. Secondly, in 2008 when the leakage of information on the conflict between the government and the civilian separatists of the Bolivian 'half-moon' (the departments of Santa Cruz, Beni, Pando and Tarija) to the U.S. embassy was detected, several high-ranking officers, including Wilfredo Vargas, the commander-in-chief of the armed forces, were dismissed (Telleria 2016). This situation also led to the suspension of officer training at the School of the Americas, as well as the expulsion of the U.S. ambassador and the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) (Quintana 2016).

Despite the repeated warnings issued by the Cuban and Venezuelan intelligence agencies about the untrustworthiness of the cadres of the armed forces,⁴ several ex-servicemen formerly deployed in the country's different departments were put in charge of the administration of companies (Unidad Operativa de Servicios 'Transnaval', 2015, gas transport, Empresa de Construcciones del Ejército, 2012, civil infrastructure projects,⁵ and Empresa de Transporte Aéreo Militar [TAM], civil transport), government institutions (Dirección General de Aeronáutica Civil [DGAC], and Administración de Aeropuertos y Servicios Auxiliares a la Navegación Aérea [AASANA]) and Bolivian embassies (in Asia, the United States, and several countries in the region).

Following the tactical equipment renewal agenda (fighters, helicopters and ordnance) and infrastructure (barracks and training facilities), during the period from 2006 to 2019 defence expenditure rose steadily, increasing by 162 per cent from the year 2000 to 2019, due to the more or less constant public spending to gross domestic product (GDP) ratio and the positive growth of the GDP (see Table 16.1). Unlike the budget cuts during the neo-liberal governments, the strengthening and resourcing of the armed forces were priorities during this period (Table 16.1).

Table 16.1 Public expenditure on the armed forces

	2000	2010	2019
GDP growth rate (%) *	2.5	4.1	2.2
Public spending to GDP ratio (%) **	2.1	1.7	1.5
Public expenditure in constant \$US millions (2019) **	367	493	598

Sources: * World Bank (2021); ** SIPRI (2021).

The enquiries of the Truth Commission, from its creation in 2017 to 2019, were unable to shed any light on the fate of those tortured or who had gone missing during the country's military dictatorships, due to the fact it was considered to be confidential information only for the eyes of the state and the armed forces.⁶

The 2009 Political State Constitution, envisaging the inclusion of the Whipala indigenous flag on military uniforms and the substitution of the slogan 'Subordination and constancy. Long live Bolivia!' with 'Fatherland or death. We shall triumph!', as symbolic concessions to pro-indigenous and socialist ideas, did neither alter the armed forces' objective appraisal of the indigenous status of Morales or that of Che Guevara and Hugo Chávez nor their willingness to cooperate militarily in the face of the resurgence of separatism. The colonial racial and meritocratic structuring of the nation was one thing, whereas the invasion of national territory by a foreign army was quite another.

An event in 2014 which illustrates the armed forces's conservative mindset was the top brass' harsh reaction to a group of non-commissioned officers (NCOs) for having publicly demanded institutional reforms. Their demands included the elimination of discrimination on the grounds of class or race as regards promotions, the offering of better study and service conditions, and the eradication of sexual harassment for similar discriminatory reasons (Molina 2018; RTVE 2014). After identifying and discharging the ringleaders, 630 of the 715 insubordinate servicemen who had violated 'the dignity and honour of the institution' were reinstated, after having received an exemplary punishment in their garrisons of origin.

The Conservatism and Esprit de Corps of the Armed Forces

The aforementioned injustice did not reflect the relationship between the armed forces and the government, which was one of rapprochement. But it did reveal that the reform's conceptual approaches, its slow and patchy implementation and the persistence of the ways of conceiving, organising and deploying the armed forces required more aggressive measures. Even more so when taking into account the participation of the high command in the political crisis of 2019. But the question was how to change an institution like the army when those in charge enjoyed a privileged socioeconomic

and political status and whose conservative ideology was constantly being reinforced by its deep-rooted organisational tradition.

At this point, it should be clarified that this tradition does not only refer to rituals, discipline, morality and nationalist values, but also to daily military life hindered by obsolete or scarce technologies and infrastructures. In this context, the question was how to avoid reproducing a limited perspective of institutional change, namely, one that went beyond a restructuring that merely involved improving the armed forces's tactical equipment and infrastructures, while leaving its traditional ideology in place.

The Role of the Armed Forces in the Coup d'État and the Irregular Government: 2019–2020

Neither was the 2019 coup spontaneous, nor was it the result of an insurrection or popular counter-revolution but of the progressive accumulation of contradictions in the government and the MAS-IPSP and between these and the leaders of the opposition.

There were two important developments before the coup. On the one hand, there was the first coup attempt in 2008, which was organised around the autonomy movement by the *Comités Cívicos* (local civic committees) and prefectures of the regions of the Bolivian 'half-moon'. The movement's aim was to provoke a rift between these regions and the state so as to gain individual control over the hydrocarbon resources and land. This conflict was resolved through a governance agreement between the MAS-IPSP, the landowners and the agricultural industry (Argirakis 2021). At a political level, this increased the MAS-IPSP's national power, while leaving regional administration in the hands of the opposition. And at an economic level, the government and the opposition took it upon themselves to fulfil their role in revitalising the mixed economic model, which would be subsequently constitutionalised in 2009, with a view to promoting a plurinational economy.⁷

On the other hand, the defeat of the motion to amend the constitution so as to allow Morales and García Linera to run for a fourth term in office on 21 February 2016 (21F) established the political conditions for breaking the 2008 agreement. The civic committees and entrepreneurs of the 'half-moon' and the rest of the country saw an opportunity for vying yet again for national power.

The strategy implemented between 2016 and 2019 was tantamount to a soft coup (Tamayo and Íñiguez 2020). The 21F served to weaken the government and Morales' leadership. The fraudulent candidature and anti-democratic authoritarianism of the government and its (legal and electoral) apparatuses were used as a discourse to discredit both. Movements like *Bolivia Dijo NO* (Bolivia Said NO) and the chapters of the civic committees in urban centres urged the citizenry to take to the streets. Different forms of struggle converged during 2019, making the most of

the fact that it was election year covered by the international press. The opposition's campaign was widely echoed in the corporate media, on social media and on the streets, before and after polling day. The idea of electoral fraud was used as a weapon to counter any scenario that was not a second round (Stefanoni 2019).

Lastly, the institutional rift immediately after the elections, the negative results for the opposition and the rather opaque technical information provided on vote counting by the electoral commission created the right conditions for abandoning the discourse of de-legitimation and resorting to street violence. During the following three weeks, there were other important developments: the storming and burning of institutions; the persecution of legislators and activists of the MAS-IPSP; the launching of armed operations by civilian and paramilitary groups; a nationwide police mutiny; the incomplete or irregular publication of the audit report on the elections released by the Organisation of American States (OAS); the refusal of the armed forces to intervene in defence of the constitutional order; and the pronouncement of the high command in favour of the president's resignation.

Notwithstanding the fact that he agreed to hold another election and to reconstitute the electoral commission, the pronouncement of the armed forces on the afternoon of 10 November was the final blow for Morales. Minutes later, he resigned, thus paving the way for the irregular constitutional succession concluding the coup d'état.

The constitutional succession ousting the Morales government was the result of an act of sedition (Galindo 2019) on the part of the leaders of the political opposition, with the cooperation of the armed forces and the police.⁸ At the Bolivian Catholic University (UCB), in the midst of the crisis, Carlos Mesa (Comunidad Ciudadana), Samuel Doria Medina (Unidad Democrática), Rolando Villena (former ombudsman), Walter Albarracín (representative of the Comité Nacional de Defensa de la Democracia), Jorge Quiroga (former president), Jerjes Justiniano (representative of the Comité Cívico Santa Cruz) and Juan Carlos Nuñez (Fundación Jubileo), together with representatives of the Catholic Church, the European Union, Spain and Brazil, articulated the succession outside the 2009 Constitution.

The coup between 10 and 12 November was endorsed by the military when Jeanine Áñez was recognised as the president and the captain-general of the armed forces. This recognition was symbolically acted out when General Williams Kaliman, wearing his campaign uniform, handed over the presidential sash to Áñez on the night of 12 November.

This process had not been unforeseen, for 2019 was marked by violent political power struggles.⁹ While Áñez announced that the Bible and the tricolour flag of the Republic of Bolivia had been recovered by the civic movement, there were troops on the streets of La Paz and K-8 jets flew over the city as a warning that 'democratic order' had been re-established.

The Armed Forces's Support for the Irregular Government

The external (including civic movements, the Catholic Church, international bodies, ambassadors, opposition parties, foundations, etc.) and internal (the members of parliament of the Unión Democrática [Democratic Union, UD] and the judiciary) support for the government led by Áñez was sealed by the backing of the armed forces and the police a few days later.

On 14 November, three days before the coup, in view of the escalation in the protests of the supporters of the MAS-IPSP and other like-minded civic movements, Áñez passed Supreme Decree 4078 whose aim was to authorise the armed forces to intervene in the protests to enforce law and order and to defend the constitution. The following day, the armed forces assaulted a group of peasant supporters of the MAS-IPSP in the locality of Sacaba (Cochabamba), the first violent clash resulting in 12 casualties and injuries to 100 people. Five days later, with the excuse of preventing the siege of the gas plant in the area of Senkata and the attacks against petrol convoys supplying the city of La Paz, another 12 people were shot dead by the armed forces in the city of El Alto (La Paz).

After restoring law and order by resorting to state terrorism, in light of the latent political crisis, the armed forces lent their support to the civil authorities and as of March 2020 became actively involved in the public health emergency response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The debilitation of the government and the national and international condemnation of the repression led to its scaling down. The popular protests in several of the country's regions, chiefly in the centre and the west, in August 2020 ultimately forced the government to call presidential elections on 18 October 2020. As the end of the irregular government drew near, the armed forces and the police backed down.

Main Aspects of the Coup and the Irregular Government

The coup and the irregular government were characterised by three aspects. First and foremost, the desire of part of the economic elites to recover their influence over the state in pursuit of their business interests (landownership, price controls on the agricultural industry and legal concessions, among others) and the recouping of their oligarchic privileges. This aspect coincided with the specific interests of the urban civic movement. On the one hand, the members of this movement, professionals with academic qualifications, aspired to retrieve their foothold in the state apparatuses in order to improve their opportunities for upward social mobility and thus regain their lost status (Molina 2019); and, on the other, the working classes without academic qualifications sought to restore democracy and to put an end to the arbitrary use of the constitution, the judiciary and the commission that had confirmed the fraudulent election results.

A third aspect had to do with the links between the interests of the local oligarchies and those of imperialism: regaining their control over

the state and territorial administration and, consequently, raw materials (hydrocarbons, minerals, energy, etc.); to continue with the ideological and physical process of destroying the anti-system resistance and alternative political parties; and to recover geopolitical control with a view to combating the growing Chinese and Russian presence on the continent (Romano and Lajtman 2020).

As has been suggested at the beginning of this chapter, the influence of these three aspects on the process of destabilisation that led to the coup was, in the main, only possible because of the accumulation of internal contradictions in the government and the MAS-IPSP: the manoeuvres to ensure prolonging Morales' presidency that led to the deinstitutionalisation of the government and its incapacity to reform the state, the judiciary or the electoral commission, not to mention the armed forces or the police, reforms that should have furthered the construction of the plurinational state.

The New Government and the Armed Forces, towards 2025

Context of the New Government

The electoral victory of Luís Arce and David Choquehuanca, with the support of 55.11 per cent of the electorate, has not only allowed the MAS-IPSP to regain power but also to comply with its patriotic agenda. However, the recent political deadlock, linked to the health and economic crises, has left it very little leeway for making progress in this direction.

The governability resulting from the 2021 regional elections, marked by the political deadlock between the neo-conservative bloc of Santa Cruz and the popular bloc, is similar to the polarised situation between 2005 and 2008. In view of a probable pact between the MAS-IPSP and the fragmented opposition, the central and regional governments look to be all set to take up the political struggle. Even more so when considering that the country's main cities (Santa Cruz, Cochabamba and La Paz) and the departments of the 'half-moon' (Santa Cruz and Tarija, including Chuquisaca, Beni and Pando) are currently governed by some of the coup's main actors.

This democratic whitewashing recalls the case of Hugo Banzer in the 1980s. His transition from dictator to career politician, before finally occupying the presidency was tolerated by the left- and right-wing political class and the conservative elites of Santa Cruz, La Paz and Cochabamba, in accordance with the practice known as 'accorded democracy'.

Looking ahead to a new opportunity for seizing power or by demonstrating their capacity for government in their respective constituencies with a view to the 2025 elections, albeit unpredictable, the conservative bloc will doubtless enter into the political fray.

Against this backdrop, the MAS-IPSP government does not have an easy task ahead of it. The party's internal fragmentation, linked to its autocratic organisation far removed from the traditional political party model,

together with the rifts in several organisations and social movements, points to the need for self-criticism and internal reform if it intends to cope with a new struggle and to continue with the ‘process of change’ beyond the national bicentennial.

‘It Is Not Revenge but Justice’

The irregular government has been dismantled in five months. All the supreme decrees (relating to land, the market, military promotions and visas for Americans and Israelis, among other issues) have been revoked, Bolivia has returned its ‘irregular and onerous’ International Monetary Fund (IMF) loan and has re-established diplomatic relations (with Venezuela, Cuba, among other nations). Be that as it may, scant, or rather superficial, progress had been made in meeting popular expectations as to the legal prosecution of those involved in the coup.

While Áñez was captured and accused of sedition five days after the October 2020 elections, there are people who contributed to the country’s destabilisation and attended subversive meetings who continue to go about their lives with absolute freedom. Other authorities of the irregular government, involved in the coordination of the armed forces and the police, such as the former minister of government Arturo Murillo and the former minister of defence Fernando López, for whom arrest warrants were issued, fled to the United States.

New Government and the Armed Forces

The legal prosecution of members of the armed forces, an institution wary of civilian intervention, has historically required precision, delicacy and extra institutional support. According to the reports of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) and the ombudsman, after Lidia Patty, an ex-member of parliament for the MAS-IPSP, lodged a complaint at the end of November 2020, the Public Prosecutor’s Office initiated proceedings against high-ranking officers of the armed forces for sedition, terrorism, murder, wounding or causing grievous bodily harm and assault occasioning actual bodily harm.

The arrest of the first perpetrator of the massacre of Sacaba triggered a reaction from retired servicemen and the military top brass. The former expressed their concern, since it involved an active serviceman who was only obeying orders and who, in principle, could only be held accountable in a court martial. In other words, they believed that the Public Prosecutor’s Office had overstepped its bounds. In an unprecedented public statement,¹⁰ the military High Command expressed the institution’s bewilderment, noting, ‘When conflicts are imminent, we invoke God and call the soldiers to arms; when the conflict has passed, we forget about God and judge the soldiers.’

Epilogue

In the twenty-first century, the Bolivian political vanguard did not understand that winning consecutive elections and passing a constitution were the first steps towards constructing another kind of state and, by extension, society and nation, but not the ultimate goal.

Their capacity for mobilisation and the boom in raw materials generated important objective and subjective conditions for the popular classes between 2006 and 2020. These same political and economic forces, under the leadership of the MAS-IPSP, lacked the practical know-how to implement a ‘process of change’ more committed to the decolonisation and dismantling of the traditional state apparatuses, especially those of repression with the armed forces at the top of the list. It was decided to arrive at an agreement with the military, with the opposition still embedded in the state institutions and active at a national level, thus giving it the opportunity to counter the process of change from within. Furthermore, this occurred in anticipation that the armed forces, following their secular tradition, would not champion the cause of collective welfare but would cater to small-minded, twenty-first-century interests. And also in the knowledge that the urgent political imperatives needs would obfuscate the strategic tasks that should be undertaken to achieve its structural transformation.

The government and its political and social supporters would be wise to perform a critical analysis on whether their progressive identity is still a valid basis for transforming Bolivian national reality or adjustments are needed to make progress in the ‘process of change’ in accordance with the experiences of the last 18 months. Whatever option it chooses, the government has a couple of years of hard dialectical and physical struggle ahead of it until the bicentennial, regardless of whether its aim is to reproduce the system or, alternatively, to overcome capitalism.

Notes

- 1 A former member of the Ejército Guerrillero Tupac Katari (Tupac Katari Guerrilla Army [EGTK]), he was the leader of a heterogeneous group of left-wing intellectuals supporting the MAS-IPSP.
- 2 In August 2011, five high-ranking members of the armed forces were put on trial for the massacre of 67 people in 2003 and found guilty of genocide.
- 3 Atilio Borón, a political scientist and university professor who opened the school, remarked, ‘On that occasion, I was embarrassed by the pervasiveness of the most reactionary U.S. slogans inherited from the Cold War period and by the undisguised irritation caused by the fact that an indigenous person was the president of their country.’
- 4 In 2020, Morales would regret not having created a national intelligence agency while he had had the chance.
- 5 The inefficient management of these projects caused the state economic losses estimated at \$80 million.

- 6 According to Nila Heredia, the head of the commission, the vice-presidency was responsible for managing the information generated.
- 7 The government's commitments include continuing to subsidise diesel, pushing back agricultural boundaries and refraining from intervening in private land ownership (Argirakis 2021).
- 8 In a postscript, Galindo remarks that this video has been censored and is no longer available.
- 9 'The 2019 elections will be a key moment for political instability in Bolivia. [...] A very contested election, in which accusations of electoral fraud proliferate, could kindle the flames of an already tense domestic political scenario' (StratFor 2018).
- 10 According to the Constitución Política del Estado (State Political Constitution [CPE]) and the Organic Armed Forces Act, the armed forces obey the president and are administratively dependent on the Ministry of Defence, which are the formal channels through which they should express any discontent.

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17 Military Officers for Democracy

The OMIDELAC in the 1970s and the 1980s

Raúl Vergara Meneses

Prologue

In the majority of Latin American societies, civil–military relations are characterised by fear, mistrust and condemnation from the perspective of progressive parties and movements. And this is the result of an extremely limited knowledge of—when not contempt for—the military world in its psychological, organic and professional dimensions, which explains its many painful misunderstandings throughout history.

Paradoxically, as to the political role and authority, the aforementioned leads to a weak and inefficient exercise of control over the defence sector and, in turn, to the well-known levels of autonomy of the armed forces. The premise seems to be, as one could hear in government circles, ‘While we [the authorities] do as if we are in control and they [the armed forces] do as if they are obeying, everything will be fine.’

My personal experience in the armed forces (as a pilot) has taught me that in military life there is (beyond its own characteristics) a huge social potential that from time to time shows us its validity and which should be scrutinised, stimulated and cultivated. This does not imply justifying—quite to the contrary—the deplorable excesses in which the armed forces have been involved throughout history—and quite recently, in fact.

Making the most of the tribute that Dirk Kruijt and Kees Koonings, the editors of this book, have offered me, I would like to describe an initiative in which I had the privilege to participate and which demonstrates the aforementioned social potential of the military world. I am referring to the Organización de Militares por la Democracia, la Integración y la Liberación de América Latina y el Caribe (Organisation of Military Officers for Democracy, the Integration and Liberation of Latin America and the Caribbean [OMIDELAC]).¹

Unfortunately, because of its nature the OMIDELAC has not left any traces of the intensity of the activities developed during its short but productive life. Notwithstanding this and with the desire to vindicate its existence, based on some of the few documents that have been recovered, contacts with some of the survivors and my own partial memories, I would

like to pay tribute to this chapter of Latin American military history, as encouraging as it is unknown.

Background

In Latin America, the military dictatorships of the second half of the twentieth century gave rise to a paradoxical phenomenon, namely, the existence of servicemen with a democratic and progressive mind-set who, when faced with the uprisings of their institutions, chose to oppose sedition and remain faithful to their republican oath.

Such an attitude towards the military who had seized power came at a high price for the disaffected and their families. Subject to public humiliations and spurious trials, quite a few of them paid for their democratic coherency with their lives, while the majority suffered long periods in prison or exile.

That tough experience, however, did not dampen their republican zeal or—surprisingly—their original military calling. Living among their respective political collectives of fellow citizens in exile, they participated actively in the protests against the imprisonment of their comrades. Their particular contribution to the broad political debate developing abroad enriched their analyses of their respective armed forces. To the debate on the causes behind military coups was added that the role the military should play in a reconstructed democracy.

As a Chilean exile, my first contact with military personnel from other countries in my expatriate status was in Nicaragua. Following the triumph of the Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional (Sandinista National Liberation Front [FSLN]) and the reorganisation of the liberated state, at the end of 1979 I was invited to participate in the organisation of what would become the Sandinista Air Force. In this role, I made the acquaintance of Ariel Ferré, also a pilot and an ex-officer of the Uruguayan Air Force. Through him I got to know—during our long and frequent ‘combat guard duty’—the odyssey of the Uruguayan military who had confronted their rebel institutions and whose symbol was the imprisoned General Líber Seregni.

Against this backdrop and making the most of my trips to Mexico to engage in political activities with the Chilean diaspora, I made contact with former Uruguayan servicemen, especially Captain—also of the air force—Jerónimo Cardozo, a prominent activist of the Uruguayan exile and the Frente Amplio (Broad Front [FA]), who was in direct contact with General Seregni. From his exile in Mexico, he participated in activities in solidarity with the guerrilla movements of Central America. As our friendship grew stronger, so did our desire to unite Latin American military exiles. In addition to our respective comrades, we knew of the existence of servicemen who were responsive to the subject of democracy and social justice, and not necessarily only among the exile communities.

We thus appealed to the political communities in our respective countries for support, while also resorting to the valuable help of our contacts in Cuba and to international bodies, such as the social democratic Conferencia Permanente de Partidos Políticos de América Latina y el Caribe (Standing Conference of Political Parties of Latin America and the Caribbean [COPPPAL]) and its president the Chilean Anselmo Sule, a former senator and member of the Partido Radical de Chile (Radical Party of Chile [PR]). This was when we began our efforts to identify and contact servicemen who shared the ideal of defining and vindicating what for us should be the essence of all the armed forces of our countries, to wit, their submission to the democratic authorities and their contribution to national independence and development with social justice. An essential contribution of those armed forces should, because of their nature, be the regional integration of all aspects, including the issues of security and defence.

The OMIDELAC

We had the chance to become acquainted and to share our concerns at an international event organised in Buenos Aires. Sponsored by two local organisations, the Unidad Argentina Latinoamericana (Argentine–Latin American Unity [UALA]) and the Centro de Militares para la Democracia Argentina (Military Centre for Argentine Democracy [CEMIDA]), the Primer Foro Latinoamericano de Defensa (First Latin American Defence Forum), which was attended by prominent servicemen and civilians, was held in September 1984.² The former included the Peruvian generals Edgardo Mercado Jarrín, Miguel Ángel de la Flor Valle and Jorge Fernández Maldonado, all holding key positions during the Revolutionary Government of the Armed Forces of General Juan Velasco Alvarado, the president between 1968 and 1975.³ The encounter was also attended by the Ecuadorian Minister of Government Major General Richelieu Levoyer and the Uruguayans General Víctor Manuel Licandro and Coronel Pedro Montañez, both political prisoners together with General Seregni during the dictatorship, among others.

We ‘subaltern officers’ were assigned practical tasks during the encounter. Accordingly, Cardozo, the officers of the UALA—mainly its president, the former coastguard Julio César Urién, imprisoned during the dictatorship—and yours truly worked on the proposals for what would become the final declaration of the First Forum, in consultation with the different delegations.

It should come as no surprise that the forum’s final declaration, known as the Declaration of Buenos Aires, included all the objectives that had been established during the deliberations, particularly the assumption of the Bolivarian legacy of regional integration under the premises of unity and independence from all foreign interference.

With the aim of expressing the continuity and scope of the objectives established in the forum, it was decided to create a preparatory committee for what would be the Second Latin American Defence Forum, scheduled to be held in the Argentine capital the following year. One of the main objectives established by the committee for the following encounter was to determine how to structure the group of democratic servicemen determined to implement a new military approach in the region, which would provide this important social sector with an institutional platform, conveying its professional contributions to the critical situation in the region through recognised channels.

To this end, the Chilean delegation was tasked with elaborating and submitting the first draft of a charter of organic principles and statutes for paving the way for its institutionalisation in the region. At the time, the Chilean servicemen in exile were organised in the so-called Fuerzas Armadas Democrática de Chile (Democratic Armed Forces of Chile [FAD-Chile]).

In order to consolidate the group of servicemen emerging from the aforementioned encounter, most of them were invited to participate in the Primer Encuentro Contra la Deuda Externa de América Latina (First Meeting Against Latin American Foreign Debt), a major international event held in Havana (Cuba) in August 1985. Indeed, the opportunity and setting strengthened our identity and commitment. Among the many meetings with delegations and authorities, special mention should go to General Raúl Castro's invitation to his office at the Ministry of Defence, where we had long and relaxed meeting.

The delegation's trip to the region allowed me to coordinate a visit to Nicaragua with the country's authorities, which—in the true *nica* spirit—was hosted by the Ejército Popular Sandinista (Sandinista People's Army [EPS]) itself. During the visit, we toured different military units, attending numerous encounters with combatants of the famous Batallones de Lucha Irregular (Irregular Fighting Battalions [BLI]) and the special forces of the Ministry of the Interior (MINTER). The high point of the visit was the meeting with President Daniel Ortega.

At the Second Forum in Buenos Aires (April 1986), our delegation submitted the first draft of a charter of organic principles and statutes, which we had been tasked with drawing up and which, after a few minor modifications, led to the creation of the OMIDELAC. It is worth calling attention to the preamble to the statutes:

We Latin Americans who have chosen the military profession as a way of serving our nations, inspired by the ideals of the founding fathers of our First Independence, declare the need to continue the unfinished work of liberation from all forms of external dependence and internal domination.

Further on, it decried,

That within the framework of domination the inter-American system and the military relations that it generates have been one of the tools through whose components not only the meaning of the terms ‘nation’, ‘sovereignty’, ‘development’ and ‘security’ have been deformed, but also the authentic mission of the Latin American armed forces, forged in the heat of struggles for independence and whose main virtue was that of subordinating their actions to the sovereign will of their nations, has been undermined.

In light of this complaint, assuming or vindicating the true role of the military, the OMIDELAC made a heartfelt appeal: ‘This reality urgently prompts all the military citizens of the GREAT NATION to close ranks as a single army so as to achieve the most heartfelt demands of our nations: independence, peaceful development and social justice’, while establishing that the OMIDELAC ‘is the answer to that call’.

The document described here comprehensively developed the organisational structure of the OMIDELAC. In 10 chapters and 56 articles, it defined both the purposes and objectives of the organisation, as well as its structure: (1) the National Organisations (ONs); (2) the assembly of delegates; (3) the managing board; (4) the executive secretariat; and (5) the work commissions.

This organisational structure was corroborated in Buenos Aires on 14 April 1986, with the signatures of the following (see Box 17.1):⁴

The ultimate purpose of the OMIDELAC was defined in Article 2 of Chapter 1:

Its purpose is to institutionalise the contribution of this sector of society to the collective efforts of the Latin American and Caribbean nations which are fighting for their independence and integral development, helping to achieve the following objectives: (a) unity and integration as instruments that allow for achieving definitive and complete national and regional independence; and (b) the merger of the armed forces with their respective nations in pursuit of achieving, consolidating and extending democratic forms of social coexistence.

For its part, Chapter II established its objectives, with respect to which special mention should go to those appearing in Article 3: ‘(c) the spiritual, doctrinal, technical and logistical union of the armed forces of Latin America and the Caribbean, according to the ideals of our founding fathers’. Further on, as to the issue of defence it had the following to say: ‘(m) the creation of a new integral defence and security doctrine, according to the interests of our nations and the establishment of a Latin American defence system’.

Box 17.1 Board members of the OMIDELAC 1986

President:

General (R) Edgardo Mercado Jarrín (Peru), former Minister of War and Prime Minister during the Revolutionary Government of the Armed Forces (1973–1975)

Executive Secretary:

Air Force Captain (R) Jerónimo Cardozo (Uruguay), former political prisoner

Delegates:

Midshipman Julio César Urién (Argentina), former political prisoner

Major General (R) Humberto Cayoja Riat (Bolivia), former presidential candidate of the Alianza Renovadora Nacional (National Renewal Alliance [ARENA])

Air Force Colonel (R) Alfredo Ribeiro Daudt (Brazil), former political prisoner

General (R) Richelieu Levoyer Artieda (Ecuador), former Minister of Government and member of parliament

Air Force Captain (R) Raúl Vergara Meneses (Chile), former political prisoner

General (R) José Joaquín Matallana (Colombia), former chief of staff and peace negotiator

General (R) Miguel Ángel de la Flor Valle (Peru), former Minister of Foreign Affairs during the Revolutionary Government of the Armed Forces (1973–1975)

General (R) Víctor Licandro (Uruguay), former presidential candidate of the FA

In Article 4, Chapter II concludes by describing the tasks that the OMIDELAC should undertake to reach its objectives, above all the following: ‘(c) the development and implementation of all those national and international initiatives that allow for disseminating these objectives among Latin American and Caribbean armed forces and society as a whole’.

It is important to stress that the discussions and definitions included in the parent document of the OMIDELAC resulted exclusively from the servicemen involved in its creation, without any type of external interference.

General Mercado Jarrín occupied the presidency of the OMIDELAC from 1986 to 1988, before being succeeded by Major General Richelieu Levoyer, with the following board members (see Box 17.2):⁵

Box 17.2 Board members of the OMIDELAC 1988

President:

General (R) Richelieu Levoyer Artieda (Ecuador), former Minister of Government and member of parliament

Vice-President:

Víctor Manuel Licandro (Uruguay)

Executive Secretary:

Air Force Captain (R) Jerónimo Cardozo (Uruguay), former political prisoner

Delegates:

General (R) Ernesto López Meyer, president of the Centro de Militares para la Democracia Argentina (Military Centre for Argentine Democracy [CEMIDA], 1985–1995) and Coronel (R) César Díaz (member of CEMIDA) (Argentina), both former political prisoners

Coronel (R) Manuel Cárdenas Mallo (Bolivia), former Minister of Defence (1985)

General (R) Nelson Werneck Sodré (Brazil), former political prisoner (1964)

General (R) José Joaquín Matallana (Colombia), former chief of staff and peace negotiator

Air Force Coronel (R) Ernesto Galaz Guzmán (Chile), former political prisoner

Admiral (R) Wilfredo Pazmiño (Ecuador), former chief of staff of the armed forces (1976–1977)

Lieutenant Colonel (R) Pedro Guardado (El Salvador), leader of the failed coup against the military dictatorship (1972)

General (R) Miguel Ángel de la Flor Valle, (Peru), former Minister of Foreign Affairs during the Revolutionary Government of the Armed Forces (1973–1975)

General (R) Víctor Licandro (Uruguay), former presidential candidate for the FA

General (R) Elio García Barrios (Venezuela), former president of the Military Tribunal

Members of the Executive Secretariat:

Major (R) Gonzalo Bermúdez Rossi, (Colombia), a sociologist who published a study criticising the army⁶

Captain (R) Carlos Escobar (Bolivia)

Captain (R) Raúl Vergara Meneses (Chile), former political prisoner

Captain (R) Ricardo Alejandro Fiallos (El Salvador), member of the Military Youth Coup in 1979 against military hardliner General Humberto Romero, in an attempt to avert the civil war

Midshipman (R) Julio César Urién (Argentina), former political prisoner

In its relatively short history, the OMIDELAC was involved in numerous activities, for which its members had to reconcile their particular responsibilities and obtain the necessary logistical support. An illustrative example of the organisation's commitments is a report on its activities appearing in the gazette of the Centro de Estudios Estratégicos de Uruguay (Strategic Studies Centre of Uruguay [CEEU]), to which I had access thanks to my comrade and friend General José Luis Villamil of Uruguay. Under the title 'News on the Organisation of Military Officers for Democracy and Liberation of Latin America and the Caribbean, OMIDELAC', the report lists the following activities:

During 1987, despite the fact that its executive board had not met, OMIDELAC complied with a broad agenda aimed at consolidating its national organisations (ONs) and disseminating its objectives at an international level.

February: Participation of a delegation formed by the national organisations of Argentina, Chile, El Salvador and Uruguay at the 11th Meeting of COPPPAL, held in Lima, Peru.

March: Participation of the president of the OMIDELAC General Edgardo Mercado Jarrín (Peru), General Víctor Licandro (Uruguay) and Major Gonzalo Bermúdez (Colombia) in the Foro Internacional de Enlace de las Fuerzas de Paz [International Liaison Forum for Peacekeeping Forces], held in Vienna, Austria.⁷

April: The president of the OMIDELAC, General Edgardo Mercado Jarrín, visited Colombia. The Colombian ON, which acted as host, made it possible to establish a full agenda: [the most important one was(the)] interview with President Virgilio Barco and Foreign Minister Colonel Julio Londoño.⁸

May: Participation of the executive secretariat in the COPPPAL meeting organised in Bogota, Colombia. During this month, the executive secretariat travelled to Colombia, Bolivia and Venezuela to establish contacts with the national organisations there.

June: Members of the executive secretariat (Major José Luis Villamil, Uruguay, and Captain Raúl Vergara Meneses, Chile) visited Europe to establish contacts with cooperation institutes and organisations

in the following countries: Spain, France, the Netherlands, Sweden, Germany, Switzerland, Norway and England.

October: A delegation formed by General Edgardo Mercado Jarrín, General Víctor Licandro and Captain Jerónimo Cardozo participated in the Seminar 'El Atlántico Sur: Zona de Paz y Cooperación, Libre de Armas Nucleares' [The South Atlantic: Zone of Peace and Cooperation, Free of Nuclear Weapons].⁹

I cannot remember all the visits to countries where, in one way or another, we received the support of the respective ON and the local authorities, although the countries in the region in which we were present included the following: Argentina, Bolivia, Colombia, Cuba, Nicaragua, Mexico, Panama, Peru and Venezuela.

Our last meeting was held in Panama in 1989. As this country did not have an ON and since I was living in Nicaragua at the time, I was asked to organise the event. The meeting had the wholehearted support of General Manuel Antonio Noriega and his National Guard. Our hosts spared no effort and the encounter was perhaps the most impressive and convivial of all.

Epilogue

Although, as an act of will, the creation of the OMIDELAC has a precise date, its dissolution was gradual and silent, for which reason my interpretation of this final stage is subjective. This was due, among other things, to the return home of those of us who were living in exile (in my case, I returned to Chile in March 1990). Curiously enough, this limited—rather than hindered—our mobility, insofar as our reintegration was not an easy process.

The transition to democracy of those countries that had been previously governed by dictatorial regimes redirected the contributions of international cooperation projects, which had hitherto flowed towards their libertarian parties and movements. The activities of the OMIDELAC had depended on that support.

To this should be added the indifference of the political parties that had previously been staunch supporters of the 'democratic military movements', because once integrated into the republican system, our presence became 'uncomfortable' vis-à-vis the regular armed forces of each country. To recognise us was a provocation. In this connection, it is also important to mention those who, on more than one occasion, refused to recognise our movement. (As to the slavishness of the 'progressive political parties' in this respect, there are many unfortunate examples in my country.)

The meetings and encounters thus came to an end.

It was Comandante Hugo Chávez who made a final effort to revive the OMIDELAC. In 1994, after being amnestied and released from prison,

he went on a tour of Latin America for the purpose of restructuring the organisation and vindicating its initial principles, among other objectives. He contacted Captain Jerónimo Cardozo in Uruguay to ask him to prepare his visit there and, on his behalf, Cardozo asked me to do the same in Chile.

I have to admit that it was a frustrating task. Having come to power, the left-wing parties—my parties—considered that it was inappropriate ‘to receive the military leader of a coup’ in a democratic country. In fact, they believed that it was only possible to organise meetings with marginal movements. When informed about their refusal, the Comandante stoically accepted the situation, while letting me know that he appreciated my efforts, however unsuccessful. In our long conversations during his visit, I saw that he had a sound knowledge of the principles of the OMIDELAC and that he remained hopeful of breathing new life into it, a promise that he made every effort to fulfil during his term in office.

To end with, I would like to vindicate the gesture of the Uruguayan political class and, in particular, the FA, who in 2006 recognised the merits of their democratic servicemen who had been severely abused and repressed by the dictatorship, passing a law by virtue of which all were promoted to the rank of brigadier general. My friend and comrade-in-arms Captain Jerónimo Cardozo died, after a full life, with this rank in 2016. I sincerely hope that this account will serve as a tribute to his prolific life and the lives of those who, like him, vindicated true military spirit and honour.

Notes

- 1 See OMIDELAC (1986).
- 2 See the publications UALA (2011) and CEMIDA (2012). On the phenomenon of progressive servicemen, see also Nesbet Montecinos (2015).
- 3 See Kruijt (1991: 293–294).
- 4 In Box 17.1, (R) stands for retired.
- 5 In Box 17.2, (R) stands for retired.
- 6 Bermúdez Rossi (1984).
- 7 The executive secretary Captain Jerónimo Cardozo participated in the seminar ‘Objetivación de tensiones y conflictos fronterizos en Sudamérica’ [Objectification of border tension and conflicts in South America], organised by the Instituto Latinoamericano de Estudios Transnacionales [Latin American Institute of Transnational Studies, ILET].
- 8 They also conferred with the leadership of both the Liberal and the Conservative Parties; held a conference at the Centro de Investigaciones y Educación Popular [Centre for Research and Popular Education, CINEP]; held another conference at the Asociación de Oficiales Retirados de las Fuerzas Militares de Colombia [Association of Retired Officers of the Military Forces of Colombia]; and attended a reception at the Naval Officers’ Club and ‘Casamata’ Infantry Officers’ Club.
- 9 The seminar was organised by the Consejo Argentino por la Paz [Argentine Peace Council] in Buenos Aires, Argentina. The participants included the Group

of Generals for Peace and Disarmament (Great Britain), all former NATO flag officers, the Group of Soviet Generals for Peace (USSR), the Comisión Sudamericana de Paz (South American Peace Commission, Chile) and the COPPPAL.]. The 13 members were all retired generals: Brigadier Michael Harbottle (Great Britain); Major General Gert Bastien and Lieutenant General Günter Vollmer (West Germany); Lieutenant General Johan Christie (Norway); Marshall Francisco da Costa Gomes, former President of Portugal; Lieutenant General Georgios Koumanakakos, Lieutenant General Antonios Paspaspyrou, Brigadier General Michalis Tombopoulos and Lieutenant General Miltiades Dapathanasiou (Greece); and Vice-Admiral John Marshall Lee (United States). See Bastian (1984), the author of the book that this group published.

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18 Conclusions

Latin America's New Civil–Military Politics

Kees Koonings and Dirk Kruijt

In this book, we have explored the links between the military and national politics in a large number of Latin American nations since the turn of the century. This inquiry was inspired by a broader concern for the travails of democracy in the region. In the 1980s and 1990s, the third wave of democratisation raised expectations of the consolidation of liberal democracy in Latin America. Reviewing the state of democracy 20 years later, its problems and constraints have apparently eclipsed them.¹ In view of the complexity of the causes behind democracy's troubles, reverting to the old recipe of calling in the armed forces seems both futile and appealing.

Old-school institutional military authoritarianism has not re-emerged as a response to the problems of democracy. Yet, new and more diverse forms of military proximity to and involvement in politics have become visible over the past two decades. In a number of cases, this has contributed to what a few of the authors contributing chapters to this book have called 'de-democratisation', or in other words, democratic backsliding (Bermeo 2016; Haggard and Kaufman 2021). Although elections and civilian governments are still prevalent, the quality and meaning of democratic politics has been gradually eroded by new forms of illiberalism and repressive authoritarian rule. We contend that the *political militarism* of the past has been replaced by *civil–military politics* across the region.

The Four Scenarios

In the introduction to this book, we presented four scenarios for examining how relations between the military and politics have developed since the turn of the century. We will now re-examine those scenarios, drawing on the country case studies presented here, with the aim of identifying a number of trends and mechanisms in each one. Lastly, we will foreground five issues characterising the current state of the question of civil–military politics in Latin America.

Back to the Barracks

In this scenario, there were indeed ‘institutional transitions’ during the 1980s (in Argentina, Chile, Uruguay and Peru), either through the negotiated withdrawal or collapse of the region’s military dictatorships. Since then, democratic governments have sought to impose civilian control on the military and to re-orientate them towards classical, non-political and technical missions.

In the case of Costa Rica, the de-militarisation of politics was taken to a radical extreme with the abolition of the military as early as in 1948. This has been an important element behind the stability of the country’s democratic institutions and the construction of a civic political culture. In contrast, in Chile and Uruguay, the military attempted to cling on to their autonomy and prerogatives in several spheres. In Chile, only after the constitutional reform of 2005 could more serious steps to redress this situation be taken. In Uruguay, the uneasy co-existence between the centre-left governments of the Frente Amplia (Broad Front [FA]) and the military has recently led to the creation of a new political party embracing the military’s conservative (if not radical right-wing) ethos. The demoralisation of the military in Argentina, following the collapse of the dictatorship in 1983, and in Peru, after the Fujimori regime was ousted in the year 2000, paved the way for a more decisive de-militarisation of politics. In Peru, however, in 2021 right-wing politicians have been trying to draw the military back into the political game.

So, a deeper inquiry into these cases reveals that the consolidation of democracy and the protracted de-politicisation of the military has not been without problems and has not been completely brought to fruition anywhere, except of course in Costa Rica and arguably in Argentina.

Regional Powers under Siege

Brazil and Mexico have experienced different undemocratic periods (military rule versus single-party autocracy) and have taken different paths to democracy and political pluralism since the 1980s. But they are similar in that their regional ‘middle power’ status is currently being undermined by the political fallout of drug-related crime and violence, against which, during the past two decades, state security forces have waged a domestic war that has ultimately redefined the relationship between the military, on the one hand, and politics and the state, on the other.

Between 1995 and 2016, in Brazil, the successive centre-right and centre-left federal governments were characterised by a cycle of de-militarisation. However, the string of mayor political and social crises between 1990 and 2018 revived the ‘military party’ in a new form. Civil–military politics under Bolsonaro is currently expressed as part of an electoral movement that has placed military bureaucrats in charge of strategic areas of the state apparatus. Meanwhile, Bolsonaro has kept alive the spectre of military

authoritarianism to curry favour with his supporters and at the expense of the established democratic institutions.

In Mexico, the military and their domestic policing and counter-insurgency roles had been subordinated to the hegemony of the ruling party since the end of the Revolution (1910–1917), a situation prevailing up until the year 2000. The breakdown of de facto single-party rule coincided with the escalation of the ‘war on drugs’ and the stepping up of the role of the military in combating the cartels. This has given the armed forces a new profile in their old mission: domestic policing and counter-insurgency at the service of civilian governments, above all since López Obrador won the federal elections in 2018, after which he has reinforced the role of the military in public administration and extended it beyond the war on drugs.

Violent Pluralism

Violent pluralism refers to the diversification and internalisation of different forms of violence as part and parcel of democracy and electoral politics (Arias and Goldstein 2010). The armed actors involved in violent pluralism also include the police and the military. Colombia and the three countries of the Northern Triangle of Central America are excellent examples of how violent pluralism not only has its roots in the political armed conflicts and authoritarian rule of the previous century but has also escalated and morphed under democratic governments. In all four countries, the armed forces have been involved in fully-fledged counter-insurgency, hybrid law enforcement and public security operations. Until the 1990s, their role in politics and public administration had been fairly visible, but since the turn of the century this has become more hybrid, which, in turn, begs the question of the role that they ought to play in complex situations of sustained criminal and political violence in vulnerable democracies.

In Guatemala, the armed forces provided a niche for military–civil political entrepreneurs that eroded the institution, while their Salvadoran counterparts retained a certain degree of institutional tutelary power and the Honduran military combined both aspects. In all three countries, violent pluralism has taken the shape of the gang networks of the Maras, drug trafficking organisations and coercive armed and police forces. This state of affairs has made a huge contribution to the sustained militarisation of law enforcement, the constant availability of the military as a source of political backing and the fragility of democracy, resulting in a clear shift towards conservative or right-wing populist illiberalism.

For many years now, Colombia has been the archetype of violent democracy and violent pluralism. Between the 1960s and the early 1990s, the armed forces were granted the exclusive control over national public security in exchange for refraining from becoming involved in power politics, which converted them into a formidable professional counterinsurgency

organisation. However, it also led to their political abandonment and made them receptive to social cleansing, dirty warfare and right-wing para-militarism.

Armoured Bolivarianism

The role of the armed forces in the Latin American ALBA countries is ambiguous. Either the military staged a coup or they became deeply embedded in the government, the government party, public administration and the management of the economy. In the case of Venezuela, both phenomena occurred. There were also coups in Ecuador and Honduras, both former ALBA countries.

In Cuba, Venezuela, Nicaragua and Bolivia, there is an ambiguous agreement between their political leaders and the armed forces to embrace a 'Bolivarian/socialist/indigenist' alternative to the hegemony of neoliberal capitalism and the power and privileges of the domestic elites. The country case studies in this section show how the recent economic, social and institutional crisis of Bolivarian socialism (be it a model, a regime or mere lip service) has been affecting the position of the military—from preserving the apparently stable Cuban authoritarian status quo, to supporting the violent defence of the regimes in Nicaragua and Venezuela, through co-authoring the ousting of Evo Morales and his 'indigenous socialism' in Bolivia.

From Political Militarism to Civil–Military Politics

This overview of the country case studies presented in this book brings us to the concluding remarks on five themes that have emerged as defining traits of the different, yet persistent, importance of the military in Latin American politics.

Firstly, political armies have largely vanished, with the military losing in most cases (but not in Venezuela) their institutional political vocation (as an embodiment of national sovereignty and destiny that leads the military to authoritarian control of state power) and the foundations on which this power was built in the era of dictatorships: the control of intelligence, policing and social development, plus direct administration. Military involvement in, or even control over, policing, social programmes (including humanitarian missions and combating the COVID-19 pandemic) has been preserved and, in many cases, expanded. But the aim of this is no longer to backstop military rule but to resolve problems for civilian governments. Having said that, the militarisation of Venezuela's Bolivarian Revolution has arguably given rise to a new type of political army, while the old variety has lingered in military circles in Brazil, Chile, El Salvador, Honduras and Uruguay. This has been expressed in the form of ideological discourse, electoral activism or tutelary ambitions.

Against this backdrop, it is interesting to reflect on the little known history of the OMIDELAC, a regional network of reformist and pro-democratic ‘military activists’. While its rejection of conservative military autocracy resonated with the reformist military politics of the past (namely Velasco Alvarado in Peru in the 1970s and Chavez in Venezuela during the initial years of his presidency), the group have not survived as a voice in the debate on current civil–military politics among the Latin American military.

Secondly, the demise of political armies has by no means interred the political significance of the Latin American military. On the contrary, they continue to play an active and relevant role in politics through both their connections with civilian politicians or governments and electoral politics. In many cases, civilian politicians have sought the active participation of (retired) military officers in their governments: ‘knocking on the barracks’ doors’. In the two most extreme cases, the military have participated in veto coups, temporarily intervening in the political power game. As such, the military, in some of the countries reviewed here, have been complicit in democratic backsliding, illiberalism and populist nationalism on the Right and the Left. Considering the cycle of recent and (at the time of writing this in December 2021) forthcoming presidential elections,² it can be observed how, in some cases, the military have either witnessed the victories of regimes that they have supported (Nicaragua) or the return to power of those whom they helped to oust before (Bolivia and Honduras).³ More generally, though, electoral politics in the region has been, and will continue to be, volatile, the flames being fanned by protests, polarisation and the spectre of illiberal populism. This may be one of the explanations for the region-wide tendency of electoral democracies to knock yet again on the barracks’ doors. We call this ‘civil–military politics’, as opposed to political militarism.

Thirdly, although the military no longer politically control national development and domestic law enforcement, they are still very much engaged in both. Moreover, many armed forces in the region have gained or greatly expanded their control over key economic activities and sectors of the state apparatus. This has had politically relevant consequences: salvaging their own institutional prestige, breathing new life into memory politics of the past, becoming the partners of besieged civilian governments and compensating the low levels of trust and legitimacy enjoyed by civilian governments. Nowadays, civilian politicians are swift to resort to the services of the military as a ‘reserve’ bureaucracy in a gradually longer list of policy fields, whenever it is understood that the normal state apparatus is not up to the task.

Fourthly, in stark contrast—or as a shady extension—to these modes of co-governance, there is the military’s embroilment in criminal governance and violent pluralism. This appears to be particularly systematic in Guatemala, where *poderes ocultos* (hidden powers) form a ‘deep

state' in cahoots with clandestine repressive actors and drug trafficking organisations.

Lastly, there is the ever-changing international context. The prolonged aftermath of the 9/11 attacks spelled the end of the liberal democracy imperative sponsored by the (former) North Atlantic hegemons. The liberal peace/liberal democracy ideal at the 'end of history' (Fukuyama 1992) has been replaced by a new economic and geo-political 'realism'. This was demonstrated by the different reactions to the 2009 coup in Honduras and to the current exploits of the Maduro regime in Venezuela. The former was tacitly endorsed by the United States and forcefully rejected by Latin American countries led by Brazil; the latter have been condemned by the United States, the European Union and conservative governments in Latin America, but have been supported by China, Russia, Iran, Turkey and left-leaning Latin American countries, including Mexico. International peacekeeping, for that matter, was originally seen as a short-term strategy for improving conventional ('old') military professionalism, thus keeping the Latin American military happy, busy and away from politics. But this has by no means resulted in the curbing of domestic military roles and missions (except in Argentina), for in countries such as Brazil and El Salvador, international peacekeeping missions have enhanced the armed forces' domestic public security roles. Paradoxically, the internal armed conflict in Colombia, subject to international verification and support missions as of 2004, did indeed lead to a focus on conventional military tasks (but with the fallout of 'dirty warfare' and extra-legal liaisons with the paramilitary).

To our mind, these five points show that military involvement in politics in Latin America after the year 2000 has ensued under quite different domestic and international social and political circumstances, as already observed in the introduction to this book. Discontent with electoral democracy has not led to its suspension but to the military's involvement in its different areas. The conditions and constraints of neoliberal globalisation, including the 'securitisation' of poverty and inequality, have enhanced the involvement of the armed forces of most Latin American countries in a variety of economic sectors and social policy fields, most notably in public security and law enforcement. Social contestation and violence are closely related to the tensions between global neoliberalism and national governance (regardless of whether the aim is to manage or to change neoliberalism); they both foster political disenchantment and instability, which, in turn, is one of the main reasons why politicians and governments seek military support.

So, as to the question of whether we are witnessing the re-militarisation of Latin American politics, we would have to say 'no', considering that old-school political armies, with their doctrines of national guardianship, bureaucratic-authoritarian dictatorships, dirty wars, state terrorism and mass human rights violations, have not returned despite the fragility of

democracy on many counts. However, we would have to say ‘yes’ judging by the ongoing and growing involvement of military actors in governments, party politics, elections and public administrations.

Notes

- 1 See among many other works: Domínguez and Lowenthal (1996); Agüero and Stark (1998); O’Donnell (1999); Méndez, O’Donnell and Pinheiro (1999); Eckstein and Wickham-Crowley (2003); Peeler (2004); PNUD (2004); Foweraker and Trevizo (2016).
- 2 The current (2020–2022) cycle started with the presidential elections in Bolivia (October 2020), then in Ecuador (February 2021—not included in this volume), Peru (April 2021), Nicaragua (November 2021), Honduras (November 2021) and Chile (Constitutional Convention elections in April 2021 and presidential elections in November and December 2021). In 2022, presidential elections are scheduled to be held in Costa Rica (February), Colombia (June) and Brazil (October). Additionally, in 2021 legislative or regional/local elections were held in El Salvador, Argentina, Mexico and Venezuela. The overall public context of these elections across the region has been one of polarisation, social protest and the advent of ‘street politics’.
- 3 In the case of Honduras, the presidential elections resulted in the victory of the leftist-reformist candidate Xiomara Castro, whose husband Manuel Zelaya was ousted by the military in 2009.

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