

THE PROBLEM OF MILITARISM IN LATIN AMERICA

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1. Introduction

Militarism has been regarded as a typically Latin American phenomenon and from the historical perspective it is so. Practically each country has been ruled by a military government at least temporarily and most states regularly during this century. Such a tradition of militarism understood as rule by military governments that Latin America has experienced is unique. Lately the problem has, however, become more universal and the majority of the developing countries are now under the control of the military.

The overall militarisation that has taken place in developing countries in the 1960s and 1970s cannot be a mere contingency. The causes are to be sought in the position of these countries in the international system, in the economic and political structures and their changes. What has, then, been characteristic is perhaps the greater integration of economic activities within the international system on a world-wide level which sets the economies and political systems of especially the developing countries to a new situation.¹ Latin America offers a classical example of a dependent development model which also gives proof of militarism being among the changing means of control to maintain the dependencies.

Militarism is, no doubt, a more diversified problem than only an aspect of dependency. The Latin American experience can contribute substantially to the

¹ More than fifty developing countries are for the moment under military rule according to the data collected by the Turku Peace Research Group. On the structure of the world economy with respect to militarisation see e.g. Esko Antola, *Kehityksmaat maailmantaloudessa* (Developing countries and the world economy), *Ulkopolitiikka*, 3/1977, p. 37.

research on militarism in developing countries in general: to the understanding of the character and the development of the phenomenon and to the finding of common nominators and dimensions when questioning the relation of militarism to development.

2. Trends Within Latin American Militarism

Military control or military participation in politics has been present throughout the independent history of the Latin American countries in one form or another. The roots of militarism can perhaps be traced back to the centuries under colonialism although the armies were not notably strengthened until the late 18th century. The *fuero militar* system also contributed to the special status of the military which became more underlined in the course of independence struggles. The social, economic and political system of *caudillismo*, roughly between 1830—1860, leaned on violence and power exercised by local leaders with their troops.² The historical expressions of militarism have not been without any significance in the existence and permanence of the phenomenon but to-day we may see militarism with new forms and dimensions.

Russell M. Fitzgibbon has estimated the length of military rule in Latin American countries according to the nature of presidencies, civilian or military;³ years with military presidency are distributed between 1941—1969 as follows (number of years):

29—19	15—10	less than 10	None
El Salvador	Honduras	Haiti	Chile
Nicaragua	Venezuela*	Mexico*	Uruguay
Paraguay	Bolivia	Colombia*	Costa Rica*
Dominican Rep.	Brazil	Panama	
Argentina	Cuba*	Ecuador	
	Peru		

* Now civilian.

The validity of an estimation like this has to be related to the definition of militarism: a civilian president is not a guarantee of civilian rule as the political role of the military can be indirect as well and cannot be exactly measured in its extension and amount. Certain differences are to be seen through these groupings already.

² Magnus Mörner, *Caudillos och militärer i latinamerikansk samhällsutveckling. Utrikespolitik*, årg. 14, nr. 4, 1959, pp. 140—150.

³ Russell M. Fitzgibbon, *Components of Political Change in Latin America. Journal of Inter-American Studies and World Affairs*, April 1970, vol. XII, no. 2, p. 193.

Militarism or non-militarism within political systems seems to have been of stable character. Considering the whole century (1900—1969) the military has held power sixty-fifty years in Guatemala, Venezuela, Nicaragua, the Dominican Republic whereas countries like Chile, Uruguay, Costa Rica and Panama only have been short times under military rule.⁴

Important shifts from military to civilian rule have taken place in Mexico and Venezuela. The most recent changes in the other direction have been those in Chile and Uruguay. Since 1973 fifteen military governments exist in Latin America. A clear upward-turn to militarism came in the years after the Cuban Revolution. Between 1962—1964 seven civilian governments were overthrown in Peru, Argentina, Ecuador, Dominican Republic, Honduras, Bolivia and Brazil, which takeovers all aimed at preserving status quo against the possible influences of the Cuban example.⁵ These events signified a turn to militarism in a wide sense.

As another indicator to military participation in politics we may use the frequency of military coups d'état. Most successful coups since 1945 have taken place in Bolivia and Ecuador (eight successful); in Argentina, El Salvador, Honduras and Peru (four). Chile, Nicaragua and Uruguay of the present military regimes have only experienced one coup d'état. Armed conflicts between states have been rare although some boarder disputes are still actual.⁶

The case of Latin America very well shows that militarism is not merely something that is "military" in purely technological terms but the problem must be understood as a primarily social phenomenon with political and economic dimensions. To-day's Latin America is characterised by militarism as an institutionalised system of control.

Since the 1930s the role of the military has become more and more considerable in the national politics. It was at that time that the armed forces tended increasingly to function as a unit in the political arena and even to overthrow constituted regimes. As Alexander remarks:⁷

"Although individual leaders often emerged from the ranks of the leading officers to become presidents, they differed from the caudillos of the nineteenth century in that they came to power through the intervention of the national military establishment rather than at the head of groups of personal retainers."

⁴ *ibid.*

⁵ On the military coups d'état of the early-1960s see e.g. Edwin Lieuwen, *Generals vs. Presidents. Neomilitarism in Latin America*. New York 1964.

⁶ The data: see note one. Cf. István Kende, *Local Wars in Asia, Africa and Latin America, 1945—1969. Studies on Developing Countries*, no. 60. Budapest 1972.

⁷ Robert J. Alexander, *Latin American Politics and Government*. New York 1965, pp. 90—91.

So there were factors in the consolidation of the national political systems that gave an impetus to strong centralised governments. As one symptom of this "depression dictatorships" were established in many countries with farheaded consequences e.g. in the small Middle American countries. This process has often been defined as "nation-building" in Western political science literature describing the rise to power of a leadership oriented toward the growth of a nationwide government and the transformation of the economy and society from a rural, agrarian pattern to a predominantly industrial one.⁸ These kinds of phases can be distinguished although the transformations take different forms at different times. In the traditional dictatorships the military-socio-political system of caudillismo was still to be seen. On the other hand, the "modernisation" of the economic sector at the same time is mainly a reflection of the societies being increasingly integrated to the world market.

Considering military regimes as such one more contributor to the changed positions of the army was the development of the military-technological capacity. Ideological orientations within the army need to be considered as influential factors as well. Different army movements have given variety to the outcomes of military participation, such as the movement of tenentes in Brazil in the 1920s and 1930s. Reformist militarism of different types emerged also at an early stage. Especially in the 1940s and 1950s new alliances of younger army officers, growing middle-classes, intellectuals etc. were born that were opposed to the old order. New coalitions and governments came to power. One of the most striking examples from this period is the Arévalo-Arbenz regime in Guatemala. Arbenz was overthrown (1954) by an intervention with U.S. support: Guatemala was to become "a showcase for democracy". What it became was rather a showcase for the counterrevolution. The Guatemalan case revealed one more aspect affecting the phenomena of militarism: the dimension of dependency.

Personalist dictatorships still existed but reformist or populist governments were common in the post-world war period. The political forms of dependency were not yet well developed although the structures of penetration were under transformation on all levels. The Cuban Revolution finally opened the crisis and this event had great significance from the point of militarism as well. The essential thing is not merely the increase in the number of military governments but the new contents in the policies of the governments. There is enough ground to see the beginning of a new type of militarism since the early 1960s. It implies the functioning of the army as an institution, increasing contacts with other Latin American armies, participation in the promotion of economic development

⁸ This is discussed by Mary W. Helms, *Middle America. A Culture History of Heartland and frontiers*, Englewood Cliffs 1975, esp. pp. 259—261.

which is often attached to national development on the ideological level.⁹ Militarism can further be regarded as a total institutionalised system throughout the society, in political life, social relations, in conducting the state machinery and as servant of foreign interests. The functioning of the armed forces as an institution and as an irreversible part of the state machinery are features perhaps separating the militarism of Latin America to-day from the previous forms or the emerging forms of the same phenomenon in other parts of the world.

3. Inter-American Relations and Military Dependency

There were frequent military interventions by the United States in the years between 1900—1930 in the Central American and Caribbean area. Correspondingly, American economic and political influence was expanding in Latin America. By 1945 the United States had already acquired a monopoly in military assistance in the region. The special aspects of military dependency cover the U.S. military assistance programs (MAP), military training and arms trade. Direct military interventions have been few although the involvement of U.S. interests have been obvious in connection with several military coups. The essential thing with military dependency is not solely the number or type of ties but the relative importance of the military in relation with the political and economic aspects of dependency which all are interrelated.

The concept of security as the ideological basis for Inter-American military "co-operation" has been changing due to changes in the international system and in hemispheric relations. What started as a collective security has now become a system with emphasis on national security and national defense. This responds to the actual conditions: strong military regimes under the inter-American system did not exist until the latter half of the sixties.

Institutional Co-operation

Military co-operation was realised in the first place as a part of other interstate arrangements which gave the formal political basis for further co-operation. The Organisation of the American States (OAS) was established in 1948 and it completed several multilateral agreements which focused especially on the continental security policy: the Havana Convention 1940, the Act of Chapultepec 1945, the Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance 1947 with its extensions (1954). The

⁹ Cf. Alberto Sepúlveda, El militarismo desarrollista en América Latina. *Estudios Internacionales*, año IV, octubre-diciembre 1970, no. 15, pp. 104—110.

Inter-American Defense Board was formed in 1942.¹⁰ These were the main foundations for political and respectively military co-operation.

The next phase to formal institutional commitments were the bilateral military agreements which were set up between the United States and most of the Latin American countries in the first half of the 1950s. This implied new principles for security: arrangements with individual countries, diminishing the purely collective system and increasing foreign assistance. The Mutual Security Act was passed in 1951.

The Cuban Revolution resulting at the separation of Cuba from the dependency system created a situation so far unknown on the continent. Emphasis in security had to be laid on the maintenance of the societies from inside and internal security became the leading idea to direct the U.S. — Latin American relations. As to the official U.S. policy towards Latin America there have been certain variations. Before 1961 the policy was more or less pragmatic, under the Kennedy administration the promotion of democracy was preferred; the policy of the later governments has more been dictated by the U.S. "interest".¹¹ The human rights principle of to-day's American foreign policy has so far created more question marks than essentially new solutions with respect to military dictatorships.

Forms of Military Co-operation

In the 1960's a counter-revolutionary strategy was applied that covered as well the military, economic as political fields of co-operation between the United States and Latin America. Emphasis was laid on actions like indirect intervention, intensification of military relations, utilisation of the inter-American system and promotion of development by the "Alliance for Progress".¹²

There was a notable shift in the United States assistance policy as two thirds of the total foreign assistance in 1956 had been military by nature but ten years later the share of military aid was one third and that of economic aid was two thirds. Military civic action became the crucial part of military aid under the Alliance for Progress program since 1961.¹³ Civic action was an essential part

¹⁰ On the development of the inter-American system see e.g. David Wood, *Armed Forces in Central and South America. Adelphi Papers*, no. 34, 1967 and the *Military Balance*.

¹¹ James D. Cochrane, *U.S. Policy Towards Recognition of Governments and Promotion of Democracy in Latin America since 1963. Journal of Latin American Studies*, vol. IV, part 2, Nov. 1972.

¹² Claude Heller, *United States Military Aid to Latin America: an Attempt at Evaluation. 30 Congreso Internacional de Ciencias Humanas en Asia y Africa del Norte. México 1976 (mimeo.)*, p. 10.

¹³ Michael T. Klare, *Sota vailla loppua (War Without an End)*, Turenki 1975, *passim*.

of internal security maintenance and thus underlined the political aims of the military assistance programs.

The training of Latin American officers serves also the purposes of the U.S. military policy. The soldiers are not offered only military skills but even capabilities to be prepared to participate in social development and internal security programs.¹⁴ The main training centers¹⁵ are located in the Panama Canal Zone and some training takes place in the United States. To implement the training programs the U.S. Southern Command has been used as a center for American military missions and advisers (MAAGs) and Mobile Training Teams (MTTs) which operate within different countries. The training was directed through special groups towards internal security on the national level and the training is completed by local military schools like the Escuela Superior de Guerra in Brazil. In their curricula economic and social issues and counter-revolutionary strategies are included.

Armaments by trade are the third sector of imported military technology and it seems to be the least monopolised area as well. In 1970—1972 the share of the United States of the Latin American arms supplies was thirty percent, that of France and Great Britain little more and nearly forty percent came from other sources. Arming is thus perhaps less tied to the general trends within political and economic relations than are military aid and training. On the other hand, the decrease in direct military aid from the United States has meant respectively an increase in arms sales.¹⁶

The initiation of domestic arms production in countries like Brazil and Argentina has been a more recent phenomenon as to armaments. This has been mainly co-operation between local governments and foreign enterprises. The arms business reflects more general trends in dependency relations: there is not one imperialistic state but the activities of the multinational "empires" diversify the picture. Moreover, the control of the military industry and military technology is a question of keen interests in militaryruled societies.

4. Military Rule and Development

To understand the contents of the new militarism that was born in the situation after the Cuban revolution it is worth studying the policies of the new militaries

¹⁴ Robert P. Case, *El entrenamiento de militares latino-americanos en los Estados Unidos*, *Aportes*, no. 6, octubre 1967, p. 50.

¹⁵ Klare, *op. cit.*; Don L. Etchison, *The United States and Militarism in Central America*. New York 1975, pp. 101—111.

¹⁶ *The Arms Trade with the Third World*. Stockholm International Peace Research Institute. Harmondsworth 1975, p. 260; Fabrizio Battistelli, *Armas para la represion y el subdesarrollo*. *Chile-America*, no:s 33—34, julio-agosto 1977, pp. 94—100.

in power. What are the differences between the countries and governments? Although historical and political developments in each country do differ, the national development strategies and political directions seem to become more and more alike. The differences will have more relevance in the comparison of civilian and military governments than among military regimes. Some hypotheses can be made about what "types" of governments exist and what factors may be significant for the further developments. The interplay of economic and military variables gives the background for the political expressions and outcomes of military rule.¹⁷ What is obvious in Latin America is the fact that the regional context and the special dependency structures very much determine overall developments including the phenomenon of militarism. The long traditions of militarism and the rather permanent presence of the military in politics have also affected the expressions of to-day's militarism.

With reference to the economic appearance of the Latin American countries we may find such distinctions as economic resources, "capacity", and economic growth which characterise some countries. Countries like Brazil, Argentina, Chile and Peru belong to the "capacity" group which is, no doubt, of vital importance to the dependency system. Foreign finance is a major source of economic capacity. Growth seems to be somewhat related to economic resources but it is obvious also in "less" developed countries. Growth often takes place within certain sectors as Ecuador and Bolivia have been able to refresh their economy by oil.

It will be possible to formulate hypotheses such as: strong military regimes with high economic activities are necessary to maintain the dependency system. On the other hand, unstable political and economic development with upward or downward turns encourage takeovers in order to establish military rule: crises may reflect being at stake in the dependency system.

The "new" militarism during the last decade has brought about new types of governments, very much relying on the abovementioned features. The Brazilian regime has been considered the core model for the establishment of a new order, notably in the Southern Cone countries.¹⁸ Such counterparts as the Peruvian Revolution of 1968 used to be, or attempted to be, practically no more exist.

¹⁷ Here we refer to a study made by the Turku Peace Research Group on military governments in developing countries. The group is publishing a book (in Finnish), where the articles cover the development of militarism in Asia, Africa, Near East and Latin America as well as theoretical approaches to militarism which aspect has been neglected here.

¹⁸ The case of Brazil in connection with the recent developments of militarism has been discussed by e.g. Michael Löwy & Eder Sader, *La militarisation de l'état en Amérique Latine*, *Revue Tiers-Monde*, no. 68, octobre-décembre 1976, pp. 873—875; also James H. Mittelman, *De la dépendance et des relations entre l'armée et le pouvoir civil*, *Revue Tiers-Monde*, no. 70, avril-juin 1977, pp. 223—224.

The development of militarism has been more stable in those countries where military rule has been more permanent. Military structures have been founded already on the remnants of the caudillo system or a long period under strong military rule has generated an overall social system so that further promotion of the military sector becomes almost unnecessary. The case of Nicaragua is quite a typical example: a small country with traditional social structure although with a strategic position. Nicaragua, however, gives an example of the traditional military state which necessarily is not remote to the most recently militarised societies. The Central American group illustrates another feature of the new militarism in Latin America, tending to integrate more the military sectors. It has been noted that the foundation of the Central American Defense Council (CONDECA) came to imply the extension of the military sphere to politics, economics and the whole society.¹⁹

The external pressures on the Latin American societies have shown their might at various stages.²⁰ The question now arises: how far will the economic and political structures created under the present phase of militarism condition the future development of the continent? And what factors will contain the next stage of militarism? The interplay of economic and military factors seems highly relevant considering the future options for development.

¹⁹ See Etchison, *op. cit.*; also John Saxe-Fernández, *The Central American Defense Council and Pax Americana*. In Irving Louis Horowitz & Josue de Castro & John Gerassi (eds.), *Latin American Radicalism. A Documentary Report on Left and Counterrevolutionary Movements*, New York 1969.

²⁰ In the late 1960s there was e.g. less "pressure" from the United States on the South American region — at a time when reformist military governments appeared in Peru, Bolivia and Panama.