



# PROLOGUE

The armed forces in Latin America have been weakened for many years because they have been isolated from the societies for which they provide the critical public good of national defense. This isolation and weakness has had extremely negative impacts on the region's military institutions, the professional soldiers who serve in them, and the political systems which they defend. Strong military institutions would consist of well-trained and well-paid professionals carrying out defense missions critical for their nations' security and essential for their foreign policies. Instead, these weakened and isolated forces often carry out a miscellaneous melange of military and non-military duties with little constructive input from the rest of their nations' political systems or from individual citizens themselves. Latin America's military professionals would be much better served if the importance of their essential missions were clearly understood by the citizens of their countries. Only then could national defense policies be set which would provide proper pay and material for the region's defense professionals.

In the past this weakness and isolation has resulted in such separation between military and civilian that essential information about the region's armed forces was kept from the public record. Precise and accurate information about troop strength, military material, military technology, and their underlying budgets was simply not available, often to the general public and frequently even to select committees of the region's legislatures. Today that pattern is being reversed. The publication of "White Books" describing basic information about the armed forces of many of Latin America's countries represents an important step forward, one which shows clear progress with each passing year; the regular meeting of the region's defense ministers (most recently in 2004 in Quito, Ecuador) shows promise for coordination of concerns and rationalization of resources among these nations.

This progress is essential for the institution building which is central to the strengthening of democracy in the region's political systems. In fact it is particularly important because, in every nation in the western hemisphere, the armed forces are the largest and, usually, best-organized institution of the state. For progress to be made on democracy in Latin America, then deepening the institutionalization of its armed forces is essential. This institutionalization will be advanced if citizens and their representative are aware of the defense and foreign policy needs carried out on their behalf by their nations' armed forces and the material requirements necessary to carry them out. For this to happen elected representatives must be able to cast informed votes on military budgets, their advisors must know how to read and interpret the statistics on which they are based, and private sector and civil society organizations must have the capacity to review and monitor those budgets.

With the publication of *The Defense Budget In Latin America* RESDAL has made an important contribution to that effort. This volume describes the political and technical contexts in which defense budgets need to be interpreted; it explains why budget transparency is so important for good governance and political democracy. It explains the cycles through which budgets are constructed; the categories through which they are expressed; basic questions to ask when examining a military budget; how outside organizations can monitor military budgets; and where information on military budgets can be found.

Formed in 2001 as a network of scholars and practitioners concerned with deepening the institutionalization of defense and security in the hemisphere, RESDAL has helped those in the network stay in touch and answer critical questions addressed in their day-to-day work. The publication of this book directly extends the skills of the members of the network to citizens in the political systems of which they are part. RESDAL is to be congratulated for this practical application of the skills of its members. It is my hope that it will be widely utilized by citizens and civil society organizations throughout the hemisphere. The result would be a strengthening of the professionalization of the armed forces in countries in the region and a corresponding strengthening of democracy in those nations.

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December 2004