

The Armed Forces and Society in South America: How Similar? How Different?

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As a field of scholarly inquiry, the study of civil-military relations can be defined as the analysis of the relations between the armed forces, the state, and society. For the last 25 years, students of the Latin American armed forces have focused almost exclusively on one side of this triangular relationship. Particularly among the political scientists in this group, the dominant concerns have been coups, military regimes, the military's role in democratic transitions, and the varying degrees of military autonomy and political power following those transitions.¹ Given the uncertain and often fragile state of democracy in Latin America, it is not surprising that U.S. and Latin American scholars have concentrated their attention on the interactions of the armed forces with civilian leaders and on the progress (or lack thereof) in reconstructing those interactions to conform with democratic norms.

Nevertheless, it should have been obvious to all of us that focusing exclusively on the interaction of the military with the rest of the state was in effect to ignore the other side of this triangular relationship. Detailed studies of the social origins of the officer corps are lacking for most of the region. To my knowledge, no one has done a comprehensive sociological study of a Latin American military since Roy Hansen's 1967 dissertation on the Chilean army.² Neglecting the military-society side of civil-military relations means that our assumptions about the social context of military behavior are probably outmoded, perhaps dangerously so.

In the paper which follows, I propose to reconsider the classic questions of military sociology and pose new questions about military efforts to restructure its relation to society. I then argue that on both sides of the mutual inter-penetration of the

¹ See for example, J. Samuel Fitch, The Armed Forces and Democracy in Latin America (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998);

² Roy Hansen, "Military Culture and Organizational Decline: A Study of the Chilean Army," a dissertation submitted to the Department of Sociology, University of California-Los Angeles, 1967. See, however, Frank McCann, "The Military," in Michael Conniff and Frank MaCann (eds.), Modern Brazil: Elites and Masses in Historical Perspective (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), pp. 47-80; and Celso Castro, O Espírito Militar: Um Estudo de Antropologia Social na Academia Militar das Agulhas Negras (Rio de Janeiro: Celso Castro, 1990).

armed forces and society, there is evidence of significant change. Unfortunately given the paucity of research in this area, that evidence is fragmentary, largely anecdotal, and quite incomplete. Next, I attempt to address the “So what?” question, arguing that changes in the relationships between the armed forces and society may have important consequences for the political side of the civil-military equation. Finally, I outline a program of research on the armed forces and society in Latin America, in hopes of inspiring others to join in a collaborative effort to revive the study of military sociology in the region.

Societal Linkages to the Military:

The most fundamental question in military sociology is “Who constitutes the armed forces?” In a hierarchical institution like the military, the critical question is of course the origins of the officer corps that commands that institution. The first systematic answer to that question for a Latin American military came from José Luis de Imaz’s classic, Los que mandan.³ Comparing data from the personnel files of Argentine army generals and air force brigadiers, de Imaz analyzed family names, birth place, and fathers’ occupations for officer cohorts at five year intervals from 1936 to 1961. Even in what is often considered the most aristocratic of Latin American militaries by officers from other countries, de Imaz demonstrated that a large majority came from upper and upper middle class families, but not the traditional “criolla” aristocracy. Nearly three quarters were sons of immigrants--particularly Italian and Spanish, but also German and French--for whom military careers were a path to social, if not economic, mobility.

In a dissertation which was unfortunately never published, Roy Hansen interviewed a sample of retired Chilean army generals in 1967 and concluded that most were clearly from middle class families and that many--particularly those he classified as “careerists”--had entered the military for largely economic reasons. Reflecting the relative eclipse of the Chilean military’s political and defense functions after 1932, Hansen found significant military discontent with low salaries and declining budgets. While working class civilians looked favorably on military careers for their sons, Hansen observed that “major portions of the middle and upper classes no longer considered the military as a satisfactory career choice.”⁴

Alfred Stepan’s study of the Brazilian military in the 1960s found similar trends in social origins of the officer corps. Comparing fathers’ occupations of cadets entering the army academy in 1941-43 and 1962-66, he documented a sharp decline in the proportion of cadets from upper class backgrounds and a slight rise in recruitment

³ José Luis de Imaz, Los que mandan (Buenos Aires: Editorial Universitaria de Buenos Aires, 1964).

⁴ Hansen, “Military Culture and Organizational Decline,” p. 204.

from lower class families. But the solid majority came from middle class occupations—business executive, merchant, civil servant, teacher, accountant—in both time periods.⁵ Overwhelmingly academy applicants described their families' economic status as average. Perhaps the most intriguing of Stepan's findings was the high proportion—greater than 40 per cent in 1966—of cadets from military families and the high percentage entering from military-run secondary schools⁶ Finally, in my own work on the Ecuadorian military, I likewise found strong evidence of predominantly middle class social origins among *Colegio Militar* cadets going back to 1928, along with a significant but smaller degree of endogenous recruitment from military families.⁷

With some country-to-country variations, the common picture which emerged from this research was that of an officer corps strongly middle class in origin, with varying percentages of officers from military families. While data on military salaries were difficult to obtain and hard to compare cross-nationally, military officers appeared to be reasonably well-paid compared to other professions, particularly at the senior ranks, except perhaps in Chile. Studies of occupational prestige were rare, but these suggested that civilians typically saw military officers as part of the middle class, with perhaps somewhat less social prestige than professions requiring university education.⁸ Unfortunately the South American bias of this early research also obscured cases in the Caribbean and Central America where it is likely that more officers came from lower class or lower-middle class backgrounds, particularly in less professionalized militaries where there were fewer barriers to promotion from the ranks of non-commissioned officers, e.g. pre-revolutionary Cuba

Changing Social Origins?

While still incomplete, the evidence available suggests that important changes are occurring in the social origins and socio-economic status of military officers in Latin America. Already in the Stepan and Fitch data from the 1960s, one can see evidence of a shift toward lower social origins in entering cadets. In Ecuador, by the mid-1960s, almost a quarter of the officer candidates came from lower-middle class or

⁵ Alfred Stepan, The Military in Politics: Changing Patterns in Brazil (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1971), pp. 32-33, 36.

⁶ Stepan, The Military in Politics, p.41, fn. 16.

⁷ J. Samuel Fitch, The Military Coup d'Etat as a Political Process: Ecuador 1948-1966 (Baltimore, Md.: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), pp. 26-27.

⁸ Fitch, The Military Coup d'Etat, pp. 28-30. See Lyle McAlister, Anthony Maingot, and Robert Potash, The Military in Latin American Socio-Political Evolution: Four Case Studies (Washington, D.C.: Center for Research in Social Systems, 1970) pp. 33-34, 96-97, 158, 160-161, 170, 220-21, for similar conclusions about the social origins and socio-economic status of the military in Argentina, Peru, Mexico, and Colombia.

Table 1: Father's Profession of Entering Army Academy Cadets: Ecuador and Brazil

	Upper-Middle	Middle-Lower	Sons of Officers
Brazil 1941-1943	20%	76%	4%
Ecuador 1937-1939	40%	57%	3%
Brazil 1962-1966	6%	78%	15%
Ecuador 1962-1966	17%	60%	24%

Source: J. Samuel Fitch, The Military Coup d'Etat as a Political Process: Ecuador 1948-1966 (Baltimore: Md.: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), p. 27.

working class families. In Brazil, that proportion was lower—15%—but clearly higher than it had been in the 1940s. These officers—the entering cadets of the mid-1960s—were the colonels and generals of the 1990s.

Since then, but particularly since the debt crisis of the 1980s, in virtually every country, the military has complained loudly about declining military salaries. In Argentina, where officers' salaries were traditionally linked to those of the corresponding level of federal judges, military salaries were decoupled from civilian counterparts and real salaries fell sharply,⁹ adding to the military's many quarrels with the Alfonsín administration. Despite a transition that was supposed more favorable to the Brazilian military, in 1991 a high ranking Brazilian general complained that "salaries are very low and officers do not have the means to socialize with people of the same intellectual level."¹⁰ At different points over the last decade, Ecuadorian generals have shown me pay stubs indicating take home salaries of \$600-\$700 per month. In the early 1990s, at the height of the Peruvian economic crisis, the base pay for a Division General was \$200-\$300 per month.¹¹ While senior officers in particular

⁹ Rosendo Fraga, "Cambios sociales y función militar," Le Monde diplomatique/el Dipló (Septiembre 2001), p. 9.

¹⁰ General Manuel Augusto Texeira, quoted in João Martins Filho and Daniel Zirker, "The Brazilian Military Under Cardoso: Overcoming the Identity Crisis," Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs 42: 3: 143. Martins and Zirker argue that direct intercession by President Cardoso largely solved the salary crisis by removing military salaries from the adjustments mandated for the rest of the public administration by the Plan Real (pp. 150-151).

¹¹ Carlos Iván Degregori, "Shining Path and Counterinsurgency Strategy Since the Arrest of Abimael Guzmán," in Joseph Tulchin and Gary Bland (eds.), Peru in

enjoy various non-salary perquisites, such as subsidized medical care, commissaries, and periodic opportunities to purchase consumer durables abroad, government-wide austerity programs and the resulting cuts in military budgets have decreased the military's ability to insulate its members from the effects of declining salaries. Generous pension systems have become the albatross on the neck of military budgets, heightening the institutional tension between maintaining the standard of living of current officers and that of thousands of former officers.

Already by the mid-1980s, officer recruitment in Brazil showed clear evidence of downward movement. In what is probably the best contemporary study of social origins, Frank McCann shows a significant increase in the proportion of cadets at the army academy listing lower middle class or skilled working class father's occupations. Educational levels for fathers likewise declined, with over half the entering cadets in 1985 reporting fathers with only primary school education, double the proportion for the 1955-1979 period. This is the cohort of cadets that will be the Brazilian colonels a dozen years from now.

Table 2: Father's Occupation of Entering Cadets: Brazil 1982-1985

<u>Upper</u>	<u>Middle</u>	<u>Lower Middle</u>	<u>Skilled Lower</u>
Fazendeiro	Upper Military	Lower Military	Tailor
Doctor	Business Manager	Bookkeeper	Plumber
Lawyer	Merchant	Salesman	Store Clerk
Dentist	Civil Servant	Insurance Rep.	Nurse
Judge	Accountant	Bank Clerk	Railroad Worker
General	Engineer	Small Farmer	Industrial Worker
	Factory Owner		Airline Worker
	Teacher		Mechanic
	Public Relations		Driver
	Chemist		Mason
	Radio Announcer		Shoemaker
<u>Total</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>Total</u>
5%	34%	46%	15%

Source: Adapted from Frank McCann, "The Military," in Michael Conniff and Frank MaCann (eds.), *Modern Brazil: Elites and Masses in Historical Perspective* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), p. 68.

Crisis: Dictatorship or Democracy? (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1994), p. 97; and in the same volume, Enrique Obando, "The Power of Peru's Armed Forces," p. 116.

In the early 1990s, Juan Rial found similar trends in the recruitment of officers in the Uruguayan military. Absent data on fathers' occupations, the principal evidence consists of the educational level achieved by the parents of applicants accepted by the Escuela Militar. Forty-four percent of entering cadets' fathers had only completed primary school or less.¹² Less than 20 per cent listed fathers with military education, but 28 to 38 per cent had medical coverage through the armed forces. The lower figure presumably indicates the proportion of sons of officers and non-commissioned officers; the latter is probably a better indicator of the number of cadets from military families (uncles, grandparents) broadly defined. One quarter received health services from Public Health or the Police Hospital system, both of which are normally used by working class families.¹³ Reported family income data suggests that in 1991, in the midst of a severe recession, a majority of the entering cadets came from families below the official poverty line, with nearly one quarter qualifying as "indigent". Less than 15 per cent reported medium or high family incomes.¹⁴

Rial concludes that the military profession, particularly the Army, "has become an occupation that only attracts the lower middle and lower social strata."¹⁵

Rosendo Fraga likewise argues that, in Argentina, "the military career has ceased to be the path for social mobility that it was in the past for the middle sectors and the sons of immigrants."¹⁶ The change in social status of the officer corps is particularly evident in the changing patterns of endogenous recruitment.

Whereas in past decades 30% of those who entered the Colegio Militar were sons of officers, that figure has now descended to less than 10%. In turn, sons of non-commissioned officers, that in the past didn't constitute as much as 10% of the corps of cadets in the Colegio Militar now represent approximately 30%.¹⁷

Fraga concludes that the social origins of the Argentine army have changed from the middle sectors of the middle class to the lower-middle class. In other countries where the political weakness of the armed forces is less pronounced than in

¹² Juan Rial, "El reclutamiento del cuerpo de oficiales y la estabilidad de la democracia en el Uruguay," Documento de Trabajo, PEITHO, Montevideo, 1994, pp. 8-10.

¹³ Rial, "Reclutamiento del cuerpo de oficiales," pp. 10, 14-15.

¹⁴ Rial, "Reclutamiento del cuerpo de oficiales," pp. 16-18.

¹⁵ Rial, "Reclutamiento del cuerpo de oficiales," pp. 23-24.

¹⁶ Fraga, "Cambios sociales y función militar," p. 9.

¹⁷ Fraga, "Cambios sociales y función militar," p. 9. Fraga also notes that the social and educational differences between officers and non-commissioned officers have shrunk as a result of higher educational requirements and greater professionalization of the latter.

Argentina, the magnitude of salary losses may have been less, but the region-wide fiscal crisis of the state has probably led to similar results elsewhere.

Within this general trend toward greater recruitment of future officers from the lower-middle and popular classes, there are many questions still unanswered. The first is whether this is a specifically South American phenomenon or part of a larger trend which encompasses the U.S. and European militaries, where all-volunteer forces are an important source of social mobility for minorities and children of less privileged families.¹⁸ The second question is how much variation exists in this trend among the South American militaries. Given important variations in the social prestige of the military and in the severity of military salary losses, one would expect that the changes in the social composition of the officer would be far greater in some countries than in others. Just as it was probably a mistake to overgeneralize about the middle class social origins of the Latin American militaries in the 1960s, it would be an error to overgeneralize about the working class origins of future generations of military leaders. The third question is whether these trends apply equally to the three military forces. Historically Latin American naval officers have come from somewhat higher socio-economic backgrounds than their army counterparts, with air force officers falling somewhere in between. Whether this remains the case is not clear. Clarifying that question could provide important clues about the relative importance of the factors which have decreased the attractiveness of the military career to sons and daughters of middle and upper middle class families. Finally, there is the question of whether the social composition of the officer corps really makes any difference. From a strictly military perspective, broadening the social base of officer recruitment could expand the pool of motivated and qualified applicants. On the other hand, to the extent that socio-economic status is strongly correlated with educational opportunities, broadening the social base of entering cadets may mean more cadets entering with marginal educations and more need for remedial training. As argued in more detail below, the political consequences of having more future officers from working class backgrounds are far from obvious.

Geographic Origins:

When we ask “Who commands the military forces in Latin American societies?,” typically political scientists think in terms of social class origins, but geographic origins are also important. To take perhaps an extreme case, in Ecuador during the 1960s nearly 40% of the entering cadets came from Quito or the surrounding province of Pichincha. An additional 50% came from *sierra* provinces

¹⁸ How often these make it into the senior military leadership is unclear. The comparison is complicated by the existence of multiple routes into the officer corps in the U.S. case, whereas it is still relatively rare for Latin American officers to enter the military as soldiers or subofficials and come up from the ranks.

north and south of Quito. Only 10 percent came from the coast; less than 1 percent came from Guayaquil, the nation's largest city, with nearly one-third of the country's total population. Since then, the coast's share of total population has grown to roughly 60%, but according to anecdotal reports from Ecuadorian officers, the officer corps of the army remains overwhelmingly from the sierra. Informed sources suggest that navy and air force officers also come predominantly from the interior. In a country where pronounced regional divisions are a central feature of national politics, the geographic origins of military officers are presumably more than just matter of statistical curiosity. In other cases, military officers may be more representative of the population outside the capital than the national political elite who tend to be over-represented in the elite universities that provide entry into upper level political and bureaucratic careers.¹⁹

Marriage, family, friends, and neighbors:

Hansen's study of the Chilean army in the 1960s documents an important and often forgotten facet of military life, specifically to the posting of junior officers just graduated from the academy to garrisons in the frontier provinces. Hansen notes that officers'

informal social contacts, at this time, were with members of the rural upper class: landowners, professionals, businessmen, and those people in the provincial towns with "means." Association with these families was enjoyable; they possessed the education and all the social graces that the lower class lacked. Furthermore, the officers in the provinces were accepted as members of the set. They were invited to their social functions and were looked upon (and looked upon themselves) as potential husbands for their daughters.²⁰

As a result, despite their mostly middle class origins and status, Chilean officers often had important family ties by marriage to provincial elites, who shared important interests and perspectives with national economic elites. In informal conversations with senior Ecuadorian officers in 2001, I frequently encountered officers who had married women that they had met in their assignments as junior officers in garrisons along the southern border with Peru.²¹ Although the N is small,

¹⁹ See Rial, "El reclutamiento del cuerpo de oficiales," pp. 21-22; and María Susana Ricci and J. Samuel Fitch, "Ending Military Regimes in Argentina: 1966-73 and 1976-1983," in Louis Goodman, Johanna Mendelson, and Juan Rial (eds.), The Military and Democracy: The Future of Civil-Military Relations in Latin America (Lexington, Mass.: Lexington Books, 1990), p. 64.

²⁰ Hansen, "Military Culture and Organizational Decline," p 170.

²¹ Family ties to provincial elites are very likely changing as a result of new deployment patterns resulting from changing threat perceptions. Partly as a result of

these conversations suggested a similar tendency to marry daughters of local landowners and businessmen. While spatially and economically far removed from the economic elites of Ecuador, particularly the commercial elite of Guayaquil, these families did appear to be of somewhat higher status than the officers' own families. Moreover, it is clear that when these officers return to the provinces as commanders and senior officers of these garrisons, they are important figures in local society with a stature and prestige not likely to be accorded to even senior ranks in the capital or major cities.

Table 3: Father's Occupation for Retired Chilean Generals and their In-Laws: 1966

	<u>Father's Occupation</u>	<u>Wife's Father's Occupation</u>
Business	20%	31%
Professional/Manager	26%	17%
Military	26%	14%
Agriculture	20%	31%
White Collar	9%	6%

Source: Roy Hansen, "Military Culture and Organizational Decline: A Study of the Chilean Army," dissertation submitted to the Department of Sociology, University of California-Los Angeles, 1967, p. 172.

Military officers are linked to civilian society not only by marriage, but also by friendship and other social interactions. Hansen's survey asked Chilean officers about their five best friends prior to retirement. Over 80% were fellow officers.²² Particularly given the early age of entry into military schooling common to many Latin American militaries, it is perhaps not surprising that friendships occur most commonly in the military workplace, with one's professional colleagues. Civilian friends tended to be professionals and managers. Another question asked about membership in voluntary organizations. All of the retired generals belonged to military associations. One third belonged **only** to military organizations, but an equal number belonged to 3 or more civilian organizations, including such groups as Rotary, the Lions, hobby, and sports groups. Sixteen percent belonged to social clubs; only one general belonged to the prestigious Club de la Unión.²³ My impression from interviews and observation of Ecuadorian officers over the years suggests similar patterns, though I suspect most

the peace treaty with Peru, Ecuador is reducing its southern garrisons and creating new bases along its northern frontier with Colombia. Brazil has likewise moved troops and bases away from Rio Grande do Sul to the Amazon and the Northeast.

²² Hansen, "Military Culture and Organizational Decline," p. 178.

²³ Hansen, "Military Culture and Organizational Decline," p. 180.

military members of civic groups such as Rotary joined as retired officers, not while they were on active duty. Only a few Ecuadorian officers belonged to country clubs. Indeed, one of the “accomplishments” of the last military regime was to build new officers’ clubs for active duty and retired officers. That they did so suggests that this was a felt need, not already satisfied by civilian clubs to which military officers were either not invited or could not afford. These new military clubs in turn probably reinforced the tendency toward endogenous friendships within the military “brotherhood” and to lessen opportunities for friendship ties with civilians.

The existence of separate military clubs, along with separate military education and training institutes, and their distinctive culture and lifestyle could be read as suggesting militaries detached from the rest of society. Indeed, in the 1980s, among my Argentine colleagues there seemed to an implicit image of the army in particular as an institution that had become isolated from society, living in a social ghetto inhabited mostly, if not exclusively, by other military families.²⁴ To the extent that the more conservative sectors of the Argentine military consciously sought to reduce their contact with a society perceived to be contaminated by “subversion,” perhaps there was a degree of truth in that image of a military isolated from society. But in my experience that has never been true of the military in Ecuador. Despite their intense and highly separate professional socialization and the high degree of social interaction within the military institution, to my knowledge Ecuadorian officers have never really lived in separate military neighborhoods, except perhaps when serving in bases in the Amazonian *selva*. In my experience, they read the same newspapers and watch the same TV, go to the same movies and restaurants, and frequently shop in the same places as their civilian equivalents. And despite their distaste for civilian politicians, Ecuadorian officers were never cut off from or uninvolved in discussions with civilians about the political and economic problems facing the country.

If there was a degree of military isolation, perhaps self-insulation, from the rest of society in the Southern Cone militaries in the 1970s, the general trend of the last two decades has been toward greater interaction. One example is in education. As in the United States and Europe, Latin American military officers are increasingly expected to continue their education beyond the military academy. In addition to the progression of military schools that accompany each step up the rank hierarchy, military officers frequently seek a university title or graduate degree in a professional

²⁴ Writing in the mid-1990s, Carina Perelli and Juan Rial argue that the South American armed forces “are still rather isolated from civil society. However, in most of the poorer countries, with little development of the state apparatus, the military are the only presence of the state in far off, hard to reach places. There military forces have a close relationship with the population. As levels of modernization and urbanization increase, so does the detachment from civil society.” “The New Order and the Evolution of the Armed Forces in South America,” Documento de Trabajo, PEITHO, Montevideo, 1995.

field that they hope will provide them with post-military employment. In Argentina, the military services have aggressively pursued university accreditation for their own institutions, but have also entered into a variety of *convenios* with civilian universities to provide professional education and degrees for their officers. Partly in hopes of generating revenues to offset declining budgets, military schools have opened their doors to (paying) civilians. Ecuador's Escuela Politécnica del Ejército has evolved from the old Army Engineers School into a largely civilianized, diversified technical university serving an overwhelmingly civilian student body. What we do not know is what officers are going to what universities to study what subject matters. Equally unknown is what civilian contacts these changes in officer education generate and whether or not these ties persist beyond completion of the degree.

The other significant change which has not been properly studied is the rise of new employment ties between military families and the rest of society. Argentina is probably still the only country where outside non-military employment is common and even there the *segundo empleo* seems mostly confined to non-commissioned officers. Anecdotes abound of military personnel who work for private security firms often run or owned by retired officers. Whether this is a common pattern or one employment option among many would be worth knowing. What does seem clear is that many more military wives are now employed, not just as in the past as school teachers. Whereas officers' wives may have had part-time employment or professional careers in the past, full-time employment now seems to be increasingly an economic necessity, especially in the junior ranks.²⁵ Particularly where the cash income from the wife's job is greater than that of the officer, the rise of two-worker military families seems likely to generate conflicts with traditional norms for rotating officers through a geographically disparate set of one or two year postings. Again, we know nothing about what jobs military spouses typically hold, the degree of economic security or insecurity to which military families are exposed as a result of those jobs, or what ties are being created to what civilian sectors as a result of the growing need for second salaries to sustain military families at some semblance of their former lifestyle.

Conscription

Another major linkage between the armed forces and society is through conscription. Historically most, if not all, Latin American militaries had universal military service laws and many claim a historical role for the barracks as creators of national identity and schools for citizenship. Already by the 1960s, there was good reason for skepticism about the "nation-building" role of military conscription. While there were some exceptions, universal military service was rarely universal in Latin America. Elite and middle class males could avoid the draft through exemptions for university students, payment of modest fines for failing to register, or substitute

²⁵ Fraga, "Cambios sociales y función militar," p. 9.

service. Conscription was for the poor, for “*los indios*”. In some Central American cases, conscription operated like the classic British impressment gangs, literally dragging poor draft age youth off to the barracks.

If military service was historically less than universal in Latin America, under the fiscal pressure of the debt crisis, it has become even more so. Instead of the historic quota of 75,000-85,000 conscripts, by the early 1990s the Argentine military was effectively conscripting roughly 15,000 draftees per year, just over 5% of the draft age male population.²⁶ Because of the cost of feeding and housing conscripts, even these were often released after only months, instead of the prescribed year of military service. In 1994, following the death of a conscript in basic training, President Menem unexpectedly ordered the end of the draft and the beginning of an all-volunteer military service. Given the high rate of civilian unemployment, the Argentine military has been able to attract volunteers to what is *de facto* a much smaller military.²⁷ At the same time, women were allowed to enlist for regular military specialties for the first time and the higher-than-expected qualifications of female volunteers has helped the military improve the quality of recruits in the new all-volunteer army. Nevertheless, as in the United States and other European countries with all-professional militaries, the consequence of that shift has been a considerable decline in the already limited number of civilians who experience military service. For soldiers and for officers, one could argue that a volunteer force would have to be more “civilianized,” more like “a job,” to attract volunteers. On the other hand, as in the U.S., volunteer forces may well be less representative of the mainstream of the larger society.

In Ecuador, conscription has been maintained, though only a fraction of the age-eligible population normally serves. Since the economic crisis dramatically worsened in 2000, conscription quotas have been further reduced and draftees have been sent home early. Nevertheless, a dissertation in progress by Brian Selmeski suggests that the Ecuadorian military has successfully modernized its basic training to reflect a multi-ethnic conception of nationhood and that military service remains an important part of the life experience of young males in the heavily Indian provinces of the Ecuadorian *sierra*.²⁸ This kind of thoughtful ethnographic research on the nature

²⁶ Robert Potash notes that even this number was only half the age-eligible population during the 1950s and 60s. McAlister, Potash, and Maingot, pp. 90-91. Rosendo Fraga, “Desequilibrio militar en el Cono Sur,” y “Modernización del Servicio Militar Obligatorio,”

La Cuestión Militar en los Noventa (Buenos Aires: Editorial Centro de Estudios Unión para la Nueva Mayoría, 1993), pp. 130-132, 221-224.

²⁷ Ernesto López, “De Facto Demilitarization”

²⁸ Brian Selmeski, personal communication, February 5, 2003.

and the meaning of conscription for both conscripts and their military superiors is unfortunately non-existent for most other countries.²⁹

Again, in the area of military service, it appears that major changes are underway in an important aspect of the linkage between Latin American societies and their armed forces. Here the changes are, if anything, more difficult to assess because we do not have the kinds of earlier studies that we do have in some countries for the officer corps.

New Military Missions: Redefining the Military's Relations with Society?

The linkages described above between society and the armed forces are largely unplanned and spontaneous. Entry requirements for military academies and selectivity in the choices of potential conscripts provide some design in the shaping of these relationships.³⁰ But these are mostly the unplanned consequences of other policy choices—e.g. the professionalization (and bureaucratization) of the military career at the turn of the last century—and forces such as globalization, foreign debt and fiscal crisis that have dramatically impacted both the military and non-military components of the state apparatus in Latin America. However, focusing only on these traditional elements of the military-society equation risks missing a critical change in the post-WWII militaries in the region. By the 1960s, the larger, more professionalized military forces were already demonstrating a growing capacity to construct their own diagnoses of national problems and designing institutional strategies for dealing with those problems.³¹ In some cases, this included conscious efforts by the armed forces to create new linkages to society.

²⁹ On Bolivia, see Leslie Gill, "Un día en el cuartel," and Mayor Juan Ramón Quitana, "El ambiguo mundo del servicio militar obligatorio," Cuarto Intermedio [Bolivia] 42 (febrero 1997):3-19 and 77-100 respectively.

³⁰ Frank McCann notes that the Brazilian army has alternated between periods of broadening linkages with society through more open admissions to military academies and mass conscription and conversely periods during which ties to civilian society were restricted to prevent contamination of the military by dangerous or divisive ideas. During the Estado Novo, the army restricted admission to the Military School to applicants with "acceptable racial, familial, educational, and political characteristics. ... Officers were even forbidden to attend civilian institutions of higher learning." "The Brazilian Army, 1889-1985: Conservative or Revolutionary?" paper presented to the Latin American Studies Association, Los Angeles, 25 September 1992, pp. 5-6, 14.

³¹ Stepan, pp. 172-187. See also, Jennifer Schirmer, The Guatemalan Military Project: A Violence Called Democracy (Philadelphia, Pa.: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998). It is not clear to what degree this capacity has survived the cumulative impact of declining budgets, diminished defense roles, and shifting political winds

Already in the 1960s, many militaries outside of the Southern Cone had enthusiastically embraced U.S. “Alliance for Progress” policies encouraging greater use of the military in civic action and “nation-building” roles. Even in relatively small, poor militaries like Ecuador, engineering battalions were created to build roads in remote areas; agrarian conscription brigades were formed to train peasant conscripts in modern agricultural techniques. Military medical teams provided inoculations and health screening. In the late 1980s, faced with the threat of Sendero-type insurgencies spilling over from Peru, Ecuadorian army units in heavily Indian provinces of the sierra began a more systematic effort to make the local garrisons the center of development efforts designed to weave closer ties between the army and Indian villages. Military vehicles were used to provide transport to market from remote areas. Non-commissioned officers were assigned to provide Spanish-language literacy training and job training courses. Medical units set up clinics in areas with minimal access to doctors and hospitals. Anthropologists and sociologists were recruited to assist in community needs assessments. Local commanders lobbied government agencies for contributions to military-led development projects in areas of potential insurgency. In the Amazon provinces, spurred by the contributions of Shuar scouts to Ecuadorian success in the brief 1995 war with Peru, the army has mounted a sophisticated effort to create special relationships with several small but strategically located ethnic groups.³² For at least portions of Ecuadorian population, the armed forces have become a major provider of social services. Even in countries like Argentina with strict restrictions on non-defense roles for the military, providing disaster relief in floods, hurricanes, and earthquakes is typically a task assigned to the armed forces.³³

In other countries, particularly outside the Southern Cone, similar trends seem to be at work. In Venezuela, Harold Trinkunas notes that

the armed forces role in development activities also greatly expanded under [President Chavez’s] *Plan Bolívar 2000*, which channeled large amounts of social welfare funding away from civilian agencies and towards the military garrisons in each Venezuelan state. As a result, the armed forces became involved in infrastructure construction, repairing schools and hospitals, and

over the last two decades. In visits to various senior level military schools, I have been dismayed at times with faculty, both civilians and retired officers, who seem to be simply repeating the mantras of the 1960s about security and development, the need for a “national project,” and the failings of the civilian *clase dirigente*.

³² In turn, it appears that these efforts have reduced military opposition to demands by the confederation of indigenous peoples for constitutional recognition of Ecuador as a multi-cultural, multi-ethnic nation.

³³ Fraga, “Cambios sociales y función militar,” p. 9.

even the sale of consumer goods at cut-rate prices in popular markets in an attempt to hold down inflation.³⁴

On a smaller scale, Brazilian Presidents Franco and Cardoso have likewise utilized the logistical capabilities of the army to distribute food supplies to poor communities.

Concurrent with the military's growing role in development and social services, the army has also assumed a greater role in dealing with the region's growing crisis in crime and public insecurity. In Rio, army troops were mobilized to challenge the hold of drug gangs over large sectors of the favelas. In Ecuador, the army mans roadblocks in poor neighborhoods and on major highways to confiscate weapons and deter crime. Even as he aggressively supported the modernization of Brazilian military technology and equipment, President Cardoso frequently employed army troops in situations of potential domestic disorder, including land disputes and aid to drought-stricken regions.³⁵

Throughout the region the armed forces have contributed logistical capability and surveillance for the "war on drugs." In producing countries, such as Bolivia, Peru, Colombia, and Mexico, the armed forces have assumed greater or lesser roles in crop eradication and destruction of processing facilities. Thus far, these efforts appear not to have had any great impact on crime, but neither have they led to large scale human rights abuses. Still, particularly in the last decade, the citizens of Latin America's huge urban conglomerations, who would ordinarily have little contact with the armed forces, are today perhaps more likely to encounter them acting as guardians of public safety than as guardians of the country's borders.

The Latin American militaries' role in the economy is not a new phenomenon. Particularly in Argentina and Brazil, state enterprises were created in strategic sectors of the economy in the 1930s as part of a conscious strategy of trying to reduce dependency on foreign suppliers of strategic goods. Domestic arms industries were part of this strategy, with varying formulas for military, state, and/or private ownership, although major weapons systems were generally still purchased from the U.S. or European suppliers. While the military-industrial complex in Brazil and Argentina has been in decline, if not outright crisis, in other countries the economic role of the armed forces has expanded into areas which have no strategic connection. Again, Ecuador is perhaps the extreme case. The latest symbol of military

³⁴ Harold Trinkunas, "Militarizing the State: Implications for Democracy in Venezuela," paper prepared for the Latin American Studies Association, Dallas, Texas, March 27-29, 2003, pp. 9-10; and "The Crisis in Venezuelan Civil-Military Relations: From Punto Fijo to the Fifth Republic," Latin American Research Review 37, 1 (2002): 68-70.

³⁵ Martins and Zirker, "The Brazilian Military Under Cardoso," pp. 151-160.

entrepreneurship is Quito's new 5-star hotel operated by the Marriott hotel chain, but co-owned by the Ecuadorian army. The air force operates the major domestic airline; the navy operates two shipping companies, including a lucrative share of the country's oil exports. And the Social Security Institute of the Armed Forces owns everything from shrimp export farms and banana plantations to metalworking factories, cement plants, and plants producing munitions, uniforms, and camping supplies. In addition, the military has important ownership shares in several automobile assembly plants and other enterprises, like the Marriott, in which it has no active management role.³⁶

As a result of its multiple missions and the frequency with which civilian governments have called on the military to provide urgent services and respond to emergencies, Ecuadorian civilians could encounter the armed forces in a wide variety of roles in recent years:

In order to control corruption, a joint military force took control over Customs, despite opposition from Guayaquil merchants.

The Army built small bases along the Colombian frontier and moved in troops in response to reports of guerrillas being pushed into the border zone by Colombian paramilitary forces.

The Army Corps of Engineers cleared roads and repaired the oil pipeline after large mudslides killed 38 people and damaged the pipeline in three places.

The Ministry of Defense and the Ministry of Public Health announced a 10-year accord for the armed forces to provide health services in rural parts of Esmeraldas on the northern border with Colombia. The Health Ministry will provide doctors and nurses; the military will provide logistics and dispense medical services from military locations.

Government officials reported a clash between a military and police patrol and alleged Colombian guerrillas who entered Ecuadorian territory to rob an armored car on the highway between Tulcán and Quito.

Commanders of the three Forces were called to appear before the Oversight Committee of Congress to explain the exclusion of women from the armed forces.

Residents of the southern sierra city of Cuenca asked for military patrols to counter a growing crime wave.

³⁶ These various enterprises and ownerships were transferred to the military's social security agency from the Army Directorate of National Industries.

The Foreign Minister announced that the Army destroyed 3 coca labs near the Colombian border by the Army and that 300 hectares of coca plants have been manually destroyed by the police.

The Defense Minister, Economics Minister, and Chief of the Joint Command appeared before Congress to defend—unsuccessfully—the government’s proposal to extend the dedication of a portion of the country’s oil royalties to the Junta de Defensa Nacional.³⁷

While individual Ecuadorians probably had limited personal contact with the military in any of these capacities, as shown in this sampling from the local press, ordinary citizens do experience military-society relations through the mass media. In Ecuador and elsewhere in the region, the armed forces have become increasingly self-conscious about their institutional image and increasingly active in efforts to shape that image.

In part this concern follows logically from several decades of writings in military journals about “psychological operations” and the importance of the mass media in public opinion. In part it stems from military concern about declining military budgets and the hope that a positive military image in society can somehow be translated into congressional support for greater resource allocations to the armed forces. Another manifestation of this concern is the growing spate of military complaints about the lack of a “culture of defense” which would presumably value the armed forces and their military function more highly, and hence provide them with a more “appropriate” share of national resources.

Impressionistically at least, it appears that public affairs/public relations offices have multiplied, particularly at the command level of the armed forces. Following the lead of the U.S. and European militaries, information and media specialists are now accepted as a valuable technical specializations, at least up to a certain point in the military hierarchy. The extent of these “public information” capabilities has yet to be systematically assessed, but the examples are instructive. In Ecuador, the former Commander of the Joint Command (and now Mayor of Quito), General Paco Moncayo, organized a basic “Introduction to the Armed Forces” course for journalists when he was Commander of the Second Military Zone in Guayaquil. The Ecuadorian

³⁷ In order of appearance: “Los militares entraron a las Aduanas,” Síntesis Noticiosa (El Comercio online), 16 enero, 2001, np. “El Ejército con nueva táctica en la frontera.” El Comercio, 1 junio 2001, p. 1, 7. “La reparación se dificulta,” El Comercio, 15 de junio de 2001, A1. Hoy (online), 13 diciembre 2000, np. El Comercio, 6 junio 2001, p. A7. El Comercio, 7 junio 2001, p. A3. “Cuencanos sin seguridad,” Hoy, 25 agosto, 2000, p. 8A. “Moeller: 300 ha de coca en Ecuador,” Síntesis Noticiosa (El Comercio online), 21 marzo 2001, np. Síntesis Noticiosa (El Comercio online), 13 November 2000, np.

version of “embedded” journalists accompanying military campaigns produced a very sophisticated and sympathetic series of newspaper articles in the elite press on military efforts to reinforce the northern border against incursions by Colombian guerrilla and paramilitary forces. Working through private contractors, the military also has its own public opinion polling capability. As with any kind of public relations campaign, assessing the impacts of these activities on public opinion is far more difficult than noting that they exist. Nonetheless, it seems undeniable that the armed forces of the region are increasingly concerned about their reputation and image in society. The logical institutional response to that concern is greater efforts to enhance that image through whatever means are available.

Potential Political Consequences of Changing-Military Society Relations

At this point, the skeptical reader is certainly entitled to ask “So what? Even if military-society relations are changing, what does that have to do with the more immediately important questions of consolidating and institutionalizing more democratic civil-military relations?” With some justice, the neglect of military sociology in the region could be read as an implicit judgment that these are questions of secondary or tertiary significance. Indeed, trying to read too much into the changing social origins of the officer corps would be a mistake. Nevertheless, I would argue that social origins do have a significant impact of military officers’ identifications, on the likelihood of shared discontents with specific social sectors, and on the distribution of political perspectives within the politically relevant ranks of the armed forces.

One of the earliest attempts to find theoretical significance in the social origins of South American officers was José Nun’s “Middle Class Military Coup” which argued that mostly middle class officers had led the way in various reform coups at the turn of the century that broke the power of the export oligarchy, bringing to power parties dominated by a weak middle class that required continued military intervention to protect its interests from the later rise of populist and leftist movements.³⁸ Criticism of Nun’s thesis came from mostly North American political scientists who argued that, regardless of their social origins, military officers undergo a rigorous and extensive professional socialization process consciously designed to subordinate pre-existing psychological identifications to an overriding identification with the armed forces and with symbols of the Nation and the *Patria*. Stepan’s work on Brazil, Fitch’s analysis

³⁸ José Nun, “The Middle-Class Military Coup Revisited,” in Abraham Lowenthal and J. Samuel Fitch (eds.), *Armies and Politics in Latin America*, revised edition (New York: Holmes & Meier Publishers, 1986), pp. 59-95. While Nun’s thesis was often interpreted as crude sociological determinism, in fact the historical part of his argument was a structuralist account of how a non-hegemonic middle class could not protect its class interests, leading to repeated alliances with military sectors opposed to political forces seen as threatening those interests.

of Ecuadorian coups, and a host of other studies stressed the centrality of institutional interests, rather than class identifications, as the crucial determinants of the political behavior of the Latin American armed forces.

If the theoretical choice is between class identifications or institutional identifications, then empirical evidence is quite compellingly on the side of the latter. In a pretest of an interview questionnaire with cadets at Ecuador's Escuela Superior Militar, Bertha García and I asked 4th-year students about the relative intensity of their identifications with a series of collectivities. Even though the sample was no more than a (non-random) handful of cadets, the results were nevertheless impressive, particularly in comparison to a sample of civilian students studying international relations at FLACSO-Quito in preparation for careers in the diplomatic corps. Whereas the students preparing for diplomatic careers displayed a remarkable diversity in the identifications they considered to be most important, the army cadets were unanimous in listing "Ecuadorian" as their most intense identification, followed in virtually every case by strong identification with the Armed Forces and/or the Army.

Table 4: Identifications of Ecuadorian Army Cadets and Diplomatic School Students (1 = most intense, 2 = second most intense, higher numbers = lower intensity ranking)

Type	Transnational	National	Region	City	Institution	Force	Branch	Profession	Political	Class	Ethnicity	Party
Example	Latin American	Ecuadorian	Serrano	Quiteño	FFAA	Army	Cavalry	Diplomat	Citizen	middle	Mestizo	Dem Left
			Amazonía	Guayaquil			Artillery				Blanco	Dem Pop
			Costeño	Cuencano			Airborne					
Cadete1		1	3		2				4	6	5	
Cadete2	6	1	2	5	3	2	4		7	8	10	11
Cadete3	6	1			2	3	4		5			
Cadete4	3	1			2							
Cadete5	8	1	6	7	3	2	5		4	11	9	10
Flacso1	1	8	6	4				9	3	5	7	2
Flacso2	2	1		3				5	4			
Flacso3	6	1	4	2				5	3			
flacs04	9	8	6	7				4	1	2	3	5
Flacso5	7	2	5	6				1	3	9	4	8
Flacso6	1	3						6	2	4	5	
Flacso7	3	1	4	2								
Flacso8	2	1						3				

Nevertheless, making this a dichotomous choice between institutional or class identifications is theoretically simplistic and empirically incorrect. Despite their strong national and institutional identifications, the response of the army cadets also indicate lesser identifications with their region or city of origin, and as citizens. Class, ethnic,

and political identifications ranked near the bottom of the list, but it is reasonable to suppose that once these officers are farther removed from the intense socialization of the Escuela Militar, these other identifications will become more salient.³⁹ If we view military officers as having a strong set of military identifications—institution, force, branch, speciality, and cohort/generation—plus a complex set of secondary identifications⁴⁰—with places, family, class, ethnic, and in some cases political, groups—then the social and geographic origins of the officers corps clearly matter, because these identifications create potential bases for solidarity or cleavage between military officers and elements of the larger society to which they belong.

In Ecuador, political identifications are weak and diffuse among the military and among their civilian counterparts. Even so, a minority of party identifiers was evident in my interviews with Ecuadorian officers and these officers were often critical interlocutors between civilian political leaders and the military institution. As precarious as the survival of the democratic regime has been in Ecuador, at least part of the explanation for that survival lies in the ability of virtually every president to find a nucleus of senior officers identified with that party to serve as his *Alto Mando*. On the negative side, the lack of officers identified with the coast, particularly with the parties and political movements based in Guayaquil, could easily fuel tensions between senior officers and the political leadership, when the majority of the electorate comes from a region which produces only a small fraction of the officer corps.⁴¹

³⁹ For purposes of both theory and measurement, it is important not to forget that the intensity of identifications manifested in particular situations depends on both the psychological intensity of the affective bond, but also on the extent to which that bond is evoked by the situation. Thus, many U.S. academics who identify quite strongly as global citizens nevertheless reacted strongly as Americans to the attacks of September 11.

⁴⁰ Such a formulation is consistent with a later, more sophisticated version of Nun's thesis and Martin Needler's critique of Nun's class-based explanation. Cf. Liisa North and José Nun, "A Military Coup is a Military Coup ... or is it?" Canadian Journal of Political Science 11, 1 (1978): 165-174, and Martin Needler, "Military Motivations in the Seizure of Power," Latin American Research Review 6, 4 (1975): 614-624.

⁴¹ In informal conversations with Ecuadorian officers in the summer of 2001, the upcoming presidential election elicited little enthusiasm for either of the leading candidates, Febres Cordero, former president and Guayaquil mayor, or Alvaro Noboa, an independent Guayaquil millionaire with a reputation for corruption. It would be interesting to know how many senior officers abstained or voted for former coup leader Lucio Gutiérrez in the second round as the lesser evil compared to Noboa, despite their distaste for Gutiérrez's challenge to military hierarchy in the January 2000 coup.

In Argentina, party identifications and sympathies are more evident among active-duty and retired officers, even though the former typically do not participate in partisan activities. In particular, there is an important fraction of the officer corps—certainly a minority, but not a small fraction—who come from Peronist families. To varying degrees these officers continue to be sympathetic to or identify with the Peronist party. As I have argued in more detail elsewhere,⁴² in part because of these identifications, in part their political beliefs were more likely to be supportive of majoritarian democracy, these officers were more likely to adopt democratic professionalist role beliefs. While the negative lessons that the military collectively drew from their experience with the *Proceso* was undoubtedly the most important factor in the redefinition of Argentine civil-military relations after 1983, that redefinition would very likely not have succeeded if the military itself had not been internally divided. Explaining those internal divisions is impossible if we postulate purely institutional identifications and interests, ignoring the myriad ways in which the armed forces of any society reflect—however imperfectly—the cleavages and beliefs present in the larger society.

Despite the existence of various institutional boundaries which try to constrain the ability of civilian groups to identify and access like-minded military officers, nevertheless these borders are often as permeable as international borders are to both legal and illegal immigration. Family and geographic ties, shared pre-military education, social and neighborhood interactions all provide natural paths across those institutional boundaries. This point was driven home to me in perhaps my first interview in Ecuador over thirty years ago. The officer with whom I had an appointment was late getting home for his office, so I sat and talked with his wife. The conversation moved quickly to the economy and rising prices. As we talked, I realized that her husband might be a military officer, but she was middle-class housewife complaining about the difficulties of making do in a period of inflation. In my analysis of various coups in the 1960s, Ecuadorian officers frequently invoked public opinion as an explanation for their actions. Since this was clearly before the days of public opinion polls, how did these officers know what “the public” thought about the government of the day. Clearly part of the answer came from what they read in the major newspapers; part came from observing protests and demonstrations against those governments. But part also came their everyday conversations with their friends and neighbors. In that instance, those friends and neighbors were overwhelmingly the middle sectors of the middle class of the Ecuadorian *sierra* and the capital.

In the first decade of the 21st century, the trend toward a lower-middle class military is occurring in the midst of a complex series of economic changes that have negatively impacted both the military and civilian components of the public sector. While the poor have undoubtedly suffered more, it is worth remembering that austerity plans and adjustment policies have also reduced salaries, forced layoffs, and reduced

⁴² Fitch, The Armed Forces and Democracy in Latin America, pp. 91-101.

the employment options for many civilian white collar workers, particularly those in the public sector.⁴³ As more officers come from the lower middle class in the decade ahead, they are likely to share similar economic circumstances with other members of that class, including limited economic reserves and strong fears of downward social mobility. The most likely direction for these shared discontents is growing opposition to neoliberal economic policies, nationalist resentment of globalization and U.S. hegemony, and perceptions that government corruption is the principal cause of economic hardships. In the Venezuelan case,

Suddenly officers who had been comfortably upper-middle class found themselves barely able to maintain lower-middle and working class living standards. Even junior officers had been able to afford housing, new cars, and vacations, but now their families had to share cramped apartments in poor neighborhoods. These disparities affected junior officers (lieutenants and captains) the most, and more and more abandoned their military careers for employment in the private sector. The abrupt decline in living standards in less than a decade deepened military discontent with democratic rule. In this context, corruption in military procurement infuriated many younger officers. ... The failure to resolve many of these cases satisfactorily reinforced suspicions among the public and the officer corps of the incompetence and dishonesty of senior military and political figures.⁴⁴

In Venezuela, this volatile mixture resulted in the attempted coups of 1992 which nearly brought down what had been for three decades one of the region's strongest democracies. Although the decline in military living standards was less

⁴³ Alejandro Portes and Kelly Hoffman find a significant decline in the number of public sector workers and a smaller but corresponding rise in the number of petty entrepreneurs since 1980. "During the 1990s, the petty bourgeoisie assumed a novel role as a place of refuge for public servants, salaried professionals, and other skilled workers displaced by the adjustment policies promoted by the neoliberal model." (p. 48) Despite significant measurement issues, they estimate that "the average incomes of the Latin American urban workforce stagnated or declined during the years of neoliberal adjustment [and] the average incomes of all the subordinate classes, including the urban petty bourgeoisie, declined as well. Portes and Hoffman, , "Latin American Class Structures: Their Composition and Change during the Neoliberal Era," Latin American Research Review 38, 1 (2003): 55-65.

⁴⁴ Trinkunas, "The Crisis in Venezuelan Civil-Military Relations," p. 52. See also Domingo Irwin G., "Comentarios Sobre las Relaciones Civiles y Militares en Venezuela, Siglos XIX a XXI (Sencillamente Complicado)," ponencia preparada para XXIV Congress International of the Latin American Studies Association, 27-29 de marzo de 2003, Dallas, p. 8. Irwin notes that resentment of limited budgets and declining salaries was particularly strong among junior officers, who accused senior officers of corruption and spinelessness in dealing with party-dominated regime.

dramatic, this account could easily have been written about junior officers' reaction to short-lived government of Jamil Mahuad in Ecuador.

In ideologically divided societies, what you see depends on where you stand. As the military's social origins and current circumstances move toward the lower middle class and more educated sectors of the urban working class, we should expect the political views common to the civilian lower middle class to become more common within the armed forces.⁴⁵ Conversely, ideological positions, especially liberal internationalism, more often found in the civilian upper middle class, are likely to decline. To the extent that the lower middle class is weakly articulated with establishment parties, shifting social origins may well result in greater receptivity to anti-system and/or independent non-party movements and declining representation within the military of parties like Ecuador's *Democracia Popular* or Venezuela's *Acción Democrática*. Barring a sea-change in economic performance over the remainder of the decade, it seems unlikely that the lower middle class in Latin America will be a bastion of support for democracy. If lower-middle class Latin Americans lose faith in democratic regimes, if "corrupt" and "politicians" increasingly go together in the minds of this segment of society, if these people feel like their economic futures are being sold out to pay debts to foreign bankers and taxes to dishonest leaders, these complaints are likely to find a sympathetic audience, especially among the more junior ranks of the armed forces. Increasingly it seems, these are likely to constitute the friends, the family, and neighbors of the military officers of the future.

A Research Agenda for a New Military Sociology

If this argument is correct, the study of the changing relations between the armed forces and Latin American societies is an "academic" matter. Indeed, a revitalized military sociology is urgently needed to better understand the social context of the military's understanding of and reaction to the unfolding events of a new century. Very briefly let me sketch what I see as the most critical research needs.

First, we need up-to-date studies of the social origins of the officer corps, preferably of all three forces, in order to understand how these are differentially or similarly impacted by the legacies of the past and by changing economic circumstances. Longitudinal data on the number and characteristics of applicants and cadets is needed to determine to what extent social origins have in fact changed from the historic patterns described above. Here the primary problem is access to the data, which is undoubtedly collected on an annual basis by the military academies, but there are also methodological questions about how to categorize father's and mother's

⁴⁵ Perelli and Rial come to a similar conclusion in "The New World Order," p. 11.

occupations according to social class, when the class structure of the larger society is itself undergoing significant change.⁴⁶ How to classify sons of officers is one case in point; some occupational categories, e.g. “self-employed” and “dueño de empresa,” are also likely to be quite ambiguous. In the ideal world, construction of categories for parents’ occupation would be accompanied by empirical validation of the status attributed to different occupations. Information on parents’ education and household income would provide more accurate classification of social origins. As noted above, geographic origins also matter. In addition to the obvious classification by province, it would be helpful to distinguish between cities of differing sizes and between urbanizations within the metropolitan areas.

In Latin America, as elsewhere, entry into the military profession is largely a matter of self-selection among academically and physically qualified youth. Hence, we need to know why cadets choose to apply to the military academies. In particular, what are their images of the military career and what backgrounds are associated with an attraction to those images? What alternative careers did cadets consider and/or apply for? What do they consider the advantages and disadvantages of the military career relative to those alternatives? Interviews with entering cadets would also be useful to establish what role friends or military relatives (other than fathers) played in the decision to apply to the academy. Since cadets are chosen competitively on the basis, *inter alia*, of attributes like character and motivation, we also need to know what these terms mean to those doing the selection.⁴⁷ Interviews are also needed to determine what cadets bring with them from society into the military in terms of political beliefs, interest (or lack thereof) in political issues, religious beliefs, and identifications.

Given the central role of identifications in the theoretical argument above, it would be highly desirable to explore the relative intensity of institutional and other non-military identifications among entering cadets relative to those about to graduate. While it seems logical that the latter would be mostly strongly identified with the armed forces (and beginning to form more specialized identifications as pilots, submariners, etc.), cadets—or at least those who survive the initial months—may come to the academy with a strong predisposition to those identifications, hence it is an open question how much change one should expect between those entering the academy and those leaving as officers.

Second, we need studies of military career patterns and the social interactions with civilians that take place over the span of a typical career. Every officer has the military equivalent of a curriculum vitae, but knowing that he was a second lieutenant

⁴⁶ See Portes and Hoffman, “Latin American Class Structures,” pp. 41-82.

⁴⁷ The application form for Ecuador’s Escuela Militar Superior asks for the political affiliations of both parents. Thus far, I have been unable to find an explanation for why that question exists or what, if anything, is done with that information in the selection process.

in a particular place or an instructor at a military school does not tell us much about what interaction he had with what civilians during those years or whether any of those experiences resulted in any enduring ties to people or places. Semi-structured interviews with officers attending their respective war academies would probably be the most efficient way of capturing a snapshot of the middle years of the military career in each of the services. Such interviews would also provide an opportunity to assess again the expectations that officers have for their careers and the extent to which those expectations are or aren't being realized.

Third, we need studies both of civilian images of the military and military images of civilians. On the civilian side, we have in most countries periodic public opinion surveys which ask respondents about their trust in various institutions, including the armed forces. These data need to be expanded, disaggregated, and compared systematically over time. Knowing that on average Ecuadorians have more confidence in the armed forces than in Congress or political parties is interesting, but doesn't tell us much. It would be more interesting—and not terribly expensive—to find out what attributes civilians associate with each of these institutions. In much of the region, human rights abuses and/or corruption scandals have diminished the social prestige of the armed forces. Civilian images of the military as torturer or rentier now compete with the traditional military self-image as guardians of the *Patria*. Hence, we need much better maps of which civilians hold what kinds of views of the military, particularly in ideologically diverse societies like Chile or Argentina, or countries like Peru, El Salvador, and Guatemala which have experienced serious civil wars.

On the military side, the data will be much harder to collect, since surveys of military officers are still quite rare. Nevertheless, interviews in the war academies could easily elicit the images that officers associate with various types of civilians, from the average citizen to the economic elites. It would be useful to determine whether there are significant differences among military images of various political elites—members of Congress, judges, cabinet ministers, and politicians—and whether these vary according to one's political views or not. Over the years I have encountered some officers with very sophisticated notions of politics and politicians, and others given to the most simplistic stereotypes. I suspect that these variations stem in part from family backgrounds, particularly families where politics was part of the family conversation. To the extent that military officers differentiate good civilians and bad civilians, the differences may just reflect the ideological axes that individual officers want to grind.

Fourth, while we have lots of anecdotes, to my knowledge we have no systematic studies of military families in Latin America. Interviews or surveys of families across the rank hierarchy are needed to collect basic data on where military officers live, how and where they purchase homes, who their neighbors are, how well or poorly their incomes match the cost of living, how they cope with the realities of two-job households, variable if not shrinking real incomes, and growing economic

insecurity. In the past, military officers—like U.S. university professors—have enjoyed comfortable, but not extravagant incomes and the military equivalent of tenure. Absent gross misbehavior, most officers had virtually guaranteed employment (and promotion) up to the rank of Lieutenant Colonel. Under current circumstances, we need to know what expectations officers and their families have about their careers, and what degree of security or insecurity officers and spouses feel about their odds of realizing those aspirations.⁴⁸

Fifth, we need studies of the extent and character of civil-military interaction in the so-called “new military missions.” To take just one example, the size and significance of military-controlled industries is not well understood. To the extent that these are operated as holding companies to generate money to fund military pensions, they may not be very different from investing in the stock market for the same purposes. To the extent that these are large and/or strategic industries, the military could conceivably become an economic actor in its own right. To the extent that military officers managing such enterprises join sectoral organizations, they may encourage new ties to civilian elites. To the extent that such companies generate significant profits, off-budget revenues may increase the military’s autonomy from congressional budget authorities and create economic interests which the military forces will logically seek to defend.⁴⁹ To date, it is unclear whether unions are permitted in these military enterprises and to what extent they have the right to strike. Alternatively, a military-controlled bank may be nothing more than its own credit union. While much attention has been given to the wide variety of military enterprises in Ecuador, my impression is that collectively they constitute only a minuscule fraction of the economy and most of the profits come from military investments in enterprises in which the military has no management function. In Ecuador and elsewhere, careful analysis is needed to determine what these economic activities are and how important they are before we declare them a threat to democracy.

Likewise, the new missions of the military as service providers, anti-crime forces, natural disaster assistance, or even their participation in the war on drugs need to be carefully assessed. In some cases, these activities may be significant enough to impose real opportunity costs in terms of training and implementation of professional military functions.⁵⁰ But it is possible that in some/many countries, the combined time spent in all of these functions is relatively insignificant—a well drilled here, a school built there, some trucks sent to evacuate people stranded by floods, occasional anti-

⁴⁸ To the extent that expectations decline in line with declining living standards, downward social mobility does not necessarily lead to discontent.

⁴⁹ In Ecuador, the Association of Generals and Admirals has been outspoken in its criticism of government attempts to privatize military industries.

⁵⁰ Trinkunas, “Militarizing the State,” p. 12.

crime patrols in the slums on weekends—while the military continues to do all the standard training and other activities it has always done. Before we declare these new military missions to be a big deal, we should at least document how much time the armed forces spend doing them. We also need to know more about the nature of the civil-military interaction in these activities. It would be plausible to hypothesize that army officers providing social services in poor neighborhoods would do so paternalistically. In that model, the military commander becomes the local representative of the military state-within-the-state, receiving petitions from individuals and groups and then deciding which petitions to grant. In such an interaction, it seems improbable that petitioners would have “rights” to have their demands satisfied or that they could hold military commanders accountable for their decisions. Nevertheless, the “military paternalism” hypothesis may simply be a projection of civilian stereotypes. The Ecuadorian army reportedly insists that villages define community needs before discussing what the military can or cannot do to assist them.

On both sides of the military-society interaction, there will almost certainly be important cross-national differences reflecting different experience with military rule, subsequent patterns of civil-military relations, and varying degrees of economic crisis. In countries like Chile where military rule was relatively “successful” and both the economy and military budgets have encountered fewer stresses, one would expect less change in the social origins of the officer corps than in countries like Argentina, where a legacy of human rights violations is combined with more serious budget and salary cuts. But the counter-hypothesis is also plausible—that profound recessions will impede change as long as alternative civilian careers are non-existent or even more poorly paid. The extent of non-military missions varies widely across the region. Anecdotally there is reason to suspect that these missions, especially crime-fighting, are popular with the poor majorities, but it remains to be demonstrated that there is any causal relation between societal trust in the armed forces and the missions in which those forces engage. It is likewise unclear whether it is the actual engagement in those missions or the public relations image of that mission that matters in public opinion. Comparative analysis within and across the subregions of Latin America is needed to sort out fact from fiction, stereotype from reality.

Conclusion

Understanding civil-military relations and future prospects for democratic consolidation in Latin America requires renewed attention to questions of how military officers “see” the world as it changes around them and how they make choices within the world as they understand it. That understanding must be socially situated. In particular, theoretical progress in the study of civil-military relations requires giving up the implicit model of the armed forces as a unitary actor with a single mentality, a single set of interests, and a consistent universal political agenda.

We know in fact that military officers do not all think alike, that there are important differences cross-nationally and within countries in military thinking about their political role and in their views of democracy. We know that military identifications, ideas, and interests matter, and that these are shaped in part by who goes into the military, the position officers occupy within the social order, and their ongoing contacts with different segments of the larger society. Until we do far more research, it is difficult to know how much or how little change we will find. Unless we do that research, our understanding of the military as a political force in the next decade will be undermined by our ignorance about the interactions of the military with the rest of society.

Fuente:

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