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The Changing Role of the Military in Latin America

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This policy paper examines the current trend to redefine the roles and missions of many of Latin America's armed forces— both at home and abroad. Since the end of the Cold War, militaries around the world have seen a reduction of traditional inter-state conflicts, which has prompted them to start seeking a new *raison-d'être*. Latin America is no exception. The region has in fact experienced a plethora of recent changes aimed at modernizing these most conservative of its institutions. Domestically, there have been attempts to re-institutionalize the armed forces, often reducing their size and defence budgets. There has been a trend towards professionalizing armies, increasing the participation of females, and moving into non-traditional nation-building roles that often overlap with law enforcement. There's also been a push to internationalize militaries, given the increasingly globalized nature of security, and an emerging priority of multilateralism and international cooperation in many countries' foreign and defence policies. This trend has seen a number of Latin American countries beginning to embark on large-scale peacekeeping, which in some cases includes joint missions with former enemies. June 2004 marked the beginning of the peacekeeping phase of mission in Haiti— to be the largest-ever UN mission led by, and almost entirely composed of, Latin American troops. Such missions reflect the deep changes that are taking place in many of Latin America's most notorious armies— efforts that aim to shed the image of their torturous and often dictatorial pasts.

RÉSUMÉ

Le présent document d'orientation examine la tendance actuelle à la redéfinition des rôles et missions de nombreuses forces armées en Amérique latine, dans leur pays comme à l'étranger. Depuis la fin de la Guerre froide, les armées du monde entier voient reculer le nombre de conflits internationaux classiques, ce qui les incite à commencer à chercher une nouvelle raison d'être. L'Amérique latine ne fait pas exception. En fait, depuis quelques temps, les changements destinés à moderniser ces institutions les plus conservatrices abondent dans la région. À l'échelle nationale, on essaie de redéfinir la place institutionnelle des forces armées, souvent en réduisant les effectifs et les budgets. On assiste à une tendance à leur professionnalisation, à une participation croissante des femmes et à une orientation vers des rôles non traditionnels de construction des nations qui se recoupent souvent avec le maintien de l'ordre. Par ailleurs, étant donné la nature de plus en plus mondiale de la sécurité et la nouvelle priorité accordée au multilatéralisme et à la coopération internationale dans les politiques étrangère et de défense de nombreux pays, on cherche aussi à internationaliser les armées. Cette tendance voit plusieurs pays latino-



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américains commencer à participer à de grandes opérations de maintien de la paix qui comprennent parfois des missions communes avec d'anciens ennemis. Juin 2004 a marqué le début de la phase de maintien de la paix de la mission en Haïti, qui sera la plus importante mission onusienne jamais dirigée par et presque entièrement composée de troupes latino-américaines. Ces missions reflètent les changements profonds qui connaissent bon nombre des armées les plus tristement célèbres d'Amérique latine, et ces efforts visent à faire oublier leur passé abominable et souvent dictatorial.

RESUMEN

El presente trabajo hace un análisis de las tendencias actuales encaminadas a redefinir el papel y funciones de las fuerzas armadas en numerosos países de América Latina, tanto en el plano interno como externo. Tras el fin de la Guerra Fría, los conflictos tradicionales entre estados se han reducido, por lo que los militares en todas partes del mundo se han visto impulsados a buscar propósitos nuevos. América Latina no es una excepción: en los últimos tiempos los países de la región han efectuado una plétora de cambios orientados a modernizar a esta la más conservadora de todas sus instituciones. En el plano interno, se han realizado esfuerzos por reinstitucionalizar las fuerzas armadas, así como se han reducido su tamaño y se han recortado los presupuestos de defensa. Igualmente se observa una tendencia hacia la profesionalización del ejército y la incorporación de un número mayor de mujeres, así como una reorientación hacia funciones no tradicionales como tareas de fomento nacional las cuales en muchas ocasiones se yuxtaponen a las funciones propias de las autoridades de la ley. Asimismo, se ha observado un empuje hacia la internacionalización de los cuerpos militares a raíz del carácter cada vez más global que adquiere el tema de seguridad y la mayor relevancia que se otorgan a las actividades multilaterales y de cooperación internacional en las políticas exteriores y de defensa de muchos países. Esta nueva realidad se ha visto reflejada en un número de países latinoamericanos que han comenzado a participar en misiones de mantenimiento de la paz de gran envergadura, en ocasiones en unión a antiguos enemigos. El pasado mes de junio de 2004, se inició la fase de operaciones de mantenimiento de la paz en Haití, la cual se prevé sea la mayor operación de la ONU encabezada casi totalmente por tropas latinoamericanas. Estas misiones reflejan los profundos cambios que se vienen generando en el seno de muchos de los ejércitos más notorios de la región y constituyen esfuerzos por modificar la imagen de un pasado tormentoso y muchas veces dictatorial.

INTRODUCTION

Until the late 1980s, most of Latin America's militaries were largely devoted to border protection and internal control. And for the majority of countries ruled by military dictators, this included silencing civilian dissent. During their rule, the militaries of Guatemala, El Salvador and Argentina alone, were collectively responsible for an estimated 300,000 deaths and disappearances. But while in the past Latin American soldiers were sooner known for abusing human rights, today they can be found around the world protecting them.

This recent shift in mission, from one of internal repression to international boy-scoutism, has many roots. The end of the Cold War largely laid to rest the threat of insurgencies connected in some way with that East-West conflict, halting foreign military intervention, and the 1997 settlement between Peru and Ecuador quelled the last hot border conflict in the region. Democratization also gave way to an increasingly demilitarized landscape. As a result, these days the region lacks the kind of external threats national militaries were designed to protect

against. Shrinking defence budgets and calls for military reform have enlisted the region's once-imperious armed forces in their toughest battle ever—the battle for institutional survival. Indeed, Panama, Costa Rica and Haiti have actually abolished their armed forces completely. In the absence of a clear enemy, many of the region's militaries are facing an existential crisis and are searching for new activities to justify their existence at home and improve their tarnished image abroad.

From this perspective, peacekeeping and other activities broadly termed “international cooperation,” have broad appeal. The source of conflicts is endless, and such missions are prime opportunities to keep soldiers and officers on their toes. From a political point of view, making a mark on the international scene also makes sense. The last decade has seen Latin American governments entering international conventions and treaties of all kinds (science, education, trade). The effects of globalization can also be seen in the area of defence, where countries have started collectively redefining and expanding their concept of security, to encompass a whole range of

non-traditional internal and external global threats—from drug-trafficking, to natural disasters, to organized crime. Given these political and economic changes in focus, and the change in the very definition of security itself, it's only logical that countries have looked to redefine the roles and missions of their armed forces accordingly.

INTERNATIONALIZATION

The great change in mission for Latin America's militaries in recent years has been their reorientation towards a more international focus. That's what has largely fuelled the redefinition of their roles at home and abroad. Their increased participation in peacekeeping, mine-clearing, and civic action abroad reflects a deeper desire to take part in the new international order. Many governments have been putting the UN front-and-centre of their foreign policy, and stressing the importance of multilateralism. And while most countries had participated in peacekeeping long before the end of the Cold War, the massive increase in the number of missions in which they are taking part, and in the number of soldiers they are sending, shows to what extent they have now become a priority. Such missions also provide opportunities for improving relations within the region, and the current peacekeeping mission in Cyprus is a novel example of regional cooperation. The recently started mission to Haiti, for its part, combines all of these positive steps. It is also a precedent as the first mission in the region to be led by, and almost entirely composed of, Latin American forces.

Prioritizing multilateralism

While all are members of the UN and a handful of other treaties and international organizations, historically, some Latin American nations have tended to concern themselves with domestic and at best regional affairs. Because of their long-running civil wars, Central Americans have often been concerned with their immediate region, but not with South America, for example. And historically, Chile, Argentina and Uruguay suffered a certain stigma based on their vacillating isolationism. In fact, strong nationalist or even isolationist currents still persist in parts of Latin America as has been amply

demonstrated including in such instances as the popular overthrow of Bolivia's President Gonzalo Sanchez de Lozada in October 2003.

But the international orientation of most countries across the region has nevertheless grown in recent years, with the end of insular dictatorial rule, and the increasing influence of globalization. The successive global security changes have also led to the formulation of new principles, such as preventive diplomacy and humanitarian intervention. That has improved and deepened international collective action. And in a continent dominated by one superpower that has pulled strings in all countries' internal affairs, Latin American nations have not surprisingly sought as many foreign partners as possible for their action on an international scale.

They have come to care about what the rest of the world thinks of them, and to see the strength of global treaties in achieving concrete results at home (be that in economic, judicial, or defence circles). Now they have become involved international actors. Latin America was the only continent to uniformly sign the global treaty banning landmines, for example. This despite the fact that mines are littered across many of the region's borders, and despite the great expense of cleaning them up. Colombia, Guatemala and Nicaragua, now have widespread UN-sanctioned programs underway. After years of seeming

complacency, Colombia has undertaken many serious steps in the past two years to confront its mine problem. These include the development of the National Mine Action Plan 2002-2006, a joint fact-finding mission to Colombia in April 2003 by UNICEF, the United Nations Development Program, and the UN Mine Action Service; and the adaptation and implementation of an Information Management System for Mine Action. In 2003, the Colombian government and the Organization of American States (OAS) signed a General Agreement on Cooperation and Technical Assistance for mine action; and a new four-year National Development Plan includes mine action as an important government priority. In Nicaragua, where more than 135,000 landmines were installed during the 1980s, the government and the Nicaraguan army initiated mine clearance in 1989. When the government ratified the anti-personnel

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Mine Ban Treaty in 1998, it reaffirmed its commitment to complete clearance by 2005, and it is well on its way, with international support. The Nicaraguan Army has cleared 794 mined areas, removed more than 65% of installed landmines, and destroyed all (133,435) landmines in the country's arsenal.

Even in legal areas, there has been an opening and an increasing acceptance of, and adherence to, international conventions. All countries in the region have signed the Rome Treaty to establish the International Criminal Court (although five have yet to ratify). And this despite the huge challenges it poses and the potential judging of the human rights abuses of military personnel who were protected by amnesties at home. Many Southern Cone countries are still grappling to deal with this past and their legal systems have not always acted as international bodies would prefer. Chile, for instance, has ignored repeated appeals from the UN and Amnesty International to repeal its amnesty law and imprison condemned military officials. Meanwhile, President Ricardo Lagos seems to talk of the need to respect and promote international law and human rights whenever he is abroad. So, moves to internationalize on a legal front are tepid at best, given the distance of some judiciaries from current political will.

However, specifically in the area of defence, there has been a marked change. And the changing definition of security has helped underline the need for multilateral action. At the Special Conference on Security held in Mexico City in October 2003, leaders agreed that security must be seen as multidimensional— including threats from poverty, drug trafficking, AIDS, natural disasters, environmental abuses, terrorism, illegal migration, and other issues not usually considered part of security. Because such threats often cross national borders— Colombia's drug problem spills over into neighbouring countries, for instance— leaders at the Mexico City gathering discussed the need for a broader solution that would involve countries cooperating in an integrated body to face these common threats. "Subregional and regional integration processes contribute to stability and security in the Hemisphere," reads the Declaration on Security of the Americas, approved by 34 leaders at the

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Special Conference on Security. While the region should not be judged in terms similar to the European Union's common security and defence policy, or its combined rapid-reaction force, the fact that countries are seeing the value of regional integration and concerted multilateral action is an important and relatively recent change in mindset for many.

Peacekeeping

Peacekeeping is not a new activity for many of the region's armies. Latin American soldiers served as observers in the UN Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO) in Lebanon as early as 1948, with others participating in the India-Pakistan observer mission in 1949. Brazil and Colombia deployed infantry battalions to the Suez in support of the first United Nations Emergency Force (UNEF I) in 1956. UNEF I was commanded on two different occasions by a Brazilian general. In 1960, the Argentine Air Force provided pilots and maintenance personnel to operate DC-3 aircraft in the UN mission in the Congo. In 1974, Peru provided infantry for the UN Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) in the Golan Heights, with a Peruvian general serving as the interim commander of UNDOF for six months. But such UN participation by Latin American forces, although significant, was not an established part of their defence doctrine until just recently. They were largely symbolic contributions that often consisted of only one, or a handful, of military observers. Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Canada, India, and others provided the bulwark of UN peacekeepers prior to the end of the Cold War.

Since 1989, however, the participation of certain Latin American armed forces with the UN has increased exponentially. In 1990 the UN deployed 1,060 troops, including an 800-man Venezuelan battalion, to 14 locations throughout Honduras and Nicaragua as part of the United Nations Observer Group in Central America (ONUCA). Contingents from Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Mexico, and Venezuela served in the UN Observer Mission in El Salvador (ONUSAL), monitoring the cease-fire and disarmament process.

As of 30 September 1994, there were 2,816 Latin American military personnel from 10 different countries serving in 13 UN operations throughout the world. Today, there are approximately 4,500 from 11

countries. That represents almost a doubling from 10 years ago, and an exponential increase from their Cold War low 20 years ago. Latin American support of United Nations peacekeeping missions now ranks just after principal troop contributors like New Zealand, Scandinavia and Canada and is well above that of most of the UN membership. Brazil and Uruguay are the biggest providers of troops to the UN, and Uruguay is one of the highest contributors per capita, with 2,500 soldiers (15% of its army) currently serving in peacekeeping missions abroad.

The increasingly popular exercise of peacekeeping is one way of preserving or restoring armies' size and influence. On a political level, the participation of national contingents in a multinational capacity provides a level of prestige for the national government. From a military perspective, peacekeeping is attractive not only because it gives soldiers something to do, but because it helps improve the battered image of Latin American armies both at home and abroad. Argentine army general Carlos Maria Zabala, a former UN sector commander in Croatia, cited many of the advantages of peacekeeping for his army: "On a professional level, it is an occasion to operate in a complex operational environment. You have the opportunity to work with other armies and appreciate their capabilities as well as your own. It provides first-hand knowledge of the effects of war, allowing our troops to appreciate the importance of the UN and its peace operations. On a personal level, it lends opportunity for travel to foreign locations and exposure to other cultures and customs. Additionally, it allows the troops to feel as representatives of their country in an important mission abroad."

UN peacekeeping missions essentially provide this traditionally restless institution with an operational environment to exercise a military role. Hence, even if the army's primary motivation for UN participation is institutional survival or the avoidance of large military cutbacks, the unintended consequences can promote democratic consolidation and increase professionalism. Peacekeeping also makes sense financially for cash-strapped armies because UN missions pay. In addition to reimbursement for their per-capita contribution, the military receives money to acquire all of the material it will need to use in theatre.

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But it is, nevertheless, the region's better-off economies of the Southern Cone that have seen the biggest increase in participation. For example, in the past Chile had provided piecemeal participation of observers, police and military, usually not exceeding ten contributors. But over the past year, Chilean troops have embarked on a barrage of new peacekeeping missions to places like Bosnia, Cyprus, and Congo. In March, Chile jumped at the opportunity to serve in Haiti, its first-ever peace-making mission. Within 48 hours, Chile had 330 troops on the move—its largest-ever foreign deployment. That contribution has now been topped with a force of almost 600 military and police personnel for the peacekeeping phase of the mission. As a result, there are now a total of almost 700 Chilean military personnel serving abroad today. In 2002, there were only 33.

But while peacekeeping has come to be embraced by the military, it's had a surprisingly hard sell with some populations. In Chile, only 50% of the public supports them, according to a study released recently by the Faculty of Latin American Social Sciences (FLACSO). Claudio Fuentes, a coordinator with the Santiago-based think-tank, says the typical argument is whether it's worth it to go abroad to places that don't immediately affect Chile's interests, places like Haiti, Cambodia, or Cyprus. He says they worry about diverting national resources to such missions and they question the trade-off between sending these troops, risking their lives, and not getting anything tangible in return. So ironically, the very missions that aim to improve their image abroad are not necessarily being applauded at home. Such public concerns, which can be interpreted as a form of nationalism, can be an obstacle in some ways for Latin American countries seeking a more international mission for their armed forces.

Improved training

This increased participation, and the new types of tasks these missions involve, have also changed the way contributors train their personnel. Many countries have set up peacekeeping training centres and embarked on combined training activities with other militaries from the hemisphere.

In 1995, Argentina established the Argentine Joint Peacekeeping Training Centre (CAECOPAZ), to prepare

Latin American officers from across the region for overseas UN assignments. In addition to Argentine personnel, it has received military officials from Bolivia, Brazil, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Paraguay, Peru, Venezuela and even the US and Belgium. In 2002, Chile established a Joint Peacekeeping Training Centre (CECOPAC) where approximately 600 personnel have been trained so far. Officers from around the world come to teach military, police, lawyers and doctors topics including ethics, negotiation, international human rights law, conceptual frameworks of the UN, etc. Such improved training can only serve to enhance the professional stature of the armed forces and help to justify their continued relevance in the post-Cold War era.

Many countries have also taken part in joint peacekeeping training activities in recent years. The ongoing exercise “Fuerzas Aliadas/Fuerzas Unidas” uses scenarios in fictitious countries to simulate how armed forces, international organizations like the United Nations, non-governmental organizations like the Red Cross, or other interested groups should interact in peace operations. The exercise's goal is to increase regional and multinational cooperation in peacekeeping. When the exercise takes place in Central America or the Caribbean, it is called Fuerzas Aliadas (Allied Forces); in South America it goes by the name Fuerzas Unidas (United Forces). Twenty-two countries participated in the first seminar in Barbados in August 2001, and an equal number took part in a military simulation exercise in El Salvador in June 2002. Such joint training fuels the broader goal of promoting harmony among military personnel in countries that were previously at war. And it serves to strengthen regional cooperation.

UNFICYP: A model for regional cooperation

The ongoing UNFICYP mission in Cyprus is the perfect example of regional cooperation between armed forces. Since September 2003, it has included a contingent lead by Argentina, which also includes participants from six other South American countries (32 officers from Chile, 30 from Paraguay, 3 from Uruguay, and 2 each from Bolivia, Brazil and Peru). It's the first-ever mission involving South American countries serving together under another's command. It's remarkable because less than two decades ago, Chilean and Argentine soldiers were on

the verge of war, and Chilean soldiers are now serving under Argentine commanders.

The platoon in Cyprus also includes single officers from many of the region's historically uneasy neighbours, making the mission a glaring example of the new international cooperation many countries are striving for. In fact, Argentina's website devoted to the mission hails this participation by militaries of “brother nations” as a “clear example of the ties of fraternity that unite the armed forces of the continent.” UNFICYP definitely reflects a newfound desire for regional integration, that isn't altruistic, but which hinges on the new definition of security threats, and the idea that each country's security also depends on that of its neighbours. Working together is the only way to get at the root of some of their shared problems.

Joint action in Cyprus may not immediately address the region's problems, but it's been an ideal training ground for this in-theatre peacekeeping cooperation

in a country where no one has direct interests involved. It can be seen as a pilot project for future joint action in peacekeeping within Latin America itself. The current mission in Haiti has provided a real regional opportunity for a test-run.

MINUSTAH: Latin America's largest contribution yet

In February 2004, a peace-making mission entered Haiti in the midst of severe violence after the departure of President Jean Bertrand Aristide. On June 1st, the mission moved into its peacekeeping phase, as the UN Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH). The UN mission is mandated to coordinate its operations with the Organization of American States (OAS) and the Caribbean Community (CARICOM). It aims to keep a tentative peace in the divided country and train an ill-equipped and understaffed police force, as well as work on development projects. MINUSTAH is the fifth UN mission mounted for Haiti since 1993. It includes 6,700 troops and 1,622 civilian police, and will be led by 1,200 Brazilian troops, the largest contingent the South American country has ever sent on a UN mission. Brazilian Army General Augusto Heleno Ribeiro Pereira is the commander of the UN force. Chile has sent almost 600 troops, also its largest-ever peace-time deployment. Contributions from other Latin American countries include 500 from Argentina,

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190 from Guatemala, 130 from Paraguay, and 600 from Uruguay. All told, more than half of the mission's forces will be Latin American, making MINUSTAH the largest-ever peacekeeping operation made-up mostly of the region's own personnel.

The mission's composition is significant because it shows that the region is taking an active part in finding solutions to its own problems; and that the countries of Latin America are pursuing greater regional cooperation to do so. Participation in such peacekeeping operations helps the region's armed forces improve their interoperability, meaning the way they work with foreign armies. It also creates a more cohesive and integrated working environment for their own forces from different branches. For example, countries sending larger contingents are usually sending army, navy, air force, engineers and/or police, who don't normally get a chance to work together on a common mission at home. Given Haiti's complex security problems and the interaction with NGOs needed, it also provides an opportunity for the region's militaries to work on civil-military cooperation.

But the missions to Haiti and Cyprus can't be seen as stand-alone expressions of a new military humanism abroad. They are in many cases, the culmination of a decade or more of internal, domestic changes to many of the region's armed forces. The internationalization of Latin America's militaries involves a process of change that has to start from within, by changing domestic functions and priorities, and reorganizing the armed forces in a way that will suit its new missions.

DOMESTIC CHANGES

Reinstitutionalizing the military means making domestic changes to the structure, make-up and roles of the armed forces at home. Such changes haven't been uniform across the region, but in many countries, the last decade has seen a reduction in the size of their armies, or at least a professionalization of their forces. Armies have looked to modernize their forces by opening their doors to women— a move which takes into account their vocation for some of the new roles officers have to perform in their international missions. The roles they fulfill within the country have also expanded to include duties

previously left to police, engineers, or NGOs. Dubbed nation-building activities, the new military civic action most prevalent in Central America are nevertheless seen with caution.

Feminizing

As in most regions, the military has traditionally been one of the most conservative institutions. While women do compulsory military service in countries like Israel, and they joined the ranks of European and North American armies decades ago, their entry into the militaries of Latin America— as equals— is a more recent phenomenon.

Chile opened its military college to women in 1974, but it was a limited opening, for teaching or administrative positions. Real changes began with the integration of men and women in military colleges in 1995. In 1999, women were allowed to enrol in war materials courses for the first time. In

2002, Chile's Air Force opened its doors to women fighter pilots, but last year saw the biggest steps towards equality. The Navy incorporated women, although they still can't serve on ships. Women soldiers began receiving the same training as men— including combat weaponry courses in artillery, engineering and communication. And the army opened its barracks to women soldiers serving on par with their male counterparts. The response has been incredible; with more

women applying than there is space. In terms of the upper echelons, one in five new officers-in-training are now women.

This increased female participation in the armed forces of Chile and many other nations, also reflects a rationale that women can do some of the functions now required in peacekeeping activities as well, or better, than men. In his 2002 Report on Women, Peace and Security, UN Secretary General Kofi Annan suggested female peacekeepers make better negotiators and communicators than men. He said women have easier access to other women to register female combatants, and collect weapons and arms (usually left to women for safekeeping). After citing Annan's report, the Conference on "Building Capacities for Peacekeeping and Women's Dimensions in Peace Processes", con-sponsored by the government of Chile and Denmark on behalf of

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the European Union, held in Santiago, Chile, in November 2002, indicated that “Women in uniform are in a better position than civilian women to gain access to military resources needed to establish refugee camps, provide logistic support and liaise with their civilian counterparts during complex humanitarian crises. More women should therefore be included in all peace/humanitarian and disaster relief exercises and activities.” Today, a record eight Chilean women are serving in a variety of capacities in the UN peacekeeping mission to Haiti.

Downsizing

The makeup of Latin American militaries is not only being changed by who is allowed to join, but by the actual number of personnel they can employ. Militaries across the region have seen their forces shrink substantially over the past decade. In Central America's case, this is due largely to reductions mandated by peace accords. El Salvador's military, for example, was slashed from its wartime high of 63,000 personnel, to the 32,000 mandated by its peace accord, to less than 15,000 in 1999. In the years following Nicaragua's civil war, the country slashed its military budget and reduced its armed forces from about 60,000 to 16,000 soldiers. Across Central America, militaries also fell prey to downsizing in the absence of Cold War military assistance from countries like the U.S., which pumped billions of dollars into their counter-communist insurgency efforts. This assistance let militaries stay outside of civilian control and budgetary limits, giving them great power and less public accountability. Without it, militaries have been limited by increasingly scarce resources.

The end of the Cold War, along with sub-regional confidence-building measures provided not only an incentive but also an opportunity for countries to reduce military spending. Between 1985 and 1990, Brazilian defence expenditures were reduced by 75%. From 1985-1993, defence spending as a share of GNP fell in Argentina from 2.9% to 1.7%; in Chile from 6.8% to 2.1%; in El Salvador from 4.4% to 1.6%. In fact, in the 1990s, Latin America spent a smaller fraction of its GNP on its defence forces than any other region of the world and putting a smaller fraction of its men into uniform than any other area except poor sub-Saharan

Africa. But the rhetoric surrounding demilitarization and democratization hasn't afforded much room for frank discussion of the army's new role in this process, almost as if shrinking the size of the military were tantamount to improving it.

Professionalizing

Many countries which have been slicing the size of their armed forces, have also gone about professionalizing them— making sure missions are well-defined, promoting officers on the basis of 'merit,' not patronage, refraining from political interference and maintaining institutional responsibility. Chile has begun recomposing its armed forces as it reduces their size. In the last decade, Chile has reduced the number of officers in its army, navy and air forces, by a quarter or more, and closed 15 army regiments across the country. Chile's Undersecretary for War, Gabriel Gaspar, says they are abandoning the idea of an army spread out across the country, with regiments every 50 kilometres, and they're moving

towards a smaller, more mobile, more educated army, whose new mantra is international cooperation. Professionalization also implies moving away from a conscript army, which some countries have abolished, such as Uruguay and Argentina. Chile has begun recruiting professional soldiers, with 2,000 taken on this year. Still, 18,000 soldiers, the bulk of Chile's army are

conscripts. One Chilean official says his country has been unwilling to give up its compulsory year-long military service because "it's a cheap way to keep our population trained." Professionalization involves paying forces and reserves which are more expensive than conscripts but which might balance out given the overall reductions in size. But the need for compulsory military service is currently the subject of hot debate between presidential hopefuls in Chile, and elsewhere.

In several countries, budgetary scarcity combined with a loss of public face, has meant armies can do less than ever. Nevertheless, much of the military reform of the past decade has involved armies seeking to expand their roles. They've sought new missions in an attempt to justify their existence and protect their budgetary allocations.

Militaries across the region have seen their forces shrink substantially over the past decade

Policing

In the absence of outright external aggression, the primary role of many of Latin America's armed forces has been to maintain internal order as a second-line police force. This is in fact enshrined in the Constitutions of El Salvador and of many Central American countries. With the amplified definition of security, many of the region's armed forces have increasingly been tackling intra-state security problems like crime and drug-trafficking, which usually fall under police jurisdiction. However, military encroachment on police roles has spread to nations where the mingling of tasks is less natural. Much of Mexico's police force is now commanded by the army. And Mexico's Military Police has blurred the lined between these forces. Such jurisdictional trespassing has raised concerns among critics, who argue that police sectors are not meant to be handled by armed forces.

But in many countries, there is widespread public support for a military approach to crime fighting. Crime and violence are growing problems which governments have been unable to deal with. As a result, people are increasingly looking to the army as the only institution capable of controlling crime. In May 2004, Brazilian President Lula da Silva put 5,600 soldiers on standby to enter Rio de Janeiro to help police mount an offensive against the spiralling urban violence and drug-trafficking in favela Rocinha, one of the city's largest slums. Three hundred military police have already been stationed there since late April.

This confidence in the military as a guarantor of personal security may seem ironic, given that many militaries have perpetrated their own brutalities against civilians. A report by the Commission for Historical Clarification blamed the military for killing over 200,000 people during Guatemala's 36-year civil war. Nevertheless, before the 1996 peace agreement, the Guatemalan army kept a lot of the crime in check. Since the peace, crime has escalated. Government and police inability to control crime and the public's reliance on the military as an outside intervener, signal a troubling erosion of trust in public institutions.

(...) people are increasingly looking to the army as the only institution capable of controlling crime

The 2004 Latinobarómetro Report shows half of South Americans (and a quarter of Central Americans) trust their armed forces; but only a third have such trust in police. Thus, involving the military in crime-fighting and shifting the military's central mission to civic action may not only overshadow the role of police, to the extent that some fear it could encourage military leadership to perceive itself as more efficient, not just as instruments of development, but as managers and policy-makers. In Guatemala, such exercises have reinforced the sense of military competence and civilian incapacity.

But the consolidation of democracy entails strengthening civilian institutions and organizations. Doing the opposite, bypassing civilian institutions and using the military in civic tasks, sends exactly the wrong message— an acceptance of the ineffectiveness or even the failure of civilian institutions. In some cases, military attempts to do the work of these civilian institutions illustrates their

desire to regain their traditional prestige. Yet rather than expand their mandate to preserve Cold War resource levels, many believe Latin American militaries should shrink to fit their decreasing responsibilities.

Some advocate the dissolution of an institution that, like the dinosaur, has fulfilled its purpose. In recent years, both Panama and Haiti have seen their militaries eliminated and their functions

taken over by civilian-controlled police forces. Former Vice-President of Panama, Ricardo Arias Calderón, said his country's army was abolished because it “was above all, used against its population, not to defend it. A small army in the contemporary world, in a small country, with a limited budget, isn't useful for anything. It only serves to repress its people.” Neighbouring Costa Rica successfully scrapped its military in 1948 and now thrives as an oasis of stability in Latin America. The country retained only a civilian police force and redirected military spending towards schools, hospitals and infrastructure. But in countries with larger populations such as Peru and Colombia, insurgencies, terrorism and widespread political violence put the necessity of professional armed forces beyond any doubt.

Where militaries are needed, a better division of tasks between police and military is perhaps the answer. El Salvador created a civilian police force (PNC) in June 1992 (with 6,000 new police officers), for public security. And its military was designed to focus on national defence, although its constitution still says it can ensure internal peace in exceptional circumstances. To make sure the distinction between military and police functions is clear, civilian officials could delineate in clear and explicit terms where the jurisdiction of each institution begins and ends. A reform of the police is imperative in many countries so that the military does not continue to be the "default option" when civilians decide they need to impose order. A reform of the police must include measures to root out corruption and to force greater compliance with human rights standards.

Nation-building

But police roles aren't the only ones the region's militaries have been taking on. The expanded concept of security threats has men and women in uniform working as engineers, health practitioners and even farming, in domestic, do-good projects. Nation-building, or civic action, involves the military in development-related endeavours meant to address the socio-economic causes of conflicts.

In security as in health care, these days more attention is being paid to preventative than restorative medicine.

As a result, there is an emerging "security is development" doctrine—which holds that a nation's security is a function of the degree of social, economic, technological and political development. Security is seen as going beyond military to encompass factors like the viability of democracy, socio-economic development and environmental protection. In some Latin American countries, militaries have entered traditionally civilian areas like grain-production, manufacturing clothing, cement-production, even banking. In many, they have also taken on the roles of engineers, building roads, schools and hospitals. In recent years, Bolivian military have been fulfilling many roles related to natural disasters, removing hail after storms, evacuating during floods, and fighting forest fires. In Mexico, the military is involved in those missions as well as: vaccination and alphabetization

programs, reforestation, water distribution, building bridges and public buildings, protecting national archaeological areas, etc.

Involving the armed forces in non-military activities and various forms of community support is an attempt to gain acceptance for the military as a useful contributor to society. Like peacekeeping, civic action gives armed forces something to do, but there is the political bonus of helping one's own population. Many applaud these new missions as positive directions for military reform, but some have reservations about involving forces trained to kill in work designed to save lives.

The tarred image of many armed forces can be a barrier to involving military in grassroots assistance. In Chile, the military was responsible for thousands of deaths under the 17-year Pinochet regime, and the institution is still struggling to improve its reputation.

In recent years, Chile has enlisted its military in civic action projects to build rural highways. One Chilean official says commanders made a conscious choice to restrict their work to largely deserted rural areas, because "people would get scared if they saw the military building up their street, considering the legacy of trauma caused by the military in Chile."

In other areas, troubled military histories directly contradict the goals of civic action projects. In the 1960s, the mission for many Latin American militaries was not

defending the environment, but enhancing the ability to exploit it, or even actively destroying. Today, defending the environment and protecting indigenous people from exploitation are part of civic action missions. But for many, having the military defend them is a classic case of setting the fox to guard the chicken coop. It also resembles previous American strategies of winning 'hearts and minds'. An older version of this was The Alliance for Progress—a U.S. concoction where Latin American armed forces were given substantial U.S. funds for civic action projects through nation-building and strengthening the economy by modernizing basic facilities and improving the infrastructure. It was seen as a way of finding a non-political role for the armed forces. But it had an important role in legitimizing them. Before, many armies had important roles in social and

A reform of the police must include measures to root out corruption and to force greater compliance with human rights standards

economic development, but they never had the resources themselves. But the Guatemalan military, for example, was even given its own bank. This gave them lots of autonomy, money to make changes, and control over civilian duties.

Most Latin American countries are wary of re-empowering the military with Scout-like roles, because of the low popular support for many of the region's elected politicians. Democracy is fickle and people tend to support leaders they see as capable and powerful. Conscious of the potential political threat an improved image for the armed forces represents, some governments have resisted expanding military roles into civic action or policing. In 1990, Bolivian president Jaime Paz Zamora explicitly denounced US insistence on expanding the role of the Bolivian armed forces in the nation's anti-drug campaign. He warned that such a role might undermine civilian control over the military, increase levels of repression and social violence in the Bolivian countryside, and thus pave the way for a future military coup against his democratically elected government. Similar concerns were expressed by former presidents César Gaviria of Colombia and Alan García of Peru.

Another issue is that some soldiers don't want to be turned into police or NGOs. They fear being converted into a militarized police force or humanitarian aid providers. But practising such roles at home can nevertheless help them contribute in a positive way, preparing to undertake such activities abroad. Many militaries are the best equipped to handle large-scale natural disasters, for example. This humanitarian assistance is the only international role the Mexican military is now undertaking. But Mexico is the exception in a region whose militaries have become overwhelmingly internationalized.

CONCLUSION

There can be no doubt many of Latin America's militaries are experiencing a deep internal transformation that is resulting in a fundamental change in their roles. Some are facing fundamental reforms, professionalization and modernization at home, which in many cases aims to better equip them for the internationalization of their missions. How successful such changes will be in Latin America remains to be seen. Much will depend upon military willingness to relinquish its power and accept civilian

control. There are still many constitutional and cultural changes that need to be made in many countries in order to reinforce civilian control over their armed forces.

The general willingness of many militaries to embrace these recent changes is evidence that they are living deep cultural changes themselves. It also shows they've realized the value of peacekeeping and other international missions from a military, as well as a humanitarian, point of view. The reduced political power of the militaries almost everywhere has helped many forces shed their governing ambitions and drive home the fact that they are servants of the state. There is an unlikely, but still present, threat of military attempts to form government, particularly in unstable democracies, so some countries fear involving the military in civic action projects that overshadow police or NGOs in civilian roles.

In some cases, there is concern about creating a glowing image for a largely respected institution that has the potential to outshine the reputation of many

Most Latin American countries are wary of re-empowering the military with Scout-like roles (...)

political leaders. Rather than fear being overshadowed by this new military humanism, politicians need to implement appropriate public policies that target the root causes of their country's security problems. The stability of the region depends on civilian governments' ability to earn public confidence— which requires looking

beyond short-term, cosmetic efforts to address the socio-economic causes of instability.

Overall, the internationalization of Latin America's militaries can also be seen as a sound policy decision. It gives them a new *raison d'être* and paid duty in an era of low cash flow. It also encourages human rights components in military training, and provides an opportunity to improve interoperability with their own forces and those of other militaries. It encourages fence-mending with neighbours. Moreover, it puts them to work doing good in the world, while helping provide the security and stability needed so that political, social and economic development can be strengthened in Latin America and abroad.

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