
Book Reviews

A handbook for dismantling the armed forces of Ibero-America

by Gretchen Small and Dennis Small

The Military and Democracy: The Future of Civil-Military Relations in Latin America

edited by Louis W. Goodman, Johanna S.R. Mendelson, and Juan Rial
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The vehemence with which Argentine President Carlos Menem responded to the recent military protest in that country led by Col. Mohamed Alí Seineldín, shocked observers worldwide. From the outset, Menem called for the death penalty to be applied to Seineldín and his followers; he backed off only when faced with an outpouring of national and international opposition.

Why such violence? Why would Menem risk turning Colonel Seineldín, the acknowledged hero of Argentina's Malvinas War against Great Britain, into a murdered martyr for all nationalists across the continent?

The answer lies not with Menem, but with his international backers in the Anglo-American Establishment, whose policy objectives are shaped by their global power-sharing deal with the Soviets. Their joint objective is to dismantle the armed forces of all Ibero-America, thereby leaving the continent defenseless in the face of Soviet-sponsored narco-terrorist and other subversion—as is now occurring in Colombia, El Salvador, and elsewhere. The armed forces of Argentina and neighboring Brazil, in particular, are in the way: They stubbornly remain bulwarks of morality, pro-development sentiment, and a sense of national purpose, and they have not acquiesced to their institutional dismantling.

This policy of dismantling the military has been operational for a number of years. Over the course of the 1980s, it was pushed by Henry Kissinger and Oliver North's Project Democracy apparatus, which used the promotion of "democracy" and "human rights" in Ibero-America as a weapon to attack nationalist institutions there, in particular the armed

forces. The end-result of this policy is visible in Panama today, where there is no national military force any longer: The U.S. Army runs the show, from top to bottom.

This Establishment policy is laid out, justified, and presented with its philosophical underpinnings, in the volume reviewed here. The theses of this study, which was designed and financed by the U.S. government, and which consists of 17 chapters by as many authors, can be summarized as follows:

1) The "preparation for a new age" of superpower cooperation and "internationalist economic policies" of the International Monetary Fund variety, demands the radical restructuring of the Ibero-American military, under U.S. supervision, and the creation of a "new civil-political culture."

2) The principal obstacle to this is the outlook among at least a faction of the Ibero-American military, especially in the Southern Cone countries of Argentina and Brazil, that they have a national mission to defend the values of the "Christian West . . . honor, dignity, loyalty . . . [and] to guard and guarantee the development process." Such a national security doctrine is mistaken and dangerous, in the view of the authors.

3) This outlook is decried as "Messianic," "fundamentalist," "authoritarian," "ethical-religious," "ideologically inflated," and "patriarchal." It is a view whose ideological basis is found in a "historical period predating the Enlightenment," and which believes that there is a fundamental "struggle between good and evil."

4) This philosophy has been "shared and reelaborated by the armed forces of the Southern Cone, [and] is disseminated throughout the rest of the subcontinent through numerous technical missions. . . . The most notorious [of these] was the presence of [Argentine] Col. Mohamed Alí Seineldín in Panama between 1986 and 1988."

5) This "ethicist" current in the military must be rooted out and supplanted with "pragmatism" and a new "democratic-liberal doctrine . . . of national stability" which defines a new, narrower mission for the military—such as becoming

“a specially trained national gendarmerie.”

6) There are three models cited for the State Department's intended dismantling of the Ibero-American militaries: “A self-important military that had forged an unholy alliance with local oligarchies . . . [was] defeated by popular uprisings in Mexico (1910-1917), Bolivia (1952), and Nicaragua (1978).”

The sponsors of the project

The Kremlin leaders couldn't have concocted a set of policy proposals more favorable to their strategic interests, if they had financed the study directly. But they didn't have to. The U.S. government did it for them.

As the preface explains, the essays in the book are the result of a several-year-long project entitled “Civil-Military Relations and the Challenge of Democracy,” run through the School of International Service of The American University in Washington, D.C., and PLEITHO, Sociedad de Analisis in Montevideo, Uruguay. The project was U.S. government-run and financed: “Primary financial support for the project was provided by the Office of Democratic Initiatives of the United States Information Agency.” The Southern Command and the Secretary of the Army provided logistical and other support to the project. The State Department was involved at every level and stage: “Dr. Norma Parker and Ms. Roma Knee, of the Office of Democratic Initiatives, USAID, Dr. Luigi Einaudi, Terry Kleinhauf, Dr. Michael Fitzpatrick, Bismark Myrick, and Col. Curtis Morris, Jr., USAF, of the Office of Policy Planning and Coordination, Bureau of Inter-American Affairs, Department of State, provided sage advice and assistance with logistics throughout the project.”

In early 1987, the project organizers “invited some 20 experts on civil-military relations” to a planning meeting at the American University to “identify major issues for examination,” set up a work plan, assign chapter authors, and so forth. Drafts of the essays were initially presented at a meeting in Panama City, Panama in December 1987. Logistics for the meeting were arranged by the U.S. Army Southern Command, under Gen. Fred Woerner.

In May 1988, a conference was held at the American University to discuss the conclusions and develop “the themes raised by the project.” The editors proudly note that this was the largest privately sponsored meeting of high-ranking Ibero-American military officers held in the U.S. (“more than 50 Latin American military officers at the rank of colonel or above, including three defense ministers” attended). And why not? Transportation for the Ibero-American military to the conference was provided by the U.S. Secretary of the Army.

The final drafts of the essays published in the book were pulled together after this conference, as were plans “to extend the network.” Now the sponsors expect the publication of the study to further the process of building “pluralist democracy” in Ibero-America—i.e., to the dismantling of the military.

Attack on Ibero-America's Christian culture

This book is hardly the first study of the Ibero-American military coming from such quarters. In fact, a number of the experts involved have spent a lifetime on this issue, preparing the groundwork for the current policy. This is the case, for example, with Luigi Einaudi, who has been a State Department policy planning expert on Ibero-America for nearly a quarter-century, through Democratic and Republican administrations alike. Einaudi, currently U.S. ambassador to the Organization of American States, is widely known as “Kissinger's Kissinger for Ibero-America.” He has written extensive psychosocial profiling studies of the Brazilian and Peruvian militaries, in particular.

What distinguishes the mentioned volume from all earlier studies is its identification of the philosophical and cultural issues at stake, and its unabashed insistence on the need to bring about a total paradigm shift in the Ibero-American military.

Juan Rial, one of the three editors of the book, and a senior researcher at the Uruguayan institute PLEITHO, centers his argument on the need to create for the military a new self-conception to replace their dominant Catholic worldview, a self-conception more in accord with liberal secular society. Today, members of the Ibero-American officer corps:

do not accept the idea that they are members of an organization that can be created, changed, and even “closed down” . . .

Adherence to forms of thought derived from the Christian tradition is a constant among the armed forces of Latin America. In many countries, the military position coincides with the official state position, in that Catholicism is acknowledged as the official religion of the country. In other cases, this stand accentuates the divorce between the armed corporation and the state, particularly when there is marked secularization of the states, which is perceived to be associated with a democratic-liberal political regime. In all cases, the democratic-liberal doctrine and its implementation are perceived to favor the dissolution of traditions rooted in a natural order.

Rial complains:

Some members of the officer corps identify the West with older processes. They believe that today's West is the heir of Greece, Rome, and the Holy Roman Empire—the defender of Catholicism and the so-called natural order. They believe that the Reformation introduced a deviation of that tradition by opening the door to liberalism and to the “dissolving” values introduced by the North Atlantic revolutions. . . . [These tendencies do not dominate] except in some of the more im-

portant armed corps—that is, those of the Southern Cone.

The problem with such an outlook, Rial states bluntly, is that it views the world in moral terms, i.e., that there is right and wrong, and that the military must play a role in “the struggle between good and evil.”

Another contributor, Carina Perelli, also a PLEITHO researcher and a graduate of the universities of Grenoble in France, and Notre Dame in the U.S., puts it thus:

The division between the “pragmatists” and the “fundamentalists” within the military is simply a parallel to that produced within civilian society, between the “politicians” and the “ethicists.” Such division is singularly important, in that it transforms political problems into problems of principle—by definition not negotiable. The potential for compromise is thus limited. . . . The essence of the military group journalists call fundamentalist is . . . the principles that guide its actions—principles that can be synthesized in the struggle between Good (incarnated in the Christian West) and Evil (embodied in the international Communist movement).

Rial is confident, however, that such a view of the world—which actually dares to call for a defense of Christian values!—can be extirpated. Fortunately, he reports, a “post-Enlightenment” outlook prevails in the West—a reference to the 18th-century British and French school of philosophy which promoted an empiricist view of nature and man converging on atheistic materialism. There are no universal truths or values in society or the universe, the victim of the Enlightenment argues, only a pluralist interplay of differing, but equally valid, opinions. Ibero-American military leaders will have trouble implementing their views in a world dominated by such philosophy, Rial gloats:

Taking on projects whose ideological basis is found in a historical period predating the Enlightenment makes it difficult to obtain firm allies for a long-term enterprise. International contexts in which there is a predominance of the rationalism deriving from the Enlightenment, superimposed on postmodern cultural developments, are not favorable to such attempts.

Redefining the military’s mission

But such difficulties are not sufficient to thwart military nationalists, the State Department-funded study argues. It is also necessary to define for them a new, smaller mission. The problem today is that the armed forces think too big: They actually believe they are responsible for safeguarding the nation’s vital interests—a task which presumably were better left to the bankers and the State Department!

Authors Goodman and Mendelson trace the problem back to the 1964 seizure of power by the Brazilian military:

The 1964 Brazilian elaboration of a national security doctrine, which formalized military professional responsibility to respond to internal security threats and to play a role in national development matters, has profoundly influenced debates in other militaries.

Worse still, the Brazilian military has emerged virtually unscathed from the recent return to civilian government. Author Alexandre Barros, who has written broadly on the Brazilian military and was trained at the Catholic University of Rio de Janeiro and at the University of Chicago, states with frank disappointment:

The military establishment emerged from the military regime completely intact. It was touched neither as an institution nor in its human composition. . . . No military personnel were purged, expelled or punished.

In addition to Brazil, the other country that receives especially hostile treatment is Argentina, mainly at the hands of author Carina Perelli. Her thesis is that “prolonged contact with power” has led to the “ideological inflation” of the military, which “is characterized by the sanctification of political principles.” She prefers “ideological deflation, [which] is characterized by the reevaluation of secularization and a call for realism, which discharges ethical-religious commitments from politics . . . [and] visualizes politics as the art of the possible.” This “ideological inflation” has led to very dangerous consequences, according to Virginia Gamba-Stonehouse, the author of the chapter entitled “Missions and Strategy: The Argentine Example.” Gamba-Stonehouse was trained in strategic studies at the University of Strathclyde, Wales, and taught strategy at the high commands of the Army, Air Force, Navy and Chancery in Argentina. She opens her piece with the following alarm:

In South America, the armed forces have usually taken a leading role in the formation and development of the nation. Revolution and independence have been, on the whole, military experiences. This fact has been greatly exaggerated, so that the military, has perceived its role to have been the foundation of independence and national unity. . . .

The military believed that its role was intimately linked to the development and progress of its societies. It proposed to guard and guarantee the development process. . . .

The military feels it is its duty to interpret the wishes of the “silent majority” in its societies, particularly when internal disorder or governmental immobility on

development and economic issues threatens the future of the nation-state. It feels responsible for safekeeping, safeguarding, and guaranteeing a future for the nation that it helped build.

There is a related problem, according to Perelli's essay, and that is the military's self-assigned mission to fight a "total war" against the enemies of their nations' development. She describes the offending outlook:

The subversive war is a total war. This implies that it is a kind of conflict in which there is no room for negotiation or reconciliation of interests. . . . The military of this region firmly believes that it is living a total war, a situation in which wars are life-or-death struggles . . . and what is at stake is the very soul of the nation. . . . The doctrine of revolutionary war extends the military institution's perception of threat to unthinkable limits, both in time and space. At the same time, it provides an inextinguishable justification for the military's political action.

This is all terrible, according to the authors. The military must be separated from feeling any institutional responsibility for either: a) national development, or b) the security of their nation-state as a whole. The simplest answer, concludes Rial, is to deny outright the existence of any such thing as the nation or national interest! In a fit of unbridled nominalism, he argues that the only thing that exists is "society," the momentary, pluralist aggregation of different groupings, each with their own self-interest:

The legitimacy of the armed forces as a political action is founded on the nation. They exist because of and for the nation. It is to that mythical entity—the nation—that they owe "subordination and obedience". . . . [But this] overlooks the impossibility of any purely objective identification of "national interests" or "the common good."

Perelli then poses the task facing her fellow enemies of the Ibero-American armed forces: They must come up with a doctrine to replace the nation-building commitments they so much hate. But it must be a doctrine "of equal level, rigor, and importance, capable of making reality intelligible with the same degree of simplicity and plausibility." But that is easier said than done. "Thus far," she admits, "there seems to be no military or civilian doctrine on the ideological market that meets these requirements."

Rial is also wary about the prospects, and especially of how to sell the package to the targeted military. In his concluding remarks he warns that the task should not be approached in any way that might be perceived as "a threat aimed directly at the corporation. . . . In Latin America, the

military organization is unlikely to accept a change in its model of socialization and its internal authoritarian norms. . . . The emergence of situations in which serious threats are perceived must not be permitted."

How to go about this?

The authors suggest that the hated doctrine of "national security" be replaced with a new doctrine of "national stability . . . conceived as the balance of the political, economic, psychosocial and military powers." The military should face up to "the necessarily limited international roles [their] countries can play," stop thinking of itself as the guardian of the national interest, and instead concentrate on its "professional capabilities," leaving politics to the professional politicians, the bankers, and the State Department. The study suggests extensive training in "managerial" and "administrative" skills, as well as merging the different branches of the armed forces into one, as a means of eliminating institutional resistance to the new tasks.

So who is the enemy?

Certainly not communism, say the book's authors. And not the narco-terrorist hordes that the Soviets help sponsor. In fact, at one point they refer critically to the Peruvian military's "overblown perceptions of threat" posed by the Shining Path narco-terrorists. This, in reference to the continent's most brutal organized subversive force, which has murdered thousands of people in the last decade, which self-admittedly works symbiotically with the international drug traffickers in Peru, and which today controls as much as half the national territory, according to some Peruvian sources.

Author Varas goes so far as to criticize the Ibero-American military for their "thoughtless alignment on the Western world defense side." Could it be he would prefer them to align with the Soviets? Yes. In fact, the entire State Department-run study ends up proposing that all of Ibero-America be transformed into a zone of "neutrality and self-exclusion from the global conflict." What is needed is "the military neutralization of the region and its transformation into a buffer zone . . . in respect to world conflict. In a way, a special 'power void' would be gradually created."

And what would fill this "power void" achieved by destroying the Ibero-American militaries? Why, the United States, of course!

Regional defense systems should protect the hemispheric collective defense interests through a revision of military relations with the United States and a new design for hemispheric defense that is separated from global confrontation. Because world peace depends on regional defense systems, the need for a U.S. presence in them must be recognized.

Sounds a lot like Panama today.