INTER-AMERICAN SECURITY RELATIONS: THE FUTURE OF US MILITARY DIPLOMACY IN THE HEMISPHERE

by

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Every nation, great or small, whether part of the central strategic balance or not, is fundamentally concerned with its ability to defend the integrity of its territory and maintain internal order. It is of substantial political importance to the United States that we be able to respond to the felt needs of nations with which we seek constructive relations across the broad range of contemporary issues. The United States cannot expect to retain influence with nations whose perceived defense needs we disregard. Thus, a careful security assistance policy is a crucial instrument of our national policy in much the same sense as are our political support and economic assistance.

–Henry A. Kissinger, in a statement before the House Committee on International Relations, 6 November 1975

As Dr. Kissinger clearly suggested, there are two significant issues that the US government must face in its military relations with Latin America. First, each country will seek to acquire the necessary military hardware and supplies it deems essential for the protection of national interests. Second, the provision or denial of such military items has become a troublesome question in US foreign policy. Like it or not, in one way or another, the transfer of armaments will continue to adversely affect relations–especially security and military-associated relations–between the United States and the majority of the countries in the Latin American region.

Historically, the armed forces of Latin America have depended upon the US and Western Europe for needed weapons, equipment, and training. Until World War II, arms were obtained primarily from European countries. However, by the end of the war, the United States had become the predominant supplier of most types of military equipment. With the transfer of American arms, US doctrine, training, and advice gained a stronger role in the development of the Latin American armed forces. But by the late 1960's a sharp shift began to occur. Numerous Latin American countries began again to turn toward European suppliers. Although the United States continued to supply military equipment and spare parts, arms supply relations between Latin America and the United States gradually deteriorated. For the past decade, US arms transfer policies have received considerable criticism in Latin America for being restrictive and interventionist in tone, while the same policies have been criticized in the United States for being ineffective and/or supportive of repressive governments.

Current trends suggest that for the remainder of the 1970's, US arms policies will remain controversial and undoubtedly play a significant role in relations between the United States and Latin America. What is

evident is that these policies concerning Latin America continue to be grounded in myths which generate controversy and absorb government time and energy as US policymakers attempt to reconcile competing interests. This is so, despite the fact that the US portion of the Latin American arms market is relatively small. When compared to other areas of the world, the proportion of US security assistance going to the Latin American region is virtually insignificant. For example: during the 1973-75 period, Latin America represented 2 percent of the grant military assistance program, 2 percent of foreign military sale orders, 12 percent of foreign military sale credits, 4 percent of commercial sales, and received but 3 percent of grant excess defense articles from the inventories of the US services.[1] Between 1966-75, US arms accounted for about 32 percent of the total arms transferred into the Latin American region; in the early 1960's, the US had provided 40 percent of the total, but by the 1975-76 period, the US share had dropped to 15 percent.

The basic foreign policy dilemma facing the United States is how to continue to effectively pursue its national interests in Latin America while segments of the government rely on punitive policies in the attempt to influence the behavior of governments in the hemisphere (Latin American governments view these as efforts to impose unacceptable standards). Because many of the Latin American governments are military-dominated (and most likely will remain so for the remainder of the 1970's), current attitudes prevailing within the US government, media, and public may well stimulate a quasi-ideological reaction to "military dictatorships," if not to the Latin American region as a whole. Such trends suggest the return of a paternalistic mood toward Latin America which would take the form of anti-militarism. Thus, the manner in which US arms policy and military representation is managed for the region of Latin America will strongly influence the intensity of diplomatic and military alienation in the Western Hemisphere.

The specific intent of this essay is to briefly examine some of the perceptions, conditions, and government policies which have contributed to the straining of security and military relations between the US and Latin America. Special attention will focus on (1) the uncertain relationship between the transfer of US arms and supplies and the enhancement of US national security; (2) the US attempt to influence the acceptance of a human rights "code of behavior" by linking the effort to the provision of arms; (3) the growth of military nationalism in the region; and (4) the need to evolve a military diplomacy program that can help manage the strains and changes in US-Latin American military relations.

US-LATIN AMERICAN MILITARY RELATIONS: ARMS TRANSFERS AND NATIONAL SECURITY

The range of questions that are suggested from an examination of military assistance and arms sales policies is very broad. One question, however, appears central: Does the transfer of arms to Latin America enhance the national security of the United States? The answer has eluded academicians and government policymakers alike. The difficulty arises from the fact that the consequences and impact of security assistance may be uncertain—that is, the political benefits are often short-lived and the economic and psychological costs unknown, usually unintended, and generally long-range. However, of greater consequence is the uncertainty and ambiguity of events taking place in Latin America that are often beyond the management capabilities of local governments and even to a greater extent, the United States.[2]

Despite these limitations, several questions need to be addressed, if only for practical policy planning reasons. Questions that are fundamental to a better understanding of current and future military relations in the hemisphere include: Is US security enhanced or influence obtained via specific forms of military relations? How much political leverage does military assistance offer the US with a recipient country in Latin America? Further, if we have the analytical capacity to

determine if military arms and training make a difference, do we have the same capacity to ascertain which US interests are affected?

Most recently, the provision of military hardware to Latin America has usually caused concern because of the possibility of contributing to arms races, local border conflicts, or the strengthening of military regimes that violate human rights. (In the past, however, US interests in good working relations and in the acquisition of influence and leverage seemed to require that the United States engage in competitive marketing and preemptive selling in an effort to mimimize the quality and quantity of Latin American arms purchases from "third countries.") During the last decade, US arms transfer policies have been complicated by the lessening of US presence in the region, the continuing effort by Latin America to diversify relations, the likelihood of conflict rather than cooperation between Latin American countries, and the repressive and authoritarian practices of several countries in the region. Under these circumstances, a standardized set of criteria for military relations and arms transfer decisions was made virtually impossible—despite the persistent efforts of the US government. The most apparent pattern that seems to emerge from three decades of security assistance to Latin America has been the temporal nature of diplomatic benefit and the uncertainty of the consequences of the transfer of arms to the region. Satisfactory conclusions have not been reached regarding Latin American military requirements, or the relationship between security assistance programs and regional stability, influence, access to raw materials, keeping the Soviets out, and the protection of American interests.[3]

As has already been suggested, the link between the provision of arms and military services and US national security is vague and ambivalent. Unless one assumes that "stability," access to raw materials, and contact with local militaries is by definition enhancing the national interest and is a reflection of influence, then one must be prepared to examine critically much of the conceptual framework of military relations between the US and Latin America. To view arms sales as a diplomatic tool for influence, considerably more knowledge is necessary concerning the decisionmaking processes of recipient countries. The uncertainties and complexities of events in Latin America and the lack of agreeable criteria to evaluate the consequences of security assistance make an assessment of the degree of influence that the US gains from the transfer of arms suspect. Defining, as well as actually identifying, cases of influence as a direct result of security assistance is difficult and can often be misleading. For that matter, the influence of small allies and friends in a security assistance relationship is often overlooked—often to the detriment of US interests and foreign policy objectives.[4]

The concern for seeking influence via a military relationship raises a further conceptual problem—namely, the debate over the extent to which security assistance should be based on valid military requirements or on the concern for political influence and leverage. Often, the US has appeared to be considering the psychological needs of a particular regime and/or military institution, regardless of the merit of the military requirements for such arms. The concern for political good will frequently becomes the principal (although unspoken) rationale in the provision of arms.

The concern for the maintenance of political good will with the armed forces and military regimes of the region led the US to

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what eventually became nothing more than a preemptive arms transfer policy in most cases. The preemptive rationale consisted of the following assumptions: (1) if the US refused to respond to a military request, arms suppliers not concerned with US interests would provide the military items; (2) other countries were frequently seen as being more effective in utilizing an arms supply relationship at the expense of the US; and (3) Latin American countries were believed vulnerable to the pressures and intrigues of arms-selling countries (non-Communist as well as Communist). Latin American countries, once exposed to "third country" military hardware, training, and advisors were thus seen as somehow adversely affecting US security interests and incapable of protecting their own national interests.

However, by mid-1977, newly legislated Congressional restrictions and arms transfer policy guidelines enacted under the Carter Administration have made it virtually impossible to call upon the preemptive arguments as justification for future arms transfers to the Latin American region. In fact, White House, State Department, and Congressional statements suggest that not only is the US no longer worried about "losing influence" to "third country" arms suppliers, but that we are prepared to try to use security assistance as an instrument of influence in pursuing human rights objectives. For some segments of the government and public it would be a diplomatic failure if the US did not attempt to utilize what many believe to be the region's military dependency (maintenance and logistic support for US equipment) as a means to influence the manner in which Latin American governments—especially military regimes—treat their citizens.

Congressman Edward I. Koch, a leading human rights advocate and critic of security assistance to Latin America, has stated that he hoped the State Department would utilize the ban on military aid to convey United States concern about repression in Latin America. He went on to note that "the Uruguayan regime is not alone as the oppressor of its own people. Chile, Brazil, Argentina, and many other nations in Latin America seem to have no regard for the basic human rights of their people. The cutoff of military aid to Uruguay should send a message to those regimes as well."[5]

This turn of events was at first not understood and eventually not tolerated by the regimes to which the criticism was directed.

There is one final consideration in assessing the linkage between arms transfers and US security. Substantial evidence exists to suggest that military assistance to Latin American countries can result in improving the quality and performance of the armed forces. However, providing arms and training has seldom been apolitical.[6] It has been virtually impossible for the United States to exercise control over the political consequences of security assistance. Nevertheless, we are still confronted with the proposition that while the influence and security derived from providing military assistance is seldom commensurate with the assistance provided, it has proven just as difficult to determine the costs to the US of not providing security assistance.

Thus, the assessment of future security assistance relationships between the US and Latin America should take into account not only a realistic determination of what is attainable, but also an evaluation of the unintended political consequences—including undesirable involvement in domestic and regional politics and unwanted identification with repressive regimes. The capacity to attempt the reformulation of Inter-American security relations will be largely influenced by the ideological and psychological inclinations of US decisionmakers toward institutions, personalities, and events in Latin America. More frequently than not, critics as well as proponents of US-Latin American military relations have tended to regress to solutions largely determined by ideological predispositions. The US concern for the protection of human rights abroad is illustrative of this problem.

HUMAN RIGHTS AND MILITARY RELATIONS: A NEW CODE OF BEHAVIOR?

With the increased presence of military governments in Latin America (reaching an apex with the Chilean military coup which literally destroyed the regime of Salvador Allende in 1973) and the intensified efforts of governments throughout the region to deal with terrorists, the US Congress took the lead in the mid-1970's to examine the relationship between US foreign policy and the violation of human rights in Latin America. Congressional hearings on the status of human rights in Chile, Argentina, Uruguay, and Central America eventually led to the termination of grant and credit assistance to Chile and Uruguay. The past few years of Congressional-Executive branch debates on the subject of arms sales and human rights make it quite evident that for the remainder of the decade the future of US-Latin American military relations will be greatly affected by the disillusionment that exists in Congress—fostered and supported by the media and various private interest groups—with US foreign assistance programs and with the behavior of the Latin American armed forces.

At the base of the current debate over human rights conditions in Latin America is the extent to which basic American political values should be reflected in this country's foreign policy.[7] Injecting American values and morality into US foreign policy has come to mean avoiding entangling relationships with repressive military regimes and promoting human rights in every country of the region. One such entangling relationship is reflected in the image that the US is the "arms merchant," or worse, the exporter of "tools of repression" for Latin America.

Some critics of US arms sales have focused on what is termed "repression technology." The support of police organizations and paramilitary forces via the provision of small weapons, riot control equipment, surveillance devices, and training to Latin American governments is seen as a form of support for governments engaged in the violation of human rights.[8]

However, for others, arms sales and security assistance relationships are necessary foreign policy instruments for the defense of "friendly" countries and, thus, in the best interests of the United States. These proponents of arms transfers generally downplay the fact that security assistance relationships do in fact identify the US with regimes whose citizens have been subjected to personal violence and inhumane treatment.

In the effort to gain a larger role in the administration of security assistance, the Congress has passed numerous restrictions in amending the International Security Assistance and Arms Export Control Act.[9] Included in these restrictive efforts have been a yearly ceiling on total military sales, the gradual elimination of grant assistance and military missions, the prohibition of security assistance to a country found in gross violation of human rights or practicing discriminatory policies, and the subjection of arms sales over $25 million to Congressional approval.

Congressional (and now White House) pursuit to promote human rights has come to severely constrain military relationships between the US and Latin America. The efforts taken to terminate grant assistance and military assistance advisory teams, to gradually limit military training, and to eventually eliminate credit assistance can be seen as an attempt not only to disassociate the US from military regimes but also to disrupt formal relations with military institutions in Latin America. One need not be reminded that the current concern for human rights abroad is much in keeping with US efforts in the early 1960's to suspend assistance and/or recognition for the purpose of influencing a regime to maintain liberal democratic practices. Such paternalistic measures, however, proved to be ineffective.

What should be kept in mind, however, is that until the arrival of the Carter Administration, the target of these restrictive amendments was not only Latin America, but the Executive branch of the American government. From a variety of views within Congress, the Executive branch of government has been lax in utilizing military,

economic, and financial assistance to these countries as a means to protect US investments, tuna boats, and democratic government; to discourage the purchase of expensive and sophisticated military equipment; and to insure human rights.[10]

Past experiences suggest that the curtailment of military sales or economic assistance may have minimal impact on a regime's desire or ability to protect human rights. In practice, the restrictions will be easiest to implement against countries such as Chile, Uruguay, Guatemala, El Salvador, and Nicaragua—countries which continue to attract Congressional scrutiny.

Patricia M. Derian, the State Department's Coordinator for Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs, declared that, "President Carter is very serious about human rights. This is not a fad. This commitment has become a key element in the consideration of American foreign policy.... We are concerned about human rights violations wherever they occur." She said the Carter Administration's human rights platform was based on three fundamental principles: (1) The right of a citizen to be free from torture; cruel, inhuman, or degrading punishment; and imprisonment; (2) The right to food, shelter, education, and health care; and (3) The right to enjoy civil and political liberties including freedom of speech, religion, press, and to move in and out of one's country.[11]

Obviously, problems exist in attempting to use military and economic assistance as a lever to influence the behavior of other governments. As yet undetermined are the qualitative and quantitative factors that might trigger an assistance cutoff and what it is that in fact constitutes official and gross violation of human rights. Complicating the assessment of human rights conditions in Latin America is the fact that human rights conditions are invariably a function of the overall internal security situation—thus, the official governmental attitude toward violence in general tends to govern national practices in the treatment of individuals. Furthermore, the repressive tactics of governments in their campaigns against rural guerrillas and urban terrorists are often, some would argue, a reflection of weak and corrupt legislative and judicial systems. It is further argued that the repressive measures that are frequently resorted to are often the only effective instruments in the pursuit of internal order and stability—given the weaknesses of national institutions.

The basic foreign policy dilemma facing the United States is how to continue to effectively pursue its national interests in Latin America while developing a nonpunitive approach to the promotion of increased observance of human rights. The danger is that, as relations with Latin America become increasingly inflexible because of either Congressional restrictions on security assistance or the linking of economic assistance to human rights conditions, other countries with fewer inhibitions will more than likely be prepared to provide military equipment to the region. Israeli military sales to Central America and the attempt to sell Kfir fighter aircraft to Ecuador, plus the USSR's willingness to heavily subsidize military sales to Peru, demonstrate the capacity of other countries to take advantage of US inflexibilities.

In response to the concern of some Congressmen regarding the consequences of American unresponsiveness to arms requests, Secretary of State Cyrus Vance told the Senate Appropriations Committee early this year that the Carter Administration recognized and accepted the "risk" of permitting further Soviet penetration of Latin America through arms sales. He noted that the possibility of such setbacks represented a "risk that we are going to have to take."[12]

The US emphasis on human rights and Latin America's concern for internal security are both eroded by the increasing unmanageability of events in the region—i.e., population growth, rural migration to the cities, urban crime and congestion, active and armed groups of both the left and the right, and persistent rural poverty. It should, therefore, not be unsettling to the US to see countries in Latin America experiment politically and economically to solve national development

problems. Some of these countries may well choose nondemocratic and noncapitalist forms of political and economic experimentation. The US, however, should not consider such events as a threat to either its "security" or its "democratic ideals." The US must be prepared to accept and tolerate disorder and instability as the experimentation and frequent failure of social change and development takes place. A foreign policy focusing on the goal of "democratic" or "humanistic" governments abroad in such a regional environment is fraught with the seeds of failure.

At least for the remainder of the 1970's, economic and security assistance programs will remain the principal vehicle through which the US can raise the question of human rights violations. In the face of this, the use of repressive tactics for counterterrorist purposes may periodically provoke a rigid reaction from the United States in the name of human rights. Thus, the continued persistence of military regimes, combined with reliance on torture, assassination, and imprisonment in dealing with subversive groups, could turn the late 1970's into an era of recrimination and alienation between the United States and Latin America. At this point in time, however, the impact of our termination of security assistance to Chile and Uruguay and the rejection by Brazil, Argentina, El Salvador, and Guatemala of any grant, credit, and cash transactions which are subject to human rights review by the United States remains unknown.

REDEFINING SECURITY RELATIONS: THE RETURN TO TRADITIONAL MILITARY DIPLOMACY

The issues associated with US-Latin American military relations, as well as the costs and benefits of security assistance as an instrument in foreign policy, are much more political than military or economic. In addition, the apparent concern for maintaining US military prestige in Latin America may not be as serious an issue as generally thought. The United States is too large and too economically powerful, regardless of the military hardware and services it can offer, to be ignored by Latin American countries. "Prestige" may be an altogether meaningless and costly issue. Furthermore, the limits of US security assistance to Latin America often go unrecognized because of the failure to realize the extent to which military resources can be used by local political actors. Over the decades, numerous Latin American countries have been able to manipulate American commitments and resources as a means to develop a US interest in the regime's survival. In short, the security rhetoric utilized to justify arms transfers to Latin American countries is a major contributor to the weaknesses not only in policy evaluation, but also in exploring options in military relations.[13]

The need to reformulate military relations with Latin America will require extensive inquiry into (1) the aftereffects of a Panama Canal resolution; (2) a diplomatic "opening" to Castro's Cuba; and (3) the demise of institutionalized "anti-Communism" as the common mode of political communication in Inter-American security relations. Given these significant changes in Inter-American relations, the basic assumption of a US-Latin American military relationship should be that it is good diplomacy to have working relations with major national institutions in the hemisphere. The military is one of these major national institutions. However, a US military policy need not have to justify or rationalize an ongoing relationship or program in terms of threat or influence. This is not necessary for effective military diplomacy. More importantly, the fact that the US maintains working relations (to the extent desired by the Latin American country) with a military institution does not preclude the possibility of communicating human rights concerns or any other US foreign policy concern that may arise.

A revitalized US military diplomacy should:

- Deal with Latin American governments as governments—regardless of the extent of military participation.

• Continue the program of military sales, allow credit for only large end-items, lessen the restrictive nature of arms sale policy, and seek to overcome the inertia existing within the arms transfer bureaucracy—especially as it pertains to requests from the smaller Latin American countries.

• "Modernize" the US military training program: curtail combat type training (most Latin American military institutions have this capability) and aim US training programs at the higher officer and NCO levels, with course content dealing with helicopter and transport operations, administration, management, logistics, resources management, higher education, and intellectual/professional exchanges.

• Concentrate on officer exchange programs at the War College and Command and General Staff levels for periods of 2-3 years.

• Maintain 3-5 member US Defense Cooperation Teams, whose presence would be negotiated with each country desiring such a relationship with the US.

The Defense Cooperation Teams, with additional members to be contracted for by the host country for needed technical specialties, should consist primarily of Foreign Area Officers (FAOs) with the language training and knowledge of the country required for effective military diplomacy. The functions of each member might fall into the following areas: one senior officer to act as counterpart to the host country's Minister of Defense and General Staff; a logistics officer who could act as a "broker" to facilitate the acquisition of US military items and services; and a politico-military area specialist responsible for reporting on military affairs and for providing English instruction at military academies and senior service colleges.

What I suggest is that effective and mutually beneficial military relations can be based on less than a security rationale. The maintenance of good working relations with a vital Latin American national institution is of itself a worthwhile foreign policy objective to pursue. Unfortunately, some US attitudes and policies regarding arms transfers to Latin America have generally contributed to the deterioration of US-Latin American relations over the past decade. Punitive measures—be they in the area of arms restrictions or human rights—have stimulated elements of military nationalism and resentment of US paternalism and moralism. US lack of response in the area of military hardware has tended to adversely affect Latin American judgments about our responsiveness in other policy areas—especially in cases where countries are governed by military regimes.

This is not to suggest, however, that the US should engage in promotional arms transfer policies. Such an effort could be just as counterproductive. A reformulated arms sale philosophy should lessen the restrictive as well as the promotional pressures existing within the US government and private sector. Such a policy of arms transfers would enhance American capacity to meet Latin American requests and needs in the face of international competition. Only in this manner can we avoid continued strained relations with Latin American countries, especially since arms sales, at least from our perspective, are largely marginal to American national interests in the region. The US has little to gain from an aggressive arms program. However, we can only contribute to continuing problems in bilateral relations by engaging in restrictive and punitive policies which mainly serve to discriminate against Latin American countries—especially those countries whose governmental leadership is drawn from the officer corps of the region's armed forces.

President Carter's 19 May 1977 statement on "Conventional Arms Transfer Policy" places the burden of persuasion on those who favor a particular arms sale, rather than on those who oppose it. Such a policy could provide the proper balance between promotional and restrictive pressures. However, the complicating factor for most Latin American countries is not the tightening

up of the arms business, but the human rights reports, which they find intolerable and regard as a form of intervention in their internal political affairs.

Despite the criticism and disapproval by the Congress, media, and academic community, the Latin American military will continue to play a significant political role in most Latin American nations. Although professionalization of the military continues, this has not brought about less military involvement in the administration of government or less military influence in the determination of domestic and foreign policy. Of perhaps greater consequence has been the "rebirth" of military nationalism (not a "militarism," as it is so frequently, and erroneously, referred to) among the region's armed forces. As this military nationalism spreads and experimentation in national development continues, the possibility of stronger "anti-foreign" postures increases.

Despite several common characteristics among the armed forces in the hemisphere, military diversity is evident—that is, each military institution and military regime must be understood in the context of its individual society. Ideological and policy differences within each Latin American military institution will periodically alter the political behavior and government programs of the military. Furthermore, as members of a central political institution, military officers will continue to reevaluate the function of their institution in society. Regardless of the directions of specific political, economic, and social changes, the armed forces will inevitably continue to be politically involved.[14]

Given these circumstances of change and uncertainty, a US policy relating to the military in Latin America must therefore be selective, and must of practical necessity focus on bilateral rather than regional policies. The US, in addition, should be sensitive to, though certainly not apologetic nor defensive of, the military nationalism that has grown as a result of domestic and international conditions. While such nationalism may generate less anti-US feeling than would be evident in the civilian population, it is nevertheless present in the military cultures of Latin America. A Latin American phenomenon which now presents a challenge to US interests, though not necessarily security, has been the rise of military intervention and overt military rule. The most significant consequence has been the continual growth in the bureaucratization and militarization of government in Latin America. Such a trend has not prevented the takeover of US investments and properties.[15]

However, a sensitivity to military nationalism will not of itself provide the necessary policy guidance with regard to a particular country. Recognition of the impossibility of a regional military or arms transfer policy remains imperative, and must in fact be supplemented by an understanding of the severe limits on direct US influence on the internal political role of a particular Latin American military institution. The days when individual US military advisors, military doctrine, and the provision of arms might have influenced the behavior of the military institution are rapidly disappearing—if they have not in fact already vanished in such countries as Guatemala, El Salvador, Ecuador, Peru, Chile, Argentina, and Brazil.

US INTER-AMERICAN SECURITY INTERESTS

Latin America does not present a military threat, conventional or otherwise, to the United States. Nor can it be said that a nonhemispheric power has posed a military threat to the United States in Latin America since the Cuban missile crisis of 1962. The absence of immediate threats to US security in the hemisphere cannot, however, be taken to imply the absence of US security interests in Latin America. Experience suggests that security in an interdependent world cannot be defined in strictly military terms. The growing economic and political importance of such countries as Mexico, Venezuela, Brazil, and Argentina, given the shifting balance of world economic power and vulnerabilities, make any simple correlation between "security threat" and "military power" fallacious.

What this suggests is that even the US cannot afford to disregard the concerns and

interests of neighbors. Changing patterns of global communication, increased trade and investment sensitivity, and the dangers of nuclear proliferation have tended to shrink the planet. Geographic proximity remains a critical psychological and, therefore, political-military fact of life. The US will find it virtually impossible not to maintain at least a residual interest in the security concerns of its neighbors. For example, Cuban involvement in Angola and other African nations has demonstrated to the Latin American military communities that a conventional threat from the small Caribbean island is in fact a realistic contingency to plan for. Possessing several hundred thousand well-trained troops, some of the most modern armaments in the world, and fresh from a hard-fought victorious war thousands of miles from home, Cuba represents an imposing, if not at times convenient, threat to many regimes in the hemisphere. This fear exists despite the fact that Cuba, without Soviet support, lacks the necessary seacraft and aircraft to transport weapons and supplies beyond its territory for large-scale and long-term military operations.

An additional consideration for the US is the substantial rise in the activities of nonhemispheric nations in Latin America. While these have, until recently, been principally Europe and Japan—powers generally considered friendly to the United States—they also include the Soviet Union and some East European countries.

However, this is not to say that the conditions of interdependency, geographic proximity, or nonhemispheric country activities indicate a present or future threat to US security. Indeed, their uncertain and diverse nature tells us that even if they did, the threat would not be one that could be met by a traditional military response. Taken as a whole, nevertheless, these three conditions do suggest that US military policy and arms transfer programs can serve foreign policy objectives in the region. A revitalized military policy could (1) serve as a mechanism to demonstrate US responsiveness to Latin American conditions and interests; and (2) maintain the professional contact and communication needed for ongoing cooperation and future contingencies. These objectives do not require large or concessional security assistance programs. They do, however, call for programs whose content should be both professionally sound and politically defensible. Institutional linkages between the United States and Latin American military forces based on professional liaison, training programs, and arms transfers can contribute to these two fundamental objectives in US-Latin American military relations for the remainder of the 1970's.

In seeking to reformulate military and arms transfer policies for Latin America, one must recognize (1) the limitations of gaining "influence" and protecting economic interests via security relationships and (2) the diversity of military institutions and societal environments in the hemisphere. But perhaps the greatest error of all will be to ignore or underestimate the strength, capabilities, and ingenuity of the Latin American countries and their respective military institutions. While no country individually poses a credible political or military threat to the United States, the likelihood of an unfriendly, uncooperative, and united Latin America, determined to make use of domestic resources and international pressure tactics as a means to negotiate better treatment from the US, cannot be totally dismissed.

NOTES

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