IMPLICATIONS OF A NATIONAL SECURITY DOCTRINE AND THE UNITED STATES' INFLUENCE IN LATIN AMERICAN MILITARIES : A HYSTORICAL ANALYSIS

ABSTRACT

Latin American militaries' incorporation of counterinsurgency strategies in the 1950s and '60s left a legacy of state sponsored violence and unimaginable pain for many victims, decades after. This paper explains the various ways U.S. inter-American policy of intervention and the normalization of military training in the Americas has propagated the notion of national security doctrine in Latin America during this period. An historical analysis of three national cases: Guatemala, Cuba and Brazil, are employed to historicize the specific juncture at which the militaries of this region began incorporating counterinsurgency strategies in the first decades of the Cold War era, as well as decipher their motivations to do so.

As seen in the later decades of that era, the decisions to use violence by many military governments in the region were shaped by rulers' beliefs about the acceptability of these ideological strategies, and by the uninhibited use of this ideology. Future U.S. policies in the inter-American system should alternatively be geared toward benevolently promoting and protecting the principles of democracy.

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The United States' inter-American policy during the 1950s and 1960s turned primarily toward the defense against the permeation and eventual spread of Communism into the Americas. Generally, it was believed by the U.S. that this counter ideology had possibility of interfering in U.S. economic interests, forming unfavorable leftist governments, and creating social/political instability in the region. Much of this perceived fear dictated U.S. policy in both open and covert forms in Latin America. In basic terms, the U.S. government introduced and trained Latin American militaries in counterinsurgency strategies, in order to eliminate a perceived communist threat spreading in the hemisphere; helped to topple unfavorable governments; and continued the proliferation of a national security doctrine throughout the region. The goal of this paper is to expand upon the above general statements in order to historicize the specific juncture to which Latin American militaries began incorporating counterinsurgency strategies in the first decades of the Cold War era, and their motivations to do so. By incorporating historical examples from the national cases of Guatemala, Cuba and Brazil, this paper will explore how U.S. policy contributed to the increasing importance of national security doctrine in Latin America during this period.

"From the birth of the republics of the western hemisphere, questions of control of territory and resources; of asymmetric political, military and economic power; of cultural and ideological differences; even of political sovereignty itself have been disputed."[1] These early observations are reoccurring themes that mark the national period in Latin American history and have been used to explain problems inherent in Latin American development in the twentieth century. Various scholarship on Latin

[1] Coerver, Don M, Linda B. Hall. *Tangled Destinies: Latin America & The United States*, University of New Mexico Press. 1999. Pg. 3. Introduction to the relationship between the U.S. and Latin America.

American social, economic and political development throughout this period, indicate that “significant historical changes in the process of Latin American development have always been accompanied, if not by radical alteration of the structure of domination, at least by the adoption of new forms of relations and, consequently of conflict between classes and groups.”[2] These significant changes can be seen in the first decades of the Cold War period, when Latin American development was contingent upon new forms of U.S. domination over the region, and by the adoption of new forms of inter-American policy (counterinsurgency measures and national security doctrine). Crucial to this understanding is U.S. hegemony,[3] which will be explained further.

When the United States’ rose to its hegemonic status post World War II, so did its direct influence over Latin America. Politically, economically and militarily, the U.S. forged new domineering relations with the whole of Latin America, acting in self-interest, usually attaining its goals. This asymmetry of influence and gross imbalance of power meant that whenever the United States believed its interests were threatened, it would act like other hegemons typically have acted in the past, by safeguarding its security, economic, and ideological interests.[4]

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[2] Assertions made by Cardoso, Fernando Henrique and Enzo Faletto. "Dependencia y desarrollo en América Latina." University of California Press*. 1979.* Pg. 14.

[3]Layne, Christopher. “The Unipolar Illusion Revisited The Coming End of the United States’ Unipolar Moment.” *International Security.* Vol. 31, No. 2 (Fall 2006). Drawing from other scholars, Layne defines hegemony by five principles: “First, militarily, a hegemon’s capabilities are such that no other state has the wherewithal to put up a serious fight against it, also a hegemon enjoys economic supremacy in the international system and has a preponderance of material resources. Second, hegemon acts self-interestedly to safeguard its security, economic, and ideological interests. Third, hegemony is about polarity. Because of its overwhelming advantages in relative military and economic power over other states in the international system, a hegemon is the only great power in the system, which is therefore, by definition, unipolar. Fourth, a hegemon purposefully exercises its overwhelming power to impose order on the international system. Finally, hegemony is fundamentally about structural change, because if one state achieves hegemony, the system ceases to be anarchic and becomes hierarchic” Pg.11.

[4] Layne explains that this is still the way the U.S. functions in the international system, and finds that U.S. supremacy will not last. Ibid., Pgs. 11-12.

Real and imagined threats to U.S. national interests came from the fear of Soviet expansion to any free country threatened by internal subversion, and by unfavorable anti-capitalist economic and ideological movements forming in the western hemisphere. The U.S. began to address global Soviet threats in 1947, with a foreign policy of "containment."[5] That same year a similar but more regionally directed policy was established by the U.S., in conjunction with other nations in the western hemisphere. At the Inter-American Conference of Rio de Janeiro a common interest was discussed- the defense of the continent against outside aggressors. In spite of their differences on economic issues, namely the United States' unwillingness to provide economic aid to Latin America, both international bodies agreed upon the Rio Treaty.[6] Also known as the hemispheric defense treaty, it was one of the first post war regional security arrangements entered into by the United States. It called for and provided collective action against aggression that originated within or outside of the Americas and promoted hemispheric solidarity.[7] National and regional security concerns were not the only issue of importance for the U.S. government, however. Unfavorable economic development and reform by various governments in Latin American also threatened U.S. economic interests.

In the aftermath of World War II, the maintenance of economic superiority over the hemisphere was a top priority to the U.S. officials negotiating its place in a bipolar

[5] According to Coerver and Hall (1999), "The containment policy was based on the contention that the Soviet Union was inherently hostile to the United States and ideologically committed to expansion" Pg. 107.
[6] López-Maya, Margarita. "Change in the Discourse of US-Latin American Relations from the End of the Second World War to the Beginning of the Cold War," *Review of International Political Economy*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (1995). Pg. 147.
[7] Coerver, Don M, Linda B. Hall. *Tangled Destinies: Latin America & The United States*, University of New Mexico Press. 1999.Pg. 108.

world system. Problems of the United States began when Latin American nations, motivated by a growing world market, and the desire to industrialize, began instituting various economic liberal reforms and Import Substitution Industrialization development (ISI) models.[8] Some of these efforts were threatening to U.S. national interest, as they would create national programs that would affect the interests of powerful foreign companies. I primary example can be found in the case of Guatemala under the presidency of Jacobo Arbenz in 1951.

A social reformist, Arbenz instituted extensive land reforms that resulted in the expropriation of more than 200 acres for redistribution, including much of banana plantations owned by the United Fruit Company in Guatemala.[9] Subsequently, the U.S. associated these progressive efforts as Communist in nature, for they breached both hemispheric security and solidarity.[10] Threatened by the prospect of the Arbenz government spreading ideas of land reform to other areas in the region, the Eisenhower administration, via the CIA, planned, funded and armed a small opposition force to topple the "communist regime."[11][12] Although the CIA referred to this operation as a

[8]According Victoria Murillo, "Import substitution industrialization (ISI) was a development strategy adopted by most Latin American countries after the Great Depression. They originally raised tariffs to compensate for the shortage of foreign exchange produced by the crisis, but this policy gradually evolved into active protectionism that included subsidized exchange rates for importing inputs with closed markets. ISI created few incentives for developing internationally competitive industries and, thus, exporting. See Murrillo, Victoria. "From Populism to Neoliberalism: Labor Unions and Market Reforms in Latin America." *World Politics.* 52 (January 2000). Pg. 138.

[9] Handy, Jim. *Revolution in the Countryside: Rural Conflict and Agrarian Reform in Guatemala, 1944-1954*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press. 1994. See also, Hagopian, Frances and Scott Mainwaring. Eds. *The Third Wave of Democratization in Latin America: Advances and Setbacks.* Cambridge University Press. 2005. Pg. 203.

[10] See discussion in Weshler, Lawrence. *A Miracle, A Universe: Settling Accounts with Torturers.* The University of Chicago Press. 1998. Pg. 116.

[11] Hagopian, Frances and Scott Mainwaring. Eds. *The Third Wave of Democratization in Latin America: Advances and Setbacks.* Cambridge University Press. 2005. Pgs. 203-204.

[12] According to James Mahoney (2001), "solid evidence suggests that Arbenz would have been removed even in the absence of U.S. intervention primarily because land reform was unacceptable to the military, whose entire organizational existence was linked to the polarized rural economy." See Mahoney, James.

victory in the Cold War struggle, it was widely believed throughout Latin America that the CIA was involved in covert operations in that nation. This covert intervention marked a policy switch in U.S.- Latin American relations from a noninterventionist "Good Neighbor" policy of the Roosevelt Administration, to the more interventionist, anticommunist policies of the Cold War.[13] This historical account of U.S. intervention, in the name of national or hemispheric security, was not uncommon. The 1954 success of the U.S. covert operation in Guatemala later encouraged the U.S. to form a similar plan in dealing with revolutionary Cuba.[14]

The most notorious accounts of U.S. intervention in Latin America during this period occurred during the intense power gridlock of the U.S. and Soviet Union in the early 1960s. The two polarized leading nations found themselves in a heated arms and economic race. Although both superpowers enjoyed asymmetrical trading relationships, it is evident that some countries profited more than others. In terms of Soviet trade relations, one of its major dependents was the island country of Cuba. Joined in ideological solidarity, these two nations caused an underlying threat to democratic stability in the western hemisphere. The U.S. dealt with this situation like it had so many times before, by basing the majority of its foreign policy on mitigating threat by blocking or trying to block Soviet/communist expansion.

In 1960, Eisenhower took the first steps toward covert action against Castro by directing the CIA to train Cuban exiles for a possible invasion.[15] In a number of

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"Path-Dependent Explanations of Regime Change: Central America in Comparative Perspective," *Studies in Comparative International Development*. Spring 2001, Vol. 36, No. l, pp. 126.

[13] Sikkink, Kathryn. *Mixed Signals: U.S. Human Rights Policy in Latin America*. Cornell University. 2004.

[14] Coerver, Don M, Linda B. Hall. *Tangled Destinies: Latin America & The United States*, University of New Mexico Press. 1999. Pg. 114-115.

[15] Ibid., Pg. 120-121.

memorandums from the records of a White House meeting in 1961, top U.S. officials discussed how the United States has undertaken a number of covert measures against Castro, as well as aided in the training of anti-Castro guerilla forces in Guatemala.[16] In a notorious ploy of U.S. policy of intervention in the Cold War era, Eisenhower simultaneously made public forms of intervention by placing trade sanctions, cutting agricultural imports and imposing an embargo on all exports to Cuba.[17]

After the election of President John F. Kennedy in 1960, the first covert attempt made by this administration to block Soviet expansion in Cuba took a similar form as that of the Guatemalan coup sponsored by the CIA six years earlier. Not surprising, many officials who devised the plan to topple the Guatemalan government in 1954, also played similar roles during JFK's first attempt to topple the Cuban government. Sadly, the U.S. invasion of Cuba at the Bay of Pigs in 1961 became a national tragedy, "an operation that had failed to remove the communist leader Fidel Castro."[18] Frustrated by this failure, Kennedy placed increased pressure on the Cuban regime, including more covert action along with economic, propagandistic, and diplomatic efforts.[19] These actions reinforced previous inter-

[16] White, Mark J. *The Kennedys and Cuba: The Declassified Documentary History.* Ivan R. Dee; Chicago. 2001. Pgs. 15-16.
[17] According to Coerver and Hall (1999), Eisenhower used his authority under the 1949 Export Control Act, which left open the possibility that foreign subsidiaries of U.S. companies could continue sales to Cuba. Ibid., Pg. 122.
[18] White, Mark J. *The Kennedys and Cuba: The Declassified Documentary History.* Ivan R. Dee; Chicago. 2001. Pg. 13.
[19] Specific covert activities included sabotage to agricultural and natural recourse production, and assassination attempts on Cuban leaders including Castro. See Coerver, Don M, Linda B. Hall. *Tangled Destinies: Latin America & The United States*, University of New Mexico Press. 1999. Pg.125.

American policy by invoking national and hemispheric security as a means to legitimate U.S. intervention.

After the triumph of the Cuban Revolution, military anticommunism was mostly directed toward extreme left political groups, which looked toward the Revolution as a model for defeating U.S. hegemony and military repression throughout Latin America. This experience occurred in the wake of the Guatemala invasion in 1954, which led to the onset of repressive regimes that were later countered by guerrilla insurgencies.[20] The U.S. and Guatemala perceived these guerrillas as threats to national security and hemispheric destabilization. Adversely, the U.S. also helped train guerrilla insurgents to combat the Castro regime in the early 1960s. Both experiences arguably bolstered the need for the development of an inter-American standardization of counterinsurgency methods and military training in combating subversives and unfavorable governments.

In 1946, the U.S. Army's School of the Americas (SOA) became the first institution established as the center of the repressive military apparatus to counter Communist threat in the hemisphere. Located in the U.S. controlled, Panama Canal Zone, this institution functioned as a U.S. Army training center for Latin American militaries. Since its inception, the SOA trained over sixty thousand soldiers, including many notorious military dictators and high-level officers, in combat-related skills and counterinsurgency methods.[21] The SOA, along with a network of other military facilities in the U.S., served not only to familiarize Latin American officers with democratic

[20] Hagopian, Frances and Scott Mainwaring. Eds. *The Third Wave of Democratization in Latin America: Advances and Setbacks.* Cambridge University Press. 2005. Pg. 203.
[21] Gill, Lesley. *The School of the Americas: Military Training and Political Violence in the Americas.* Duke University Press. 2004. Pg. 6.

principles and U.S. governance, but also served to indoctrinate these men in methods of counterinsurgency, intelligence gathering and interrogation.[22]

A prominent example of the direct effect of this U.S. military training and exposure received from the SOA and other military schools in U.S. is seen in the case of Brazil. In the 1964 military coup of President Goulart (a progressive nationalist bent on unprecedented land, labor and educational reform), 80 percent of the core group of senior officers who formed the first military government after the coup was trained in the United States.[23]

The legacy of SOA training in the Brazilian case are more pronounced when taking into account the denunciation of the U.S. by the Brasil: Nunca Mais[24] authors. The authors "hold the United States co-responsible to a significant degree for the doctrine of national security[25], its imposition on Brazil in the 1964 coup, and the growing use and increasingly effective organization of torture in Brazil thereafter."[26] The SOA and other U.S. training facilities were undoubtedly crucial to the way in which U.S. propagated and contributed to the importance of national security doctrine in Latin America during this period. A recent ethnographic study has argued that over the course of the twentieth century, this institution has been used as a means to extend and

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[22] Weshler, Lawrence. *A Miracle, A Universe: Settling Accounts with Torturers.* The University of Chicago Press. 1998. Pg. 118.
[23] Weshler, Lawrence. *A Miracle, A Universe: Settling Accounts with Torturers.* The University of Chicago Press. 1998. Pg. 60.
[24] Book based on the records of the Brazilian regime and the verbatim transcripts of military trials, which were never intended to be read by the public. "A shocking report on the pervasive use of torture by Brazilian military governments, 1964-1979, secretly prepared by the Archdiocese of Sao Paulo." Ibid., Pg. 9.
[25] See also: Serbin, Kenneth. *Secret Dialogues: Church-State Relations, Torture, and Social Justice in Authoritarian Brazil.* University of Pittsburgh Press. 2000. Pgs. 28-29. In the case of Brazil, the Army established a doctrine of national security, based on that of the United States, "that focused on the political and psychological dangers of leftism and asserted the interdependence of security and economic development."
[26] Ibid., Pg. 62.

maintain U.S. power in Latin America, by manipulating independent governments as it pursued political, economic, and security interests in the region.[27] This is not to say however, that many Latin American militaries held their own dominant place in Latin American political history without the U.S. intervention.

In the Cold War period, authoritarian interventions were common occurrences in response to political crisis throughout Latin America. This usually entailed the armed forces seizing control over the state. Generally, the militaries' role was that of a "guarantor of stability and political order, but it was unable or unwilling in most cases to act as an impartial referee between different societal forces and interests."[28] This military history included: a legacy of ideological conflicts between capitalism and socialism, and between economic liberalism and different forms of authoritarian populism; the persistence of rampant poverty and inequality; and the application of a national security doctrine that emphasized political/social order and limited the scope of decent.[29]

Prior to rise of Fidel Castro's regime, the Latin American military establishments had echoed the United States' sentiments toward internal subversion, and have been historically characterized as vaguely anti-Communist. It was only until about the late fifties and early sixties, after the triumph of the Cuban Revolution, that a doctrine of national security began to form. As the real threat of communism materialized in the Caribbean, militaries throughout the hemisphere emerged as their respective countries'

[27] Gill, Lesley. *The School of the Americas: Military Training and Political Violence in the Americas.* Duke University Press. 2004. Pg. 7.
[28] Payne, Mark. Daniel Zovotto and Mercedes Mateo Diaz. *Democracies in Development: Politics and Reform in Latin America.* Inter-American Development Bank, Harvard University. 2007. Pg. 4.
[29] Ibid., Pg. 4.

major front against it.[30] This is arguably the juncture at witch various Latin American militaries banned together and began incorporating counterinsurgency measures in their respective countries during the first decades of the Cold War.

The goal of this paper was to historicize the specific juncture in which Latin American militaries began incorporating counterinsurgency strategies in the first decades of the Cold War era, and their motivations to do so. The United States' national security concerns over Soviet and communist expansion in this hemisphere led to a regional defense block vis-à-vis internal leftist leaders and groups, heightening after the triumph of the Cuban Revolution. The historical examples from the national cases of Guatemala, Cuba and Brazil have shown the various ways U.S. inter-American policy of intervention and the normalization of military training in the Americas has propagated the notion of national security doctrine in Latin America during this period. As seen in the later decades of the Cold War era, the decisions to use violence by many military governments in the region were shaped by rulers' beliefs about the experience of the acceptability of these ideological strategies, and by the uninhibited use of this ideology in U.S.-Latin American relations historically. In this summation, it is not difficult to understand why works of history do not usually depict the U.S. policies in the inter-American system as benevolently promoting or even protecting the principles of democracy.[31]

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[30] Weshler, Lawrence. *A Miracle, A Universe: Settling Accounts with Torturers.* The University of Chicago Press. 1998. Pg. 113.

[31] Friedman, Max Paul. "Retiring the Puppets, Bringing Latin America Back In: Recent Scholarship on United States–Latin American Relations,**"** *Diplomatic History.* Volume 27, issue 5, 2000. Pg. 621.

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