

EMBARGOED UNTIL: WEDNESDAY A.M., July 4, 1984

A MONKEY ON DEMOCRACY'S BACK

- Latin American military still considers itself supreme authority*
 - Recent attempted coup in Bolivia: military is the master rather than the servant*
 - Reagan administration's dramatic increase in arms transfers breeds the basis for future insecurity for hemispheric democracies*
 - Latin American debt crisis partially due to military buying binges*
 - Rapid transformation and reduction of size and potency of military establishments called for in COHA study*
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In a soon-to-be-released study of the relationship between military establishments and prospects for development of strong democratic institutions in the Western Hemisphere, researchers of the Council on Hemispheric Affairs found that the seeds of regional disintegration are being planted now by the rapid expansion of arms sales by the U.S., Western Europe, Brazil and Israel, among others, to Latin America. The forthcoming COHA study assigns specific blame to the Reagan administration's Central American policy of stressing largely meaningless "free" elections that install figurehead presidents and assemblies and ignore constitutions, while leaving the military intact as the ultimate arbiter of power.

According to the COHA study, today's Latin American military no longer is the guarantor of constitutionalism, as it once saw itself, but rather is its saboteur. In the past several decades, the Latin American military has taken up sides with the wealthy oligarchy, determined to maintain its institutional supremacy, and has displayed its capacity to do so at all costs -- be they legal, moral or human. Rather than providing protection against a foreign invasion, recent history provides numerous instances of the military acting out its role as a warrior against domestic populations, and not in the civilian-sanctioned defense of territorial sovereignty. In the final analysis, the Latin American armed forces as a whole are loyal not to their countrymen, but only to their profession.

As the recent attempted coup in Bolivia illustrates, the military of that country -- the bulk of which so far has remained temporarily loyal to the Hernan Siles Zuazo government -- exacted a staggering fee of millions
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of dollars from the national treasury before turning over power to the civilian government. While the Bolivian armed forces have not fought in a foreign war in half a century, they have managed to overthrow almost every democratic government voted into office during that period.

CORRUPT LEGACY

The legacy of corruption-ridden military rule throughout Latin America has compounded the troubles of those successor civilian governments seeking to address their enormous foreign debts. In the case of Argentina, the former military regime inherited a foreign debt of \$6.4 billion in 1976. When it relinquished power last year, the foreign debt stood at \$43 billion. A significant portion of this debt was, and still is, unaccounted for. The military threw away billions more dollars in the Falkland Islands debacle in 1982.

Throughout the 1970s, the Brazilian military maintained that an "economic miracle" was occurring in that country. It is now evident that the country's military regime epitomized mismanagement and corruption. During a brief seven years of military rule, Brazil's foreign debt ballooned from \$4.7 billion in 1974 to over \$51 billion in 1981.

So too, traditional spending patterns and use of national resources reflect a sad legacy of military profligacy and excessive attention to self-preservation with scant regard for human development and social welfare. In 1980, public expenditures per soldier in Latin America totalled \$7,514, as compared to per capita public spending of \$75 on education and a miserable \$27 on health services. Military spending as a percentage of total government budgets for Central American countries particularly highlights the predominance of the armed forces in that war-torn region. In 1982, El Salvador's military consumed 23.4 percent of total government spending; Guatemala over nine percent; Honduras over eleven percent; and Nicaragua nearly 15 percent. Military spending in these countries totalled \$513 million in 1983, reaching \$114 million in Honduras, \$165 million in Guatemala, \$116 million in El Salvador and \$118 million in Nicaragua. In 1982, defense spending in the four countries as a percentage of Gross Domestic Product maintained its high level. El Salvador's military spending consumed five percent of total GDP; Guatemala four percent; Honduras, five percent; and Nicaragua over six percent.

ADMINISTRATION BOLSTERS TREND

The Reagan administration's Latin American emphasis on security in the name of anti-communism, rather than reform, has done little to stem the trend. Under the Reagan administration, official U.S. military assistance to friendly Latin American regimes skyrocketed by a staggering 171 percent between 1981 and 1983.

What is called for is the rapid transformation and reduction of the Latin American military, a shrinking of its priorities and role to that of legitimate guarantor of constitutional freedoms and government in the hemisphere, the forthcoming COHA study notes. Argentine President Raul Alfonsin's efforts to bring a despicable military institution into line with rational priorities, through a massive cutback in the military's share of the strapped national budget, serves as a noteworthy precedent. It should be noted that Alfonsin's success in this endeavor came despite the White House's eleventh-hour attempt last November to resume arms sales to Argentina by certifying that the lame-duck military had made "significant progress" in its human rights performance.