Democratizing Revolutionary Soldiers:
Politicized Militaries and Democratic Transitions in Latin America

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I. Introduction

When Hugo Chávez died in April 2013, he left behind a country torn between those in the throes of grief and those who celebrated the end of his reign. He also left behind some compelling questions: in particular, after increasingly ideological rule for nearly fifteen years, could Venezuela return to competitive democracy? The scenario was particularly troublesome since Chávez appeared to have thoroughly politicized the armed forces, nurturing a military that would be loyal both to him and his political project. With the idea of an apolitical military now well in the past, how might the armed forces respond to potential political change?

This paper explores transitions from ideological militaries by comparing the Venezuelan model of civil-military relations and Venezuela’s post-Chávez political situation to prior transitions from ideological rule in Latin America. The paper focuses on three cases, Nicaragua, Mexico and Chile, all countries that democratized following more ideological regimes. By “ideological regimes,” I refer to regimes in which politics are organized around a single political option, with opposition limited to either secondary positions or prohibited altogether; none are fully democratic, but the range of options
spans from semi-democratic to authoritarian, or even totalitarian. Unlike Venezuela, all three of the other cases established their ideological regimes through force. Both Mexico and Nicaragua had armed revolutions (1910 and 1979, respectively), with revolutionaries then assuming control of the armed forces—directly in Nicaragua, and through a series of purges and reforms in Mexico. In Chile, the authoritarian regime of General Augusto Pinochet was established through a coup d’etat in 1973. All three of these countries, however, ultimately transitioned to competitive democracies with elected governments from non-revolutionary parties; and, in all of these cases, the militaries mostly remained in the barracks during these transition periods. Why? And what lessons can be learned from these cases for Venezuela?

The paper proposes that these cases shared some important similarities, significant for the Venezuelan transition. First, in all three cases, despite having lost power, the outgoing regime and its supporters retained substantial political support and an important political presence; the protection of out-of-office allies combined with the wariness of the power-holding opposition encouraged depoliticization. Secondly, at least initially, the new governments did not seek to repoliticize the government in lines with a conflicting ideology, thereby allowing the military to adapt without an immediate confrontation with its new political bosses. Third, in the cases with the most abrupt transitions—Nicaragua and Chile—the military enjoyed substantial autonomy during the transition period, even retaining continuity with respect to the military’s Chief of Staff. This delayed and prolonged the transition to full democracy, but again, prevented the reversals that a more aggressive policy may have allowed. In sum, in all of these cases, institutional interests encouraged militaries to adapt to a professionally neutral role, a transition facilitated by pragmatic civilian policy decisions.

II. Civil-Military Relations in Non-Democratic and Transitional Regimes: The Challenge of Reform

Patterns of civil-military relations can be examined from a variety of perspectives, including (1) organizational (Nordlinger, Huntington), (2) military prerogatives (Stepan), and (3) military roles and missions. On each dimension, ideological regimes—whether radical or conservative authoritarian—tend to fall at the opposite pole from liberal democratic regimes. Organizationally, ideological regimes rely on shared ideas and often even administrative overlap between government and military leadership, in contrast to organizational specialization and separation in the liberal model. Militaries under ideological regimes also tend to enjoy more prerogatives than those in liberal regimes, including more political influence and often more resources. Finally, in ideological regimes, military roles and missions are generally more broadly defined, and often include domestic functions, in contrast to more narrow and primarily defense-oriented roles in liberal democratic regimes. Democratization thus implies not just a change in leadership, but potentially a much broader transformation of civil-military relations,
including not only meaningful civilian oversight, but transforming the organizational model, reducing military prerogatives, and redirecting military roles and missions.

**Structure of the Armed Forces.** Two of the most influential scholars in the study of civil-military relations have been Samuel Huntington and Eric Nordlinger. In *Soldier and the State*, Huntington argued that there are two primary patterns for civilian control of the military, objective control and subjective control. In brief, objective control relies on the organizational separation of the military from the government, based on the premise that military professionals would have a certain amount of autonomy in their area of expertise and that the armed forces could therefore function as a politically neutral tool of elected officials (as with Clausewitz). In contrast, with subjective control, political leaders seek a political affinity with military leaders. Parallel to this, Nordlinger differentiates between “liberal” versus “penetration” models (Nordlinger 1977: 12-18). Nordlinger’s liberal model closely resembles Huntington’s concept of objective control, with the premise of elected leaders who set policy and a politically neutral, professional military bureaucracy. Likewise, Nordlinger’s penetration model exhibits important similarities to Huntington’s idea of subjective control, in particular, in that both perceive a much blurrier line between political and military functions. Nordlinger’s penetration model thus refers to cases in which political leaders deliberately “penetrate” the armed forces ideologically, seeking to enhance political affinity between the armed forces and the military leadership.

Of these models of civil-military relations, those based on organizational separation and professionalism—objective control and liberal—are most suited to political democracy, in large part because they allow different political leaders, parties and ideologies to alternate in power, without provoking a military response. Whether that democracy were a more limited electoral democracy or more participatory would likely be irrelevant, as long as the civilian-political sphere and the bureaucratic-military sphere remained organizationally separate. On the other hand, the penetrative (or subjective control) model is more problematic for democracy, since this would essentially require either re-politicizing or replacing the entire military leadership with each successive political administration. This model thus tends to be more suitable and more successful in non-democratic regimes, especially revolutionary regimes, with the expectation that a single political ideology and, in general, a single dominant political party will remain in power indefinitely. As will be discussed, despite the many democratic aspects of Venezuela’s Bolivarian regime, civil-military relations under Chávez, and now Maduro, have conformed much more to the penetration model than the liberal model. Rather than structuring civil-military relations around the principle of separate spheres of expertise, with policy decisions left to the civilians, the Chávez
administration deliberately sought to “penetrate” and politicize the Venezuelan armed forces.

**Military Prerogatives: Empowering the Armed Forces.** Another factor influencing patterns of civil-military relations involves the privileges and powers enjoyed by the armed forces, or “military prerogatives.” In *Rethinking Military Politics*, Alfred Stepan proposes that levels of contestation—military challenges to civilian authority—and prerogatives shape the strength and stability of civilian governments (Stepan 1988). When the military has substantial prerogatives, especially if levels of contestation are also high, then civilian regimes are very vulnerable.

Stepan outlines a number of prerogatives that could be problematic, having to do with issues such as excess autonomy, direct political influence, and authority in non-defense areas. For example, with respect to autonomy, Stepan highlights situations in which the military has a significant amount of freedom in determining its roles; there is little legislative authority over the budget; little or no legislative influence over promotions; and military officers staff most top defense positions, rather than having a civilian Minister of Defense and largely civilian-staffed Defense Ministry. In the area of direct political influence, among high prerogatives would be having active-duty members present in the Cabinet. Finally, with respect to authority in non-defense matters, important prerogatives might include military control of top intelligence agencies; military authority over the police; and military involvement in state enterprises (Stepan 1988: 94-97).

In new democracies, governments struggle to reduce these prerogatives, in order to assert civilian control over the armed forces. Yet this can be risky. When governments threaten key prerogatives, military resources, or military impunity with respect to human rights, leaders may well find themselves facing an uncooperative or even hostile military; such was the case in Argentina in the mid- to late- 1980s (See Norden 1996). Relatively older democracies, like Venezuela, can also face challenges from the military, however, if the military has gained disproportionate prerogatives. If those prerogatives are left in place, the military may exert excessive influence over politics, a situation that Stepan refers to as “unequal civilian accommodation” (Stepan 1988: 100). Rescinding prerogatives, though, risks losing military loyalty.

**Military Roles.** In post-authoritarian Latin America, many have expressed considerable opposition to using the armed forces for purposes other than defense, and have found internal security roles to be particularly threatening to human rights. Others, however, have argued that what really matters is that civilians leaders make the primary

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1 This discussion draws from Stepan’s list of 11 selected military prerogatives, but does not strictly follow that list.
choices about what the military does and does not do (Pion-Berlin). Utilizing the military to help with development tasks (or civic action, as this has traditionally been referred to in Venezuela), is a very tempting way to make use of an available force, especially when the government may lack other organizational resources to carry out its policies. When used for poverty relief, this can even be seen as contributing to “human development,” which, O’Donnell would argue, would enhance “agency” and therefore deepen the quality of democracy. At the same time, though this can provide a base from which the military could expand its political influence, especially in times of crisis. In Venezuela, authority is fused and military roles tend to be more diffuse, rather than narrowly specialized, just as during authoritarian rule in Chile and Nicaragua, and in Mexico even now.

III. Military-Political Fusion in Venezuela

It has been widely accepted that in a strong representative democracy, elected officials make the policies. That means that these democracies cannot be constrained by such unelected forces as occupying or dominant foreign governments, or by an interventionist military (Dahl; Karl and Schmitter). Yet, most analysts of civil-military relations have also argued that the form of civil-military relations most suitable for democratic continuity would be organized around a functional separation between the military and civilians (Huntington, Nordlinger). These analyses also, however, presume a “liberal” model of democracy, emphasizing individual rights and voice.

While Venezuela defines itself as a democracy, none of these presumptions hold true. Since Hugo Chávez first took office in 1998, civil-military relations have been based on the premise of fusion rather than separation, with both a strong military presence in government as well as a substantial government effort to shape the political values of the armed forces. With respect to structure, the government pursued a “penetrative” model rather than the liberal separation of political and military functions. Military roles have also reflected more of a civil-military fusion than separation, with the armed forces assuming a wide range of functions that might be considered more naturally “civilian” in nature.

Chavismo and the Origins of Venezuela’s Bolivarian Military. From 1958 until the MBR-200 failed coup attempt in 1991, Venezuela was seen as one Latin America’s strongest democracies. The military enjoyed considerable professional autonomy, and engaged in a wide range of military roles, but did not exert substantial influence over democratic politics. Thus, despite the fact that the leading political parties, Acción Democrática and Copei, apparently did cultivate personal ties amongst the officer corps, overall, pre-Chávez civil-military relations could be best categorized as mostly liberal/objective control, with moderate military prerogatives, and some role diffusion (military involvement in civic action and counter-insurgency) (Norden 2014). In other
words, while pre-Chávez Venezuela may not have resided at the furthest end of the continuum from separation to fusion, it nonetheless did appear to have been far enough in that direction to provide a reasonably secure democracy... at least for a while.

**Ideological Penetration: Creating a Socialist Military.** When Hugo Chávez was elected president in 1998, it was already evident that he would be very different from the parade of AD and Copei presidents who had preceded him. First, he gained his prominence through his role as one of the lieutenant colonels that led the 1992 coup attempt. Competing in the presidential election really just meant pursuing another path to power; it did not mean that his goals or values had changed since the coup conspiracy. The fact that his initial political party, MVR, was clearly named for the coup coalition, the MBR-200, and that he chose to be inaugurated on Feb. 4th, 1999, the anniversary of the coup, underscored the continuity in the movement. Secondly, Chávez’ primary agenda item in his election campaign, and even before, was to hold a constitutional convention to sweep away every remnant of the struggling “Punto Fijo” democracy of AD and Copei, and to create a new regime that would be both more participatory and more attentive to the concerns of the poor. Thus, it was evident that Chavez’ approach to civil-military relations was bound to include some significant changes.

In many respects, civil-military relations under Chávez had more parallels with revolutionary regimes like those in Nicaragua or early Mexico than with other democratic regimes in Latin America (See Albright 1980). Rather than seeking objective control, Chávez sought to transform the military into a revolutionary partner. Unlike in Nicaragua, however, where a guerrilla military created a revolution and therefore was a central revolutionary player even before taking power, Chávez was dealing with a military that was divided and by no means fully committed to a radical transformation of the state. Even those who had supported either the February or November 1992 coup attempts had mostly been pursuing more limited goals, essentially seeking to oust Carlos Andrés Pérez, or at most, to displace the AD-Copei “partidocracia.” Thus, just in Cuba under Fidel Castro, the leader became the central focus of military loyalty (On Cuba, see Albright 1980: 559).

Therefore in terms of the broad structure of civil-military relations, the Chavez administration pursued two main tactics: (1) “penetrating” the military, and (2) counterbalancing the existing military through the creation of a supplementary armed force directly loyal to the president. With respect to the first of these, Chávez simultaneously sought to directly politicize the armed forces, demanding loyalty to a socialist ideology, and intervened in personnel processes to ensure that top officers would maintain an ideological affinity with the regime. The 1999 constitution facilitated this by removing the legislature’s role in approving promotions, thereby concentrating more of this authority in the hands of the president. The 2002 coup against Chávez, which was quickly reversed by a counter-coup, did help the government identify disloyal members
of the armed forces. At that point, however, the government remained too vulnerable to begin actively purging opposition military officers. After the 2004 recall referendum—with a comfortable win by Chávez, and increasingly so following his 2006 reelection, the government no longer needed to tread lightly, and began aggressively purging non-Chavista officers. This process was further accelerated when the government began requiring that members of the military declare their commitment to “Fatherland, Socialism or Death” (Lopez Maya 2011: 230). Many members of the military refused to comply, and either retired or were removed at this point, leaving in place a strongly politicized, chavista military.

At the same time, however, the government was well aware that ensuring a completely loyal military would be very difficult. Members of the military had, after all, carried out a successful coup in 2002, even if this was eventually reversed. Thus, Chavez also began developing a supplementary armed force, the Bolivarian Militia, composed of armed civilians acting in a reserve capacity. According to government discourse, the purpose of this militia was to protect the country from potential invasion (i.e. from the United States), however, the more likely intent was to create a separate force directly loyal to Chávez. Notably, shortly after assuming the presidency in 2013, following Chávez’ death, Nicolas Maduro proposed creating an additional Militia, this one composed primarily of urban workers; this would appear to have been an attempt to build a force more directly loyal to him, rather than just to his deceased predecessor.

Military Prerogatives: Militarization of Politics? In addition to pursuing ideological penetration and creating a counterbalancing force, the government further advanced civil-military fusion by dramatically expanding the military presence in government. As mentioned, Chavez came from the military; he brought politics into the military, and brought the military into politics. Chavez gave the armed forces both power and resources, even while seeking to check their power with the militias. Corrales notes that there were extensive military appointments to the government from the beginning, and that by 2008, approximately one third of cabinet positions and governorships were occupied by active or retired military officers (Corrales 2010: 33). Maduro has maintained this substantial military presence in the cabinet, with a similar proportion of the military composed of officers, including the powerful Economics Ministry.

This military presence in the government indicates substantial military prerogatives, especially in the realm of military oversight of non-defense issues. Beyond that, the armed forces benefitted from very high military spending during the Chávez period, far disproportionate to the threat from any likely enemies.

Diffusion of Roles: Taking the Military Beyond Defense. The final area where we see this distinctive civil-military fusion in Venezuela has to do with military roles. The Nordlinger’s “liberal” model and Huntington’s model of “objective control” both
presume that the military’s job is defense; that is, fighting wars. That said, all militaries to some extent go beyond that—providing emergency support during natural disasters, or building roads to facilitate the movement of troops. In Venezuela, this fusion of roles has gone much further. Chávez utilized the armed forces for non-defense purposes from the beginning, particularly through the Plan Bolivar 2000, the earliest of the famed Bolivarian Missions (Norden 2008: 213). With this program, the military engaged in a wide range of functions, including repairing public buildings, such as hospitals, and even distributing low cost food. In addition to these developmental and poverty relief roles, the military has also been involved in domestic security, especially during the massive protests that have wracked the country in early 2014.

Thus, Maduro has thus far sought to prolong ideological rule and civil-military fusion, repeatedly referring to Hugo Chávez and seeking to legitimize himself as Chávez’ designated successor. This would seem to likely to prevent disruption of the civil-military status quo, in that this apparent mere change in personnel would be unlikely to challenge subjective control in the same way that democratization might. Yet, under chavismo, loyalty was primarily to Chávez, and the military grumblings increasingly being heard in mid-2014 suggest that neither the military nor the public truly accept Maduro as a sufficient substitute for the Leader. Thus, in some respects, the Maduro administration faces many of the same issues as Mexico, Nicaragua and Chile did during their democratic transitions—but, without the actual democratization.

IV. Revolutionary and Reactionary Regimes in Mexico, Nicaragua and Chile

While the four cases considered in this paper are, to some extent very different, they nonetheless share some important similarities. Mexico, Nicaragua and Venezuela underwent some form of leftist “revolution,” while Chile endured a military coup resulting in prolonged military rule. In Mexico and Nicaragua, these events can be considered classic, or “great” revolutions, carried out by armed revolutionary forces. In Venezuela, Chávez was ultimately carried to power through elections and mostly utilized democratic methods to move the country toward his “Bolivarian” model of revolution. In other ways, though, the three revolutionary cases are not so different: all to some extent prioritized nationalism and social justice, but all of three countries also included important elements of democracy. In contrast, Pinochet’s regime in Chile prioritized social control and anti-communism, with few remnants of democracy. Yet, like the others, the choice of ends above means was not absolute; the military regime’s 1980 constitution created certain bounds to the regime’s ongoing authoritarianism, including mandating the 1988 plebiscite that ultimately removed the regime from power.

**Mexico.** Mexico’s 1910 revolution brought together a broad swath of Mexican society, all sharing the same determination to remove the country’s decades-long dictator, Porfirio Diaz from power. Middle class, politically liberal moderates joined with
Emiliano Zapata’s landless *campesinos* from the South and Pancho Villa’s cowboys and workers from the North, with each launching relatively separate campaigns to remove Díaz, and engaging in a brutal and prolonged battle for power once they succeeded. From 1911, when Díaz left power, until 1928, presidencies continued to be determined largely through force, and ended mostly by assassinations.

While the relationship between the defeated, Federalist, military and the new Constitutionalist forces was rather complex, an important aspect of the revolutionary transition was that Díaz’s military was officially disbanded, allowing for a new military—aligned with the revolution—to take its place. Faced with multiple revolutionary factions however, political leaders sought to simultaneously induce loyalty to the overall revolution, but depoliticize the armed forces with respect to the continuing political infighting. Thus the new revolutionary regime combined elements of both liberal and penetrative models of civil-military relations, ultimately establishing very effective and reliable civilian control.

As Diez and Nicholls describe, since the 1940s, civilian leaders and the military had observe a “civil-military pact,” according to which political leaders would demonstrate “absolute respect for the integrity of the military institution, and “the armed forces would give unconditional backing of the revolutionary elite and the revolutionary goals...” (2006: 9) The Obregón and Calles governments began the effort to establish civilian control over the armed forces, shrinking the budget and drastically reducing the number of personnel during the post-revolutionary period (Díez and Nichols 2006: 7; Serrano 1995: 432). Early leaders also enhanced professionalization through improved military education, while establishing practices such as rapid rotation in top military positions to prevent opposition movements from forming. At the same time, though, the Mexican military was appeased by substantial professional autonomy, with little civilian interference in issues like expenditures and promotions.

Yet, underlying this was an important base of shared revolutionary heritage and values, allowing the PRI—the party that came to dominate Mexican politics—to combine elements of objective and subjective control. As Mónica Serrano writes, “the victory of the Revolution and of the Constitutionalist Army brought to power a *sui generis* army whose popular roots were also shared by the civilian elite. .... not only did the armed forces eventually consider themselves as guardians of the Revolution, but also as active participants in the process leading to the fulfillment of revolutionary goals” (Serrano 1995: 428). Methods of subjective control, or penetration, can be seen in a variety of areas, including control of military personnel, with early policies designed to ensure that only those loyal to the military would head the armed forces; and military missions that extended well beyond defense, that were congruent with revolutionary values. To ensure a convergence of civilian and military values, Obregón and Calles began by “purg[ing] the armed forces of rivals, or perceived rivals, by retiring hundreds of generals, arranging
the mysterious disappearance of others, and bribing the rest” (Díez and Nichols 2006: 7). In place of those eliminated from the military, the revolutionary leaders recruited soldiers seen as likely to be loyal to the new regime (Díez and Nichols 2006: 8). Prerogatives like the military’s privileged position within the dominant political party-- especially during its 1938 PRM (Partido de la Revolución Mexicana) incarnation, when Cárdenas designated the military as one of the four revolutionary sectors that would constitute the party—also helped to cement subjective control of the armed forces.

With respect to roles and missions, after the revolution, regardless of formal statements emphasizing defense, the Mexican military primarily exercised domestic roles, acting in support of the revolutionary regime and the dominant political party. Their responsibilities thus included controlling election protests; the “pacification of numerous rural political disturbances;” and fighting against guerrilla movements, at least three decades before the 1994 Zapatista rebellion (Rondfeldt 1973: 2, 3). Furthermore, with mandatory military service, “...since the Cárdenas administration, the Mexican military has had responsibility for implementing the revolutionary ideals as part of its institutional culture” (Díez and Nicholls 2006: 9). According to Rondfeldt, the Mexican military also exercised a variety of “residual political roles,” such as serving as the ear of the government in rural areas where citizens might not have easy access to political officials, or working as personal aides to government officials (Rondfeldt 1973: 7-9).

Thus, from the 1920s until at least the 1970s, civil-military relations were characterized by apparently strong civilian control, based on both professional autonomy and loyalty to the heritage of the Mexican revolution, and the hegemonic party that came to represent that heritage. In other words, it was a model that merged objective and subjective control.

Nicaragua. Like Mexico, Nicaragua’s political system and military were also born from revolution. The Sandinista movement came from a broad coalition that drew from multiple sectors of society, both rural and urban, and from workers and peasants to middle class and even elites, united by their opposition to Anastacio Somoza Debayle, the dictator who had ruled Nicaragua since 1967. While much more united during the revolutionary war, nonetheless, the coalition fragmented once the Sandinista movement, or FSLN, and their allies ultimately took power in 1979. Unlike in the Mexican case, no bloodbath accompanied the largely due to “the fact that the other organized leaderships within the opposition were splintered and unarmed” (Foran and Goodwin 1993: 224). For the most part, more conservative members of the coalition left by choice, in protest against the Sandinistas policies favoring nationalization and redistribution.

Within a year, the Sandinistas had consolidated control over the government, as well as fully replacing the prior military. “With the complete collapse of the National Guard, the New Popular Sandinista Army (EPS) was built up around a core of FSLN guerrilla veterans and Sandinista-led popular militias recruited during the insurrection.
The general staff of the EPS consisted exclusively of veteran Sandinistas, and ‘Political and Cultural Sections’ headed by Sandinista militants were established in all units of the EPS and the Sandinista police for purposes of ‘political education.’” (Foran and Goodwin 1993: 225). By early 1982, the new revolutionary military was called into action, defending the new regime against the US-organized and financed contras, a counter-revolutionary force composed largely of the former National Guard. Because of this, Nicaragua never experienced peace under Sandinismo, and civil-military relations during this period of time were unavoidably defined by the civil war.

Thus, the FSLN’s approach to civil-military relations relied heavily on subjective control, or more accurately, a very high level of civil-military fusion in the context of defending the Sandinista regime. The military expanded dramatically in the early 1980s, aided by a new military draft (Foran and Goodwin 1993: 229), and the national budget became overwhelmingly focused on funding the war. According to Foran and Goodwin, “by 1987, over sixty percent of government expenditures (nearly one-third of GDP) were required for defense” (1993: 231). At the same time, the EPS (Sandinista Popular Army) enjoyed a substantial political presence. General Humberto Ortega, commander in chief, came directly from the FSLN leadership, and fully one fifth (22 of 105) of the seats in the Sandinista Assembly—the second highest body in the FSLN, under the directorate—were held by high-ranking military officers (Ruhl 2003: 119). Thus, given the civil war, even open elections in 1984 did little to separate civilian and military authority, and fused power and high military prerogatives remained in place until 1990.

Chile. The Chilean case is, in many respects, very different from Mexico and Nicaragua. In this case, democratization was preceded by right-wing military authoritarianism, in a regime that—again different from Mexico and Nicaragua—lacked any aspects of democracy. Rather than being governed by a political party with a shared revolutionary heritage, in this instance, the military itself governed, with the political parties entirely swept from the political stage following General Augusto Pinochet’s coup against Salvador Allende in 1973. In this case, therefore, it makes more sense to discuss “political-military relations” rather than “civil-military relations.”

Yet, in other respects, political-military relations during the Pinochet regime had some important similarities to the Mexican and Nicaraguan cases. As in the former cases, the military did not act as a neutral tool of the government, but instead shared the government’s political agenda and worked as a partner to implement that agenda. Also similar to the Mexican and Nicaraguan cases, that meant a predominant focus on domestic military missions, particularly internal security roles in defense of the dominant regime. With military authoritarianism, however, this took a particularly brutal turn, with the military executing thousands of civilians due to either their sympathies with the Salvador Allende’s ousted Socialist government or other suspected political activity.
In the Chilean case, military and political power were fully fused, with military officers occupying the vast majority of top political positions. Pinochet, army chief of staff, occupied the presidency as “Supreme Chief of the Nation,” while the Army, Navy, Air force and Carabineros (Military Police) divvied up authority over the ministries. Military officers also assumed positions as governors, mayors and “civil servants” within the bureaucracy. This fusion helped to ensure the military’s alignment with Pinochet’s administration. However, in other respects, Pinochet sought to preserve military professionalism, seeking forces that would be disciplined, non-deliberative and obedient-- all principles consonant with objective civilian control. Thus, political and military lines of command were kept on separate. “This system shielded officers politically yet kept them tied to the government. In this manner, Chile’s military stayed loyal to the dictatorship but free of ... divisive turf battles....” (Pion-Berlin 2011: 12)

Thus, despite significant differences between the Mexican, Nicaraguan and Chilean cases, each of these relied on a fusion of political-military authority, and considerable ideological convergence between political authorities and the armed forces. In each case, military leaders also exercised an important political presence, although in Mexico, this did diminish over time. Interestingly, though, in both Mexico and Chile, subjective control and civil-military fusion were accompanied by important elements of objective control, as political leaders still sought to focus the armed forces on the execution of policies rather than the deliberation of policies. In Nicaragua, the ongoing civil war delayed this separation of political and military roles, as the country remained militarized throughout the Sandinistas’ revolutionary government.

V. Transitions from Ideological Models of Civil-Military Relations

Despite the significant differences between ideological rule in Mexico, Nicaragua and Chile, all three countries were able to carry out successful transitions to competitive democracies. And in all three, despite the prior fusion of civil-military powers, with considerable military influence and prerogatives, the armed forces adapted—sooner or later-- to a more liberal and politically neutral model of civil-military relations. This section explores the nature of these transitions, to seek to explain the relatively successful adaptation of the armed forces in these cases, while also considering the causes and implications of the bumps along the way, especially in Chile.

**The Armed Forces and Mexico’s Gradual Democratization.** In contrast to the abrupt transitions from military authoritarianism in the Southern Cone, Mexico’s democratization was very gradual. The process began as early as the 1960s, when the PRI first introduced proportional representation for some legislative seats, allowing opposition parties to have more political voice, albeit little political power. Yet the most substantial and rapid political reforms began in the 1980s. In part, these reforms responded to the PRI’s need to rebuild legitimacy after initiating a dramatic economic policy shift towards neo-liberalism, beginning in the aftermath of the 1982 economic
crisis, and culminating with the 1994 North American Free Trade. However, the reforms also reflected growing public dismay with the perpetual corruption in the political system.

The period from 1988 to 1994 was particularly pivotal in reshaping the Mexican political arena. In 1988, Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas—the son of historic PRI leader, Lázaro Cárdenas—launched a challenge to the party from the left. Not only did his challenge put into question whether the newly neo-liberal PRI could still legitimately wear the mantel of the revolution, but the irregularities in the election and the very close announced results led many to suspect that the PRI had stolen the presidency. This forced Carlos Salinas de Gortari, the triumphant PRI candidate, to initiate a series of political and electoral reforms, designed to alleviate concerns about electoral fraud and to make the legislature more competitive. Nevertheless, the following presidential election in 1994 occurred within the context of a wave of political crises, including the rise of the EZLN (Zapatista) guerrillas on the eve of the new year, in response to the implementation of NAFTA, and the assassination of PRI presidential candidate, Luis Donaldo Colosso in March of that year. Thus, while new president, Ernesto Zedillo (again, of the PRI), had won what was undoubtedly the most democratic presidential election ever carried out in Mexico, he nevertheless put into place even more anti-fraud measures and even instituted political primaries for the PRI, thereby setting the stage for the election of an opposition candidate to the presidency in 2000. This marked what many would consider to be Mexico’s final major step toward democratization.

Yet for the military, the adjustment began before the rise of the PRI. To begin with, the PRI’s movement toward neo-liberalism meant the revolutionary model that had held together the civil-military partnership— even though always more of an ideal than a reality—was visibly deteriorating. One indicator of the military’s loyalty to the revolutionary ideals, sometimes more than to the PRI, is that many within the military supported Cárdenas in 1988 (Serrano 1995: 446), a trend that continued. This became evident when, in 1990, General Alberto Quintanar announced that he would be advising the PRD, followed by several other generals who defected to the PRD in 1997 (Camp 2005: 94). Nevertheless, neo-liberalism did not mean any reduction in the military’s size or funding. On the contrary, the military’s roles began expanding in the 1970s—first, due to the government’s concern with the Central American crisis, and secondly, due to the growth of drug cartels and trafficking— which led, in turn, to increasing military influence in security issues (Díez and Nicholls 2006: 34). This also meant an expansion of military funding and personnel during this period, particularly in 1994, following the emergence of the Zapatistas in Chiapas.

Thus, many of the changes in Mexican civil-military relations from the 1980s through the early 2000s had more to do with changing security threats and evolving military roles than democratization. These emerging threats allowed the military to retain
significant resources and influence throughout this period of transition. At the same time, though, democratization did have an impact. The PRI’s evolution away from the traditional nationalist, statist and redistributive goals of the revolution weakened the ideological ties between the dominant party and the military well before the 2000 transition, reducing the likelihood that the military’s prior alliance would lead it to block democratization or reject the authority of new, non-PRI, political leaders. The emergence of the PRD, while triggering some in the military to demonstrate their political sympathies quite publicly, may also have facilitated the disintegration of the party-military alliance, facilitating the shift to a more politically neutral military institution. At the same time, democratization also led to increasing oversight, as the emergence of a more competitive legislature led to increasing Congressional interest in military issues, with growing demands for transparency and more legislative involvement in issues such as procurement and promotions. According to Díez and Nicholls, “The increased interest in military affairs shown by opposition members of Congress and their efforts to carry out their oversight responsibilities have resulted in far better communication between the legislative branch of government and top officials.” (2006: 4). Thus, while the Mexican military lost some autonomy during the transition, overall, prerogatives remained high, and institutional interest in preserving the military’s increased budget and influence appear to have encouraged cooperating with new political leaders and expanded oversight.

**Post-Sandinista Nicaragua and the FSLN Military.** Nicaragua’s transition from ideological rule was more abrupt than that in Mexico, despite the fact that Nicaragua had previously held competitive elections. Yet in 1990, a coalition of opposition parties (UNO) won national elections, bringing Violeta Chamorro to the presidency. The Sandinistas abruptly found themselves in the opposition, a situation that would continue until Sandinista leader Daniel Ortega’s triumphant return to the presidency in 2006. Coming directly from a civil war that had essentially been fought against the new leadership, not to mention the civil-military fusion within the FSLN, the chances of the military peacefully accepting the new political leadership seemed rather slim.

Initially, the transition looked quite fragile, with the FSLN blocking UNO’s control of the armed forces and the military leadership resisting Chamorro’s efforts to exert her authority. As Ruhl explains, EPS Military Organization Law 75 “gave newly elected President Chamorro the title of Supreme Chief of the Armed forces, [but] it delegated her no specific powers over the EPS. Control of the military’s organization and operations instead rested entirely with its commander-in-chief....” (Ruhl 2003: 119) Furthermore, the Commander in Chief, General Humberto Ortega-- one of the original FSLN revolutionaries, and the brother of Sandinista President Daniel Ortega-- refused to resign when asked, only agreeing to leave power in 1995 (Wilkinson 1994).
Despite this, in other respects, the Chamorro administration achieved significant reductions in military prerogatives, and considerable progress toward objective control of the armed forces. To begin with, military officers occupying positions in the FSLN resigned from those positions, partly in compliance with an initial political pact between the Sandinistas and UNO, and partly because of the military’s own recognition that depoliticization would be essential to the institution’s survival and re-legitimization (Cajina 2008: 298). General Ortega, whose presence was seen by some as an indicator that the military continued to play a “moderator role” (Cajina 2008: 300) and who continued to make public political statements during the early Chamorro years, nonetheless served as an important ally, supporting President Chamorro in conflicts with the right wing of her coalition (González 2009: 67). According to González, “the majority of Ortega and the EPS’ public statements were oriented to defending the democratic regime, national...reconciliation, political stability, and respect for the alternation of power.” (González 2009: 67).

With respect to prerogatives, the army shrank to one third of its January 1990 size by the end of the year, diminishing even further by 1993 (Ruhl 2003: 121). During the same period, the “defense budget contracted from $177 million in 1990 to about $36 million in 1993” (Ruhl 2003: 121). Military conscription was also terminated at the inception of the Chamorro regime, an important concession, given that this practice had been an important means for the EPS to socialize citizens. According to Ruhl, in 1993, the military made further important concessions: “They agreed to change the name of the EPS to the Army of Nicaragua (EN), accept future civilian supervision over the intelligence agencies they had inherited from the disbanded Sandinista Ministry of Interior, and collaborate in the development of a military code that would legally subordinate the armed forces to civil authority” (Ruhl 2003: 122). Finally, in 1994, General Ortega agreed to retire the following year, and the President gained—legally and in practice—the power to remove the military commander.

Military actions also largely supported the new regime, with the army helping to control strikes from Sandinista unions and combatting rearmed former Sandinista soldiers in 1993. The fact that the some former Sandinista forces had rearmed to fight the new government demonstrates that those negotiating the transition had failed to achieve 100% compliance, but at the same time, the military institution remained largely intact and responsive to the military command. Nevertheless, when Chamorro’s successor, President Alemán, and his administration requested military action against student protests and transportation strikes in 1998, the military refused. As Ruhl explains, “expecting these demonstrations to be largely nonviolent and concerned that soldiers untrained in controlling urban unrest might use excessive force, the military high command only agreed to protect economically strategic locations...” (Ruhl 2003: 126). The military’s decisions not to comply does seem to have had a legal basis, however, and
to have been based largely on a concern with protecting the military institution, rather
than deliberate political intervention.

Despite undeniable imperfections, the degree to which civil-military relations
shifted from subjective to objective—albeit partial—control following the Sandinistas’
1990 electoral defeat was notable. Equally notable was that much of the reform process
was carried out by the armed forces themselves. In part, this was due a dearth of civilian
defense experts, but it was also because the post-1990 reforms resulted from the above-
mentioned political pact, negotiated between General Ortega and a representative of
UNO, facilitated and witnessed by representatives of the OAS and the Secretary General
of the UN, as well as former US president, Jimmy Carter (Cajina 2008: 298). The pact
meant that the military was party to and a participant in restructuring the armed forces,
rather than being the unwilling object of a hostile reform agenda. The context of the
reforms was also critical. Nicaragua was emerging from a civil war, which had inflated
the both the defense budget and the ranks of the military, making a reduction in the
military’s size an obvious and logical step; the struggling economy converted it into an
absolute necessity. Finally, while the armed forces did relinquish most of their political
role, they sacrificed relatively little institutional autonomy. While this did imply
incomplete civilian control, with only minimal civilian management of military affairs, it
also allowed the armed forces to protect the institution during the transition period,
thereby facilitating adaptation to the new political scenario.

**Chile and the Post-Pinochet Military.** Despite the vast difference between
authoritarianism in Nicaragua and Chile, the Chilean transition exhibited some surprising
similarities to that in Nicaragua. To begin with, in both cases the political transition was
relatively abrupt, the consequence of an election with an unanticipated outcome. Yet,
perhaps more importantly, in both cases, the transition to full civilian control of the
military was more gradual, as the armed forces retained substantial autonomy, with a
powerful military leadership in a strong position to protect institutional interests. In
Chile, the military proved relatively more contentious during the transition period, with a
longer delay than in Nicaragua before civilians were able to wrest away any prerogatives.

Chile’s transition from military rule began in 1988, with a plebiscite mandated by
the 1980 Constitution—a constitution written and implemented by Pinochet’s regime.
The plebiscite presented the regime’s candidate for president, and offered the public the
opportunity to vote “yes” or “no” on the candidate and, in essence, for the continuity of
the regime. Surprisingly, Pinochet lost the plebiscite, and in 1990, Patricio Alywin,
leader of the opposition coalition, **Concertacion**, came to office.

It was far from a complete transition, however. The military had left power with
a Constitution in place that preserved and protected the military’s political presence, as
well as a “Self Amnesty Law,” preventing human rights trials. Just as General Humberto
Ortega retained control of the Nicaraguan military, General Pinochet kept his post at the head of the Chilean military, as did nine appointed Senators, and Pinochet appointees throughout the administration and the courts, none of whom could be removed within the legal framework established by the Pinochet constitution. The outgoing military regime benefited from considerable support both within the general public and within the legislature, which prevented the Aylwin government from attaining the necessary supermajorities necessary to reform the 1980 Constitution.

Nonetheless, according to Wendy Hunter, even under Aylwin, the government was able to begin reducing military prerogatives. Defense spending remained relatively stable, but was reduced as a proportion of the national budget during this time. Furthermore, Aylwin vetoed a number of promotions within the army, and diminished military authority over internal security, in part by transferring the Carabineros from the Defense Ministry to the Ministry of the Interior (Hunter 1998: 309). With respect to establishing accountability, while the Amnesty law prevented sentencing military officers for human rights trials (and Argentina’s military rebellions had already demonstrated the risk entailed in that approach, anyway), the government nonetheless investigated human rights abuses and published an account of these in the 1991 Rettig Report (Hunter 1998: 310). This was followed by human rights trials, based on the argument that those responsible could only be amnestied after first establishing that the crimes had been committed.

The military also demonstrated its willingness to defend its prerogatives, as well as its ongoing leader, Pinochet, particularly when the government threatened to hold them accountable for human rights abuses. For example, in December 1990, with the Rettig Report due out soon, and the legislature and courts investigating Pinochet’s family and the military for corruption, Pinochet “ordered the army to the barracks (acuartelamiento) in a ‘security, readiness and coordination exercise,’” in a clear warning to the civilian government that the military remained prepared to intervene in politics (Loveman 1991: 36). In May 1993, the army moved in the opposite direction, this time leaving the barracks for an impressive display of force near the Moneda presidential palace (Hunter 1998: 311; Silva 2002: 384). In June 1995, following the conviction of Generals Espinoza and Contreras for the assassination of Orlando Letelier in Washington D.C. (an exception, due to the international nature of the case), members of the military facilitated the generals’ escape, refusing to return Contreras for several months, while the negotiated with the government for concessions in the government’s human rights policies (Hunter 1998: 312).

The government finally made more substantial inroads toward civilian control of the military in 2000, with the election of Ricardo Lagos. Lagos simultaneously sought to build dialogue and positive relations with military leaders, while allowing the courts to pursue human rights issues, including rescinding Pinochet’s parliamentary immunity
(Silva 2002: 389). Pinochet continued to avoid prosecution until his death, but essentially lost his political influence from that time on. In addition, as Chileans learned more over the years about the military period, the Pinochet regime increasingly lost its luster among voters, to the point that the conservative parties also found it more expedient to distance themselves from Pinochet. In this context, Lagos was finally able to implement the major constitutional reforms necessary to complete the transition from military rule, including eliminating the positions of the appointed senators (four of whom were former military commanders); fully subordinating the National Security Council to the president; and finally giving the president the power to remove military commanders (“Chile: Democratic at Last,” Economist, 15 Sept 2005).

Given the fifteen-year delay in removing the Chilean military from residual political positions, the considerable limitations on the government’s ability to hold the military accountable for human rights abuses, and the military’s very public demonstrations of force in protest against the government policies, Chile’s transition from ideological/military control to liberal/democratic control was clearly much rougher than the transitions in Mexico and Nicaragua. Why? The most obvious difference between Chile and the other two cases is that this was a right-wing military government, without even the semblance of civilian control during the military regime. This meant that the Chilean military had much more entrenched political prerogatives than the other militaries and, despite the separation of political and military hierarchies, a much longer path to attain political neutrality. Secondly, the areas of contention in Chile almost always revolved around the potential for human rights prosecutions. This area triggered multiple layers: ideological, in that the military believed the repression to be essential to the battle against Marxism; institutional, in that challenging the repression was the equivalent to challenging the primary mission of the armed forces between 1973 and 1990, not to mention disrupting the military command structure; and personal, given the extensive number of personnel potentially implicated in the crimes.

That said, in other ways, this was a successful transition. While the military rejected human rights prosecutions and the right delayed terminating the military’s important political prerogatives, Chile did make some important steps toward enhanced civilian authority and reduced military politicization during this period. Given the starting point, it is astounding enough that the military recognized and accepted the outcome of the 1988 plebiscite, and then allowed the leftist Concertación coalition to take power in 1990. Beyond that, while not insignificant, the scope of military contestation with respect to the human rights investigations dimmed in comparison to neighboring Argentina. At no time did during the transition period did the military actually seem on the verge of a coup attempt, despite a certain amount of posturing, nor do the armed forces appear to have interfered extensively with policy issues not directly connected to institutional interests. Furthermore, the military easily relinquished its
internal security roles and, after a number of years and the eventual involvement of the international community, ultimately even acquiesced to human rights trials.

VI. Explaining Relative Success in Military Transitions from Ideological Rule: Mexico, Nicaragua and Chile

What do these cases suggest about successful transitions from democratic regimes? As mentioned in the introduction, perhaps what stands out most is the overwhelming importance of institutional interests, and the fact that institutional interests can encourage militaries to adapt to politically neutral military professionalism. In Mexico and Nicaragua, stark political divisions meant that the militaries were caught in the middle between the old regime that they had previously been an important part of, and the new leaders, with a very different political agenda. The competition between these two contending political groups meant that depoliticization became very appealing to the military, in order to retain what prerogatives they could. In the Chilean case, the polarized political scenario offered the same potential to encourage depoliticization, but the multi-faceted impacts of human rights investigations and potential prosecution, as well as the virtual veto power of the right-wing legislative bloc, both discouraged rapid depoliticization and strengthened the military's ability to resist change.

Pragmatism by the new governments also helped support transitioning to political neutrality. This was particularly notable in Nicaragua. Because of her need for military backing, Chamorro resisted calls from the right to entirely dismantle the Sandinista military, and made a number of concessions to the armed forces. At the same time, though, the strong anti-Sandinista push from those sectors demonstrated to the military that compromise was in their best interest, as well, and that retaining and acting on their ideological commitment could provoke a civil-military conflict that the military might not be able to win. The situation in Chile was surprisingly similar. The evident support for Pinochet's regime, even after the failed 1980 plebiscite, served as a caution against moving too aggressively the armed forces, which could have resulted in an even stronger backlash from the armed forces.

Related to this, in the cases with the most abrupt transitions-- Nicaragua and Chile—the military was allowed substantial autonomy during the transition period, even retaining continuity with respect to the military's Chief of Staff. This did mean that the new elected regimes, especially the one in Chile, could at best be considered partially democratic, but it helped to provide these militaries time to adapt to democratic political alternation and to move toward political neutrality. In sum, together, these cases demonstrate the centrality of institutional interests which, if threatened, can serve to sustain military politicization, but can also encourage militaries to adapt to a professionally neutral role, if adaptation best serves the military's interests.
VII. Civil-Military Relations in Venezuela: Prospects for a Peaceful Transition

As in the Mexican, Nicaraguan and Chilean authoritarian regimes, the Chavez government sought to control the armed forces largely through penetration (Nordlinger), developing a *shared ideology*, and granting the armed forces a prominent position in politics and an integral position in the government’s social policies. As Chávez’ chosen successor, Maduro was expected to continue with the “Bolivarian Revolution,” rather than moving toward a competitive democracy, and thus far, he has chosen to do so. He has particularly sought to retain the allegiance of the armed forces, increasing benefits and prerogatives, and relying heavily on their support. This includes even expanding the utilization of the military in internal security, for example, sending in the National Guard to quell student protests and protests against economic policies in early 2014. Most strikingly, the Maduro government has sought to deepen the politicization of the military, rallying the armed forces for much more overtly political functions than ever before. In particular, on March 15, the Minister of Defense ordered members of the military to participate in a PSUV-sponsored political rally, celebrating the National Guard’s role in the February protests. In response to a legal challenge to this mobilization, in June 2014, the Supreme Court ruled that, despite the fact that the Constitution prohibits the armed forces from “participating in acts of propaganda, militancy, or political proselytism,” military participation should be permitted. In fact, the judges lauded this participation as contributing to the “`progressive process of consolidation for the military-civic union.’”

Yet, Maduro is not Chávez. Just as a military successor to Pinochet might have struggled to keep the loyalty of the armed forces, Maduro has struggled to keep the loyalty of all chavistas, civilian and military. Increasingly, that effort is failing. Rumors of dissent within the armed forces have been supported by very public criticisms by officers such as Captain Juan Carlos Caguariipano Scott, of the National Guard, who—following the violently repressed protests—released a video calling for the president’s resignation. Former Defense Minister General Angel Vivas has also been using social media to speak out against the regime. And, while their infractions are less well known, Businessweek reported in May that “.. in the past few weeks, more than 30 military officials have been detained and denounced as plotters against the government...”

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The increasing tensions in Venezuela show the difficulty of succession in a political system that was so dependent on populist leadership. It also demonstrates that continuity within a political party or movement does not suffice to ensure a smooth transition. In Venezuela, the chavistas owed their allegiance to Chávez, above and beyond the political party and regime that he had created. Thus, while Maduro’s assumption of the presidency falls far short of a democratic transition, it nonetheless does require that the military be willing to accept the authority of a new leader. The democratic transitions in Mexico, Nicaragua and Chile demonstrated that civilian governments seem to have the most success achieving cooperation from a previously ideological, subjectively controlled military when the armed forces begin shifting toward political neutrality, and when institutional interests encourage that. Yet, in this case, Maduro’s policies have been oriented toward politicizing the military even further. This approach seems much more likely to provoke further division within the armed forces rather than compliance. Again, Maduro is not Chávez.
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