Civilian Authority without Civilian Dominance?

Assessing Venezuelan Political-Military Relations under Chávez

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Since taking power, Hugo Chávez has begun a process of transformation within which the military play a crucial role. In order to ensure his control of the military, Chávez has incorporated military personnel into his government, he has promoted loyal officers, given the military new responsibilities on the domestic front, and he has sought to create a series of shared values related to socialism and anti-imperialism. This has enabled him to consolidate a certain authority within the armed forces and maintain civilian control, but his domination must not be overestimated. The Venezuelan political system is undergoing a period of transition and, until it is completed, there can hardly be a truly stable relation between civilians and the military.

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Civilian Dominance, Management and Authority

Decades after Latin America's military governments gave way to civilian rule, civil-military relations continues to be an area of concern in the region. Even countries with long democratic histories, like Venezuela, have faced threats from rebellious military

factions. Concerns also surround less contentious militaries or moments, as observers ask whether civilians actually have the capacity to manage the armed forces, or whether the limits of civilian expertise weaken civilian control. In this article, I suggest that we could gain considerable insight into these issues by disaggregating the concepts: first, differentiating military from defense and security policies, and second, looking at the objectives of military policies in terms of different aspects of civilian control, including civilian dominance, civilian management and civilian authority. These concepts will then be used to evaluate political-military relations in Hugo Chávez' Venezuela. I argue that although the Venezuelan government has established very minimal oversight over the armed forces and has utilized its military in roles often considered to be problematic for democratic control, the government's ability to fit the armed forces into its broader policy goals may nonetheless allow for relatively more political authority over the military than might be expected.

This relatively optimistic perspective comes from looking at the relations between military and security policies. Analyses of civil-military relations have often been inclined to conceptually combine military policy with defense and security policies, largely because both of these affect civil-military relations. I would suggest that these goals rightfully belong to different policy areas, the first to military policy, and the latter two to defense policy. These are actually very different things, even if closely related. Military policy concerns government policies toward the military institution, and in relatively new or fragile democracies, usually emphasizes establishing civilian authority over the armed forces. On the other hand, the primary goal of defense and security policies is to protect the country from foreign and domestic security threats, respectively. Since both of these involve policies toward the armed forces, they clearly overlap; however, since the priorities differ, the specific policies used to achieve these goals may also differ. When the government has well-developed defense and security policies, and these are compatible with military policy goals, then both are likely to be more successful. However, when defense and security policies are neglected in favor of military policies, or priorities in the two policy areas seem to conflict, then both may suffer. This is particularly true when considering civilian control: military policies designed to seek civilian authority over the military may actually be counter-productive if military policies appear to contradict defense interests.

Because civil-military relations in Venezuela violate many of the conditions assumed to ensure civilian authority over the armed forces, it makes a useful case to more closely examine these conditions. Is Venezuela teetering on the verge of renewed

military insurrection, or is it in the process of consolidating civilian control? This article argues that civilian control needs to be understood not only as the minimalist assurance that the military will not seek to overthrow the government but should also encompass the more ambitious goal of military cooperation with the government's national security policies. In some regards, the Chávez government has made important progress toward this end, despite its failure to establish institutional oversight of the armed forces, and despite the inevitable divisiveness of the government's efforts to transform Venezuela from one of the region's oldest political democracies into a socialist semi-democracy. After crushing a military coup in 2002, Chávez government appeared to progress toward controlling the armed forces, even though not really *managing* the armed forces. In this case, the government has pursued military subordination by seeking ideological convergence rather than developing the bureaucratic capabilities to effectively oversee military activities. While counter-productive for democratic control, in which militaries should presumably remain politically neutral in order to respond to different democratically elected leaders, in a revolutionary regime, developing a shared set of values may help political leaders achieve more profound political authority over the armed forces.

Political Control and Military Policies

Most models of political control of the military have presumed either a democratic regime, or a regime seeking to consolidate democracy. The classic formulation is that of Samuel Huntington (1957: 80-85), which looks at two alternative models: objective and subjective control. With the «objective» model, civilians control the armed forces by relying on the military's professionalism and political neutrality. The government designs defense policies, but allows the military considerable autonomy in their realm of expertise. This, according to Huntington, allows governments to ensure political control of the armed forces while still developing effective defense policies. Civilians exercise power over the military, but mostly through a division of labor. In contrast, Huntington's «subjective control» model rests on the idea of power struggles, both among different civilian groups seeking to control the military, and between the military and civilians. With the subjective control model, civilian groups seek to control the military by «making them the mirror of the state;» this, according to Huntington, «presupposes a conflict between civilian control and the needs of military security» (Huntington 1957:81; 84). While I would—and will-- argue that something similar to subjective control can coexist with political control of the military, a critical element in Huntington's discussion concerns the effect of military policy, or models of civilian control, on defense policies. Huntington's

conceptualization suggests that models based on the idea of competition between political groups and the armed forces would be likely to lead to the neglect of defense, and possibly even to unstable civilian control, while models based on compatible but distinct spheres of expertise could strengthen both civilian control and defense. Ultimately, the goal should be for political leaders to effectively direct defense policies, and to develop all policy without any threat of military interference, and to develop a relationship with the armed forces that allows them to do so. Different facets of civilian control may contribute in distinct ways to the attaining military cooperation with security and defense polices. To the extent that this cooperation is achieved, both policy outcomes—those focused on the sector (military policies) and those focused on the issue area (defense and security) will be more successful.

What, then, are these different facets of civilian control, and how do these interact with different military-defense policy relationships? I would suggest conceptualizing civilian or political control as including three possible dimensions: domination, management, and authority. Success on any of these dimensions might grant the government some level of control over the armed forces, however, the more dimensions on which the government achieves control, the greater the level of control.

Domination: Who Commands the Armed Forces. *Domination* may be considered the least demanding dimension of control. According to Max Weber, «domination» is «the probability that a command with a given specific content will be obeyed by a given group of persons.» (Weber 1978: 53) This goes beyond simply power, in that it implies that the recipients accept and comply with these orders without resistance. With respect to political control of the military, this would mean that, using Alfred Stepan's terms, the military doesn't «contest» government policies, but may still have considerable «prerogatives,» such as autonomy in determining military missions, allocating the budget and controlling promotions, as well as possibly maintaining a separate military justice system or even overseeing police and/or intelligence agencies (Stepan 1988: 94-97). According to Stepan, this «unequal civilian accommodation» could be unstable, both because the military's prerogatives could allow it to disproportionately influence government policies, and because future civilian administrations may challenge the military's prerogatives, provoking a response (Stepan 1988: 100-101).

Yet, when military prerogatives are confined to areas of their specific expertise, this balance closely resembles Huntington's conceptualization of objective control, presuming that the military also accepts the government's autonomy. Ernesto López notes that objective control, partly reflected in this form of accommodation, is especially suited to democracy (Lopez 2001: 101). This is because both the military's acceptance of the rules and procedures of democracy, and its political neutrality allow it to adapt to the range of civilian leaders and political parties that may come to power. However, as used here, mere «dominance» may fall short of legitimate authority, as will be discussed. Dominance requires only obedience, not cooperation, and could be contingent on the government not straying too far from the military's policy preferences or intervening too much in military affairs.

Management: Who Directs the Armed Forces. In comparison to dominance alone, management requires a greater degree of political involvement in directing, organizing and overseeing defense and security affairs. Most civilian administrations in Latin America are lacking in this respect, usually both in terms of staff and expertise (See, for example, Sain 2005; Bruneau 2005). Effective *management* of the military means that not only would legislatures control budgets and Defense Ministries control issues such as military roles and missions, but both would have large and knowledgeable enough staffs to go beyond this. For example, the legislature would presumably also be involved in determining some of the specifics about how budgets are spent, as well as the broad parameters about how the military can be used. Requirements for the Defense Ministry would go further; not only would the Ministry of Defense be led by a politically-appointed civilians, but it would have enough civilian staff to be able to at least partially oversee how the armed forces prepare for and carry out their missions, including military education, training and deployment. To do this, civilian policy-makers would need to go beyond *military* policy and focus more on defense and security policies.

According to David Pion-Berlin, one of the main reasons that civilian defense expertise is limited in Latin America has to do with the lack of inter-state conflict in the region (2005). Without serious threats, civilians have little motivation to develop defense expertise, and governments are not pushed to invest in building well-staffed Defense Ministries. However, Pion-Berlin has argued that governments have still gained the military's obedience by using «political civilian control.» As Pion-Berlin describes this, political leaders have sought personal loyalty from those promoted to high military ranks or appointed to the Defense Ministry; «Presidents promote officers with whom they are familiar, have known via political party or familial

connections, or who they surmise will be loyal to them.» (2005: 28). Through this method, civilian governments may achieve *political dominance*, but not *political management*. Without the capability for political management, the government may be limited in its ability to effectively utilize the armed forces to support its broader foreign, and conceivably domestic, policy goals. As long as the country faces no serious threats, this may be a tolerable accommodation, however not one that maximizes either security or military compliance.

Authority: What Militaries Believe. According to Weber, those who exercise dominance will also seek to legitimize that dominance. Legitimate authority means that not only do people obey the person or entity issuing commands, but that they also believe in the right of those individuals or groups to give those orders than mere obedience. Legitimate authority, or simply «authority» in the present framework, therefore rests on a deeper congruence of ideas between political leaders and those who follow those orders. I would also suggests that this form of congruence goes well beyond either Huntington's «subjective control» or Pion-Berlin's «political civilian control,» both of which seem to rest on simple alliances between particular civilian leaders and that segment of the military leadership whom they have opted to trust. Subjective or political civilian control may be based on shared loyalty to a certain political party, non-political personal ties, or even material interests, but both terms imply that this loyalty is limited to the relationship between certain military and political leaders or factions. Yet, for civilians to exercise a more enduring *authority* over the military, the military's obedience must rest on a deeper recognition of the legitimacy of civilian leadership. This authority may emanate either from (a) a shared set of beliefs and preferences about the shape of the political system, or from (b) the military's recognition of the political regime's effectiveness.

Thus, *military beliefs* are critical. During the 1960s and 1970s, military beliefs played a central role in encouraging Latin American militaries to intervene in politics. Specifically, the national security doctrines of this era encouraged them to consider everything from economic development to foreign policy, education and internal political movements to fall under the umbrella of «national security.» Perhaps more important, though, was that militaries considered themselves to have the final responsibility for these national security issues, well beyond national defense. The national security doctrines mostly developed during the Cold War environment when U.S. allies perceived communist insurgency to be their greatest threat. As a consequence, militaries throughout the region came to believe that many

democratically elected governments were either incapable of dealing with these threats or even somewhat responsible for them. Thus, this belief system encouraged many militaries in the region, including those in Argentina, Chile, Brazil and Uruguay, to oust their democratic governments and rule directly.

But just as the national security doctrines may have contributed to military impatience with democracy or opposition to revolutionary movements, other belief systems may lead militaries to support either of these. Within a democratic system, this would mean that the military accepts the rules and procedures of democracy, including accepting elections as the only legitimate way of selecting political leaders. Because democracy also assumes that elections will bring changes in leadership, this would imply that the armed forces are also relatively neutral politically, in order to be able to work with whichever leader or party might win. A different set of military beliefs might be compatible with a revolutionary regime; in this case, however, beliefs would focus more on outcomes than processes. Revolutionary regimes, whether based on religious or secular ideologies, tend to emphasize ends over means. Thus, authority would rest more on a political-military consensus about the regime's ultimate ends and values rather than the procedures used to select decision-makers.

Finally, political effectiveness may also be a path to establishing political authority, regardless of the regime's political model. For the armed forces, though, the most salient issues are naturally defense and security, so they are most likely to recognize the authority of political leaders if they are successful in these areas. This, however, does require that political leaders do actively develop defense and security policies, and grant the appropriate institutions (military, police, intelligence) the resources to be able to fulfill the government's policy goals, regardless of whether the administration's management goes further than this.

Current day Venezuela faces a particular dilemma in establishing political authority, in that the regime is neither purely democratic nor purely revolutionary. In some ways, this is a similar issue to that faced by Mexico during its early post-revolutionary period. The Mexican regime was founded on the 1910 revolution, which led to a prolonged period of single-party rule by a revolution-based party, but also enshrined democratic principles. So, which would dominate? The political neutrality essential to a democratic regime with alternating political leaders, or the shared political ideology consistent with a revolutionary regime, in which a single party or ideology reigns? As Roderic Camp writes, «political passivity or neutrality in the officer corps is a luxury regimes can afford only after they have achieved some minimal level of national integration that promotes an underlying value consensus on

the fundamental nature of the regime» (Camp 2005: 21-22). In Mexico, the dominant party, the PRI, recognized the armed forces as one of the nation's important revolutionary actors, and thereby incorporated the military around the shared political agenda. By the time the regime moved toward democratization, the military had been sufficiently professionalized to accept a more politically neutral role (and the PRI had gradually moved away from its original revolutionary goals, anyway). In Venezuela, the path has been different. Chávez' «revolution» has been progressing through a top-down model, beginning with from a strong democracy, but gradually moving toward more concentrated government with more emphasis on revolutionary goals and fewer democratic checks. Thus, the Chavez' government has had the challenge of convincing a military that has been historically committed to democratic processes to accept the administration's revolutionary process. In fact, until the 21st century, many of the military's most anti-democratic expressions-- including the coup attempt led by Chávez in 1992-- originated from their rejection of what appeared to be an overly closed political elite. As will be discussed below, the Chávez administration has sought to develop authority in various ways, including developing alliances with military leaders (similar to subjective control), encouraging the military to adopt the values of the new regime, and allowing security and defense policy to take priority over military policy.

Policy Convergence vs. Conflict: What Militaries Do. An essential factor in determining the extent to which governments exercise *authority* over the armed forces, concerns the roles and missions of militaries. Any government is more likely to achieve military cooperation if it pays attention to what the military does, and makes it an essential—or at least, useful—participant in carrying out the government's policies.

Conventional wisdom claims that domestic roles for the military, especially internal security, politicize them and consequently encourage them to intervene in politics. Another concern is that when militaries are used for domestic security, they may be more likely than police to use deadly force, or violate civil rights if used for domestic intelligence. For some, even civic action roles like building bridges and schools, helping with preventative medicine, or distributing food during shortages can be seen as problematic for controlling the military, in these could push militaries toward an expanded understanding of their roles and responsibilities, well beyond those exclusive to militaries. An enduring concern of civilian analysts of Latin American military affairs is that these practices could encourage the return of the last century's «national security doctrines,» complete with their devastating consequences for

human rights.[1] Others, however, have argued that it is less important what militaries do than who decides what they do (Pion-Berlin). If civilians decide what roles the military should assume and the military complies, then that would suggest that civilians to some extent do control the armed forces.

Yet what roles the military assumes *do* matter. In some cases, militaries may have long histories of civic action roles (as in Venezuela, until the 1990s) without this necessarily leading to a politicized or interventionist military.[2] Domestic roles may pose some risks, though whether or not civilians determine the military's roles is critical. But at least as important is whether the military actually has a place within the government's broader policy agenda. In Argentina, the democratic president who had the most success in subordinating the armed forces was Carlos Menem, largely because of the tight integration between foreign policy, defense policy and military policy during that period. The government sought an internationalist, pro-US foreign policy, and thus developed a defense policy that relied heavily on international peace-keeping; this approach converged nicely with military policies designed to keep the military away from any internal roles. Thus, despite very limited political management of the military during this period, the government was able to improve control based on their attention to defense and security policy, and the compatibility of these policies with military policies. This shared civilian-military agenda consequently expanded civilian *authority* with respect to the armed forces.

Venezuela's Popular Democracy: Democracy or Revolution?

In Venezuela, maintaining civilian control over the armed forces has been especially challenging during the presidency of Hugo Chávez, largely due to Chávez' attempts to transform his country's political system. As mentioned above, in Venezuela, both the manner in which defense affairs are managed and the roles assigned to the military violate what would be considered «best practices» for democratic control of the military. But, is Venezuela still democratic? In many respects, Chávez has been gradually moving from populist democracy toward semi-democratic revolutionary socialism, beginning with his inauguration in 1999, and peaking during 2007, with his effort to reform his earlier 1999 Constitution and implement a much more radical

[1] Based on this premise, Argentina's democratic regime has sought to strictly divide defense and security roles, legally confining the armed forces to external defense, only.

[2] The Venezuelan military's domestic roles may have made them more sympathetic to the impact of economic decline and attempted neo-liberal reforms in the 1980s, though. These roles appear to have deepened the military's identification with the Venezuelan masses and weakened their connection to elites.

political model. This process has had important implications for civil-military relations in Venezuela. On the one hand, Chávez' efforts to change Venezuela's political model did provoke a strong reaction from some sectors of the military, most notably in the 2002 coup attempt, but also in the context of the 2007 Constitutional Reform campaign. At the same time, though, the government's efforts to deepen the military's ideological identification with the new regime, while giving the armed forces roles supportive of the administration's overall political agenda, provided a possible alternative path toward political control over the armed forces.

Chávez first gained public attention following a coup attempt in February, 2002. The coup failed, but Chávez managed to use the event to call attention to the stagnation of the political system and its neglect of the poor. Still determined to take power, Chávez continued to explore either a further coup attempt or popular revolt as possible paths to the presidential palace, finally settling on the electoral route by 1998. Precisely seven years after his coup attempt, Chávez was inaugurated as Venezuela's new president.

Upon gaining the presidency, Chávez immediately moved to consolidate his control. Following up on one of his primary campaign promises, he convoked a constitutional assembly largely designed to wrest power from the two previously dominant political parties (AD and COPEI), securing a new constitution by the end of 1999. The 1999 constitution began the process of expanding the president's political power, in part simply by closing the existing bicameral legislature-- and unseating its occupants—in order to install a new, unicameral National Assembly. The president's term in office also expanded from five to six years and, most important, he gained important decree powers, contingent on the legislature passing an enabling law.

The opposition did not go quietly, however. Just as Chávez had sought to gain power through any possible route, the opposition used all available means to try to force him out: a coup in April 2002, quickly reversed by a counter-coup only days later; a general strike that shut down the country's crucial oil industry in late 2002 to early 2003; and finally, after considerable effort to get the required number of signatures on a petition, a recall referendum in August 2004. None of these succeeded. Instead, an unexpectedly high percentage of Venezuelans voted against removing the president, 59% versus only 41% supporting the measure (Kornblith 2005: 124).

Thus, far from removing Chávez from office, the referendum reinforced the president's mandate, despite the opposition's continued suspicion of fraud, and allowed him to advance further toward consolidating his power and radicalizing the regime. The government became much less tolerant of the opposition, increasingly silencing those who voiced dissent. This peaked in May 2007, when the government closed down the country's most important opposition television station, RCTV, based on accusations of its complicity in the 2002 anti-Chávez coup. By November 2007, the pro-Chávez National Assembly had ratified a constitutional reform project that sought to further consolidate the president's power. This complex document promised to both drastically extend the government's «Bolivarian Revolution,» as well as to greatly expand the president's own power. Thus, the Constitutional Reform not only would have extended the presidential term from six years to seven, but would also have permitted the indefinite reelection of the president.[3] Perhaps even more important, the proposal also sought to give the president extensive rights to declare states of «alarm,» emergency, or «internal or external commotion,» any of which would allow the government to greatly restrict civil rights (Reforma de la Constitución Nacional de la República Bolivariana de Venezuela). At the same time, it created new barriers to future recalls votes like that of 2004, thereby making it even more difficult to remove the president from office.

Ultimately, the referendum on the Constitutional Reform proposal failed, with approximately 51% voting against it and around 49% voting in favor, according to official reports. Interpretations of why the reform failed varied considerably, with some pointing to the government's failures at day-to-day problem solving, some seeing it as an overall rejection of the Chávez' «revolution,» and still others pointing to the article permitting indefinite reelection as the critical piece. Opponents of *chavismo* jumped to proclaim the end of the revolution, while Chávez recalled his words following the failed 1992 coup: «por ahora.» Thus, while undoubtedly a setback for the government, the vote against the referendum should not be interpreted as the death of Chávez' revolutionary project. The Venezuelan left quickly moved to consider other options, including using petitions to bring the constitution to a referendum again, exploring how the proposal might be modified to make it more publically acceptable, and pursuing at least some elements of the reform through legislation and decrees. What was clear, however, was that the Venezuelan public was unlikely to support a proposal that so drastically limited the democratic elements in the political system.

[3] This contrasts markedly with the very firm and detailed prohibitions of reelection in the 1961 constitution, which even sought to block family members from prolonging a leader's power.

Military and Politics in Contemporary Venezuela

Chávez' revolutionary process naturally also had important consequences for the armed forces. Shortly after becoming president, Chávez began redesigning the relationship between the military and the government, both through legal measures and in practice. Until Chavez' 1992 coup attempt, Venezuela's military had been notably absent from politics for decades, bound in part by the 1961 constitution that declared the armed forces to be «apolitical, obedient and non-deliberating,» and responsible in part for «the stability of democratic institutions» (República de Venezuela, 1961 Constitution). Using a combination of personal ties between political parties and leaders, considerable military autonomy, and a system of rapidly rotating top positions and relatively fast promotions, the democratic regimes had successfully attained the military's prolonged subordination.

With the 1999 Constitution, the government sought a lasting transformation of the military's role in Venezuelan society. Thus, the 1999 constitution weakened the prohibition against the political activity by the military by granting it the right to vote and replacing the term «apolitical» with «without political militancy.» In addition, the constitution gave the military expanded authority over weapons, and formally incorporated «cooperation in the maintenance of internal order and active participation in national development» into the military's missions (Trinkunas 2005: 211). While these roles were not new to the armed forces, as Harold Trinkunas points out, placing these missions within the constitution «made altering or restricting these missions… more difficult than in the past» (Trinkunas 2005: 211).

In some ways, the 1999 Constitution foreshadowed both the regime's future and the government's expectation of the military's role within it. Domestic transformation is an essential element in any revolutionary regime, and militaries are frequently key players in that process. Therefore, both shifting the armed forces toward a more politicized role and strengthening their internal functions—without losing the simultaneous mandate to defend the country—fit with Chávez' goals of moving the country toward socialism. Thus, the 2007 Constitution Reform proposal defined the military's missions to fit even more tightly to those goals, while also seeking to restructure the armed forces in a manner congruent with deepening and defending a revolutionary regime. Despite its failure, the Reform proposal remains significant as the embodiment of the government's conceptualization of the regime it has sought to

create. This is no exception in the area of military and defense policy. Thus, with respect to military missions, the document states that:

> The Bolivarian Armed Forces constitutes an essentially patriotic, popular and anti-imperialist body. … The Bolivarian Armed Force will be organized by the state to guarantee the independence and sovereignty of the Nation, defend it from any external and internal attack, and assure the integrity of the geographic space through the study, planning and execution of Bolivarian military doctrine, the principles of integral defense and the popular war of resistance, and cooperation in the tasks of maintaining citizen security and internal order, as well as active participation in plans for the economic, social and technical development of the Nation, in accordance with the Constitution and the law. (Article 328, Reforma de la Constitución de la República Bolivariana de Venezuela.)

Thus, the Constitutional Reform clearly indicated the government's intent to involve the military in deepening the socialist revolution on a wide variety of fronts. The document also underlined the administration's concern that they might need to defend the new socialist regime against either national elites or foreign enemies--presumably the United States—and therefore emphasized that the armed forces will be «always in the service of the Venezuelan people in defense if their sacred interests, and in no case that of any oligarchy or foreign imperial power.» (Article 328, Reforma). To reinforce this, and to prepare for the eventuality of combating a stronger opponent, the Constitutional Reform sought to expand the Armed Forces from four branches—the Army, Navy, Air Force and National Guard—to five, with the addition of the Bolivarian National Militia (Article 329).

Shaping Beliefs and Ideologies: Defending Democracy or Socialism? The proposed Constitutional reform pointed to one of the main components of the government's military policy, the pursuit of political authority with respect to the armed forces by encouraging ideological identification, or shared values. This value set is complex, however, in that even as the Chávez government continued to advance toward a socialist regime with more concentrated political power, the Constitution continued to sustain at least some elements of a democratic system, albeit one in which the president would have been unusually powerful, socialist goals would take precedence over democratic means, and representation would have shifted in part from the states to various locally-based councils or civil society groups. Yet, the continued possibility that the opposition could at some point defeat the Chávez' MVR party and assume the presidency (strengthened after the December 2007 defeat of the referendum) would suggest that it could be advantageous to maintain some military neutrality.

Nevertheless, in April 2007, Chávez declared that the time for the Venezuelan military to remain neutral was over, and the military should now embrace socialism. According to Chávez, military officers should «declare every day, with greater force and radicalism, to be anti-imperialist, revolutionary, Bolivarian and socialist» (Universal.com, 13 Abril 2007). At the same time, he declared the new military slogan to be «fatherland, socialism or death,» subsequently elaborating that «the North American army is an instrument to impose imperialism, the Venezuelan Armed Force is an instrument to establish socialism» (Universal.com, 1 mayo 2007). Thus, the shared values that Chávez sought were socialist values, emphasizing nationalist and social justice goals instead of democratic procedures.

Missions and Roles: Expanding Civic Action, Preparing for Invasion. While Venezuela's long-standing democratic traditions would seem to make it difficult to modify military values, the fact that the government's security and defense policies fit with its military policies has helped it to establish authority in this respect. Since the beginning of his administration, Chávez utilized the military for a wide range of civic action, first through PAIS (Plan for Sustainable Immediate Action) and then through the much longer-lasting Plan Bolívar 2000. These projects brought the armed forces into everything from direct poverty relief to development, including public health, nutrition, education, and construction. Military personnel were set to work repairing schools and hospitals, providing medical care, and even selling low cost food in poor areas. These missions may have been very far from traditional military roles, but did make the armed forces valuable players within the government's broader policy agenda.

The government also utilized the armed forces for security and defense, however. With the goal of addressing the country's serious problems with public safety, the armed forces—especially the National Guard—gained new responsibility with regard to crime fighting, one of the roles generally considered most problematic for civilian control. At the same time, though, Chávez' tense relations with the United States helped to justify increasing investment in homeland defense, including weapons purchases and training to combat a powerful invader. To the extent that the military shared the perception of an external threat, this shared national defense agenda would undoubtedly strengthen the government's authority vis-à-vis the armed forces.

The Absence of Civilian Management in Venezuela. While the government struggled to exert dominance over the armed forces, including purging those officers implicated in

the 2002 coup against Chávez, and actively pursued authority over the military through a shared ideology and a shared agenda, it largely neglected political management. The limits to civilian oversight of the armed forces in Venezuela are immediately apparent when one looks at the Ministry of Defense, now formally entitled the Ministry of Popular Power for the Defense of Venezuela. Venezuela remains one of very few countries in Latin America in which the Defense Ministers are almost exclusively uniformed officers.[4] Legislative oversight is also minimal in Venezuela. While legislative approval is required to send troops abroad, it is not required to declare war, and has no power over promotions. Yet, under this executive-dominant system, the legislature really holds little independent power, anyway; this lack of balance is augmented by the fact that the president's party, the MVR, holds an overwhelming majority in the National Assembly.

Nevertheless, the armed forces have complied with the roles assigned to them by the government, even when those roles have seemed very far from traditional defense. One reason is that the government has not entirely sought strict civilian control of the military, or even much of a separation between the two. Instead, Chávez' military background has been strongly evident in his political appointments. Thus, the Chávez government has brought the military directly into politics, instead of pursuing the political management of the military.

Conclusion: Civilian Control of the Venezuelan Military?

In Venezuela, the Chávez' government's strategies to achieve control of the armed forces have differed significantly from those of its predecessors. During most of the latter 20th century, military policy was adapted to democratic conditions, and was therefore oriented toward developing a relatively professional and politically neutral military. Yet, Chávez has never sought to be a democratic president like any other. At the time of his failed 1992 coup attempt, he criticized then-President Carlos Andrés Pérez not only for corruption, but for neglecting the poor. The methods Chávez used to attain power certainly demonstrated that he would be unlikely to value procedures more than outcomes. Thus, the government has sought to establish control over the armed forces through different means, quite distinct from Huntington's objective control model. Members of the military have been integrated into the administration and left in control of the Defense Ministry, while the military as an institution has been utilized for a range of internal roles, even including domestic security.

[4] The one time Chávez made an exception to this, the appointed civilian had very little success obtaining the compliance of the armed forces.

At the same time, Venezuelan society has been wrenched in two, divided between chavistas and anti-chavistas, much like the peronist versus anti-peronist conflicts that engulfed Argentina for so many decades. Both the government's efforts to restrict the opposition's freedom of expression and to consolidate the transformation of Venezuela's political system through the 2007 Constitutional Reform proposal triggered irate protests on the part of the regime's opponents, including a newly powerful student movement, and some members of the armed forces. In a democracy, a politicized military is not without risks, and the challenges to democratic rules and procedures posed by the proposal did provoke a response, voiced most notably by Chávez' former Minister of Defense, retired General Raúl Isaías Baduel. The domestic dissent combined with the strong international antagonism toward the Chávez administration certainly made a difficult scenario for stable civil-military relations.

That said, the Chávez government has made some policy decisions that hold promise for establishing political—if not democratic-- control. It appears to have made considerable progress toward establishing dominance following the 2002 coup, selecting allies as leaders and gradually weakening much of the military opposition. And, while unable to rely on pre-1992 grounds for political authority (mostly, shared democratic values), the government has nonetheless clearly communicated the new set of values that it hopes will shape both civilian and military beliefs. Perhaps most important, while the government's military policies appear to have been focused on precisely this aspect, converting the armed forces into an institution dedicated to a socialist proposition, its defense and security policies have been oriented toward the same socialist transformation. Thus, what the military has been asked to do coincides completely with what they have been asked to believe. This facilitates the creation of a shared political-military agenda, and may therefore enhance the government's authority over the armed forces. Nevertheless, the Venezuelan political system remains in transition, and until the transition period is complete, no civil-military relationship can truly be stable.

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