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**VENEZUELAN CIVIL-MILITARY RELATIONS:
PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE**

BY

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ABSTRACT

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For decades, Venezuela was an exceptional country at the international level, with political stability, a stable polarization between right and left political parties, an Armed Forces that was a model of professionalism, huge petroleum reserves, productive social programs and high standard of living.

In the past fifteen years the country has become gradually political and economically vulnerable to the consolidation of a stable democracy consequences of a possible failure in the civil-military relationship process.

This paper outlines the process of transition of the civil-military relationship during the different stages of the political and military history of Venezuela.

Venezuelan Civil-Military Relations: Past, Present and Future

Introduction

The purpose of this research paper is to outline the process of transition of the civil-military relationship during the different stages of the political and military history of Venezuela. The paper will examine the historic origin and tradition of the civil-military relationship process and the behavior of the Armed Forces during critical transitions from dictatorial regimes to democratic systems and vice versa. The internal and external influences that have caused the military intervention in political affairs will also be examined. Finally, the paper will examine the failures of civilian power in the process of civil-military relations considering that it involve when, how and, with what legitimate and moral end, the Armed Forces will be employed.

Historically, Venezuela has been an example for latin America. In colonial times it had a dynamic commerce, during the Independence struggle it was characterized by its export of freedom to neighbor countries and for almost one century was under the political control of dictatorial governments.

Nevertheless, Venezuela survived and got partially the perfection of a democratic government system.

For decades, Venezuela was an exceptional country at the international level, with political stability, a stable polarization between right and left political parties, an Armed

Forces that was a model of professionalism, huge petroleum reserves, productive social programs and a high standard of living.

In the past fifteen years Venezuela has become gradually and increasingly political and economically vulnerable at the point that the consolidation of a stable democracy has been seriously threatened by failures in the civilian and military leadership and, a civilian-military relationship.

The subject discussed in this paper for its own nature is very extensive, deep and captivating; it was impossible to cover in detail all the factors that affect so interesting political history and phenomenon.

The Civil-Military Relations in the Past.

The Independence Era.

In the mid-seventeen century Venezuela occupied a relative peripheral position in the Spanish empire, the Spanish Crown left the colony with considerable political autonomy. In 1777, the Captaincy General of Venezuela, corresponding roughly to the present national territory, was created with Caracas as its capital. The seat of the Captain-General had both civil and military authority. The seven Captains-general that ruled Venezuela from 1777 until its independence were all high ranking Army officers.

The commerce of cacao promoted within Venezuela a ruling

class, the creoles which came to be divided into factions. There were the *peninsulares*, who were associated with Spanish colonial political authority and commercial power; and the Mantuanos, who increasingly chafed under Spanish rule and eventually revolted. The only political control under the Mantuanos were the Cabildos (town councils), which became an experiment in self rule. A group of Mantuanos who had been educated in the country and abroad, included Francisco Miranda, Simon Bolivar, and Antonio Jose de Sucre. They were attracted to an enlightened political philosophy and were hesitant to break with colonial authorities, whose power kept the *pardos* (racial mixed peons) and slaves subjugated. Several late eighteen-century revolts against Spain failed when locals elites aborted the uprisings.

The liberal philosophies of the French and American revolutions were welcomed because they justified opposition to the arrogance and arbitrariness of the peninsular rulers. The general decay of Spanish imperial and royal institutions, the imposition of a pretender on the Spanish throne by Napoleon and the ensuing war, further weakened the monarchy. This environment favored the ambitions of the creole ideas of equality among the citizens and, in consequence lead to *the first coup d'etat* in Venezuela when, on April 19, 1810, the town council of Caracas was transformed into the government of Venezuela. The Supreme Junta (Assembly)¹ was created, and a draft of a new constitution was written. The new constitution retained slavery and excluded the propertyless *pardos* from rights as citizens.

A declaration of independence was signed in 1811, the Supreme Junta (Assembly) resigned its power to an elected congress. The first constitution was written and approved and the bases and forces to lead the future War against Spain were established.

The idea of a democracy with civil-military relation of the type of system of government such as is understood today in terms of a modern theory of political co-existence, had no meaning for the colonial society in times of colonial development or independence efforts. This society was composed of castes and founded on inequality with its own ruling oligarchy, and local rather national views.

The Spanish governor, Jose Thomas Boves, rallied many slaves and *pardos* against the independence movement, and took full advantage of Miranda's political and military mistakes. He ruthlessly crushed the independence movement becoming Venezuela's first royalist *caudillo dictator*.²

Bolivar, who in 1814 was invested by the congress with dictatorial power, understood better than Miranda the social bases of revolution. He rallied lower class support with a more egalitarian approach including such things as promoting soldiers for merit regardless of their background or color. Bolivar sealed the defeat of Spanish forces on June 24, 1824; after more than 400 battles fought on Venezuelan soil. Venezuela had gained its sovereignty.

Sub-Conclusion:

Militarism was an immediate consequence of the war of independence. It grew stronger during the revolutionary wars with the blanket commission in the army and which every rebel was granted with a lavish hand. For a period of about fifteen years after 1930, General Jose Antonio Paez, the first constitutional president of Venezuela, was able to provide a modicum of social peace, by advocating a more decentralized state, expansion of suffrage, freedom of the press, control of the church's power, and other reforms.

The Caudillismo Era:

The *caudillismo* in Venezuela is defined as "the union of personalism and violence for the conquest of power . It is a means for the selection and establishment of political leadership in the absence of a social structure and political grouping adequate for the functioning of a representative government".³ The *caudillismo* should not be equated with military rule. In order to survive, beyond the reach of a weak central government, (the caudillist) required skills more akin to those of a gangster rather than those of a professional armed forces. The existence of these organizations and institutions made the practice of any civil-military relationship impossible..

The majority military soldiers at that time came from the humblest ranks of society, and divisions of a quasi-racial nature existed well into the nineteenth century. In addition to this

contact with and influence from foreign militaries was minor and incidental.

During most of the *caudillo* period (1830-98), the military was only marginally involved in politics and required little doctrine or ideology to define their mission. They used force to advance the *caudillo* power, coercively controlled the populace, and defended against rival caudillos. Impassioned discourse, inflammatory editorializing, and a host of different colored factions within the political parties were all part of the free-for-alls of coalition and defense. Political ideology existed even among the most partisan intellectuals, however, many military men occupied political roles.

The subsequent growth of constitutionalism was seldom strong enough to bar military intervention during troubled times or when the civilian politicians seemed to have betrayed their mandate. The nineteenth century caudillism, violence, and anarchy were rooted in the country's primitive social and economic structure.

Sub-Conclusion:

Throughout the nineteenth century, civil revolt, remain a route to emancipation or property ownership for rural masses, by 1888, Venezuela suffered through periods of harsh as well as mild dictatorship and anarchy, punctuated with periods of relative peace. Regional strongmen (*caudillos*) capable of mobilizing peasant armies, acted as power brokers. Although many were semi-literate, they dominated politics throughout the nineteenth

century.

The Andean Hegemony 1889-1935.

The period from 1898 to 1935 is known as the Andean hegemony because the government dictatorial leadership was of Andean (Southwest region of the country) origin and relied on personal, familial, and regional loyalty. The last caudillos and first praetorian was General Cipriano Castro, whose rule was called the Restoration. The origin of this movement can be traced to the history of the Venezuela *caudillismo* since 1830. This movement disturbed the country by breaking up society with constant wars and revolts, that provided no periods for rebuilding. The movement was fed by the ambition for power. The lack of a constitutional tradition and a political consciousness also aided the Castro movement.

By 1908, Venezuela had a national political government dominated not by a party, but by a regional clique headed by a single, autocratic caudillo, Juan Vicente Gomez. The cradle of South American independence descended into another twenty-five years of despotism. It would not end until Gomez died in 1935.

The most articulate defense of Gomez's dictatorship came from Laureano Vallenilla Lanz. Like earlier Venezuelan positivists, Lanz denigrated the Venezuelan national character, but avoided crude racism. Lanz introduced the phrase "democratic caesarism"⁴ to describe Gomecista rule. Though not freely elected, he argued that Gomez's regime was democratic because it was embarked on a mission consistent with the national will,

(Philosophy of the Gomecismo, probably born from the Pact of Rousseau). Of course the rule of Gomez was anything but democratic.

Gomez, relying on an Andean clique to control the political and military apparatus, built a overseas espionage network to complement a corps of petty officials who assiduously reported on opposition activities at home, and kept track of one and another as well. This intelligence made it possible for Gomez to anticipate and diffuse challenges to his power from local and exiled *caudillos*.

Gomez chose his officers from local cronies and relatives, from just graduated high school students of the region, and from the traditional leaders of paramilitary gangs who had joined their cause. A regular Army and a conscription system had been in existence since 1899, and some basic training was given in a regularized military organization with the collaboration of the loyal Andean officers.

In 1910, the Military Academy was reestablished,⁵ in 1912, a Naval academy was opened, and a school for military aviation was inaugurated in 1920. Thus by mid-1920, the officer corps was becoming professional. Foreign military advisors were brought in to assist in the reform of the Armed Forces (1910-14) undertaken by General Juan Vicente Gomez. He was advised by General Francisco Linares Alcantara, the first Venezuelan West Point graduate, and Col Samuel McGill, a Chilean Officer who had been military educated by the first Prussian military mission to that

country just after the turn of the century.

Over several years of service, he gradually completed the Prussianization of the armed forces. Also because the reform was opened approximately a dozen officers had been sent to military academies in Colombia and Peru before 1920. The involvement of the Venezuelan military in economic and industrial activities became important during this time, and Gomez, rewarded active duty officer with the opportunity to represent his personal interest in other business. He also originated new industrial activities directly under the militaries.

As positive justification for the Gomez dictatorship, Laureano Vallenila Lanz began to form a doctrine of power and a role for the armed forces as "the necessary gendarme" for the maintenance of order, imposing a civilianizing, democratic Caesar. Very little advancement in military doctrine and ideology was made for the next three decades until the Peruvian generation initiated the drive for modernization and creation of to a doctrine of military professionalism.

Once the reforms were in place and Gomez was convinced that his forces were invincible, foreign contacts were dropped except for assistance from France in the establishment of the Military Aviation School. The rejections of interchanges, including scholarships and missions, seems to have been provoked by repeated conspiracies by graduates of foreign programs. Civil government and the military were controlled by the dictatorial military regime. The only way authoritarian relations flowed were

from the military to civilian society.

Sub-Conclusion:

With the dictatorships of Castro and Gomez the epoch of the caudilism came to an end. Revolution led by a soldier of some degree of prestige was the simplest way to gain power. One local chief by raising an army and issuing a proclamation was enough to bring the country to the state of war. The republican ideal of alternating rulers in office was only achieved in this way.

Transition to Democracy 1935-1948

The institutional and personal involvement of the military declined from 1935 to 1948. After Gomez's death the presidency, which was previously congressionally approved, passed temporarily, to the Minister of War and Navy, General Lopez Contreras. Lopez was, later elected president for the term 1936 to 1943, in accordance with the Venezuelan constitution. He established democracy and a respect for the law. These were the outstanding characteristic of his political and administrative activity. [The Venezuelan bourgeoisie was so weak that it did not even form its own national interest group until the founding of the federation Chamber of Commerce and Industry in 1940.]

Lopez took off his uniform but did not leave the ranks. Improvement in quality (military modernization, technical training, and military academy training abroad) and self-respect which the Army gained under Lopez, gave rise to a change in

public opinion with regard to the esteem in which the Army was held. He created the National Guard and removed the police and civil security functions from the armed forces.

For the first time in the history of Venezuela, a president elected according with the constitution completed his legal term and peacefully handled over his office to his legitimate successor, General Medina Angarita.

Lopez, General Medina , and the Accion Democratica (AD)⁶ leadership, successively reduced the number of ministries, governorships, congressional seats, and other posts held by officers. By 1948, the military was returned to the barracks.

The professionlization of the military and quasi-democratization of society were strongly increased.

Medina, sent more officers to foreign schools, especially to the Superior War College in Peru. This Peruvian generation, frustrated by the dominance of unprofessional *gomecistas officers*,⁷ instigated a conspiracy with the Action Democratic (AD) party and overthrew Medina in 1945. The officers alleged incompetence and corruption in the government so that they would be free to modernize and professionalize the Armed Forces. Their goals included the depolitication of the control of the military professional criteria for promotion, selection, assignments and others affairs, patterned after the Peruvian model.

Sub-conclusion:

The three years ("trienio") of AD rule, (1945-48) marked a

time of intense professional renewal. Hundreds of officers were sent overseas, a large built-up of new material was accomplished, the removal of all officers above the rank of major allowed for the rapid ascent of the Peruvian generation, (most of which participated in the overthrow of the AD in 1948) and intense foreign contact was initiated especially with the new US mission.

The New Military Intervention

With the coup of November 1948, the military formally assumed more institutional responsibilities than ever before. The immediate motive for the military coup was not entirely clear.

The successful conspirators claimed that AD was recruiting young officers into party ranks and arming its own cadre, both of which would have represented a threat to the corporate interest of the armed forces. Others stated that it was instigated for the political civilian opposition to AD such as demonstrated in the declarations of Luis Herrera Campins, a prominent *copeyano* (opposition party), just days before the coup:

"the discontented miliary officers have two alternatives. If the officer is unsatisfied with the sectarian line of the regime, he has the obligation of resigning his the commission; if he stays, its means the approval of the arbitrary policies of the government. These officers ... must some day respond to the deviation of the revolution".⁹

On the other hand, some reactionary political sectors accused the U.S. embassy and the oil companies of complicity in

the overthrow. In retrospect, it is plausible that the most important conspirator, Perez Gimenez, was motivated more by ambition than anything else.

Col. Delgado Chalbaut became the head of government while Perez Gimenez became Minister of Defense, a base from which he consolidated control over the military in order to professionalize all the Armed Forces. He did not seek to subordinate the junior branches. A complete military services instruction was given by each services, its own academy and then the Basic School took over the first two years of training for all the branches. Army Officers achieved more prominence.

The repression was relatively mild, but in Nov 1950, Delgado became the first Venezuelan chief of staff assassinated in office. Evidence pointed to Perez Gimenez as author of the crime. For two more years Perez Gimenez was content to rule behind the facade of two appointed civilian presidents. This period end when he manipulated the elections by suspending the vote count, and with the support of the chief of the branch of the Armed Forces and the handpicked new assembly, was declared the constitutionally elected president for the period 1953-58. He ruled over an unified military establishment and a complacent society.

Perez Gimenez became the key arbiter of power, and industrial development in petrochemicals, steel, and hydroelectricity was placed under direction of officers. In both steel and petrochemicals, the officers involved were implicated

in the personal profiteering of the dictator. At the same time, the Armed Forces reached a stage of higher development. Favoritism for the Army was not present because the Navy got a fleet of destroyers, and the Air Force got a squadron of the latest jets. However, all branches were subordinated to the Seguridad Nacional (non-uniformed counter-terrorist paramilitary force about half as large as the Army), which operated under the control of the Interior Minister.

Sub-Conclusion:

With the coup of 1948, the military formally assumed more institutional responsibility than ever before. Similarly, the recent increases in professionalism, the relative youth of the officers corp after the purges of 1945-48, and the increasing reliance of Perez Gimenez on his civilian cronies prevented much real institutional involvement in politics. There was no officers' council, military think tank or mobilization program led by the ranks.

Return of Democracy

In 1958, after a failed coup, Perez Gimenez, accepted exile and a five-member military junta assumed power. More demonstrations and violence forced the original junta to discharge two officers closely associated with the dictatorship. Right-winged military officers awaited an opportunity to stage a coup, then a Junta of Government. The military might have become more institutionally involved in politics if the officer corps

had been able to retain control of the new junta, but the overwhelming civilian rejection of such a role removed both the institution and officers from a formal political position. The junta of government handled over power for the term 1959-1964 to a duly elected president.

Sub-Conclusion:

The constitution established in 1961 has been in effect until the present time and a democratic life has been kept since then. During the past 38 years, Venezuela has celebrated free elections every five years and successive presidents from different parties have taken control of the government. The Armed Forces have understood its role in the national, social and political life of the country with some incidents that will be referenced later.

The Establishment of Democracy.

Majors reforms of the organizational armed forces took place at this time. Many of these officers remain to the present and others adopted the original pattern. This pattern eliminated army preponderance or unified control over other branches by formalizing command and educational autonomy for the different services and branches. Other measures included: restructuring the general staff into a joint general staff, putting cadet training under the control of separate branches, and promoting more officers from outside the Army to the post of Minister, Inspector General and Chief of the Joint General Staff. The

reason for this action was that the Army was seen as the major source of military conspiracies.⁹

The yearly turnover of Defense Ministers and their rotation among the services was conceived as a method of strengthening civilian control and preventing the rise of dominant military leaders, but this format also had the effect of greatly weakening ties between the rank and file and the high command. No officer served as defense minister long enough to gain the authority and loyalty of those below him.

In terms of training and promotion, the proportion of high-ranking *Andeans* declined, and the regional origins of military cadets for the service academies reflect statistically minor imbalances. High foreign contact is initiated and maintained.

The Inter-American System,¹⁰ specially its war college (Inter-American Defense College) UNITAS fleet exercises, and the School of Americas in Panama became the more important foreign sources of ideas about civil-military relations, subordination to the civilian power, military doctrines and, missions.

Article 132 of the constitution of 1961 formally added an important new ingredient to the professional, nationalistic, developmental, hemispheric and, anticommunist framework that was carried over from early years. This addition was the concept of the virtue of the military's nonpolitical societal role (non voting, nonoffice-holding, non partisan and nondeliberative) under civilian guidance and in support of democracy (assuring

orderly elections and sovereign elected authority).

The Armed Forces were more inclined to accept their new subordinated role. This is evident in the vigorous response of the bulk of the officer corps to armed uprisings of right and left wing extremists, including military elements between 1958 and 1962. In the next few years the largely conservative, anti-communist military consolidated its loyalty to the democratic state through its successful counterinsurgency warfare.

The new government also lavished praise on military personal for the new spirit of professionalism, patriotism, discipline, and sacrifice. This has been greatly reinforced by the evolution of the doctrine of military mission during the following years.

The ideological framework of the military mission allows for a definition of the threat that focuses military attention on border regions, the oil industry security, and subversion of the neighbor states where Venezuela's interest are at stake.

From 1964 to 1978, the successive governments of Raul Leoni, Rafael Caldera and Carlos Andres Perez elaborated the democratic adjustment mechanisms of presidential leadership and party control by exerting careful oversight of the military and maintaining delicate handling of internal Armed forces Affairs and attentiveness to institutional needs of the services.

Nevertheless, behind the image of the apolitical military and harmonious civil-military relations there were potential problems and tensions. One complaint concerns the mechanisms of civilian control over the military and the system of promotions

for high-ranking officers. By law, congressional approval is necessary for all promotions to colonel and general.

Another area of military concern involves the strategic role of the Armed Forces and the means to carry out their professional responsibilities. After the antisubversion campaign ended (mid-1960), the Venezuelan military gradually moved in the direction of developmentalism and a modified national security doctrine. While military roles were expanding, the command and control failed to keep pace. As a result, there has been a mounting frustration over the failure of the legal and structural arrangements governing the military to provide a unified command that is empowered to act swiftly and decisively in a national emergency.

A third discontent is the increasing use of the Army and National Guard in quelling antigovernment disturbance and urban violence (1984-89/89-93)

Public Discontent and the Military

By the early 1980s Venezuela's democratic system, was losing its luster. Democratic institutions had lost their dynamism and politics had lost touch with the average person. Politicians were increasingly perceived as corrupt parasites on the body politic, lacking any incentive to reform a system that had provided them wealth, status, and power.

While public confidence in government was declining,¹¹ Venezuela was undergoing an economic crisis, which began in 1982

with an unanticipated and dramatic fall in world oil prices which peaked about 1988-89. In 1989 inflation rose to 81 percent, levels unheard of in Venezuela. The country suffered balance of payments deficits, a sharp devaluation of the bolivar, and high unemployment.

The neoliberal government implemented an International Monetary Fund sanctioned economic restructuring plan. The shock was almost immediate; 1989 marked the year of "the worst recession in Venezuela's modern history". Given the increasing problems with social conditions, it was inevitable that public protest would materialize.

The February 1989 riots that hit Caracas and several other cities underlined both the strengths and weaknesses of the Venezuelan model of civil-military relations. The President ordered the Armed Forces to take Caracas. Although charges of military abuses of human rights surfaced following the riots, the Armed Forces carried out their mission with relative speed and efficiency.

The President declared that the Armed Forces had given "extraordinary proof of their loyalty to the country and their organization and discipline", but the riots clearly had a negative impact on the civil-military relations. This initial riot only proved to be the beginning rather than the end of a period of public disturbance throughout the nation. As the civil unrest continued, the military involvement in internal police role became increasingly controversial. Some politicians

expressed the fear that mixing police and military personnel would produce conflict and confusion and suggested new legislation to regulate such relations. Congress failed to act on this proposal.

Among the mid-level military, the involvement in police-type functions was not accepted. This was especially true among Army officers, many of whom complained that their mission was to defend the nation , not to defend corrupt politicians from the population. The attitude grew and was a factor in the February 1992 coup attempt.

Although deterioration in Venezuela civil-military relations had been increasing for several years the situation was made worse by deliberate policies of the government administration . Economic conditions for military personal, especially at the lower officer and enlisted levels, had been deteriorating for some time and getting worse. Discontent spread rapidly as these groups found their purchasing power evaporating.

At the same time the defense budget was shrinking, the available money was becoming inadequate even to supply personnel uniforms, boots, and daily food rations, much less to provide adequate maintenance and replacement parts for such items as aircraft, vessels and tanks.

Military discontent was not limited to specific grievances:

-The military became increasingly upset by widening civil disorder and the apparent breakdown of authority.

-The president's heavy involvement in foreign affairs made him vulnerable to criticism for neglecting pressing domestic issues. While the Armed Forces was focused increasingly on the deterioration of the democratic system, and what they perceived as growing threats to the security to the nations's frontiers the President normally was abroad.

-Officers came to believe that the President would sacrifice domestic interests to institutions such as the IMF and the World Bank in order to enhance his own international image.

-The government effort to promote regional settlements were perceived by the military as undercutting national interest, especially as this related to territorial disputes and control over frontier areas.

-The President's use of the military in international ventures also arose, increasing criticism within some sectors of the Armed Forces.

-Increasing military involvement in antinarcotics operations added to civil-military tension and also produced problems with the U.S which supposedly intended to establish bases in Venezuela. The U.S aid to Colombia was intended to strengthen that nation for a conflict with Venezuela

The inability of those officers at the top to appreciate adequately the depth and nature of the concerns and anger of their subordinates reflected the widening gap between the high command and mid level Officers.

Sub-conclusion:

There are not different resentments in the inter-service officers relationship. After the two coups in February and November 1992, many officers were retired and others were kept in the organization. From this situation was born some differentiation between who was in the coups and who was not and who did something for the country and who did not. The brave officers and the manageable officers as well as the good and the bad, because an issue. At the point, any leader, in any service or branch, at any level of the organization would have some officers with very strong and similar political ideas, officers with very confusing ideas and thinking about why or how they got involved in such situation, and officers with very clean and clear professional military positions. The unification of ideas oriented to democracy and the role and missions of the armed forces in the democratic system is actually a real challenge for the commanders.

The Civil-Military Relations at the Present

After the two coups attempt and since 1994 when President Rafael Caldera took control the government the following has happened. No sooner did he take office than one of the biggest banks crashed. The international reserves plunged and the currency fell into intense and steady devaluation. As result, inflationary pressure surged with an immediate economic effect on the population (All branches of public works, health, and housing are in crisis). Lacking a majority in the National Assembly,

Caldera suspended several articles of the constitution in June 1994.¹²

The challenges confronting Venezuela are not those of transition or consolidation of a democratic system of government but, rather, the decomposition or deconsolidation of an established democratic regime with all the consequences that it brings without differentiation of class level, employment, race or religion.

After the two coup attempts, many actions have been taken for the government in order to strengthen the civil-military relationship but at the same time the Minister of the Defense and the Service's Chiefs, who openly support the government, complain about the reduction and shrinking of the budget assigned to each service and the impact in terms of training of personnel and maintenance of equipment.¹³

On the other hand, in the last year the situation on the border with Colombia has been getting worse with the incursion of the guerrillas into Venezuelan territory and their connections with drug trafficking. This situation has kept the attention of the Armed Forces in this area in terms of combat operations in order to prevent aggression, maintain territorial integrity, and conduct civic actions. These activities have oriented the Armed Forces to be involved in their own business that is "partially" far from political affairs.

The rumors about the possibility of a coup are normally in the air of the popular environment. The people seem to have

little understanding of democracy and focus on their economic situation and their anger with government corruption and inefficiency. They look for simple solutions. The journalist Jose Vicente Rangel summed up this situation as follows, "the people do not link the "golpe" with a dictatorship... they interpret it as a way out"¹⁴

According with Dr. Gabriel Marcella in *Warriors in Peacetime*:

"There is a spectrum of civil-military relations in Latin America; from subordination of the military to a process of transition, to autonomy of military institutions from civilian authority. The character of these relations will deeply affect how the debate on mission and societal roles will be conducted"¹⁵

Venezuela, as distinguished from others countries studied, is included in this spectrum alone in a special position: Elements in revolt. By definition revolt is synonymous with uprising, insurrection, rebellion. In my opinion, in spite of this book being written some years ago, most probably the actual situation of Venezuela is in lower profile.

Despite the massive corruption of numerous government members, bankers and so on, very few politicians or citizen involved in public corruption have not been brought to justice. Except for one former president, cabinet ministers (civilian and military) and other government officials, remain in public office. They remain in the country impunely or have left the country to wait the expiration of legal processes or their condemnation in absentia.

Civil-Military Relations in the Future

The issue is whether Venezuela's weakened political institution and eroding political culture can be renewed and revitalized, or whether it will continue to deteriorate to the point that the regime will collapse and break down.

Richard L. Miller in his article on "Sustainable Democracy in Latin America" wrote:

"Today, the greatest threat to democracy comes not from the military, not from domestic radicals, not from foreign interventions, but the potential loss of faith in the process by the nation's own population. Despair, fuelled by mounting economic and social problems, by government gridlock and rampant corruption undermines effort at democratic consolidation. Frustration with a paralyzed legal system, combined with rising levels of personal insecurity make citizens willing to consider a return to patterns of official repression. The current situation in Venezuela provides a clear warning of the danger of popular frustration and despair"¹⁶

President Caldera confront the current dilemma in civil-military relations in the following way:

"Few members of either the military or civil society want violence or a dictatorship; almost all support at least the concept of elected, democratic government. But an inability to agree on the form of such a government, conflicts over definitions of democracy and responsibilities for both civil and military leaders, and the abuse and the arrogance of power, place this consensus in jeopardy"

If the problems described in this paper that have affected and still partially are affecting the Armed Forces remain uncorrected more deterioration in the civil-military process will occur.

Conclusions

Venezuelan civil-military relations remain in a state of chronic uncertainty and apprehension. The gap between the high command and the bulk of the officers corps has not been totally closed and the discreditation of the civilian government remains huge.

Historically, since colonization and until the present time, Venezuela has lived more than half of its political life under dictatorships. Many officers are imbued in the romanticism of the war of liberation, in the teachings of liberators or in the adventures of *caudillos* without understanding the evolution of the Venezuelan political process. Perhaps the military education has failed to inculcate an adequate understanding of either the nature of the democracy or the role of the military in a democratic system. The emphasis on idealism, sacrifice, and national pride may ill prepare officers for dealing with the real world of corruption, ambition, and political manipulation.

The deterioration and loss of credibility by the civilian leadership, more than any change in the military institution, produced and continue to produce a failure of the Venezuelan model of civil-military relations.

Venezuela has gone further than most of Latin American nations in encouraging officers to attend public universities and allowing civilians to participate in higher military education, both at home and abroad. This contact seems to increase the military response to the public opinion in terms of how well the democratic system is performing at any given point of the time.

"The extent of civilian-military interaction has been the subject of controversy among top military leaders, some of them view it as a source of distraction from the main concern".¹⁷

The "tabu" created in the early 1960s, concerning the role of the military in relation to democracy and the fear of the officer to talk openly about the meaning or role of the Armed Forces in a democratic system have restricted access to political knowledge for officers. This has at the same time directed officers to look for the justification of their role in military history rather than in the contemporary political life.

Venezuela shows what can happen if civilian control fail to adjust to changing circumstances and that democratic governments may break down due to polarization not among elites, but between mid-level officers and the political and military elites.

Also, corruption hinders economic growth, increases government inefficiency, undermines public confidence and support, and exacerbates problems in areas such as civil-military relations and judicial reform.

What to do¹⁸

Education.

Increase the incentive for education at university level, keeping the participation of civilians from different government institutions and organizations in the military high level schools in order to learn or understand how to manage military defense

issues. Increase the orientation of the military roles in the democratic society at different levels of education.

Participation.

The Armed Forces together with the civilian power must develop common tasks in related roles, keeping at the same time open mechanisms of mutual cooperation (Research and development, countering terrorism, humanitarian assistance, environment campaigns, etc),

Restructuring.

Restructure the basic democratic civilian institutions and power that certify and sustain the legitimacy and credibility of the civilian leadership (Example: the Judicial System).

Respect.

Respect the roles of each side in the democratic system, establishing priorities in mutual agreement for: tasks of joint development such as when and how to employ the Armed forces, and the level of participation on each side. (Example: the border guerrilla threat and penetrations).

Notes

¹Guillermo Moron, A History of Venezuela, Cambridge: Cambridge University 1964, p.101

²Daniel C. Hellinger, Tarnished Democracy, Boulder: Westview Press.1991, p.17

³Daniel C. Hellinger, Tarnished Democracy, Boulder: Westview Press.1991, p.20

⁴Guillermo Moron, A History of Venezuela, Cambridge: Cambridge University 1964, p.203

⁵The Military Academy was established in 1910 with the name of Academy of Mathematics.

⁶Robert Wesson, The Latin America Military Institution, New York Praeger, 1986, p.83

⁷Robert Wesson, The Latin America Military Institution, New York Praeger, 1986, p.82

⁸Nectario Maria, History of Venezuela, Caracas. Fundacion La Salle 1980 p.364

⁹Gene E. Bigler. Armed Forces Profesionalization and the Emergence of Civilian Control over the Military in Venezuela, (Mimeo 1975), p.96

¹⁰Robert Wesson, The Latin America Military Institution, New York Prager, 1986, This training has some of controversy as to how far the U.S was responsible for the officers ideas of subordination of the military to civilian government.

¹¹Luis Goodman, Lessons of the Venezuelan Experience, Baltimore:The Johns Hopkins University 1994, p.58

¹²"Venezuela Violent Spiral", Le Monde Diplomatique, in World Press Review, Sept 1975

¹³Las FAN no pueden enfrentar disturbios de gran magnitud. Venezuela. El Nacional News. Internet 11MAR96

¹⁴Luis Goodman, Lessons of the Venezuelan Experience Baltimore:The Johns Hopkins University 1994, p.75.

¹⁵Gabriel Marcella, Warriors in Peace Time, Future Missions of the Latin America Armed Forces, London, Cass 1994, p.9

¹⁶Richard R.Millet, Sustainable Democracy in Venezuela in Gabriel Marcella. Warriors in Peace Time, p.96

¹⁷Luis Goodman, Lessons of the Venezuelan Experience, p.160 Attendance of military officers at civilian universities has been alternately promoted and discouraged by the military leadership. Some have viewed it as beneficial for the overall civic formation of the officers, for others it is distraction

from the main professional concern.

¹⁸Gabriel Marcella. "The Latin America Military Low Intensity Conflict and Democracy", Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs, Spring 1990. Agree with the tentative working proposals but in terms explained in this SRP(Paper)

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