

BACKGROUND OF U.S. MILITARY TRAINING IN LATIN AMERICA

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EARLY HISTORY

From the beginning of the independence movement in Latin America in the early 1800's, the government and citizens of the United States displayed sympathetic interest toward the diverse political groupings in the Hemisphere. Spanish-American revolutionists sent numerous emissaries to the United States in search of recognition. The United States responded by dispatching observers to Latin America to monitor political and military developments. Sympathetic interest gave way to political and military intervention in the mid-to-late 1800's. A "Colossus of the North" image emerged as a result of the Mexican-American War (1846) and the Spanish-American War (1898).

The United States military presence in Latin American was limited to the Caribbean area following the Spanish-American War. It was closely associated with the promotion and protection of United States business interests in Nicaragua, Panama, Haiti, Cuba and the Dominican Republic. While engaged in expeditionary missions in each of these countries, U.S. troops also played a major role in training national guard and police units.

During the same period, European powers were involved in a number of South American countries, concentrating their efforts on arms sales and training. For approximately 50 years prior to World War II, Germany and France exerted the major foreign influence in Latin American military thinking and training. German military missions, at the invitation of the Governments of Chile, Argentina, and Bolivia, trained the various branches of the armed forces. The French performed the same function in Peru, Ecuador, Bolivia, and Brazil. The skills and technology provided by these German and French missions were the serious beginning of the professionalization of the Latin American military.[1] The message they brought from Europe was basically that military men were normally superior to civilians and that they had a major political and economic role to play in the development of their countries.[2]

Many political scientists believe that the foundation of Latin American military perspectives and strategic thinking was shaped during those years.[3] Attitudes were formed which, in many ways, counteracted United States influences and objectives.[4] For example, German and French military strategists transmitted ideas such as: the state is a living organism, constantly growing and in need of geographical space; and the civilian population must be organized effectively to meet the ends of the state and the nation. While this concept of continental geopolitics ignored the civil and political rights of citizens, it did inspire a strong sense of nationalism among the Latin American militaries and provided vision with respect to their destiny for leadership in the integration of respective societies.[5]

As European powers made significant inroads in Latin America through their grassroots military presence, the United States approached influence from a different direction. The belligerency that marked the era of the Mexican and Spanish-American Wars gradually gave way to a policy of more cordial relations with hemispheric neighbors. This policy was projected through participation in conferences and commissions aimed at promoting hemispheric peace and harmony. The theme of goodwill continued through various administrations, and, with the inauguration of President Franklin D. Roosevelt, it became known as the Good Neighbor Policy.

It should be noted that throughout this period, the United States maintained an extremely low military profile in Latin America. This was a calculated measure designed to: preclude the impression of intrusion into Latin American military affairs; discourage arms sales by American manufacturers; and focus the attention of U.S. armed forces on defense of the Continental United States and adjacent territories.

PRE-WORLD WAR II PERIOD

As it became apparent that the Western Hemisphere might become involved in a new European War, the United States began to superimpose military considerations against the backdrop of the Good Neighbor Policy. The base was indeed weak. In early 1938, United States military presence consisted of only six military attaches assigned among the twenty Latin American republics, and five officers assigned to small missions in Brazil and Guatemala. Initial proposals to improve upon our weak military position included: the introduction of Latin American students into United States military schools; frequent Latin American visits by U.S. naval vessels and military aircraft; the promotion of visits by high-ranking Latin American officers to the United States; the assignment of additional, highly-qualified military attaches; and the active promotion of American arms sales.[6]

Lack of military contact with the region hindered early action with respect to these proposals. Activity gradually increased as U.S. military representation grew. By December 1941, the U.S. Army had over fifty officers assigned to either missions or attache posts throughout Latin America.[7] Our involvement in regional training began as a result of interest/influence generated through this increased presence.

The initial group of trainees -- twenty-nine officers from eight countries -- began training in the U.S., at their own governments' expense, in the summer of 1940.[8] The U.S. Army G-2 summarized problems as follows:

Language presents a great barrier. Our ways are not their ways. A Latin American officer in an American training camp finds none of the pleasures encountered in his own or in a European garrison town.... Unless foreign officers are selected who can overcome these disadvantages, the net result is likely to be actually detrimental to mutual understanding.[9]

Because of these problems, the U.S. Army immediately changed its approach to training. It was decided to invite groups of forty to fifty officers for six months training with ground arms and to pay all expenses. Officers were to spend three months in schools and then three months with troop units. Two

such groups came to the United States during 1941, and the Department of State was pleased with the results.[10] This early experience illustrated that in order to maximize training potential, instruction should be conducted in Spanish and in a more culturally similar environment -- a lesson that began the evolution of the Panama Canal Area Military School (PACAMS) system.

WORLD WAR II

Interest in the military forces of Latin America increased dramatically when the United States entered World War II, and the protection of strategic commodities and sea lanes of communication took on paramount importance. Initial expectations quickly diminished when the U.S. found that, despite the general willingness of Latin American countries to assume defense responsibilities, they were ill-equipped to do so. As a result of this limited capability, the U.S. decided that rather than train, equip, and supply Latin American military forces, the most expeditious course of action was to provide the men and equipment.[11] At some cost to other theaters, over 100,000 skilled American military personnel were stationed in Latin America.[12] They provided a U.S. presence, protected the Panama Canal and the sea lanes of communications, and built various airfields, port facilities, and shore installations. There was one limited but significant exception to the "no training" decision. The "Latin American School" was established at Albrook Field, Panama Canal Zone, in 1943 to provide aviation training. This was the first of the three Panama Canal Area Military Schools (PACAMS). The school remains in operation today as the Inter-American Air Forces Academy (IAAFA).

POST-WAR YEARS

The friendly relations and cooperation which existed during the war years disappeared after 1945. The U.S. President and his national security advisors paid little attention to Latin America. From their perspective, the U.S. was secure in its influence over Latin America and there was no danger of outside interference in the hemisphere. Disappointment developed throughout the region as the U.S. lavished financial and economic aid on Europe and other parts of the world but excluded the nations of the Western Hemisphere. While the situation was not conducive to harmonious diplomatic relations, armed forces of the region had come to recognize the United States as a military model and requests for training developed substantially.

Despite the lack of a conscious policy decision to reinstitute training for Latin American military forces, the U.S. Army began to honor individual requests at the "Latin American Training Center" (the second of today's PACAMS), located at Fort Amador in the Panama Canal Zone. The Center gradually developed a curriculum based on U.S. Army doctrine and tactics.

In order to avoid earlier problems, the course of instruction was eventually presented in Spanish. In 1949, this Center moved across the isthmus to Fort Gulik where, to more accurately reflect its hemispheric orientation, in 1963 it was renamed the United States Army School of the Americas (USARSA).

Latin American policy was reemphasized and reshaped with the emergence of the Cold War during the 1950's. The Mutual Security Act of 1951 authorized \$38 million to establish a Military Assistance Program (MAP) for Latin America.[13] This program included training and grants/credits for the acquisition of arms. In conjunction with the program, U.S. military missions were established to advise on weapons requirements and to train/advise forces in their use. Congress reviewed the viability of MAP as a tenet of U.S. foreign policy at the close of the Korean War. Thereafter, it was renewed on an annual basis, and, by the end of Fiscal Year 1959, twenty countries had received a total of about \$17 million. Additionally, about 9,000 Latin American military personnel had received some form of training by the United States.[14]

THE 1960's

The Military Assistance Program entered the 1960s on the rise, peaked in the mid-years, and was on the decline as the decade ended. Congressional reaction to events of the times was largely responsible for the decline. Prior to 1965, Latin American countries were willing to meet defense requirements with excess, Korean War-vintage equipment. However, as the U.S. Congress denied requests for more sophisticated weapons, the region turned increasingly to European arms manufacturers (primarily England and France).

In this process, training associated with specific U.S. systems declined sharply. This gap was filled when the rising threat of extranationally supported insurgency on the continent redirected training emphasis. The U.S. Department of Defense's focus on regional training shifted to counter-insurgency, internal defense, and nation building. Emphasis on counter-insurgency and related specialties was short-lived and dwindled quickly with the 1967 death of Che Guevara and deeper U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War.

During the decade, the third of today's PACAMS was established. Training in the operation and maintenance of small naval craft began in 1961 when U.S. Coast Guard teams assisted the countries of Central America. Within a year, it was apparent that a central training base would be cost-effective. To reduce cost and meet increasing demands, the Small Craft Instruction and Technical Team (SCIATT) began operation in Panama in 1963. Late in 1969, the U.S. Navy assumed control from the Coast Guard.

A look at funds dedicated to the region during the 1960s reflects shifts in emphasis. MAP funds went from \$55 million in 1961 to \$79 million in 1966 before falling to \$18 million in 1970.[15] As the decade ended, over 36,000 Latin American officers and NCOs had been trained at a cost to the United States Government of \$91 million.[16] PACAMS had provided approximately 50 percent of this training.

THE 1970s

Three separate sets of security assistance considerations emerged during the 1970s -- those of the U.S. Congress, the Department of Defense, and potential recipients. The Congress, pressing for progress toward fundamental democratic principles and constitutional government in the region, balked at what was perceived as the support of authoritarian regimes. Closely

related, the issue of human rights became a major obstacle to arms sales and training. Negative Congressional reaction to arms sales and military training in certain cases was further generated by what were considered overriding social and economic needs in individual nations. Conversely, the Department of Defense maintained that the United States should provide military aid, training, and arms sales because they facilitated added influence, opened lines of communications not available via other agencies, and bolstered the region's anti-communist stance.[17]

As firm U.S. policy developed, vigorous Latin American protests surfaced. Countries consistently complained that the U.S. was, without consultation, making decisions that were of great importance to their defense posture, but that only they were in a position to determine their military needs. They added that the linkage of security assistance to human rights represented interference in their internal affairs.

These attitudes, and the overwhelming preoccupation of the United States with extra-hemispheric problems, combined to produce a decline -- in both magnitude and effectiveness -- in the regional training program. Personnel assigned to the various Latin American Military Groups (now generically referred to as Military Liaison Officers -- or MLOs) declined from 532 in FY 70 to 115 in FY 80.[18] This reduction in personnel drastically reduced the U.S. ability to evaluate training requirements in the region. Training appropriations (IMET) went from \$7.6 million in FY 70 to \$10.3 million in FY 76, and dropped further to \$6.5 in FY 80.[19] Significant increases in course costs resulting from inflation and a change in accounting procedures further magnified the impact of reduced appropriations. The net result was a slide from approximately 3,700 students trained in FY 70 to less than 1,700 in FY 80.[20,21]

THE YEARS AHEAD

With the turn of the decade of the 80s we are beginning to see a gradual increase in security assistance support for the region. The manning level of the MLOs has increased from a low of 86 in FY 81 to a level of 95 in FY 82 and a proposed level of 102 for FY 83.[22] Training appropriations have likewise shown an increase from the late '70s. Over \$7.4 million was approved for FY 81 and about \$9.5 million for FY 82. The proposed level for FY 83 is \$13.3 million.[23] The number of students training in the region under IMET has also increased from 2,000 in FY 81 to about 3,500 in FY 82.[24] We expect to train over 4,500 students in FY 83. Even with this significant increase, the United States is covering only a minute fraction of the total needs for this region.

From May to November 1981, USSOUTHCOM performed a significant research project to identify training capabilities and requirements in Latin America through the year 1990. This Regional Training Study was Phase I of a three-phase effort by the JCS to determine whether or not there is a basis for further development of regional training facilities and programs. Major findings of the study showed that, considering all training conducted by the host countries themselves and various third countries, as well as the United States, there remains a substantial shortfall in trained personnel over the period reviewed.

In an effort to meet at least part of the growing training needs of the region, plans are underway to expand the training programs available through the three Panama Canal Military Schools (PACAMS). The U.S. Army School of the Americas, largest of the PACAMS, is developing new curriculum offerings in the areas of civic action, counter-insurgency, and nation building, and is upgrading its faculty accordingly. Student weeks are expected to increase from about 10,700 in FY 81 to about 23,000 in FY 85. However, the permanent location of the school remains clouded, as its buildings and real estate are slated to revert to Panamanian ownership after 30 September 1984 per the Panama Canal Treaties. Alternatives under consideration include negotiating an extension with Panama and/or moving the school from its present site at Fort Gulik, Panama, to a location elsewhere in the region. The Navy's Small Craft Instruction and Technical Team also anticipates significant expansion. Its staff will grow from 7 in FY 81 to approximately 35 in FY 85. Student capacity will also expand from 55 in FY 81 to about 80 in FY 85. There will be an appropriate upgrade in equipment and facilities, and courses will be added to include shipboard casualty control and logistics management. Air Force related training will be expanded at the Inter-American Air Forces Academy by the addition of courses in corrosion control, air base defense, professional military education, and computer systems management. These three important schools give USSOUTHCOM a unique capability to provide much needed and sought-after training at the lowest possible cost to both the U.S. and Latin American governments.

CONCLUSIONS

The ebb and flow of United States interest in Latin America, both in general and with respect to military forces, are evidenced in preceding paragraphs. From a philosophical viewpoint, the story has been one of sporadic, short-term commitment, one that conjures doubt as to intent, and an account that provides little encouragement with respect to the U.S. commitment to collective hemispheric security. In more practical terms, historical information provides a base line for understanding our involvement in this region. We find ourselves with a legacy of a viable school system -- the PACAMS. However, we also find that in recent years, mainly the late 70s, our training has reached fewer and fewer students. This decline, in turn, has reduced dependence on and exposure to U.S. military doctrine, tactics, and organizational principles.

Our position at the beginning of this decade was much like it was in the days before World War II. Defense strategy still designated Latin America as an economy of force area, but the roots of this concept remained shallow because of limited contact and influence in the region. While the 100,000 American troops in Latin America during WWII did not constitute a relatively large percentage of total U.S. forces at the time, they did serve in retrospect to underscore previous deficiencies and inconsistencies in U.S. assistance to the region. Today, we could not afford a contingent anywhere near that size to secure our southern flank and meet commitments elsewhere. Thus, it is essential to sustain the economy of force concept as it applies to this hemisphere.

Effective peacetime coalition building in Latin America could provide a considerable reservoir of military forces in direct support of the U.S. should a world-wide crisis occur. Such a coalition depends on actions initiated now

and pursued consistently over the long term. The role of training in this important developmental effort is paramount, and USSOUTHCOM continues to foster a properly organized, funded, and administered regional training program serving Latin American needs of both today and the future.

NOTES:

1. John J. Johnson, The Military and Society in Latin America, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1964), p.69.
2. Alexander T. Edelman, Latin American Government and Politics, (Homewood, IL: The Dorsey Press, 1965), pp.190-191.
3. Johnson, The Military and Society in Latin America, pp. 70-74, 79-79.
4. Edleman, Latin American Government and Politics, p. 191.
5. Ibid., pp. 191-192.
6. Stetson Conn and Bruno Fairchild, The Western Hemisphere, the Framework of Hemisphere Defense, (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1958), p.173.
7. Ibid., pp 175, 184.
8. Ibid. p.185.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid., p. 186.
11. Ibid., p. 187.
12. Brian H. Smith, "United States - Latin American Military Relations Since World War II: Implications for Human Rights," Draft of Chapter in Forthcoming book, Human Rights and Basic Needs in the Americas, eds., Margaret E. Crahan and Brian H. Smith (1981), p. 5.
13. Kenneth Nolde, "Arms and Security in South America: Towards an Alternative View," (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Miami, 1980), p. 30.
14. Ibid., pp. 35-38.
15. Ibid., p. 67.
16. "Foreign Military Sales and Military Assistance Facts," December 1978, published by the Data Management Division, Comptroller, Defense Security Assistance Agency (DSAA), pp. 29, 32.
17. Ibid., pp. 21-29.
18. "Congressional Presentation, Security Assistance Program FY 1982," p. 45.

19. "Foreign Military Sales and Military Assistance Facts," December 1977, published by Data Management Division, Comptroller, Defense Security Assistance Agency (DSAA), p. 26.
20. "Foreign Military Sales and Military Assistance Facts," 1977, p. 32.
21. "Congressional Presentation, Security Assistance Facts, 1983," p. 591
22. Ibid., p. 47.
23. Ibid., p. 413.
24. Ibid., p. 26.

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