

WAR WITHOUT END

AMERICAN
PLANNING
FOR THE NEXT
VIETNAMS

MICHAEL T. KLARE

FOREWORD BY GABRIEL KOLLA

On May 5, 1971, the White House asked Congress to raise the ceiling on total arms aid to \$150 million beginning in fiscal year 1972. At the same time, the President announced that he would exercise his option, allowed by Section 33(c) of the Foreign Military Sales Act, to waive the current \$75 million ceiling on such aid. This move, according to Administration officials, was designed to enhance the Pentagon's capacity to negotiate with Latin American governments on the modernization of their armed forces. One official interviewed by *The New York Times* explained that "It's obvious you're going to lose influence with the Latin military if you don't furnish them equipment or let them buy it to replace the obsolete stuff they have on hand."²⁹

A major reason given by the White House for its 1971 decision to waive the limit on arms aid to Latin America was the desire to increase sales of U.S. defense items to the region (as distinct from direct grants), thus reducing the unfavorable balance-of-payments deficit. Between 1950 and 1969, the nations of Latin America bought \$342 million worth of weapons and other equipment from the U.S. Department of Defense (sales by private arms suppliers are not included in the Pentagon figures). The major buyers have been Argentina (\$71 million), Brazil (\$73 million), and Venezuela (\$100 million).³⁰

In order to keep the focus of hemispheric military concerns on the requirements of internal security, the United States has sought to dissuade Latin American governments from using scarce economic resources to obtain expensive, "sophisticated" weapons systems like supersonic jets, modern tanks, and naval vessels.* Pentagon spokesmen

* Although the United States has discouraged the purchase of modern jet aircraft by Latin American armies, there has been no such policy concerning the acquisition of propeller-driven fighters that have been refitted for counterinsurgency operations. Several such craft, P-51 Mustang fighters of World War II vintage, were acquired by Bolivia in 1968 from the Aero Sport Company of San Bernardino, California. Although ostensibly required for combat against guer-

point out that the Hemisphere is "protected against conventional military threats by the effective inter-American peacemaking machinery, by the Rio Treaty [Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance] security guarantees, and by wide oceans."³¹ These arguments, advanced by President Johnson at the Punta del Este Conference of April 1967, induced Latin American Presidents to affirm "their intention to limit military expenditure in proportion to the actual demands of national security . . . avoiding those expenditures that are not indispensable for the performance of the specific duties of the armed forces."³² Within a few months of the conference, however, Peru announced that it would purchase sixteen Mirage V jet fighters from France at an estimated cost of \$1.2 million each. Other Latin American nations soon followed suit by ordering comparable U.S. or European aircraft, thus nullifying the intent of the Punta del Este declaration.³³

The desire of Latin American military establishments to acquire advanced weapons for prestige has created a serious dilemma for the United States. On the one hand, Washington seeks to deemphasize the traditional, external defense function of the military, while on the other it cannot afford to alienate the very group upon which it depends for implementation of counterinsurgency programs. Addressing himself to this problem following his 1969 tour, Nelson Rockefeller asserted:

The United States must face more forthrightly the fact that while the military in the other American nations are alert to the problems of internal security, they do not feel that this is their

millas in remote areas, these Mustangs were used by the Bolivian military in 1971 to rout students occupying university buildings in La Paz as a protest against the ouster of President Juan José Torres. At least three high-explosive bombs were dropped on one building before army troops, loyal to the rightist regime headed by Colonel Hugo Banzer, assaulted the university and captured the student rebels. (*International Herald Tribune*, August 24, 1971.)

only role and responsibility. They are conscious of the more traditional role of a military establishment to defend the nation's territory, and they possess understandable professional pride which creates equally understandable desires for modern arms. . . . The result of all this is a natural resentment on the part of the military of other American nations when the United States refuses to sell modern items of equipment.³⁴

Rockefeller suggested that many Latin American military leaders "see the United States acting to hold them back as second-class citizens" and are thus "becoming increasingly estranged from us at a time when their political role is on the rise." In order to not lose the loyalty of this all-important group, Rockefeller urged the President to seek the repeal of Congressional restrictions so as to "permit the United States to sell aircraft, ships and other major military equipment without aid cut penalties to the more developed nations of the hemisphere when these nations believe this equipment is necessary to protect their land, patrol their seacoasts and airspace, and otherwise maintain the morale of their forces and protect their sovereignty."³⁵

Rockefeller's views are clearly shared by top officials of the Nixon Administration. Thus, in a 1969 statement to the Senate Subcommittee on Western Hemisphere Affairs, Assistant Secretary of States Charles A. Meyer reported that "Latin Americans have become puzzled and even suspicious of our motives. Strong nationalist resentment has arisen over what is seen as United States efforts to infringe on the sovereign rights of a country to determine its own military requirements." The time has now arrived, he observed, "when these nations consider that they cannot further delay their military modernization programs." While they would prefer to obtain U.S.-manufactured arms, Congressional restrictions against the sale of sophisticated weapons systems are forcing them to turn to more expensive European substitutes. Turning the Senators' arguments against them, Meyer concluded that "the long-

term consequence of our paternalistic, even patronizing, restrictions will be the acquisition of more expensive items, higher maintenance costs, and greater diversion of financial resources from civilian purposes."³⁶ Backed by this kind of logic, the Defense Department has been putting pressure on Congress to remove the restrictions on weapons sales to Latin America, and to increase the appropriations for arms credits under the Foreign Military Sales program.

According to *The New York Times* for May 19, 1971, the Nixon Administration is planning a \$30-million three-year program to sell tanks, howitzers, and armored personnel carriers to Brazil; a loan or credit sale of two destroyers to Argentina; and the sale of ground and air equipment, including transport and training planes, to Colombia, Venezuela, Uruguay, and Guatemala. It is also interesting to note that despite considerable U.S. discomfort with the socialist program of Chilean President Salvador Allende, the Pentagon has supplied \$5 million in credits to Chile's armed forces for the purchase of U.S. arms.

United States assistance to the Latin American military has often provoked criticism in Congress, particularly when U.S.-supplied armies participate in illegal seizures of power and the installation of military regimes. In response to such criticism, former Defense Secretary McNamara revealed, "The essential role of the Latin American military as a stabilizing force outweighs any risks involved in providing military assistance for internal security purposes."³⁷ These arguments notwithstanding, Washington recognizes that continued assistance to the Latin American military establishment poses a serious problem for U.S. foreign policy, since the strengthening of the armed forces means strengthening the very institutions which are most closely associated with repression and dictatorship. Indeed, by 1960 it had become clear that our military policies

bean and Central American countries.³⁹ It was only in the early 1960's, however, that civic action was elevated to its present status as one of the principal elements of U.S. counterinsurgency strategy in Latin America.

The Pentagon's counterinsurgency experts freely acknowledge that "the armed forces of some developing countries have been a major political force separate and apart from the people."⁴⁰ This condition is particularly pronounced in rural and wilderness areas, where government expenditures for education, health, and economic development are usually lowest. In Latin America, moreover, these areas are often characterized by great poverty and a highly unequal pattern of landownership, and so it is natural to expect that guerrilla movements will find it easy to take root here. The United States has learned in Vietnam that a guerrilla force is not easily crushed once it has secured widespread popular support, and that the use of indigenous troops for counterinsurgency operations in the countryside will more often than not inspire increased local resistance to the central government. Since Washington had already elected the Latin American military as the chosen instrument of U.S. policy in the hemisphere, it became imperative, in the Pentagon's view, that these armies extend the central government's authority to remote areas, and there engage in socially constructive projects designed to win the loyalty of the population.

Civic action is considered an appropriate use of Third World troops since "the most stable and modern organization in many developing nations is its military force." In remote and inaccessible areas, "the military forces are often the only governmental agency equipped and prepared to perform a much needed program in the socioeconomic field."⁴¹ This hypothesis is clearly traceable to Lucian Pye's argument that the "armies created by colonial administration and by the newly emergent countries have consistently been among the most modernized institutions in their society," and that "the peculiar advantage of ex-

were in danger of becoming counterproductive: American support of the military establishment incurred the antagonism of those Latin Americans who viewed the military as a major obstacle to social and economic progress. The Kennedy Administration, struggling with this problem in the early months of its incumbency, sought a solution in the arena of public relations: rather than curtail U.S. assistance to Latin American armies, we would seek to change public attitudes by refurbishing the image of the armed forces. If the military establishment could be converted, in the popular imagination, into an instrument of modernization and economic development, the contradiction in U.S. policy presumably would be resolved. The mechanism that could achieve this goal, Kennedy's advisers believed, was military civic action.

CIVIC ACTION

Military civic action is defined by the Department of Defense as "the use of preponderantly indigenous military forces on projects useful to the local population at all levels in such fields as education, training, public works, agriculture, transportation, communications, health, sanitation, and others contributing to economic and social development which would also serve to improve the standing of the military forces with the population."⁴² The use of the military for internal development is not, of course, a new concept, as there are many precedents for such activity both in the United States and Latin America. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, for instance, has traditionally been active in the field of flood control and harbor design, while in many Latin American nations the armed forces are frequently employed in road-construction projects in frontier regions. The United States itself sponsored such activities in Latin America at the beginning of the century, during its sporadic military occupations of Carib-