

WAR WITHOUT END

AMERICAN
PLANNING
FOR THE NEXT
VIETNAM

MICHAEL T. KLARE

FOREWORD BY GABRIEL KOLA

THE LATIN AMERICAN MILITARY

—Mercenary Statesmen

"We're going to lose Latin America," Rear Admiral Harold M. Briggs told the editors of *U.S. News & World Report* in 1961, "we're losing it right now."¹ Briggs, who had served as the Navy's Director of Pan-American Affairs, did not identify whom "we" were losing Latin America to—there really was no need for him to do so. Ever since Fidel Castro entered Havana at the head of a victorious guerrilla army, the U.S. establishment has been obsessed with what John Gerassi calls *The Great Fear*—the dread of a revolutionary movement that will sweep through Latin America and abolish the century-old system of exploitation that enriches American businesses at the expense of the rest of the hemisphere.² Between 1960 and 1970, the United States spent \$1 billion to overcome insurgent threats to the existing order, but the Great Fear remains. Reporting to President Nixon on his 1969 fact-finding tour of Latin America, Governor Nelson A. Rockefeller warned:

Rising frustrations throughout the Western Hemisphere over poverty and political instability have led increasing numbers of people to pick the United States as a scapegoat and to seek out Marxist solutions to their socioeconomic problems. At the moment there is only one Castro among the 26 nations of the hemisphere; there could well be more in the future. And a Castro on the mainland, supported militarily and economically by the Communist world, would present the gravest kind of threat to the security of the Western Hemisphere and pose an extremely difficult problem for the United States.³

At a time when the Vietnam conflict was capturing most of the headlines, Rockefeller's warning did not elicit much public interest. Nevertheless, his findings and recommendations—many of which are discussed below—received considerable attention at the Pentagon and at the Panama headquarters of the U.S. Southern Command (SOUTHCOM), where high-ranking Defense strategists have quietly been developing plans for U.S. counterinsurgency operations in Latin America. Unlike current U.S. operations in Southeast Asia, our plans for Latin America do not envision a significant overt American military presence; the emphasis, in fact, is on low-cost, low-visibility assistance and training programs designed to upgrade the capacity of local forces to overcome guerrilla movements. Such programs are not, of course, limited to the Western Hemisphere—very much the same strategy is being pursued in Africa, the Near East, and South Asia. It is in Latin America, however, that this "low profile" approach has been developed most consistently and energetically. For this reason, it is instructive to examine the Pentagon's Latin American operations in some detail, always keeping in mind that similar operations are going on simultaneously in other parts of the Third World.

In his report to the President, Rockefeller provided eloquent testimony as to why the Great Fear was well

founded: "Everywhere in the hemisphere, we see similar problems—problems of population and poverty, urbanization and unemployment, illiteracy and injustice, violence and disorder." In such a setting the abundant signs of prosperity enjoyed by a few become ever more provocative to the impoverished masses. Never again will the disadvantaged accept as inevitable the patterns of the past: "They want to share the privileges of progress. They want a better world for their children . . . their expectations have outrun performance. Their frustration is turning to a growing sense of injustice and disillusionment."⁴

The poverty and backwardness of the Third World will be overcome, in the establishmentarian view, only through the orderly processes of capitalist development. To be sure, the social changes wrought by piecemeal industrialization and rapid urbanization will engender some frustration and discontent, but these forces must be kept under control if the modernization process is to achieve its goals. There is, then, what Assistant Secretary of State for International Affairs Charles A. Meyer calls "a very close relationship between the prospects for achieving social and economic reform and development goals and a necessary level of internal security and stability."⁵ American policy attempts to maintain this delicate balance by sponsoring limited reforms of trade and investment practices under the Alliance for Progress, while subsidizing the forces responsible for maintenance of internal security through the Military Assistance Program. Economic advancement and military security are seen therefore as being interdependent: "The goals of the Alliance," Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara once said, "can only be achieved within a framework of law and order."⁶

In the volatile atmosphere of a nation undergoing the process of modernization, Rockefeller argues, pluralistic forms of government are often incapable of maintaining the proper balance between development and stability. Few of the nations of Latin America, he believes, "have

achieved the sufficiently advanced economic and social systems required to support a consistently democratic system." For many of these societies, therefore, "the question is less one of democracy or a lack of it, than it is simply of orderly ways of getting along." (Emphasis added.) In some countries, the armed forces have found it necessary to seize power in order to ensure the maintenance of public order. The United States, in Rockefeller's opinion, should forget "the philosophical disagreements it may have with particular regimes," and learn to live with the military strong men who now rule two-thirds of the Latin American republics. If we were to overcome our prejudices against military dictatorships, we would discover that "a new type of military man is coming to the fore and often becoming a major force for constructive social change in the American republics. Motivated by increasing impatience with corruption, inefficiency, and a stagnant political order, the new military man is prepared to adapt his authoritarian tradition to the goals of social and economic progress."⁷

The seemingly paradoxical view that professional soldiers can combine their "authoritarian tradition" with a movement toward "social and economic progress" can be traced to the argument, first advanced by a number of American social scientists in the late 1950's and early 1960's, that the disciplined structure of modern armies is an asset in underdeveloped countries where capable and efficient civilian institutions are slow to develop. An outstanding proponent of this theory is Lucian Pye, a professor of political science at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology; in a 1961 essay on "Armies in the Process of Political Modernization," Pye wrote:

In comparison to the efforts that have been expended in developing, say, civil administration and political parties, it still seems that modern armies are somewhat easier to create in transitional societies than most other forms of modern social

structures. The most significant fact for our consideration is that the armies created by colonial administration and by the newly emergent countries have been consistently among the most modernized institutions in their society.⁸

In another essay, prepared for the Smithsonian Institution's series on Social Science Research and National Security, Pye carried this idea further:

The basic problem in most underdeveloped societies is the difficulty in creating effective organizations capable of sustaining all the activities basic to modern life. There generally is an imbalance in the development of organization with the result that whatever type of organization as is effectively developed is quickly called upon to perform functions generally associated with other organizations....

That is to say that there is generally a high degree of substitutability of roles in transitional societies, and the more concrete and authoritarian organizations tend to assume the duties of the less explicitly structured organizations.... [In this situation] the military authorities often find that they are in control of one of the most effective general purpose organizations in the society and hence they may be called upon, or be compelled by events, to perform the duties of civil authorities.⁹

The underdeveloped countries should not, in Pye's view, "be deprived of the developmental value of the military organizations simply because the ideological basis of the military in advanced societies rejects the appropriateness of the military openly touching upon essentially civilian functions." This is even more true, he argues, "in countries faced with serious insurgency or subversion," where "it may be essential for the military to assume many civil affairs functions and operate even as the *prime institution of government* in certain regions."¹⁰ (Emphasis added.)

Pye's arguments not only influenced the conclusion of Rockefeller's 1969 Latin American report; they have also become an integral part of U.S. defense policy in the hemisphere. Officially, the United States is pledged to

support the development of viable democratic governments throughout the region; yet, out of our fear of revolutionary upheavals, we have elected the Latin American military as our chosen instruments for the maintenance of the status quo, and provided them with the arms, training, and resources they require to perform this function. Whenever any discrepancies occur between official policy and the actual patterns of events, Pye's thesis is brought in to bridge the gap. Thus Assistant Secretary of State Meyer told the Senate Subcommittee on Western Hemisphere Affairs:

The continuance of inadequate and inequitable economic and social structures which are vulnerable to subversion necessitates the maintenance of the counterinsurgency capabilities of Latin American forces in order that an internal atmosphere conducive to social and economic progress can prevail. Our training of small, mobile, rapid-reaction forces and our grant materiel program geared to maintaining equipment for the support of such forces [under the Military Assistance Program] play fundamental roles in this respect.¹¹

Moreover, the argument that armies can play a positive role in the development of their countries is, as we shall see, a major tenet of the doctrine taught Latin American officers at service schools in Panama and the United States. Although ostensibly the function of these training programs is to foster a "democratic approach by the military to their professional responsibilities," it cannot have escaped the attention of Latin American officers that we would be willing to overcome our "philosophical disagreements" with authoritarian regimes if they would at least profess to be carrying out some economic and social reforms. This tack, in any case, has been adopted by the ruling military junta in Brazil to defend its suspension of constitutional government and repression of political dissent: General Emilio Garrastazu Medici, the current President, has stated that the junta will remain in power "as

long as it is necessary for the implantation of the political, administrative, legal, social, and economic structures which can promote the integration of all Brazilians into a state of life that reaches at least the minimum level of well-being."¹²

THE CHANGING ROLE OF MILITARY ASSISTANCE

The Military Assistance Program (MAP) is the principal agency through which the Pentagon determines the armament, organization, and strategic doctrine of the Latin American military establishment. The origins of this program, according to Professor Edwin Lieuwen of the University of New Mexico, "can be traced to World War II, when Washington, in order to counter the threat of Fascist and Nazi subversion, began to establish military missions."¹³ Under the Lend-Lease Act of March 11, 1941, Latin American armies were supplied with arms and equipment in return for access to the region's strategic raw materials and the right to use certain air and naval bases. After the formal declaration of war in December 1941, the United States continued supplying weapons while Latin America provided temporary bases, stepped up production of strategic materials, and collaborated in antisubmarine warfare and other defense operations.¹⁴

Military aid to Latin America was suspended in the immediate postwar effort; as the Cold War intensified, however, the United States once again began supplying Latin America's armed forces with relatively modern tanks, planes, and ships. Under the Mutual Security Act of 1951, funds were made available for the modernization of Latin American armies in order to strengthen the hemisphere's defenses against external aggression. A country became eligible for these funds upon ratification of a bilateral mutual defense assistance pact with the United States.¹⁵

Such agreements were concluded with Ecuador, Cuba, Colombia, Peru, and Chile in 1952; with Brazil, the Dominican Republic, and Uruguay in 1953; with Nicaragua and Honduras in 1954; with Haiti and Guatemala in 1955; and with Bolivia in 1958.* As part of their contribution to the hemispheric defense effort, the MAP recipients pledged to supply the United States with minerals and other strategic raw materials needed for the production of military goods.[†]

The wording of these agreements, and all references made to them by public officials and the press upon their ratification, suggest that such pacts were viewed by Washington as being an integral part of the Cold War effort to contain Soviet Communism. Seen from this perspective, Latin America was expected to play a subordinate role to the United States, by providing a limited antisubmarine defense capability and as a supplier of certain strategic raw materials. This attitude was eloquently expressed by Sam Pope Brewer in a special article commissioned by *The New York Times*, in 1953: "Though it galls some South

* The United States also concluded an "Agreement relating to the furnishing of defense articles and services to Panama for the purpose of contributing to its internal security," and similar agreements with Costa Rica and El Salvador, in 1962. Special agreements were made with Paraguay in 1962, 1964, and 1966 for the provision of "civic action materials and services," and with Jamaica and Argentina for the delivery of military assistance goods and services in 1963 and 1964, respectively. (See U.S. Department of State, Treaty Affairs Staff, *Treaties in Force*, Washington, D.C., 1970.)

† Article VII of the agreement with Ecuador states: "In conformity with the principle of mutual aid . . . the Government of Ecuador agrees to facilitate the production and transfer to the Government of the United States of America for such period of time, in such quantities and upon such terms and conditions as may be agreed upon, of raw and semi-processed strategic materials required by the United States of America as a result of deficiencies or potential deficiencies in its own resources, and which may be available in Ecuador." (*Department of State Bulletin*, XXVI, March 3, 1952, pp. 336 ff.)