Civil-Military Relations in Latin America

Main causes of intervention
- Samuel Finer, *The Man on Horseback*: “instead of asking why the military engage in politics, we ought surely to ask why they ever do otherwise. For at first sight the political advantages of the military vis-à-vis other and civilian groupings are overwhelming. The military possess vastly superior organization. And the possess arms.”¹
- Need to define military intervention
- Coup or no coup
  - Personal gain
  - Crucial element is perception of civilian competence
  - Civilian support

Why does military leave power?
- Mission accomplished
- Worries about corrupting armed forces (professional institution)
  - Military-as-government vs. military-as-institution
- Economy is falling apart; they turn it over to civilians
  - E.g., Bolivia in 1982, Ecuador in 1977-79
  - in name of democracy, hand over mess
- Loss in war (Greece in 1974, Argentina in 1982)
- Tide is changing, cut a deal and get out while getting is good
  - All military regimes face a fundamental problem of legitimacy
  - By definition, rule by force; almost inherently don’t enjoy legitimacy

Why does military cling to power?
- Residual threat (mission not accomplished)
  - Guerrilla movements (e.g., Algeria)
  - Perceived civilian incapacity (e.g., Argentina: Peronists would win)
  - Millenarial transformation that they dreamed of remains incomplete
- Institution is already too corrupted
- Blood on their hands; afraid of what might happen to them

But simply asking whether or not there is a coup -- is this too simple a way of defining intervention?

- If I avoid a coup, is that sufficient to say there is civilian control?
- Aren’t there gradations of military involvement
- Stepan, Trinkunas

Strategies for constraining the military

- **Incorporation**
  - Create true people’s army a la classical Sparta
  - Every able-bodied citizen (or at least every male) is a member; no difference between military and society
  - Impossible to imagine conducting a coup; against whom? Against themselves?
  - Advocated by Machiavelli, who loved this idea, and by revolutionaries subsequently; most recently by Gary Hart in his book *The Minutemen*
  - Switzerland and Israel; few examples in Latin America, though Nicaragua might qualify during the revolutionary period (1979 to 1990)

- **More common approach is to go the other direction**
  - Create an isolated, professional military
  - Give them toys; let them have their own separate culture
  - Potentially could launch a coup, but in practice is likely to be too small and isolated from rest of society to carry one off
  - In developing world: Mexico
    - One of most impressive examples
    - Military simply not a major political actor in Mexico since 1940s
    - In 1920s, totally by Revolutionary generals; rebellions common
    - Steadily shrunk military
    - Now, 5x as many unionized teachers as servicemen
  - At the extreme, you abolish the army and just have a heavily armed police force (Panama, Costa Rica)

- **What if you need a large army, but it also needs to be professional?** (e.g., U.S. and USSR in Cold War era)
  - Most common solution, used in both US and USSR, is penetration
  - U.S.: Defense Department is all civilian; half-step above the military officers at each level of hierarchy
  - USSR: People’s commissars in each unit who report to Party; KGB spies
  - Copied by number of other regimes; e.g., Vietnam, Cuba

- **If all else fails...**
  - **Divide and conquer**
    - Venezuela: inter-service rivalry; all spying on each other
    - Create separate force to balance military
    - danger of peeving military, or politicizing them (Venezuela)
  - Mexico: rumor during the 1970s: military had only three day’s supply of gasoline designed to hobble military
  - Can be used in concert with other strategies
    - Mexico: Navy separated from Army; small; resource-starved; isolated

What happened in Brazil?

- Civilians really bided their time
- Appears to have worked, for the most part
- Military budgets cut, military industries privatized; military less of a political player than ever before in Brazil
- One thing they didn’t get, and will never get, is punishment for abuses committed under their regime
• Basically, this is what Stepan would have advised them. Sort of what Huntington would have advised as well
• Subtext of Stepan’s argument: look at all the stuff you can get if you just give up on the human rights front