

The US Army War College Quarterly: Parameters

Volume 31
Number 1 *Parameters Spring 2001*

Article 14

2-15-2001

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Recommended Citation

Schulz, Donald E.. "The Growing Threat to Democracy in Latin America." *The US Army War College Quarterly: Parameters* 31, 1 (2001). <https://press.armywarcollege.edu/parameters/vol31/iss1/14>

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The Growing Threat to Democracy in Latin America

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From *Parameters*, Spring 2001, pp. 59-71.

Does democracy have a future in Latin America and, if so, what is it? Only a few years ago, such questions seemed absurd. Democratic governments existed almost everywhere in the region, Cuba being the notable exception. Nowhere in the Third World did the vision of a "New Democratic Order" appear more promising.

But things change. If we learn anything from history, it should be that bad times always return. Today, anti-democratic trends are on the rise, making this a propitious moment to assess their implications both for the region and for US interests and policy. Accordingly, this essay will cover a lot of ground. This is a big subject, as well as an important one, and it will be addressed here in several parts. The first section will pose three themes and a number of questions related to the growing danger. Second will be a discussion of the syndrome of "authoritarian democracy," which poses one of the primary threats to Latin American democracy in the years ahead. Part three will offer some policy recommendations for both US and Latin American leaders before finally turning to a brief forecast of the future.

The Growing Threat

The first theme concerns the importance of democracy for US interests. Unfortunately, terrorism cannot be restricted to the violence of non-state actors. Latin American history is replete with episodes of state terrorism. Often, indeed, state terrorism has been a major contributor to the rise of guerrilla movements, as for instance in the Central American wars of the 1970s and 1980s.[1] In those cases, democratic transitions became a critical factor in defusing civil war. Today, democracy continues to serve as an important legitimizing force, inhibiting both state and non-state terrorism. Its decline would have ominous implications for the region's political stability.

Second, democracy is not an all-or-nothing proposition. It is not a matter of either you have it or you don't. Rather, there are all shades of democracy, ranging from purely *façade democracies*, such as the now-demised Fujimori regime in Peru, to *formal or procedural democracies*, where you have relatively free and competitive elections and the institutional forms of democratic governance, but where other important aspects--e.g., a free press, respect for human rights, strong and effective legislative and judicial institutions--are missing. Then there are what might be called *substantive democracies*, where you find not merely forms and procedures but also human rights, a free press, effective legislative and judicial institutions, military subordination to legitimate, elected civilian authority, a healthy, autonomous citizen participation in politics--all the things, in short, that serve as a check on the abuse of power and give meaning to the concept of popular sovereignty or self-government.

The question, of course, is how do nations move from a façade or procedural democracy to more substantive democracy? How do they broaden and deepen democracy? How do they foster democratization?

A third theme is the notion that Latin American democracy is currently in some trouble. Historically, the region has gone through a series of cycles in which periods of democracy have alternated with periods of authoritarianism or dictatorship. And the question now is whether the present cycle of democracy is coming to a close. Has democracy reached high tide? Is it beginning to recede? Last year's troubled electoral process in Peru is only the most dramatic indication that something is terribly wrong. The rampant political and economic instability that Ecuador has been experiencing is another bad sign. In January 2000, the military there launched a coup, the first successful military overthrow of an elected civilian government in South America in almost a quarter century. Serious problems have also been plaguing Haiti, which has recently witnessed deeply flawed elections and now seems poised to descend into

dictatorship and perhaps chaos. Moreover, something similar could happen in Venezuela if President Chávez continues along his current path of militarizing the political system and concentrating power in his own hands. If, indeed, these developments are portents of the future, what can be done to impede this backsliding, this reversion to authoritarianism?

Even those countries that are still making considerable progress in terms of democratization are often experiencing destabilizing or de-democratizing trends. Consider Mexico: Here is a country that is in the midst of an extended period of transition in which it is--and will remain--vulnerable to disruption on several different fronts simultaneously. The implication of this is that some bad things are inevitably going to happen; moreover, because these problems are frequently interrelated, when one thing goes wrong there will be second- and third-order consequences elsewhere.

In fact, Mexico has been simultaneously moving in opposite directions. Even as it has been making substantial progress in certain areas, it has been experiencing considerable decay in others. On the one hand, enormous achievements have been made in making the transition from a highly authoritarian political system dominated by a single political party (the Institutional Revolutionary Party) and a president whose powers resembled those of an absolute dictator (save for his limitation by the constitution to a single, six-year term in office) toward a genuinely competitive multiparty system. The stunning victory of the National Action Party's Vicente Fox Quesada in July's presidential election is clearly a watershed for Mexican democracy. Similarly, under the stewardship of President Zedillo the economy has bounced back impressively from the dark days of the "peso crisis."

On the other hand, the country has also been slowly heading in the direction of "Colombianization" as narcoviolence has accelerated, especially along the border with the United States. Hundreds of people have been killed or have disappeared in the vicinity of Ciudad Juárez, most of whom have been the victims of drug cartels or Mexican security officers linked to them. In general, the human rights situation has been deteriorating. Several years ago the head of Amnesty International proclaimed that Mexico was in the midst of a "human rights crisis." Since 1994, moreover, the number of guerrilla groups has grown, and violence has spread from Chiapas to Guerrero, Oaxaca, and other states. Chiapas itself remains a powder keg.

Nor is this all. In spite of the economic recovery from the peso crisis, living standards have not rebounded accordingly. As a result, tens of millions of Mexicans continue to struggle to make ends meet. This is a source of no small discontent. Partly as a result, violent crime has shot through the ceiling, creating a siege mentality in the major urban areas. The fear of crime is widespread and palpable. And some of this activity is attributable to the police and former police, who are putting their skills to work in new and troubling ways.

In short, what we are witnessing is a generalized breakdown of law and order. In response, the Zedillo administration turned to the military for support in the struggles against narcotrafficking, insurgency, and common crime. Law enforcement--and indeed Mexican society itself--became increasingly militarized. In turn, this led to a growing vulnerability of the armed forces to corruption as the drug cartels sought to penetrate the institution and buy military protection for their activities. Most recently, President-elect Fox promised that he will make law enforcement a priority of his administration, and that the military will be withdrawn from the war against drugs. But how this will work in practice remains to be seen. There are no easy solutions. It will take more than institutional tinkering to solve the problem. There have been many attempts in the past to foster police reform, and all have failed.[2]

Then there is Colombia, a country which maintains many of the forms and procedures of democracy, but which continues to be ravaged by paramilitary and guerrilla violence, and a veritable explosion of drug trafficking. The Colombian crisis promises to become this decade's equivalent of the Central American crisis of the 1980s. Violence and narcotrafficking are spilling over the border, threatening Venezuela, Panama, Ecuador, Brazil, and Peru, not to mention Mexico and the Caribbean, the primary transit areas for the flow of Colombian drugs to the United States. The Clinton Administration and Congress responded by pledging massive (mostly military) support for "Plan Colombia," President Pastrana's ambitious counternarcotics strategy. The hope is that the coming offensive will cripple the narcotics industry and, in the process, so weaken the FARC and ELN guerrillas (by depriving them of the financial bonanza they derive from their taxation of coca growers and traffickers) that they will sue for peace.[3]

Meanwhile, however, the violence will likely get much worse, as will attendant human rights abuses. Whether the

coming offensive will attain its strategic objectives is not at all clear. More likely it will simply spread the disease, as the guerrillas move their operations out of the Putumayo and Caquetá departments (or provinces) and the coca growers plant their crops deeper in the jungle. The strategy may, indeed, accelerate the spillover effect, with the insurgents increasingly using the territory of neighboring countries as safe havens, and coca growers shifting their operations southward, back to Bolivia and Peru, perhaps adding Ecuador for good measure. That, in turn, would further weaken regional security, spreading violence and corruption, and subverting fragile democratic institutions. By the same token, a strategy that strengthens the military without a comparable strengthening of civilian institutions could erode Colombian democracy by weakening civilian control over the armed forces.

The Syndrome of Authoritarian Democracy

The causes of these afflictions vary from country to country. Some are purely internal, rooted in socioeconomic inequality and poverty and political cultures laden with heavy doses of authoritarianism and corruption. But the United States has also made a substantial contribution. The traditional Cold War inclination to support repressive military regimes simply because they were bulwarks against communism strengthened anti-democratic structures and practices that continue to haunt these countries today. At the same time, the seemingly unquenchable US appetite for drugs has led to the rise of powerful Latin American mafias and narcotics networks that have penetrated local economies, making them dependent on drug money, and that have subverted political institutions, weakening democracy and in some cases creating virtual narcostates.

Moreover, even with the best of intentions--and US intentions are not always pure--Washington's policies sometimes have precisely the opposite effect from what is intended. It can be argued, for instance, that there is a central contradiction in our Latin American strategy: While encouraging democracy on the one hand, the United States is simultaneously strengthening the very forces (especially the military) that have traditionally constituted the greatest threat to democracy. The upshot has been the containment and weakening of democratic institutions and processes and the development of a hybrid form of "authoritarian democracy." [4]

The point here is that the economic hardships and social dislocations caused by a neoliberal US economic strategy have led many Latin American governments to adopt authoritarian measures in order to maintain public order and national security. And so civilian presidents, allied with military forces, are creating limited and militarized forms of democracy as they carry out economic restructuring. Executives have used national security laws similar to those of past military dictatorships and mobilized the military and security forces to enforce order. In turn, new US-sponsored roles and missions for the armed forces have drawn them deeper into the political realm and legitimized their involvement in social control and guardianship activities.

Eight trends or tendencies, [5] in particular, epitomize this phenomenon in a diverse array of countries:

. The first is *the enlargement of the military's presence in civilian institutions*. This is perhaps most striking in Venezuela, where politics and society have been militarized to an extent unwitnessed since the restoration of democracy in 1958. Under Hugo Chávez, dozens of military officers have served as presidential advisors, cabinet members, governors, and congressmen, as well as in many other important government posts. Army doctors are working in civilian hospitals, soldiers are building schools and highways, military doctrine is being taught in schools. In other countries, too, armed forces have increasingly been performing social welfare and infrastructural roles reminiscent of the "civic action" programs that facilitated the military's entrance into the political arena in the 1960s. [6] In many instances, they have acquired substantial business empires, both in defense industries and in areas of the economy traditionally left to civilians.

. Second, there is *the growing use of authoritarian practices by civilian governments*, as seen in the emasculating of civil liberties and the free press, the marginalization of the congress and courts, and the resort to electoral fraud in Fujimori's Peru. But again Peru, though the most notorious case, has not been alone. In a number of countries--Venezuela under Chávez and Argentina under Menem come quickly to mind--strong executives, backed by the military and security forces, have dominated the policy process, bypassed constitutional constraints, intimidated the opposition, and limited political participation.

. Third, there is *the creation or resurrection of domestic security and intelligence doctrines and missions for the military*. An obvious example is the widespread employment of the Mexican armed forces for internal policing and counternarcotics operations. Again, these are increasingly common concerns for Latin American militaries. As drug trafficking and violent crime have spread, they have undermined political and socioeconomic institutions, increased public insecurity, and overwhelmed the abilities of police, courts, and other civilian institutions to maintain the rule of law. In addition, growing social unrest and the continuation (in Peru), resurgence (in Mexico and Colombia), or threatened spillover (in Colombia's neighbors) of guerrilla wars have encouraged militaries to refocus on traditional "low-intensity conflict"--i.e., counterinsurgency and counterterrorism--missions.

. Fourth is *the use of political intelligence organizations by civilian governments*. This practice is not yet commonplace, but it could become so if the slide toward authoritarianism continues. The most notorious case is in Peru, under Vladimiro Montesinos, the shadowy head of the National Intelligence Service (SIN). Montesinos played a central role not only in the Fujimori government's counterinsurgency and counternarcotics campaigns, but in the president's wars against the political opposition. He was a major force in the shutdown of Congress and the Supreme Court in 1992, in the subsequent manipulation of judges and the news media, and in the eavesdropping and other "dirty tricks" that plagued the 1995 and 2000 presidential elections. Some of these same practices (though less extensive) occurred in Argentina under the Menem administration, where the State Intelligence Agency (SIDE) and parallel intelligence groups harassed and spied on the opposition.

. Fifth is *the continuing impunity for human rights violators*. Until recently, very little had been done to bring to justice military officers who had carried out assassinations, torture, and other abuses during the "dirty wars" of the 1970s and 1980s. That may now be changing in a few countries--the move to try General Pinochet for the abuses that occurred under his regime is the most striking example--but it remains to be seen how far these issues will be pressed. More generally, democratic governments have treated this issue gingerly for fear of triggering a military backlash. That, in turn, may have encouraged continuing human rights violations by leaving the impression that those who engage in such practices can do so with impunity.

. Sixth is *the growing resort to the use of paramilitary groups and unregulated private security agencies*. A good example of the latter is in Haiti. Private security forces in Port-au-Prince have more personnel, many of whom are more experienced and better armed, than the Haitian National Police. As for the paramilitaries, the most striking example is provided by Colombia. Paramilitaries are the most rapidly growing violent group in the country today. They are growing faster than the FARC guerrillas and are responsible for most political assassinations. Moreover, some of these elements continue to have close ties with and receive aid from the Colombian military.[7]

. Seventh, there has been *a growing trend toward "continuismo,"* of presidents attempting to extend their time in office by amending or reinterpreting the constitution to allow themselves second or, in some cases, third terms. While there is nothing inherently wrong with a president having more than one term--after all, we permit this in the United States--given Latin America's long history of authoritarianism it should make observers a bit nervous. At a minimum, it gives the impression that constitutions are being manipulated so that certain presidents can stay in power indefinitely. And that is cause for concern, especially when the democratic credentials of some of these individuals (Fujimori, Chávez, Menem) have been suspect.

. Finally, an eighth trend is *the recent tendency for retired military officers to enter presidential politics*. Now again, there is nothing inherently wrong with this. But given the region's long history of military rule, it is not reassuring. At the least, it blurs the distinction between military and civilian government and gives the appearance--justifiable or not--that the armed forces are perpetuating their power through the back door. Here one can simply note the successful election campaigns of Presidents Chávez in Venezuela and Bánzer in Bolivia, and the less-successful efforts of Lino Oviedo in Paraguay and Harold Bedoya in Colombia. And if that isn't enough, one might also note that the recent presidential election in Venezuela featured no less than *two* retired colonels, Hugo Chávez and Francisco Arias Cárdenas.

Taken as a whole, these are significant developments. They don't appear in every country, and nowhere do they all appear in any country. In some cases, there have even been reversals. (Menem's attempt to secure a third term was unsuccessful; Fujimori is now in exile and Montesinos a fugitive; and there has been notable progress of late in Argentina and Chile in purging human rights violators and in some cases bringing them to justice.) But the symptoms continue, and the overall trends are strong enough to be deeply troubling. They underscore the dangers of not coming to terms with the basic socioeconomic challenges facing Latin America today--most notably, poverty, inequality, and the problem of economic instability and volatility. They also should caution against an uncritical embrace of military-to-military cooperation. At a minimum, they suggest that strengthening the military without a corresponding strengthening of civilian institutions and leadership can gut democracy of much of its essence.

Clearly, there is a critical need to bolster civilian control of the military, as well as civilian competence in national security and military affairs. Just as evident, there is an ongoing need to cultivate understanding of and respect for democracy among both military officers and civilians, because the problem of authoritarianism is not restricted to the former. The recent examples of Fujimori in Peru and Menem in Argentina, in particular, demonstrate that civilians too can be like *caudillos* (military strongmen). Intimidation of the political opposition, harassment of the press, human rights abuses, and extraordinary attempts to remain in power can be just as much a part of civilian rule as military rule.

It is in part within this context that one must place the expanding roles and missions issue. The concern, of course, is that the increasing involvement of the armed forces in nontraditional missions like counternarcotics, law enforcement, counterterrorism, and infrastructural development will militarize society and politics to an unhealthy extent, undermining civilian institutions and leadership, increasing human rights violations, and severely constraining the further development of these nascent and still fragile democracies. The dangers are real, especially in countries where the professionalization of the military has been only partial or incomplete. There the assumption of new roles and missions could lead to the politicization of the military.

Yet, it is crucial that the total context be considered. If the dangers of "militarization" are real, so are the dangers of not coming to terms with threats (both old and new) to national security. If civilian institutions are incapable of dealing with the rise of drug cartels, escalating criminality, insurgency, and paramilitary violence, then governments may feel they have little choice but to call on the armed forces. In such situations, the risks and costs of inaction may be prohibitive.

What Is to be Done?

All this being said, what can be done to strengthen the prospects for democracy's survival and development? First of all, much more needs to be done to redress the historical imbalance in Latin American civil-military relations by strengthening civilian institutions, both in the state and civil society. Police and judicial reform should be priorities. As matters now stand, many governments feel they have no choice but to bring the military into law enforcement. The alternative is rampant criminality and national insecurity. Only when civilian institutions are strengthened--professionalized, purged of incompetent, corrupt, and brutal elements, and given more resources--will they be able to perform the missions for which they were designed. A failure on this score would mean that militarization would become a semi-permanent feature of the emerging new Latin American political order, or at least a chronic resort whenever civilian institutions fail.

Greater efforts must also be made in vetting and training judicial personnel. It will do little good to try to improve the quality of police forces if judges--whether through incompetence, bribery, or intimidation--turn loose the guilty. Such behavior only undermines morale and fosters cynicism and human rights abuses, as officers resort to extra-judicial justice to punish those whom the courts do not.

Nor are these the only challenges. Most Latin American countries have achieved formal democracy. The next step is to go beyond the form to more substantive democracy. Among other things, that will require political leadership training, civic education, corruption control, and the fostering of strong political parties and civil societies. How all this can be done in an era of declining US will to provide foreign aid is not immediately apparent. But the consequences of failure are likely to be stagnation, political decay, and a return to the authoritarianism and political instability of the past.

Second, it is critical that the United States remain engaged with the Latin American militaries. An important part of that involves encouraging Latin officers to envision their profession in a manner that fosters democratic civil-military relations. Here, education and training are vital. A military doctrine must be developed that emphasizes the proper role of the armed forces in a democratic society. And this means more than just respecting democratic elections or refraining from launching a coup d'etat, but rather a willingness to obey civilian authorities and respect human rights and civil liberties.

This training must be explicit, substantive, and ongoing. It is not a one-shot proposition, and going through the motions is not enough. One cannot just bring Latin American officers to the United States under the assumption that the mere exposure to US society or US military professionalism will foster democratic values. Osmosis is insufficient for transforming highly authoritarian military cultures and creating new patterns of civil-military relations. Indeed, it will take more than one generation to transform the Latin American armed forces, and some military cultures will be much more difficult to change than others.

At the same time, education and training cannot be limited to the military. It is equally important to educate civilians. One of the greatest impediments to the development of democratic civil-military relations today remains a lack of competence and interest in defense and national security issues on the part of civilian authorities. One cannot expect military professionals to respect civilian leaders unless those leaders are also competent professionals. Without that, there will always be a certain amount of distrust--and, indeed, contempt--undermining the relationship and, consequently, a temptation to resist civilian control, ignore official policies, and perhaps even resort to coups whenever civilian leaders are perceived as endangering national security through their incompetence and irresponsibility.

So it is important to educate civilian leaders with respect to national security issues like defense management, military strategy, and roles and missions. And not only political leaders. There is also a need for greater understanding and involvement of civil society in academia, the private sector, and elsewhere.

It was with this need for civilian education in mind that the Center for Hemispheric Defense Studies was founded a few years ago at the National Defense University in Washington, D.C. Similarly, the Department of Defense and the individual services have been active in recent years in sponsoring conferences and seminars designed to bring civilians and military from both Latin America and the United States together to explore issues like the future of civil-military relations in democracies. Many Latin American militaries also have established programs of their own to bring together civilians and military officers in courses on national security issues.

Such programs are steps in the right direction. It would be a tremendous mistake for the US military to keep its Latin American counterparts at arm's length. It would be sending precisely the wrong message--namely, that we don't care how they behave, and that there would be no cost involved in returning to traditional practices of political intervention and human rights abuse. Latin Americans need armed forces that are more professional and more committed to working within a democratic system, not less. And here the US military has an important role to play as teacher, mentor, and role model.

A vital contribution in this regard will be the work to be done by the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation, the new Department of Defense organization replacing the often-maligned US Army School of the Americas. The new institute has the potential to perform an invaluable service in helping to professionalize the Latin American militaries by, among other things, providing them with substantial human rights training. The Western Hemisphere Institute is intended to "provide professional education and training to military personnel, law enforcement personnel, and civilian officials of Western Hemisphere countries in such areas as leadership development, counterdrug operations, peace support operations, disaster relief, and human rights." The legislation creating the institute specified "mandatory instruction for each student . . . on human rights, the rule of law, on due process, on civilian control of the military, and the role of the military in a democratic society." [8]

The inclusion of civilian officials in such efforts is also necessary, because there is a danger in modernizing the military without a comparable strengthening of the capacity of civilians to provide competent leadership. To strengthen the military without strengthening civilian institutions and leadership can weaken democratic civil-military relations by making the civilians more dependent on the military and by tempting the latter to intervene or assume a dominant role

behind the scenes.

What actions might be undertaken by Latin Americans themselves? Certainly, the development of confidence between civilians and the military is critical. But beyond this, there is another question--namely, how aggressive should civilian leaders be in their efforts to extend civilian control over the military? While the answer will vary from country to country, retired General Fred Woerner, former Commander-in-Chief of the US Southern Command, makes a good point in arguing that notwithstanding the remarkable progress that has been made during the past quarter century, civilians have often acted too cautiously.[9] There have been opportunities to further strengthen democracy--including civilian control--that have not been fully explored. In many if not most cases, the armed forces would accept a greater degree of civilian control than has emerged thus far. Among other things, there is a need for civilians to assume leadership in developing effective defense policies. Today, for instance, most Latin American ministers of defense are civilians, but most of them do not wield effective power. In a democracy, however, it is the responsibility of civilians, rather than the military, to decide when armed force is used. Moreover, they must participate in determining *how* it is used as well. These matters are best decided through a frank and constructive dialogue that recognizes the political responsibilities of civilian officials and the technical expertise of military professionals.

Again, a fundamental intermediate step is a national commitment to train and educate civilian professionals in strategic affairs and the management of defense institutions. Among other things, this would include:

- The funding of institutes and think tanks devoted to the development of civilian competence in defense and security matters.
- The designation of funds to support conferences, workshops, seminars, and other meetings designed to facilitate civilian-military interaction.
- The opening of national defense and war colleges to senior government officials and other key political actors who might benefit from the educational programs offered at those institutions.
- The establishment of military liaison offices with legislatures.
- The provision of adequate and competent oversight by elected civilian government officials over the military establishments.

Some of these things, of course, have already been done--or at least have been begun--in some countries. There the need is to sustain and build on them over time. The goal is a long-term process of constructing democratic institutions and relationships, not something that can be achieved in a day or even a decade.

Finally, to return to US policy, the United States should come to terms with the contradictions in its regional strategy. Two of these, in particular, stand out: The first is the contradiction between US economic strategy and the requirements of regional political stability. The second is between US counternarcotics policy and political stability. The rapid movement toward globalization and marketization has and will continue to aggravate problems of poverty and inequality in the short to medium term. Privatization of state enterprises has worsened unemployment. The elimination of tariffs has opened up Latin American economies to foreign trade and investment, often driving local producers out of business. Rapid and massive transfers of capital have led to boom-bust cycles and severe socioeconomic disruption. At the same time, US counternarcotics policies have chased traffickers from the Caribbean to Mexico and back to the Caribbean, destabilizing both areas. Successful counternarcotics campaigns in Peru and Bolivia have pushed coca farming north, into Colombia. Attempts to sanction the Samper administration because of the president's complicity in accepting campaign contributions from narcotraffickers impaired the ability of the Colombian state to deal with guerrilla and paramilitary violence, helping to accelerate the disintegration of that country.

A detailed treatment of these issues is beyond the scope of this article. The point is simply that US policies have had unintended side effects that must be recognized and addressed. This will require a greater degree of flexibility and imagination than has been shown so far. It makes little sense, for instance, for the United States to drastically cut economic aid to the eastern Caribbean and insist on an end to the European Union's system of preferences for the islands' banana exports. A major security problem has been brewing in the region, and it has been in large part a consequence of an unfortunate combination of US actions that have increased drug trafficking while simultaneously undermining the socioeconomic structures of these mini-states.

Similarly, it is an exceedingly poor idea for the United States to slash its economic development aid to Latin America at a time when such assistance is sorely needed to strengthen democratic institutions and foster socioeconomic stability. Without a greater effort to help counteract the damaging side effects of neoliberal economic policies, we are likely to see increasing political turmoil and disillusionment with democracy and a return to more authoritarian patterns of governance.

Nor does it make much sense to blame Latin Americans for the failure of US drug policy. Certainly, Latins must bear their share of responsibility. But the driving force of the illegal narcotics industry in this hemisphere is the US demand and the enormous profits generated by it. By creating this incentive, the United States has contributed mightily to the subversion of the very democratic institutions it has been trying to promote and has, in some instances, destabilized its southern neighbors. In sum, we must clean up our own house.

The Outlook

This essay shouldn't close by leaving the impression that nothing has been accomplished these past couple of decades or that democracy is doomed. Neither proposition is true. In fact, enormous progress has been made. In the early 1970s, Latin America had military governments in all countries save Mexico, Costa Rica, Venezuela, and Colombia. And in truth Mexico was a dictatorship too--a civilian dictatorship. (The "perfect dictatorship," in Mario Vargas Llosa's memorable words.) Today, in contrast, democratic governments rule everywhere except Cuba. Some of these, it is true, may be more façade than real democracies. But even Peru and Haiti have had elections, and they have not been entirely unmeaningful. In Peru, indeed, they played an important role in Fujimori's eventual departure.[10]

Moreover, it is very unlikely that all the progress that has been made will be swept away in a wholesale reversion to authoritarian rule. Public opinion polls consistently show that while most Latin Americans are disappointed in the performance of their governments, they are in no hurry to re-embrace dictatorship. Their memories are too clear for that. Make no mistake, however, there will be erosion. The tide of democracy is already ebbing. The question is how far these reversals will go. It seems likely that most countries will remain democratic, to one degree or another. Some will continue on the path of political development and will become more substantive democracies. A larger number will probably stagnate and remain about where they are now. Some will regress and become less democratic. A few--hopefully not many--may fall back into forms of despotism, led by the military or, perhaps more likely, civilian strongmen.

This probably will be the nature of the political cycle that is now beginning--neither wholly democratic nor wholly authoritarian. But that will not be the end of the story. Democratization is a long-term process. In the United States, it has taken over two centuries to develop; in Great Britain even longer. It is a dialectical process that unfolds in fits and starts. There will be periods of setback, followed by periods of progress. Two steps forward, one step backward, until the time that new democratic gains can be made and consolidated. That will be the real future and pattern of democratization in Latin America.

NOTES

1. See, e.g., Donald E. Schulz and Douglas H. Graham, eds., *Revolution and Counterrevolution in Central America and the Caribbean* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1984), passim.
2. For a provocative look at Mexico's future, which includes a range of scenarios, see Michael J. Mazarr, *Mexico 2005: The Challenges of the New Millennium* (Washington: CSIS Press, 1999).
3. On the Colombian crisis, see especially Gabriel Marcella and Donald E. Schulz, "Colombia's Three Wars: U.S. Strategy at the Crossroads," *Strategic Review*, 28 (April 2000), 3-22; and Rafael Pardo, "Colombia's Two-Front War," *Foreign Affairs*, 79 (July-August 2000). The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and the National Liberation Army (ELN) are the two largest insurgent groups in Colombia.
4. See, especially, J. Patrice McSherry, "The Emergence of 'Guardian Democracy,'" *NACLA Report on the Americas*, 32 (November-December 1998), 16-24.

5. The first six of these are discussed in greater detail in McSherry, pp. 18ff.
6. For discussion and debate over these new roles and missions, see Donald E. Schulz, ed., *The Role of the Armed Forces in the Americas: Civil-Military Relations for the 21st Century* (Carlisle, Pa.: US Army War College, Strategic Studies Institute, 1998).
7. See, especially, Human Rights Watch, "The Ties that Bind: Colombia and Military-Paramilitary Links," Vol. 12, No. 1 (B), February 2000, internet, <http://www.hrw.org/reports/2000/colombia/>, accessed 28 November 2000.
8. Statement of Senator Carl Levin, *Congressional Record*, 106th Cong., 2d sess., 12 October 2000, internet, <http://levin.senate.gov/floor/101200f.htm>, accessed 28 November 2000.
9. See Frederick Woerner, "Civil-Military Relations in Latin America: Pitfalls and Prospects," in Schulz, ed., *The Role of the Armed Forces in the Americas*, pp. 75-76.
10. While the departure of Fujimori is an important setback for authoritarianism, it is by no means clear that Peruvian politicians can translate it into a victory for democracy. Lest it be forgotten, Fujimori's rise was largely due to the corruption and incompetence of successive "democratic" administrations in the 1970s and 1980s. It remains to be seen whether the politicians have gotten their acts together enough to play a positive role in democratic governance.

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