

THE CRISIS IN VENEZUELAN CIVIL- MILITARY RELATIONS: From Punto Fijo to the Fifth Republic*

Harold A. Trinkunas
Naval Postgraduate School

Abstract: For many who thought of Venezuela as a consolidated democracy, the 1992 coup attempts came as a complete surprise. Those familiar with the deterioration of its democratic regime, in contrast, were more surprised that the coups did not succeed. This article provides an institution-centered explanation of the puzzle of why the 1992 coup attempts occurred, why they failed, and why the Venezuelan military has remained quiescent in the years that followed. Institutions of civilian control created during the post-1958 "Punto Fijo" period, particularly those based on fragmenting the officer corps, prevented the collapse of the democratic regime in 1992. These same institutions allowed civilians to regain authority over the armed forces during the Rafael Caldera administration and have ensured the subordination of the armed forces to elected authorities to the present. It is also argued that the institutional basis for civilian control has been dismantled during the Fifth Republic, heightening the likelihood of future civil-military conflict and threatening regime stability.

Many who considered Venezuela a consolidated democracy were caught off guard by the coup attempts in 1992. But those familiar with the deterioration of its democratic regime were more surprised that the coups failed. After President Carlos Andrés Pérez adopted economic austerity measures in 1989, protests by workers, students, and retirees became a daily occurrence in Venezuela's major cities (Daniels 1992, 238–40). Although the economy experienced strong growth in 1990 and 1991, it occurred amidst increasing income inequality and declining real wages. Legislators, including many from the administration's own political party, attacked the neo-liberal structural-adjustment package because it undermined entrenched party interests. Within the armed forces, military salaries and benefits declined markedly in real terms (Tarre Briceño 1994, 146–54). Even more infu-

*Research funding and support for this article were provided by the Center for Latin American Studies of Stanford University and by the Research Office of the Naval Postgraduate School. I wish to thank Terry Karl, Thomas Bruneau, David Myers, Jennifer McCoy and the anonymous *LARR* reviewers for their helpful comments on earlier drafts. Any remaining errors are entirely my responsibility.

riating to many officers were rumors and allegations of government corruption and improprieties. Prior to the coup attempts, the approval rating of President Pérez had sunk to record lows (Romero 1997). According to most standard theoretical accounts of military intervention in politics (Zimmerman 1983), a coup d'état in these circumstances should have succeeded.¹

Since 1992 no new military rebellions have broken out, even as economic, social, and political conditions have worsened. The 1990s turned out to be another lost decade for Venezuela, one marked by recession, high inflation, steady devaluation of the currency, popular unrest, the decay of many government services, and the near collapse of the financial sector. In the political arena, Venezuelans have witnessed a presidential impeachment, gridlock during the recent term of Rafael Caldera, and a period of wholesale transformation of state institutions following the election as president of a former coup leader, Lieutenant Colonel Hugo Chávez Frías. Despite all this upheaval, the armed forces have remained largely quiescent politically as President Chávez has dramatically expanded their role in government administration, economic development, and internal security.

Recent Venezuelan history presents several linked puzzles. If Venezuela was a consolidated democracy before 1992, what changes occurred in the regime and its armed forces that created the conditions for the coup attempts? Or if its democracy had become deconsolidated by 1992, why did the coup attempts fail? Given worsening conditions since 1992, why has the military not intervened directly in politics again? Finally, although the military appears to be entirely subordinate to President Chávez now, what are the implications of expanded military participation in the state and the economy for future regime stability?

The decreasing governability of Venezuelan society lies at the heart of one set of politics-centered explanations for the crisis of the 1990s. For John Martz, Daniel Levine, and Brian Crisp, the current instability has arisen from the inability of the traditional party system to integrate effectively alternate organizations that arose in politics and civil society in response to declining standards of living and deteriorating government services.² From this perspective, President Pérez's decision to implement a radical change in economic policy attacked the consensual basis of democratic politics in Venezuela at a time when traditional political actors were incapable of crafting new rules of the game and thus generated the crisis that created the opportunity for a coup d'état in 1992 (Martz 1995; Levine and Crisp 1995). More recent analyses have elaborated on the dysfunctional aspects of the politi-

1. For a complete review of theoretical explanations and models of coups d'état, see Zimmerman (1983).

2. The traditional party system, dating from the signing of the Pacto de Punto Fijo by major parties during the 1958 transition to democracy, was characterized by a consensual approach to conflict resolution until the 1990s.

cal system that democratizers established in Venezuela after 1958, examining the roles played by political parties, social actors, and the strong presidency in inhibiting economic and political reforms (Coppedge 1994; Crisp 1998). Focusing on the relationship between the military and the political regime, Felipe Agüero, Winfield Burggraff, and Richard Millett have correctly argued that the political-military relationship deteriorated during the 1980s and 1990s (Burggraff and Millett 1995; Agüero 1995). Accounts of Hugo Chávez's 1998 electoral victory and the subsequent transformation of Venezuela's regime are only beginning to emerge (McCoy 1999). A politics-centered perspective might explain Chávez's 1998 victory as resulting from the collapse of the traditional party system and the emergence of radical alternative organizations to cope with decreasing governability.

Another group of explanations has given primacy to the political economy of Venezuela as a rentier state. From this perspective, the crisis in Venezuela is structural in that overwhelming dependence on income from oil exports "froze" early political institutions and focused political parties, labor, capital, civil society, and the armed forces exclusively on gaining access to the state's burgeoning wealth. With the decline of oil rents during the 1980s and 1990s, it became impossible to satisfy competing political interests, and regime crisis became inevitable (Karl 1997). Efforts to stave off the decline during the 1980s through government control of the economy further warped incentives and production, making Pérez's programs of structural adjustment and economic liberalization particularly difficult for the existing political system to accept (Naim and Piñango 1989). From this point of view, the failure of the Caldera administration to revitalize Punto Fijo democracy after 1992 could be attributed to terminal deterioration of state institutions in a rentier state suffering from low international oil prices.

While both political and economic factors are necessary dimensions of any explanation for the deterioration of Venezuelan democracy during the 1990s, they are not sufficient. An institutional perspective focused on civil-military relations is needed to understand why the 1992 coups happened and why military rebellion did not recur despite deteriorating conditions in the decade that followed. Institutions of civilian control of the military created during the Punto Fijo period, particularly those created to heighten the internal fragmentation of the officer corps, prevented the collapse of the democratic regime in 1992. These same institutions allowed civilians to regain authority over the armed forces during the Caldera administration and have ensured the subordination of the armed forces to elected authorities to this day.

This article will first examine the institutional pattern of civilian control established in Venezuela during the initial period of Punto Fijo democracy. It will also analyze how some of these mechanisms of control, particularly those based on appeasing professional and personal military interests, deteriorated during the 1980s and created an opportunity for a military rebellion. Next, I will examine the origins and failures of the two 1992 coup

attempts and the efforts by President Caldera to revitalize traditional institutions of control over the armed forces after 1993. The article will conclude by discussing how civil-military relations have been transformed under the Chávez administration and the Constitution of 1999.

CHANGE AND CONTINUITY IN CIVILIAN CONTROL OF THE VENEZUELAN ARMED FORCES, 1973–1989

Samuel Huntington's traditional categories of objective and subjective control are generally not useful for analyzing civil-military relations in democracies because they overlook the institutional arrangements required by elected officials to provide democratic control of the activities of the armed forces.³ I am focusing instead on the institutions and strategies used by democratizers to restrict the jurisdictional boundaries of military authority over the state and to provide civilians with mechanisms for reviewing and approving military activities (Trinkunas 1999).

In Venezuela after the transition to democracy, civilians consolidated control of the armed forces based on institutions that fragmented the officer corps yet satisfied their personal and professional interests. In 1958 political leaders (and some military officers), guided by a strategy of divide and conquer, eliminated centralized military command structures, particularly the *Estado Mayor General*, and granted administrative and operational autonomy to each branch of the military services. The ensuing competition for power and resources among the army, navy, air force, and *Guardia Nacional* minimized possibilities for interservice cooperation. This fragmentation was compounded when each service created a system of independent training centers, garrisons, and commands that led officers to pursue their careers without much contact with members of other forces. Democratic governments also responded to the potential threat of military intervention by creating institutions of appeasement, granting rising budgets for the armed forces, establishing a strong military social safety net, and deferring to their interests in security affairs.

Under this system of control, any incursion by the armed forces into rebellion or even public policy was swiftly punished during the first democratic administrations, as Venezuelan presidents zealously preserved their prerogatives to appoint military leaders, approve senior promotions, and command the armed forces. The fragmented officer corps and the satisfaction of many of its members with their professional and personal opportunities combined to inhibit conspiracies and reconcile the armed forces to democratic rule. By 1973 the armed forces retained a high degree of autonomy in the relatively narrow area of state policy that they controlled, namely,

3. Norden (1998) applied Huntington's categories of subjective and objective control to explain the 1992 coup attempts in Venezuela.

national defense. Although the armed forces preserved a nominal role in maintaining public order after the counterinsurgency warfare in the early 1970s ended, this mission was carried out by the Guardia Nacional, a militarized national police force that was viewed with suspicion by other services, particularly the army (Trinkunas 1999, 286–97).

Once civilian control became consolidated, Venezuelan elected officials practiced a policy of benign neglect toward the armed forces during the next two decades. This inattention allowed the armed forces to increase their autonomy from civilian oversight, professionally and politically. After institutionalizing strategies of divide and conquer and appeasement, civilian rulers felt confident that the threat of military intervention was fully contained. After the election of Carlos Andrés Pérez in 1974, civilian presidents cut back considerably the amount of attention they dedicated to supervising military affairs. They nonetheless retained the capacity to decide defense policy on an ad hoc basis, as in the decision to end counterinsurgency operations in 1969 and during a serious border incident with Colombia in 1987.⁴ In the absence of routine civilian supervision, however, the armed forces were allowed to develop freely and pursue their own bureaucratic reforms and defense policies. Several policies adopted to enhance their professional standing and capacity had unintended consequences that weakened the long-term integrity of the boundaries separating civilian and military authority.

The Seeds of Dissatisfaction

Beginning in the 1970s, the Venezuelan armed forces experienced a generational break within the military hierarchy, as educational reforms in the national military academies produced a new generation of highly trained elite junior officers with a strong sense of leadership, élan, and nationalism.⁵ Under the army's Plan Andrés Bello, Venezuela's Academia Militar was transformed into a university-equivalent institution, graduating its first classes at this level in 1974 (Norden 1998, 158–59).⁶ The plan was designed to stress leadership training in the new classes of cadets. The professional aspects of military education were reemphasized, but the program also aimed to inculcate a mystique of honor, discipline, and self-sacrifice in this new generation of officers.

The Plan Andrés Bello reinforced nationalist patriotic sentiments among officer cadets after 1974. Some developed an almost mystical attach-

4. Interviews with General Martín García Villasmil, former defense minister, 19 Apr. 1995, Caracas; and General José Radamés Soto Urrutia, professor at the Escuela Superior de Guerra Aérea, 7 Oct. 1994, Caracas.

5. Interview with Gustavo Tarre Briceño, former Venezuelan congressional representative and former head of the finance committee of the Cámara de Diputados, 30 Sept. 1994, Caracas.

6. Interview with Alberto Müller Rojas, former army general and professor of political science, 20 Jan. 1995, Caracas.

ment to the teachings of Simón Bolívar, and many shared a populist, egalitarian, and ultimately utilitarian attitude toward democracy. Given the uncertainties and disorder of the Venezuelan political process, which seemed to place party concerns ahead of national interests, it is not surprising that most young officers formed a greater attachment to Venezuela's glorious past than to its inglorious present (Tarre Briceño 1994, 143–46).

At the same time, the Venezuelan armed forces began to search for a new mission and doctrine to replace the narrow focus on counterinsurgency that had dominated the institution in the 1960s (Manrique 1996, 64–75). In adapting national security doctrine to a democratic regime, military educational institutes encouraged a populist, equity-oriented vision of development that matched well the political discourse of the country during the oil boom of the 1970s.⁷ Under the influence of this “soft version” of national security doctrine, military leaders successfully lobbied the Venezuelan Congress for legal provisions that would legitimize their participation in national economic affairs by adding development to the traditional missions of defense of sovereignty and counterinsurgency (Manrique 1996, 159). While new legislation expanded the jurisdictional boundaries of the Venezuelan military, these desires were frustrated in practice by a political system ensuring that all military participation in development planning was confined to ritualistic and formal exercises.⁸

Blocked in their efforts to redefine their mission, the Venezuelan officer corps increasingly lost their professional focus and began to concentrate instead on internal power struggles for resources, promotions, and assignments. By the mid-1970s, the center of gravity in civil-military relations had shifted to budgetary concerns. The dramatic expansion of government revenues in the wake of the first and second oil crises led to Venezuela's defense budget nearly doubling between 1967 and 1977.

The relative generosity of defense budgets in Venezuela is reflected in table 1, which compares per soldier expenditures in Venezuela and regional military peers or rivals. Only Argentina approached Venezuelan levels of expenditures per soldier, but in the context of considerably higher levels of per capita income. Venezuelan officers could also seek advanced training in the United States and Europe, experience that made them aware of their relatively privileged status by world standards.⁹ When health, recreation, and housing benefits are included, it becomes evident that Venezuelan military officers were among the best compensated in the Western Hemisphere, enjoying a quality of life second only to that of U.S. and Canadian officers in this period (Bigler 1981, 102–5, 117–19).

7. Interview with General Carlos Celis Noguera, former head of the Instituto de Altos Estudios de la Defensa Nacional (IAEDN), 10 Oct. 1994, Caracas.

8. Interview with Müller Rojas.

9. Interview with Soto Urrutia.

TABLE 1 Comparative Government Expenditures per Soldier in Selected Latin American Countries, 1972–1981

Year	Venezuelan Expenditure per Soldier	Argentine Expenditure per Soldier	Brazilian Expenditure per Soldier	Colombian Expenditure per Soldier
1972	\$ 33,856	\$ 18,188	\$ 8,754	\$ 9,584
1973	31,395	17,721	9,450	9,650
1974	34,139	21,878	8,912	8,659
1975	33,739	26,594	8,153	10,773
1976	32,598	30,522	9,606	7,353
1977	34,730	33,410	8,269	6,031
1978	33,364	36,044	7,774	6,582
1979	26,829	35,020	7,124	9,198
1980	25,627	31,929	7,212	10,574
1981	31,808	33,965	6,746	9,304

Source: U.S. Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, *World Military Expenditures and Arms Transfers*, 1984.

NOTE: All figures adjusted to 1997 constant U.S. dollars.

Not all of the government spending went to salaries and benefits, however. Venezuela also rearmed during this period to improve its external defense capabilities. An unintended consequence of rearmament and the oil boom in general was growing corruption and malfeasance among senior military officers and civilian politicians. Equipment was bought with little attention to its compatibility with the existing arsenal or suitability for use in a Venezuelan context. High-level government officials, military procurement officers, and well-placed civilian intermediaries all enriched themselves with overpriced defense purchases and suspiciously large commissions.¹⁰ The concern generated by these practices among officers, particularly at the junior level, became an ongoing source of tension within the armed forces and deepened divisions between senior officers and new generations of idealistic junior officers.¹¹

Military autonomy, already strong in the absence of civilian interest in security issues, shielded growing corruption from public scrutiny. The situation was compounded by legal provisions that protected military budgets and operations from civilian supervision. The Congress approved overall defense expenditures by the four services but provided no oversight of how money was spent, nor did the legislative branch participate in preparing detailed military budgets. No member of the defense committees of the

10. For numerous examples of corruption cases involving military procurement, see Capriles Méndez (1990) and Capriles Ayala et al. (1992).

11. Interview with José Machillanda Pinto, former lieutenant colonel and expert on Venezuelan civil-military relations, 10 Mar. 1995, Caracas.

Senate or the Chamber of Deputies had any experience in military affairs (Norden 1998, 151). Rather than falling under the oversight of a civilian inspector general or the Congress, the armed forces had their own auditor, who reported directly to the president. Sometimes, even the defense minister did not know how his own service chiefs were spending their budgets. Secrecy laws prevented the publication of detailed defense expenditures or a thorough discussion of defense policies in the media. Behind the shield of military secrecy, congressional or journalistic investigation of corruption scandals was discouraged, and the armed forces urged the prosecution of journalists who overstepped these boundaries (Agüero 1995, 150–51).

Although military autonomy excluded civil society from defense matters, politicians found institutional means to circumvent this barrier. The Constitution of 1961 had established the need for congressional and presidential approval for any promotion at the rank of colonel or general (and their equivalents in the navy). This requirement created opportunities for political manipulation, particularly by the president. While only a small number of promotions were affected, many senior officers felt the need to align themselves informally with one of the two main political parties, Acción Democrática (AD) and COPEI, to protect their careers.¹² Luis Herrera Campíns, president from 1979 to 1983, confirmed this practice in commenting that generals should be appointed on the basis of trust rather than merit.¹³ Moreover, a thirty-year limit on military careers and a policy of yearly rotations of officers among different positions and commands created fierce competition over choice assignments that well-connected officers could resolve in their favor (Agüero 1993, 199).¹⁴ This combination also created a mechanism by which senior military officers practiced self-regulation to avoid offending civilian politicians, providing the government with a means of controlling the armed forces at little cost in resources and civilian expertise.

The politicization of promotions and assignments particularly galled junior officers, who were held to strict ethical and professional standards during their careers. In Venezuela career assignments are made on a competitive basis at lower ranks, mainly on the educational achievements of individual officers.¹⁵ The conduct of young officers and their ethical handling of professional and personal duties also weigh heavily. For officers recently graduated from the Academia Militar and strongly indoctrinated in professional standards, promotion on the basis of political preference instead of merit led them lose respect for both their military superiors and civilian politicians. Thus politicizing the process of military promotion allowed civil-

12. Interviews with García Villasmil and with Soto Urrutia.

13. Interview with Alberto Quirós Corradi, 17 Aug. 1992, Caracas.

14. Interview with José Antonio Gil Yepes, sociologist and pollster, 6 Mar. 1995, Caracas.

15. Interview with García Villasmil. Confirmed in interview with U.S. Army Foreign Area Officer studying in Venezuela, Caracas, Feb. 1995.

ians to overcome institutional autonomy on important issues but also increasingly split the civilian and military elite from the junior officer corps (Agüero 1995, 149).

By the 1980s, civil-military relations had settled into a stable if somewhat dysfunctional pattern in Venezuela. As long as institutions designed to appease and fragment the officer corps were in place, open discontent in the military was avoided, and the armed forces' substantive authority over state policy was confined to a narrow range of issues related to defense and policy on borders. Nevertheless, confusion over the military's mission, civilian inattention to defense issues, growing civilian and military corruption, and politicization of the armed forces created the potential for a break between the armed forces and the civilian regime. The high degree of military autonomy from civilian oversight also meant that the growing alienation of many officers went undetected by the civilian government. Politicians had become complacent, confident that they could rely on their connections with the military high command to maintain supervision over the armed forces. The growing distance between the generals and admirals and their subordinates consequently undermined the ability of politicians to detect military unrest. Thus when anti-government military conspiracies finally began to develop after 1983, the government was caught mostly off guard.

IMMEDIATE CAUSES OF RENEWED MILITARY INTERVENTION IN POLITICS

The coup attempts of 1992 caught most Venezuelans by surprise because after three decades of civilian rule, military intervention had become unthinkable. Despite rising civilian unrest and broad political opposition to the structural adjustment program implemented by President Pérez, no observers seriously believed that political and economic crisis in Venezuela would be resolved through military means. Yet this same crisis in the Venezuelan model of development undermined important institutions of civilian control over the armed forces, particularly those concerned with appeasing the armed forces. The highly autonomous status of the armed forces facilitated the emergence of peculiar factions among junior officers who vehemently opposed the Venezuelan political system. Moreover, the economic, defense, and foreign policies of the Pérez administration had angered many officers and predisposed them to join the new anti-government factions in the armed forces. Although senior officers continued to support the regime firmly, they had become so enmeshed in the internal politics of budgets, promotions, assignments, and corruption that they had lost touch with the rest of the officer corps. In this environment, a small group of conspirators could organize a coup d'état relatively unchecked.

Setting the Stage: Economic Austerity and the Breakdown of Consensual Politics in Venezuela

When the international price of oil began its steady decline in 1982, the Venezuelan political economy, which was based on maintaining democratic political stability through state redistribution of oil revenues, became unsustainable (McCoy and Smith 1995, 124–25). The plunge in international oil prices that began in 1982 deprived the government of revenues to finance this profligate political model, yet Venezuelan elites were unwilling to take the painful steps needed to remedy the crisis. The foreign debt climbed past 33 billion dollars, over 80 percent of which was owed by the state. In the meantime, inequality between rich and poor widened rapidly, erasing many of the gains made during the 1970s as the number of Venezuelans living in critical poverty expanded from 32.6 percent at the beginning of the 1980s to 53.7 percent in 1989 (Karl 1997).

Faced with an acute balance of payments crisis and the accelerating collapse of state institutions, newly elected President Pérez adopted a radical structural-adjustment plan called “El Gran Viraje” (the Great Turnabout). This adjustment involved simultaneously eliminating price and currency controls, raising interest rates, reducing tariffs, and beginning to privatize state industries and deregulate the economy. The result was that in 1989 alone, the rate of inflation surged to 80 percent, the gross domestic product declined by 10 percent, and personal income dropped by 14 percent (Naim 1993, 59–60).

The results of the Gran Viraje shocked Venezuelans, cushioned by years of populist policies from the harsh economic reality facing the country. Even though the low point of 1989 was followed by two years of strong economic growth, Pérez’s policies led to widespread political discontent among manufacturers, labor unions, government employees, political activists, and the middle and lower classes. Furthermore, the public was infuriated by the perception that government corruption was continuing unabated while ordinary Venezuelans were suffering the effects of a draconian economic policy. Targeted social benefits failed to reach the poor in a timely fashion, and existing social services collapsed, exacerbating the impact of the adjustment policy on those least able to afford it (Naim 1993, 80–93).

The rise in opposition in the legislature and the public at large fomented a growing sense of political crisis in the Pérez administration. Even the president’s own party, Acción Democrática, turned against him. In national opinion polls taken at the end of 1991, President Pérez and Acción Democrática registered 12.3 percent approval ratings, the lowest ever recorded in Venezuela (Burggraff and Millett 1995, 69). Rising levels of public animosity toward the government and its policies thus undermined the consensual underpinnings of Venezuelan democracy and degraded the legitimacy of

the Pérez administration, even as the armed forces were increasingly called on to sustain the government against popular protests.

Breaking Down Institutionalized Appeasement of the Armed Forces

An unintended consequence of President Pérez's economic austerity policies was to draw the Venezuelan military into internal security functions, a leading indicator of civil-military conflict (Trinkunas 1999, 12–16). In the first weeks of his administration, a popular uprising in Caracas on 27 February 1989 was repressed by the armed forces at the cost of several hundred civilian casualties. Public protests escalated rapidly in late 1991 and early 1992, exceeding nine hundred major events over a period of seven months. Senior military commanders were mainly concerned that the rising tide of lawlessness would destabilize the political system. But the deployment of the armed forces to repress the February 1989 uprising had disgusted many junior officers, especially on contrasting the poverty of the rioters with the alleged corruption of politicians and the military high command. The military's participation in these events highlighted the power and efficacy of the armed forces in the public mind and increased the civilian government's reliance on the military for internal security, but it undermined junior officers' confidence in their superiors (Burggraaf and Millett 1995, 60–61).

Structural-adjustment measures enacted by President Pérez also exacerbated the steady decline in living standards for many military officers, thus undermining a fundamental institution for appeasing the officer corps. The wages and benefits of officers, like those of most Venezuelans, failed to keep up with the inflation of 1989–1990, which topped out at over 100 percent. The armed forces budget had peaked in 1982 at \$1.15 billion and then declined steadily during the 1980s, even as the number of soldiers in the Venezuelan armed forces grew from fifty-five thousand to seventy-five thousand over the same period (U.S. ACDA 1996). The large apparent decline shown beginning in table 1 can be explained in part by the steep devaluation of the Venezuelan currency after 1983. One measure of this trend is that spending declined from more than thirty-one thousand dollars per soldier in 1982 to less than fifteen thousand in 1991. A significant proportion of the defense budget was needed to sustain purchases of material and spare parts from abroad, particularly after a war scare with Colombia in 1987, a requirement that further reduced the proportion of the military budget spent on salaries and benefits. Moreover, because officers were government employees, their salaries were even slower to adjust to the new economic realities than those of private-sector employees, causing an extended period of relative economic deprivation (Naim 1993, 117–18).

Suddenly, officers who had been comfortably upper-middle-class found themselves barely able to maintain lower-middle and working-class

living standards. Even junior officers had been able to afford housing, new cars, and vacations, but now their families had to share cramped apartments in poor neighborhoods. These disparities affected junior officers (lieutenants and captains) the most, and more and more abandoned their military careers for employment in the private sector. The abrupt decline in living standards in less than a decade deepened military discontent with democratic rule (Burggraaf and Millett 1995, 62).

In this context, corruption in military procurement involving civilian politicians and senior military officers infuriated many younger officers. Some cases of military corruption were linked to President Pérez's civilian security chief, Orlando García (Capriles Ayala 1992, 677). Allegations of corruption were also made by firms that had lost bids to provide services to the armed forces and hoped to use public outrage to force reexamination of the contract awards process.¹⁶ Allegations of corruption received wide media coverage during this period, an unusual experience for the armed forces.¹⁷ The failure to resolve many of these cases satisfactorily reinforced suspicions among the public and the officer corps of the incompetence and dishonesty of senior military and political figures (Tarre Briceño 1994, 147–54).

President Pérez was also criticized by some junior officers for his handling of external defense issues. His privatization policies, which led to the sale of state industries and the national telecommunications company to foreign investors, were viewed as damaging to national sovereignty by many officers still influenced by a belief system that equated security with state control of "strategic industrial sectors." Within the armed forces, many reacted negatively to the president's increased reliance on the Venezuelan military to support his foreign policy ventures. A battalion of Venezuelan troops participated in peacekeeping in Nicaragua in 1989–1990, and Venezuelan officers served as observers with the United Nations on the Iraq-Kuwait border. But some officers who remained behind accused the government of using Venezuelan troops as mercenaries.¹⁸ Rounding out this picture of discontent was military outrage over comments by President Pérez acknowledging that Colombia might have some rights in disputed maritime territory in the Gulf of Venezuela (Burggraaf and Millett 1995, 63).¹⁹

By early 1992, expansion of military participation in internal security missions and weakening of the institutions of appeasement of the officer corps had created the necessary preconditions for a coup d'état. In reaction to the policies of President Pérez, junior officers began to question the legitimacy of the Pérez administration as well as the fitness of their own senior officers to lead them. Their elite orientation also convinced many junior of-

16. Interview with Tarre Briceño.

17. Interview with Beatrice Rangel, former chief of staff of President Carlos Andrés Pérez, 20 Aug. 1992, Caracas.

18. Interview with Mercedes Vivas, professor at the Academia Militar, 11 Nov. 1994, Caracas.

19. Interview with Machillanda.

ficers that they had both the duty and the ability to change the country's political course. This conviction led some junior officers to organize and prepare for a coup d'état.

Origins of the Movimiento Bolivariano Revolucionario 200

As noted, civilian leaders had institutionalized mechanisms to divide and conquer the armed forces following the 1958 transition to democracy. These institutions created cleavages that crosscut the officer corps. While these mechanisms made coups d'état difficult, they also had the perverse consequence of distancing junior and senior officers and inhibiting the ability of the military high command to manage internal discontent. During the 1970s and 1980s, groups of mid-ranking and junior officers had begun to form factions or self-help groups that shared common interests and mutually assisted each other in competing for assignments and promotions (Müller Rojas 1992, 70–71). One such group, the Movimiento Bolivariano Revolucionario 200 (MBR-200),²⁰ eventually took advantage of the declining political fortunes of the Pérez administration to lead an attempted coup.

The MBR-200 was formed in 1983 by junior army officers who were among the first graduates of the reformed university-level Academia Militar. They developed a strongly populist and nationalist belief system based on their selective reading of the ideas of Simón Bolívar and other early Venezuelan participants in the wars of independence. They were also influenced by their contacts with Venezuelan Marxist guerrillas who had been defeated in the 1960s (Gott 2000, 37–40). Members of the MBR-200 particularly opposed political corruption, neoliberal economic policies, and foreign influences, and they advocated a strong Bolivarian democracy (Tarre Briceño 1994, 177–83). They also criticized internal politicization of the armed forces, the participation of officers in nonmilitary duties like rural vaccination campaigns, and overseas missions under UN command (Agüero 1995, 141, 150). Members of the MBR-200 viewed themselves as better soldiers than their commanders, contrasting their own university-level professional education with the hasty training their commanders had received in the 1960s (Norden 1998, 160–61).

Lieutenant Colonel Chávez and his coconspirators began working as early as 1982 toward a revolutionary coup to transform Venezuela into "a true democracy." Members of the MBR-200 believed that civilian politicians had long ceased to act according to the constitution, particularly in failing to provide justice, equity, and development. This belief justified a

20. The MBR-200 was originally known as the Ejército Bolivariano 200 (EB200), which referred to the two hundred years since the birth of Simón Bolívar. The name of the group changed after 1989, when its leaders decided to seek political power rather than military reform.

coup “to restore democracy.” Several members served as instructors at the Academia Militar during the early 1980s, and their students’ graduation extended the reach of the MBR-200 into many major army garrisons.²¹

The MBR-200 did not go undetected by either senior officers or the Ministerio de la Defensa’s Dirección de Inteligencia Militar (DIM). In 1984 an army investigation uncovered the role of Chávez and others in promoting anti-regime ideas and actions at the academy, and these officers were quickly transferred to other assignments. Yet they were not dismissed from the armed forces and continued to rise through the ranks and proselytize among their fellow officers. A handful of senior officers, including Generals Carlos Peñaloza and Pedro Rangel Rojas, commanders of the army in 1989 and 1992 respectively, tracked the activities of the MBR-200. They brought the matter to the attention of President Pérez, but he dismissed the group as a serious threat (Tarre Briceño 1994, 174–76).²² Similarly, civilian intelligence organizations that monitored military activities, particularly the DISIP (the División de Servicios de Investigación y Protección, the national political police), were rendered ineffective after 1989 by a politically driven reorganization.²³ This singular lack of attention to dissent in the officer corps continued through the next three years.

At the same time, the senior ranks of the army had lost some cohesion after splitting over the appointment of General Fernando Ochoa Antich as Minister of Defense in 1991. He had graduated forty-third in his class at the academy, and his selection over General Santiago Ramírez, who was first in his class, unleashed internal maneuvering among generals and mutual accusations of corruption, malfeasance, and politicization.²⁴ These accusations received increasing press coverage as generals used friends in the press to publicize their allegations against their opponents. The publicity further damaged the image of senior officers among the other officers and also reduced the level of attention focused on the MBR-200 (Daniels 1992, 180).

By February 1992, the lieutenant colonels who led the MBR-200 had been appointed to key troop commands in Venezuela’s five major cities, including an elite airborne battalion controlled by Chávez. Membership of the MBR-200 reportedly totaled 10 percent of all army officers. The MBR-200 was thus well positioned to attempt a coup in 1992, given the level of public opposition to the government and the ongoing disorganization of civilian and military elites (Tarre Briceño 1994). Superior officers were distracted by political infighting, and the MBR-200 expected wide support among junior officers alienated from the high command and the Pérez administration. With these advantages, it seemed likely to the MBR-200 leaders that the coup attempt would succeed.

21. Interview with Tarre Briceño.

22. Interview with Aníbal Romero, professor of political science, 19 Sept. 1994, Caracas.

23. *Memorandum Nacional de Inteligencia*, year 1, no. 11 (1993).

24. *Memorandum Nacional de Inteligencia*, year 1, no. 10 (1993).

THE FAILURE OF THE 1992 COUP ATTEMPTS AND ITS IMPACT
ON THE MILITARY

Chance played a significant role in the failure of the 4 February coup attempt. The director of the Academia Militar uncovered the coup plot among his cadets on 3 February and informed the high command, allowing General Ochoa Antich to take preliminary defensive measures. Rebels initially planned to seize the president as he returned from Davos, Switzerland, to the Generalísimo Francisco Miranda Air Base in Caracas. When his plane delayed in taking off from New York, it was diverted to the civilian international airport to prevent a night landing in Caracas, thus disrupting rebel plans. The MBR-200 attempted instead to seize Carlos Andrés Pérez when he was returning to the presidential residence at La Casona, but a determined defense by the president's military escort foiled the rebel paratroopers. The plotters failed to improvise in the wake of these failures, allowing loyal military commanders to mobilize their forces, surround rebellious troops in Caracas, and force them to surrender.²⁵

Beyond these initial tactical errors, the failure of this and a second coup attempt in 1992 can be attributed largely to institutionalized fragmentation within the officer corps. These cleavages prevented military rebels from assembling an effective "coup coalition." The 4 February coup attempt failed due to lack of participation in the rebel movement of any units except those in the army. In post-coup interviews and memoirs, MBR-200 members reported that they sought the cooperation of members from all other military services but met with little success (Tarre Briceño 1994, 219–25).

Isolation of the coup plotters from the other services was not necessarily self-imposed but rather a reflection of the institutionalized policies of divide and conquer that had enforced civilian rule for thirty years. The administrative independence of each service inhibited the formation of inter-service links among junior officers. The army was considered by its members as the senior service, which led them to minimize the importance of coordinating a coup with the other armed services (Jiménez Sánchez 1996, 150, 226). In stark contrast, senior political and military leaders could work jointly during both coup attempts, coordinating loyal military units from several different services to defeat both 1992 attempts. The unity of the senior military and political leaders thus allowed them to prevail despite the confusion and uncertainty generated by the coup attempts.

Even though short-term survival was secured, the Pérez administration never recovered its political or military footing after the coup attempt on 4 February. This climate of uncertainty created an opening for a new military rebellion. Mounting civilian criticism of administration policies, con-

25. Interview with Eliécer Oteiza, former army lieutenant, member of the 1999 Asamblea Nacional Constituyente, and director of DISIP, the political police, 4 Oct. 1994, Caracas.

tinuing economic pressure on the middle and lower classes, and the inability to sustain a nationally united government isolated Pérez and his team. Even though no civilian groups were openly pushing for a new coup, calls for Pérez's resignation, constitutional reform, and an end to economic austerity measures created an atmosphere in which the collapse of the government seemed a real possibility. Civilian consensus on the legitimacy of the administration, if not of Venezuelan democracy as a whole, seemed to be crumbling. In the face of Pérez's unconditional defense of his government and his policies, some military officers concluded that another coup was not only viable but the only way to meet popular demands (Trinkunas 1999, 316–21).

In the aftermath of the first failed coup, conditions for a more broadly based coup emerged. Even though the first coup failed, it made military intervention in politics thinkable for many in the officer corps. Junior and mid-ranking officers became aware of just how widely civilian and military discontent had spread. Whereas disgust with the political system had once been a private matter for officers, the presence of overt opposition toward the government on military bases reinforced conspiratorial tendencies among the officer corps (Daniels 1992, 235–36). The navy and air force also experienced an upsurge in dissent and plotting among its junior officers, who eagerly followed the example set by the MBR-200. The spread of dissent across all branches of the military then made it possible for conspirators to identify potential allies in other services.

But in a military regulated by divide and conquer institutions, the spread of military dissent also undermined the possibility of a successful coup by fragmenting opposition to the regime. Although Chávez and the MBR-200 enjoyed great prestige for their leading role in the events of 4 February, they could not control the large number of independent conspiracies that developed during the summer and fall of 1992. Having been imprisoned in the wake of the first failed coup, Chávez lacked command of troops, hierarchical authority, and freedom of movement to maintain control of the MBR-200 or incorporate new conspirators into its ranks (Jiménez Sánchez 1996, 262–63). Confusion over goals, methods, and ideology among dissident officers contributed to the conspiratorial frenzy of this period and hindered the formation of a coherent anti-government movement. This situation placed pressure on Chávez to act quickly before his leadership of the radical opposition to the Pérez administration was challenged by another newly radicalized military faction eager to overthrow the government.

The fragmented state of the officer corps also contributed to the failure of a second coup attempt on 27 November 1992. This attempt was organized by more senior officers, Admiral Hernán Grüber Odreman and General Francisco Visconti Osorio, and they represented entirely different services. Miscommunication, mistrust, and betrayal characterized the behavior of its participants, revealing the conspiracy to senior military author-

ities before it even began (Jiménez Sánchez 1996, 393–94).²⁶ This situation occurred despite efforts by the military participants to correct “the errors” committed during the 4 February coup attempt. Both civilian commentators and military officers had argued in the wake of the first rebellion that the MBR-200 had failed to secure the cooperation of senior officers, other military services, or civilian support, thus allowing the Pérez administration to survive.²⁷ The leaders of the new conspiracy established contact with civilian politicians and technocrats, other senior officers, the MBR-200 and its civilian allies, and all four military services (Grüber Odreman 1993, 105–8). But as the organizing and executing of the coup showed, it was simply too difficult to coordinate among these different groups and sectors.

In the second coup attempt, the air force and navy coup leaders found that they could not depend on their coconspirators in the army to carry out their plans (Grüber Odreman 1993, 100, 113). This mutual distrust was exacerbated by the differing political orientations of the two sets of coup plotters, with Chávez’s group of officers representing a considerably more leftist political program than that of Admiral Grüber. Consequently, important commanders of ground units who had originally agreed to participate in the coup abstained from the final operations (Jiménez Sánchez 1996, 252–53). A successful coup requires mutual trust and the coordinated efforts of various unrelated military units that have never worked together before. Lacking hierarchy or trust, the conspirators of 27 November were unable to coordinate the military units necessary for the coup to succeed. Only the corps of senior generals and admirals were united in defending the regime, and they once again coordinated with the civilian administration to suppress military rebellion.

Disaffected officers found conspiracy against the government an attractive idea in the abstract, but actual participation in a coup was a risky proposition that could lead to loss of their careers or even their lives. In contrast, betraying the coup to the military high command and civilian authorities was a sure path to greater rewards. This set of incentives meant that only officers who were ideologically or morally committed to rebelling against the government participated in these operations. Many other officers and certainly most senior officers had simply too much of a stake in the military system and the continuation of the civilian regime to participate in overthrowing the government.

Impact of the 1992 Coups on the Armed Forces and the Government

Even though the regime survived, the 1992 coups proved to be a political disaster for the Pérez administration. Senior political figures ral-

26. *Ibid.*

27. Interviews with Tarre Briceño and Vivas.

lied rapidly to defend the civilian regime, yet popular opinion remained fascinated by the actions of the MBR-200. Opinion polls taken in the wake of the uprising suggested that while Venezuelans still favored democracy, they were deeply opposed to the policies of the Pérez administration (Romero 1994, 35). The rebels' positive image was solidified by Chávez's televised speech following his surrender, in which he accepted responsibility and promised future action against the government (Tarre Briceño 1994, 125–31). In a televised speech to the Senate, former President Caldera justified the actions of the MBR-200 as an understandable response to the policies of the Pérez administration even as he condemned the coup (Hernández 1995, 70). This speech echoed popular sentiment and solidified public opinion in favor of the rebels and against the government. Meanwhile, groups of academics, intellectuals, and elder statesmen persisted in calling for an end to neoliberal reforms, new elections, and a constituent assembly. These statements were widely publicized. Two left-wing opposition parties, the *Movimiento al Socialismo* and *Causa R*, echoed the call for radical political reform, proclaiming it the only means of saving democracy. The Pérez administration became more isolated than ever, especially after COPEI withdrew its support from a national unity government that had been formed to defend the regime in the wake of the first coup attempt (Hernández 1995, 77–80).

In contrast, the international community, led by the United States, responded quickly and effectively to news of the coup attempt. U.S. Ambassador Michael Skol and his superiors in Washington announced their support for democracy and the Pérez administration and threatened drastic sanctions against any military regime that took power in Venezuela. The U.S. armed forces immediately increased the flow of training missions to Venezuela, which sent the same message to the junior officer corps.²⁸ Most Venezuelan generals and admirals did not need much convincing that a coup was a bad idea because their personal and professional interests made them the firmest military supporters of the Pérez administration. U.S. statements against the MBR-200 angered some more nationalistic officers and civilians, however, who perceived them as evidence of Venezuela's limited sovereignty, U.S. imperialism, and the anti-national character of the Pérez administration (Grüber Odreman 1993, 235, 237–38).

On the military front, Pérez reacted quickly, using the strong links between civilian and military elites to reestablish military order and provide security for his administration. Despite previous differences, Venezuelan generals and admirals were nearly unanimous in supporting the administration and the regime because they feared public disorder, the disintegration of the military institution into squabbling factions, and the threat posed by rebellious junior officers (Daniels 1992, 193).

With the active cooperation of the generals and admirals, President

28. Interview with Oteiza.

Pérez could rely on traditional military institutional mechanisms to attack and remove rebellious officers from the armed forces. Because these efforts were cloaked in appeals to norms, laws, procedures, and respect for hierarchy, many doubtful officers found it easier to obey orders than vigorously oppose the purge of the MBR-200 from the officer corps. Its members were rapidly arrested and detained in military prisons, even though only 6 percent of the more than twenty-six hundred service members participating in the rebellion were indicted in military courts (Daniels 1992, 196). Officers belonging to the MBR-200 were tried in military courts, convicted of treason, and sentenced to decades of imprisonment. These sentences, however, were later overturned on procedural grounds by the civilian Corte Suprema de Justicia.²⁹

Pérez intensified civilian and military monitoring of the officer corps, reviving a strategy that had allowed the first presidents of the democratic period to maintain power during the 1960s. Officers of dubious loyalty were expelled from the armed forces or sent overseas for lengthy periods as students or military attachés. Officers allowed to remain in Venezuela were carefully watched and rotated through new commands every three to six months. Junior officers, once expected to work long hours and remain on base after their superiors had departed, were sent home promptly at five to reduce the potential for new conspiracies hatching during unsupervised evening hours. Generals and colonels were assigned to command units once led by lieutenant colonels and majors, and their unit armories were carefully secured and equipped with alarms, precluding any junior officers from significant access to weapons or munitions.³⁰

The Dirección de Inteligencia Militar (DIM) played a leading role in tracking conspiratorial activities in both the armed forces and civil society. Leftist politicians and activists were targeted by the DIM as well for their outspoken support for the MBR-200 and opposition to the government.³¹ President Pérez, senior military commanders, and members of the intelligence community (many of whom had experienced the counterinsurgency of the 1960s) all viewed the MBR-200 and its supporters among academic and intellectual leftists as part of a larger left-wing plot against democracy (Jiménez Sánchez 1996, 155–61, 275–305). Although these suspicions may have been unfounded, monitoring and vigilance within the army dissuaded some officers from conspiratorial activities and aborted several plots against President Pérez (Daniels 1992, 197–200).³²

The Pérez administration also reinvigorated the institutions of civilian control designed to appease the armed forces, investing a large amount

29. Interview with Tarre Briceño.

30. Interviews with Oteiza and Vivas.

31. Interview with Müller Rojas.

32. Interview with Oteiza.

of new resources in the military's social safety net. All officers immediately received 30 percent pay increases, while loyal officers were rewarded by having outstanding debts paid off. Housing subsidies and allowances also increased substantially (Burggraff and Millett, 67).³³ As the U.S. Arms Control and Disarmament Agency reported, military spending in Venezuela totaled 1.55 billion dollars in 1992, 50 percent higher than average expenditures from 1988 to 1990, even as spending on arms imports declined from an average of 233 million dollars during the same period to 80 million in 1992 (U.S. ACDA 1996). This trend suggests that more of the military budget was targeted for personnel and operations than for new acquisitions, thus improving the lot of the officer corps. All the military personnel and civilian experts interviewed noted a sharp rise in spending on the social welfare of the armed forces, which was designed to address a major grievance of the military rebels.

In the end, the 1992 coup attempts sealed the fate of the Pérez administration, even if not immediately. President Pérez was removed from office on 21 May 1993, not by a military rebellion but by an act of impeachment by the Venezuelan Senate. This step immediately followed the findings by the Supreme Court that enough evidence existed to indict Pérez on charges of misuse of government funds to provide security services for President Violeta Chamorro of Nicaragua. Pérez was replaced by noted Venezuelan historian Ramón Velásquez, who served out the remainder of the term.

Velásquez inherited a precarious political environment, particularly after he was largely abandoned by his erstwhile electors in the Venezuelan Senate. The outspoken Minister of Defense, Admiral Radamés Muñoz León, repeatedly sparked rumors of a coup with his open criticism of leftist political parties, particularly Causa R. That party hoped to win the forthcoming December 1993 elections and retaliated against the admiral in the media (Jiménez Sánchez 1996, 417–23).³⁴ Velásquez also faced a slowing economy as foreign investors lost confidence and the government's commitment to structural adjustment faltered. Public protests over economic conditions continued, although not as intensely as under the Pérez administration. Velásquez succeeded nevertheless in delivering power in March 1994 to his successor, Rafael Caldera, who was elected to serve a nonconsecutive second term as president.

33. *Ibid.*

34. Interview with Aníbal Romero.

ATTEMPTING TO REBUILD THE STATUS QUO: THE ARMED FORCES DURING THE CALDERA ADMINISTRATION (1994–1998)

President Caldera took office with the political project of returning Venezuela to the traditions of pacted, populist democracy inaugurated in 1958.³⁵ Only in the area of civilian control did he manage to carry out his agenda. By 1994 military participation in politics had expanded dangerously compared with the 1970s and 1980s. General Ochoa Antich used his position as defense minister to influence the formation of a national unity government in 1992, and Admiral Muñoz León acted similarly in attacking a major party contending in the 1993 elections, *Causa R*. Continuing public unrest led the armed forces to emphasize internal security, much to the distaste of some officers. Throughout these years the Pérez and Velásquez administrations continued their efforts to contain military rebellion, which included the manipulation of promotions and assignments of military officers.

Given this picture of increased military and civilian trespassing on each other's traditional jurisdictions in Venezuela, why were there no successful military revolts after 1992? Certainly, President Caldera's failure to restore economic prosperity and reduce inequality cannot explain why the military threat receded. In 1993 Caldera's populist platform promised a renewed commitment to social equity, justice, and an end to neoliberal economic reforms, but his administration achieved only the last of these objectives. One of his first executive decrees suspended the constitutional guarantees of citizens, stating that this measure was necessary to prosecute effectively corrupt politicians and business leaders responsible for the crisis. The administration also imposed new exchange and price controls in an attempt to halt soaring inflation, a deepening recession, and capital flight. Soon after, the government halted privatizations and abandoned neoliberal economic policies. Foreign investment dropped, the stock market plummeted, and the shaky banking system nearly collapsed. Caldera responded with billions of dollars in bailout funds, which produced soaring inflation due to excess liquidity in the money supply. Inflation rose from little more than 20 percent under Carlos Andrés Pérez to 73 percent in 1994, surpassing 100 percent in 1995. After stagnating in 1993, the Venezuelan economy entered a steep recession in 1994 accompanied by a reduction of 3.3 percent in gross domestic product (Hernández 1995, 109–12; McCoy and Smith 1995, 139–41). In 1995, 41 percent of Venezuelans were living in critical poverty (defined as those who can afford less than half the basic level of goods and services), while 39 percent had fallen into relative poverty (Romero 1997).

Because economic and social factors cannot explain why the military threat receded after 1993, I have sought an institutional explanation. Presi-

35. Interview with Andrés Stambouli, professor of political science at the Universidad Central de Venezuela, Nov. 1994, Caracas.

dent Caldera instituted a return to a well-proved model of civilian control based on institutions of appeasement and divide and conquer as part of his overall attempt to restore Punto Fijo democracy. Caldera was convinced that the democratic institutions he had helped craft in 1958 would save Venezuelan democracy in the 1990s.

On taking office, Caldera reestablished himself as the commander in chief of the armed forces by summarily dismissing Admiral Muñoz León as defense minister several months before his official retirement date. The president selected a relatively junior army general as his new defense minister, a choice that forced nearly a dozen more senior generals to resign rather than serve under a junior officer.³⁶ Thus in one stroke, Caldera reasserted civilian authority over the military high command, purged it of AD-leaning officers, and eased some resentments of junior officers toward their commanders. Caldera also eliminated a source of discontent among junior officers by issuing presidential pardons for all soldiers convicted of participating in the 1992 coups on the condition that they retire immediately from the armed forces. Some criticized this move as sending a terrible signal to future conspirators, but it removed the issue of the continuing imprisonment of the 1992 coup plotters from the public debate, thus depriving MBR-200 supporters on the Left of an opportunity to attack the government. Moreover, as civilians, Chávez and other former rebels had fewer opportunities to influence the junior officer corps, and their forced retirement signaled to active-duty military officers that participation in conspiracies would carry consequences.³⁷ By expelling both the military high command and the MBR-200, Caldera purged the officer corps of its two most politicized extremes and allowed the rest to return to their professional duties.

Caldera reemphasized professionalism by ordering the armed forces to suppress the activities of Colombian insurgents in border areas. Increasing activity by guerrillas in the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC) in Venezuela's frontier regions resulted in numerous attacks on military outposts and significant casualties between 1994 and 1998. Caldera responded by creating two military theaters of operations to combat guerrillas along the Colombian frontier and redeploying soldiers from all services to the region for external and internal security duties. This hard-line stance toward Colombia contrasted sharply with the policies of former President Pérez.

President Caldera also began to use the military to resolve public-policy crises, deploying soldiers to maintain emergency services during strikes by public-sector employees. Air traffic controllers at major airports were replaced by air force counterparts in one instance, and a doctor's strike

36. Ernesto Villegas Poljak, "Caldera ha callado el ruido de sables," *El Universal Digital*, 5 Aug. 1996.

37. *Ibid.*

was countered by militarizing government hospitals and temporarily replacing the doctors with others from the armed forces. Rather than allow Caracas public transportation to be shut down during a strike by Metro (subway) employees, Caldera ordered the army to keep the trains running.³⁸ This military participation in public service was welcomed because it resonated with the national security doctrine of “democracy and development” current within the officer corps.

Meanwhile, Caldera rebuilt institutions for appeasing the officer corps. Military officers received pay raises that matched inflation in 1994 and exceeded it in 1995, leading the defense minister to declare that members of the officer corps were receiving the best salaries in history.³⁹ While the defense budget continued to drop in dollars during the 1990s, most military spending was targeting the social needs of the officer corps.⁴⁰ Caldera also continued the policy of rotating officers frequently through different commands, appointing a new defense minister on schedule every year. Outgoing ministers were appointed to senior civilian positions in the government, including several ministries and ambassadorships, thereby retaining the loyalty of senior officers. Collectively, these measures of appeasement pacified the officer corps sufficiently and reinforced the president’s image as a concerned commander in chief.

Caldera’s statist economic policies and his anti-corruption rhetoric met with approval from the officer corps, steeped in the idea that state-led development would bring national security. His efforts to direct the economy through subsidies and price and exchange controls matched the sense of entitlement shared by most Venezuelans, including the military, as polling data from the period suggests. Even Caldera’s decision to suspend constitutional guarantees for more than a year in the (ineffective) pursuit of corruption was approved by 62 percent of Venezuelans (Romero 1997). Moreover, the long public-opinion honeymoon of the Caldera administration (indicated by its approval ratings rising by 30 percent in the first eight months) temporarily reduced public protest and solidified the legitimacy of the regime (Romero 1997). The president’s popular support and his less conflictive economic policies thus encouraged potential conspirators in the armed forces to refrain from new plots.

When Caldera’s efforts to reinvigorate the post-1958 model eventually failed, the government’s position *vis-à-vis* the armed forces paradoxically became more secure rather than shakier. The return to a state-centered economy worsened the material conditions of most Venezuelans after 1995,

38. *Ibid.*

39. Interview with General Maglio Montiel, head of the Estado Mayor Conjunto (Joint Chiefs of Staff) 1994–1995, 21 Oct. 1994, Caracas.

40. Speech by General Italo del Valle Alliegro, former defense minister, at TECNOFAN conference on the Venezuelan armed forces, 1995.

and public approval ratings for President Caldera fell rapidly. Anti-government protests and strikes again became the norm. Yet no new signs of military discontent appeared as they had under Carlos Andrés Pérez. Many in the armed forces, particularly in the high command, saw no policy alternatives to those presented by the government. This conclusion ensured that the military remained quiescent during this period of deteriorating conditions.

IMPACT OF THE ELECTION OF PRESIDENT CHAVEZ ON THE VENEZUELAN ARMED FORCES

On 6 December 1998, former coup leader Hugo Chávez was elected president of Venezuela by 56 percent of the voters. His victory culminated a year of unprecedented change in the Venezuelan political environment. Chávez's electoral fortunes had risen from near invisibility in the polls in December 1997 to a consistent lead nine months later. The dominant traditional parties, COPEI and the AD, polled in the single digits in this presidential election, after capturing over 90 percent of the votes only a decade earlier. This rapid shift in voter preferences and party loyalty is highly unusual and signals the depth of crisis experienced by Venezuelans during the 1990s. Chávez's political campaign resonated with voters because it called for radical change. The centerpiece of his agenda was to convene a constituent assembly to rewrite the Constitution of 1961 (McCoy and Trinkunas 1999). In the five elections or referenda that followed Chávez's presidential victory, his positions were consistently supported by more than 65 percent of the electorate.⁴¹ This level of support enabled him to enact a new constitution in 1999 and then to be reelected in 2000 for a lengthened six-year term.

Chávez's electoral victory and his political agenda have precipitated a major transformation in civil-military relations in Venezuela with troubling implications for the future of civilian control of the armed forces. First, his role as a former coup leader, his vindication of the 1992 coup attempt, and his reliance on active and retired military officers for administrative functions have significantly increased politicization of the armed forces. Second, at Chávez's direction, military roles and missions have been substantially reoriented from national defense to internal security, development, and government administration, all of which are likely to further politicize the armed forces. Third, the Constitution of 1999 confirms the military's expanded role in state affairs while dismantling the admittedly problematic institutional mechanisms of civilian control developed during the Punto Fijo era.

41. These five contests included two referenda, elections of a constituent assembly, congressional elections, and new presidential elections.

Politicization of the Armed Forces

President Chávez has made his experiences as a military officer and a coup leader integral to his image as a politician, but his ennobling of military virtues has generated considerable discontent in the armed forces over his blurring of the boundaries between civilian and military roles. His frequent use of military uniforms in public ceremonies belies the civilian nature of the post of commander in chief in a democratic regime and calls into question the source of his authority over the armed forces.⁴² Moreover, in vindicating the failed 1992 coup attempts, Chávez has validated military deliberation on the legitimacy of civilian regimes and future rebellions against constituted authority.⁴³ It also raises the question, what are the acceptable boundaries of military participation in a democratic regime?

Discussion of the role of the armed forces in politics sharpened in the 2000 election campaign, in which President Chávez sought reelection for a term lengthened to six years under the new Constitution of 1999. His opponent, Francisco Arias Cárdenas, was a coconspirator in the February 1992 coup attempt who later participated in democratic politics and was elected governor of the state of Zulia. Arias's decision to run was motivated by personal disagreements with President Chávez over the direction of "the Bolivarian revolution." His defection from the government camp surprisingly was supported by the other three "comandantes" (lieutenant colonels) who had conspired with Chávez and Arias to carry out the February 1992 coup. The split between President Chávez and the other leaders of the 1992 coups raised the possibility of an internal division within the military. Arias's unexpected emergence as the main opposition presidential candidate led to a bitter political debate between the two candidates in which each accused the other of treason and incompetence in his professional military career. The 2000 presidential elections were also the first in which armed forces personnel had the right to vote, and they therefore had to choose between two candidates who were former military officers. Both sought the military vote aggressively. This turn of events led to reports of factionalization of the armed forces between "Aristas" and "Chavistas," a subject that surfaced repeatedly in the press during the campaign.⁴⁴ Chávez's victory in the July 2000 elections squelched these rumors, at least for now.

President Chávez's administration has also been noted for relying on active-duty and retired military officers to staff political and bureaucratic positions. Both categories of military officers have occupied up to a third of

42. Johanne Betancourt, "Comandante en jefe y teniente coronel, o viceversa," *TalCualDigital*, 19 Sept. 2000.

43. Ernesto Villegas Poljak, "Glorificación del 4F dividió a las FAN," *El Universal Digital*, 7 Feb. 2000.

44. Jesús Sanoja Hernández, "FAN: Arianos y bolivarianos," *El Nacional*, 31 Mar. 2000.

the positions in the presidential cabinet, including the Ministerio del Interior y Justicia and the Ministerio de Infraestructura, and the governorship of the federal district during the transition to the *Quinta República*.⁴⁵ As of June 2001, more than 176 active-duty military officers held senior ministerial or administrative positions in the government. Military officers have been appointed as president and vice president of *Petróleos de Venezuela (PDV)*, the state oil company, and as chief executive officer of its U.S. subsidiary, *CITGO*.⁴⁶ Active-duty military officers have also served as the president's chief of staff and personal secretary. An active-duty general headed the state agency charged with building public housing, including new homes for victims of the 1999 flooding disaster in the state of Vargas, as well as the *Oficina del Presupuesto* (the budget office). Chávez has been careful to appoint officers who supported him in the 1992 coups to head the political and judicial police forces. A number of mid-ranking officers have also been transferred to administrative functions in traditionally civilian bureaucracies, particularly posts in tax collection and customs. More controversially, the president encouraged several active-duty military officers to run for office in the 2000 elections on his party's ticket. So far, all these officers have submitted their resignations prior to taking up political activity.⁴⁷

This pattern of military involvement in directing state agencies is unusual by Venezuelan standards, although the participation of retired military officers in politics is common in many democracies. But the high degree of participation by active-duty military officers in nondefense policy making and implementation has undermined civilian control and created the potential for increased civil-military conflict. One example was the conflict among President Chávez's civilian allies in the rump *Asamblea Nacional Constituyente* (also known as the *Congresillo*), the director of the civilian political police (*DISIP*), and the armed forces over the redesign of the national intelligence system. Former *DISIP* chief Eliécer Otaiza (another former military officer and 1992 coup conspirator) drew up legislation that would have forced the *Dirección de Inteligencia Militar* to report to a non-military national intelligence agency, the *Servicio Nacional de Seguridad*, which was to be made up of personnel of the civilian political police.⁴⁸ This

45. The term *Quinta República* was coined by supporters of Hugo Chávez Frías to distinguish their movement from other political parties. One of the central themes of Chávez's message was the need for constitutional reform to replace the institutions of the *Punto Fijo* period, which he labeled as corrupt. In the MVR's interpretation of Venezuelan history, the *Punto Fijo* period was termed the *Cuarta República* and the party aimed to found the *Quinta República*.

46. Interview with Machillanda, Caracas, June 2001.

47. "Los militares que son y donde están," *El Universal Digital*, 28 Feb. 1999; and Luisana Colomine, "Militares activos no deben optar a elección popular," *El Universal Digital*, 1 Mar. 2000.

48. Ley del Sistema Nacional de Inteligencia, 28 Mar. 2000.

law was approved by the *Congresillo* despite heavy criticism from civilians. In an unusual step, however, President Chávez vetoed the law, primarily because of opposition within the military.⁴⁹ This conflict among various retired and active-duty members of the armed forces over legislation illustrates one type of conflict that can develop when the armed forces become highly involved in policy making.

One means that Chávez has employed to retain control over the armed forces is using his presidential powers to promote officers sympathetic to his cause and to expel those suspected of opposing him. Officers who reached prominent positions under the previous administration, such as Caldera's son-in-law General Rubén Rojas Pérez, were retired as soon as Chávez assumed the presidency. Even those who maintained political neutrality during the 1998 electoral process, such as General Noel Martínez Ochoa, commander of *Comando Unificado de la Fuerza Armada Nacional* (CUFAN), were retired within the year. Meanwhile, allies of President Chávez have risen rapidly to positions of authority. For example, General Lucas Rincón Romero is now Inspector General de la Fuerza Armada, following a stint as President Chávez's chief of staff, a job reserved for civilian political allies of the president during the *Punto Fijo* period.⁵⁰ General Manuel Rosendo, noted for his speech favoring the Bolivarian revolution in the 5 July Independence Day military parade, was appointed commander of CUFAN, which enjoys operational control of almost all military assets in Venezuela.⁵¹ Rosendo's predecessor, General Gonzalo García Ordóñez held this position for only six months.⁵² Turnover in the highest military positions has been higher than under *Punto Fijo* democracy, which was already much criticized for rotating senior officers too quickly.

The politicization of the armed forces (both for and against the new regime) has become increasingly public in reaction to the new military policies of President Chávez. For example, General Manuel Rosendo stated in a speech that the military parade demonstrated the armed forces' loyalty to President Chávez. The parade itself, which added floats highlighting the military's participation in civic action projects to the usual display of tanks, was perceived by many as signaling that the armed forces backed the president's revolutionary project.⁵³ Yet only a month prior to the parade, two military officers had been arrested for stating their opposition to President Chávez's policies on videotape and television. Others have retired from the

49. Cenovia Casas, "Gobierno pide al *Congresillo* levantar la sanción a la Ley de Inteligencia," *El Nacional*, 30 June 2000.

50. Rodolfo Cardona, "Pasan a retiro en julio 8 almirantes y 21 generales," *El Universal Digital*, 16 Apr. 1999.

51. "Designado Manuel Rosendo al frente de CUFAN," *El Universal Digital*, 26 Aug. 2000.

52. "Chávez designó a los nuevos miembros del Alto Mando Militar," *El Nacional*, 8 Feb. 2000.

53. Fausto Maso, "El happening del año," *El Nacional*, 8 July 2000.

armed forces to protest what they allege is political manipulation of the process of officer promotion.⁵⁴ Similarly, a group of retired senior military officers known as the Frente Institucional Militar have repeatedly criticized the Chávez administration's use of the armed forces to implement social programs.⁵⁵ Rumors of military conspiracies have surfaced repeatedly in the press, forcing the government to deny any dissent within the armed forces.⁵⁶ These high-profile public statements by military officers for and against the new government are unprecedented by the standards of the Punto Fijo period. Such commentary reveals the increasing stress generated within the officer corps by President Chávez's use of the military to support his political and economic reforms.

Expanding Military Roles and Missions

In the Fifth Republic, the armed forces have become a main executor of government social and political policy. Since the beginning of his term, President Chávez has argued that the only way to meet the current national crisis in Venezuela is to take advantage of the human and technical resources provided by the armed forces.⁵⁷ Furthermore, President Chávez has explicitly called on the armed forces to join and support his revolutionary project.⁵⁸ The proposed reform of the Ley Orgánica of the armed forces, prepared by the defense ministry, identifies eighteen missions for the armed forces, as compared with six in the existing law, "Anteproyecto de Ley de las Fuerzas Armadas." The military has already played a prominent role in public policy through the Plan Bolívar 2000 social program, in disaster relief and internal security following the floods in the state of Vargas in December 1999, and in the staffing of key positions in the government bureaucracy.

The Plan Bolívar 2000, one of the first programs announced by President Chávez on taking office, aims broadly at incorporating the armed forces into domestic political and economic affairs. The plan calls for refurbishing and constructing infrastructure, providing health care for the poor, combating illiteracy and unemployment, and distributing food. Initially established as a six-month emergency program that hired unemployed civilians and placed them under the direction of military officers, the plan now ap-

54. Javier Ignacio Mayorca, "Coronel de la FAV denuncia a general que ascendió con un año de antigüedad," *El Nacional*, 14 Sept. 2000.

55. "Frente Institucional Militar niega vinculación con capitán García," *El Nacional*, 30 June 2000.

56. Adela Leal, "No hay ni la más remota posibilidad de fraccionamiento en la Fuerza Armada," *El Nacional*, 3 Mar. 2000.

57. Leal, "Chávez anunciará el viernes plan cívico-militar de desarrollo," *El Nacional*, 8 Feb. 1999.

58. Mayorca, "El Presidente: FAN está ganada para el proyecto revolucionario," *El Nacional*, 5 Feb. 2000.

pears to have become a permanent part of the Chávez administration's policies.⁵⁹ Under the Plan Bolívar 2000, the armed forces have used soldiers even to sell basic goods at below-market prices to hold down costs in lower- and working-class marketplaces. The air force now provides low-cost rural air transport through its *Rutas Sociales*, and the navy is aiding the fishing industry through the program *Pescar 2000*. Some twenty-nine thousand troops (out of a total force of eighty-five thousand) participated in this program in its first year.⁶⁰

While these military-led efforts at alleviating poverty and stimulating economic development may provide significant public benefits, they have come at the expense of civilian participation and leadership in these areas. Instead, the Chávez administration has starved opposition governors and mayors of resources with which to address these problems.⁶¹ This strategy of underfunding regional governments has continued even as Venezuela has benefited from a sharp rise in world oil prices that peaked at more than thirty dollars per barrel, generating a large sum of windfall revenues with which the central government can fund discretionary spending. Even though the government was legally required to channel a substantial amount of this funding to state and local governments, it failed to do so (Monaldi Marturet 1999). President Chávez avoided disbursing windfall profits from the sale of oil that were set aside in a macroeconomic stabilization fund, part of which was originally destined for the use of regional governments. Instead, military garrisons, as principal executors of the Plan Bolívar 2000 in each state, have benefited from these revenues and replaced the state and municipal governments as the main agents for regional development and the alleviation of poverty.⁶²

Another significant expansion of the military mission occurred following the December 1999 floods that devastated the coastal state of Vargas and left tens of thousands homeless. In response to this crisis and the wave of looting that followed, President Chávez deployed regular army troops to provide security and disaster relief. They acted in cooperation with the police and the *Guardia Nacional*, the forces that traditionally have performed internal security missions.⁶³ This type of deployment is not an uncommon mission for any armed forces, even in well-established democracies. What has been unusual in Venezuela is the extended length of the

59. The second report by the Venezuelan army on its activities under the Plan Bolívar 2000 included projections to the year 2005. Comando General del Ejército, *Plan Bolívar 2000*, no. 2 (Caracas: Impresos Mundo Gráfico, 2000).

60. Cardona, "Relanzan PB2000 el 27 de febrero," *El Universal Digital*, 14 Feb. 2000.

61. Luisa Amelia Maracara, "Gobernadores pedirán a Chávez reforma del FEM," *El Universal Digital*, 30 June 1999.

62. Interview with Roberto Bottome, publisher of *Veneconomía*, 28 July 1999, Caracas.

63. Alicia La Rotta Morán, "Dividen el litoral en diez campamentos de seguridad," *El Universal Digital*, 10 Jan. 2000.

operation, which continued for several months following the disaster, and the accusations of violations of human rights that quickly surfaced in the wake of the military's deployment.⁶⁴ President Chávez and his administration initially discredited the reports of human rights violations by army troops, and some elements of the government harassed the journalist who had reported them.⁶⁵ Further investigation resulted in the indictment in civilian courts of two low-ranking soldiers for crimes committed during the Vargas emergency, but the security forces have resisted cooperating with prosecutors.⁶⁶

The expansion of military roles and missions has generated considerable debate within Venezuela. Retired military officers have criticized the expansion of the military's role as a threat to the professionalism of the institution.⁶⁷ Former Prosecutor General Eduardo Roche Lander reported several cases of corruption involving irregularities in administering Plan Bolívar monies.⁶⁸ The current Prosecutor General, Clodosvaldo Russián, has faced media criticism for delaying publication of an official report confirming large-scale corruption in the Plan Bolívar.⁶⁹ Former presidential candidate Francisco Arias Cárdenas has accused the government of decreasing military readiness due to excessive emphasis on the plan. Other critics have questioned the diversion of government resources into funding a civic action plan under the auspices of the military, which has used secrecy regulations to shield from scrutiny its activities on behalf of the plan.⁷⁰ Although all these critics have valid grounds for their specific concerns, the danger lies not only in expanding the military's role but in the fact that it is occurring while institutional mechanisms of civilian control are being dismantled.

Impact of the Constitution of 1999 on the Venezuelan Armed Forces

The new constitution, designed largely by President Chávez, has dismantled the traditional mechanisms of civilian control of the armed forces developed in the wake of the 1958 transition to democracy. In some respects, the new constitution represents a significant step forward in democratizing

64. Rafael Lastra Veracierto, "No cesan los saqueos a la propiedad privada," *El Universal Digital*, 3 Feb. 2000.

65. Edgar López, "Madre y esposa de un desaparecido acusan a grupo de paracaidistas," *El Nacional*, 21 Jan. 2000.

66. Víctor Manuel Reinoso, "Acusación fiscal a dos militares desbloquea impunidad en Vargas," *El Nacional*, 31 Aug. 2000.

67. Rafael Huizi Clavier, "Si estamos amenazados," *El Nacional*, 18 June 2000.

68. Edgar López, "Contraloría debe investigar uso de recursos para la reconstrucción de Vargas," *El Nacional*, 18 Nov. 2000.

69. "Plan Billuyo 2000" (editorial), *TalCualDigital*, 21 Mar. 2001.

70. Maya Primera Garcés, "AN busca opciones para controlar PB 2001," *TalCualDigital*, 22 Feb. 2001.

Venezuelan politics, as in providing soldiers with the right to vote. But it also creates an opening for civil-military conflict in failing to replace the dysfunctional institutions of the Constitution of 1961 with new avenues for elected officials to oversee and command the armed forces.

The Asamblea Nacional Constituyente introduced four major changes in the constitutional standing of the armed forces in 1999, all of which have generated political controversy. Now that active-duty soldiers and officers have the right to vote, this reform encourages military personnel to participate individually in politics rather than corporatively as part of an armed institution. More important is Article 328, which redefines the mission of the armed forces to include cooperating in the maintenance of internal order and participating actively in national development. Article 330 gives the armed forces the right to perform administrative police and investigative activities. Although the Venezuelan armed forces legally acquired a development role in the *Ley Orgánica de Seguridad y Defensa* in 1976, the Constitution of 1999 gives the mission constitutional rank. This change makes altering or restricting these missions by future governments much more difficult than in the past. Article 331 contains a third critical change in eliminating the right of the legislature to approve military promotions, leaving this task entirely to the armed forces. The final significant change enacted in the new constitution was unifying the armed forces into a single structure of command.

President Chávez became the ultimate arbiter of military promotions by virtue of Article 236, which gives him the right to approve promotions of colonels and generals (and their naval equivalents). Since taking office, Chávez has moved rapidly both to purge and to enlarge the senior officer corps, now at its largest since 1945 with fifty-five generals and fifteen admirals.⁷¹ Furthermore, the proposed *Ley Organica* of the armed forces would extend the maximum period of military service from thirty to forty years and would add the new senior officer rank of lieutenant general.⁷² These changes would allow Chávez to extend the service of his current generals and admirals (most of them from his graduating class at the academy) for another ten years.

Taken together, these reforms eliminate two of the underpinnings for civilian control dating from the Punto Fijo democracy. The first was the constitutional requirement for legislative approval of military promotions for the ranks of colonel and general. Legislative approval of military promotions overtly affected less than 5 percent of officers in any given year, according to former defense minister García Villasmil. But it had the important effect of self-censoring ambitious military officers into compliance with the policies of elected officials. Eliminating this requirement means that

71. Aníbal Romero, "Explicando los ascensos militares," *El Nacional*, 5 July 2000.

72. Dubraska Romero, "Generales: 12 años más en el cargo," *TalCualDigital*, 20 Sept. 2000.

the only elected official with any constitutional relationship to the armed forces is the president. The second underpinning was the decentralization of command authority within the armed forces, originally brought about by Decree 288 of the 1958 transitional government. During the Punto Fijo period, each service had administrative independence, which increased the cleavages crosscutting the military. This arrangement deterred military intervention by increasing the risk that a coup d'état would fail due to lack of coordination, and it encouraged each service to compete with the others for resources and attention from elected officials. Without these two mechanisms or any alternatives that could facilitate civilian control, the Venezuelan armed forces have become substantially more independent of political oversight.

CONCLUSION

Venezuela survived the coup attempts in 1992 because democratizers had achieved institutionalized civilian control of the armed forces after 1958. Yet even though these institutions managed to contain military rebellion, they could not survive the radical transformation in Venezuela's political regime that accompanied the election of President Hugo Chávez. The Constitution of 1999 provides for personalized control of the military by the president. President Chávez has the military knowledge and skills that may enable him to exercise this oversight effectively during his term in office (which could last up to thirteen years).⁷³ The absence of institutionalized control, however, means that future elected officials will have little or no control over the activities of the armed forces, nor will they have any mechanism for deterring renewed military intervention in politics.

Venezuela's political and economic crisis in the 1980s provided an opening for military intervention, which led to the 1992 coup attempts. This crisis called into question the legitimacy of the democratic regime, at least for a sizable minority of military officers. It also undermined significant institutions for appeasing the officer corps, particularly regarding salaries and benefits. Simultaneously, the absence of military intervention for three decades and the willful inattention of senior military and civilian officials to discontent among junior officers allowed conspiracies to develop unchecked.

Only the divide and conquer institutions of civilian control developed during the 1958 transition to democracy checked the success of the 1992 coup attempts. The difficulty of coordinating military rebellion among officers in different services and a high degree of cohesion among senior civilian and military officials worked against a successful coup. Once the immediate crisis had passed, these institutions also allowed President Caldera

73. The new Tribunal Supremo de Justicia ruled that even though Hugo Chávez was reelected in June 2000, his term of office did not begin until 2001 according to the new constitution.

to rebuild civilian authority over the armed forces. This authority persisted despite worsening economic conditions between 1994 and 1999.

Venezuelans missed a substantial opportunity to reform civil-military relations in the wake of the failed coups of 1992. Although institutionalized civilian strategies of divide and conquer and appeasement effectively deterred military intervention, they did not enable elected officials to carry out the level of oversight necessary for strong civilian control of the armed forces. Rather than develop a civilian ministry of defense and effective legislative oversight committees, civilians chose to retain the weak institutions of civilian control inherited from the 1958 transition to democracy. These institutions were sufficient to deter renewed military intervention but did not address the fundamental sources of military discontent. This situation laid the groundwork for military support of the reforms carried out during the first year of President Chávez's administration.

The Chávez administration has transformed Venezuelan civil-military relations, although not necessarily for the better. Some reforms were long overdue, such as the military vote, yet the overall impact of these measures has been to dismantle the institutions of civilian control. Even the recent appointment of a civilian, José Vicente Rangel, as defense minister has not strengthened civilian authority. Negative reactions forced President Chávez to remove Rangel from the direct chain of command and appoint instead Inspector General Luis Amaya as senior military officer directly subordinate to the president. Tellingly, the office of the new civilian defense minister is not located at the ministry but at the former headquarters of the air force. This outcome leaves elected officials with little choice but to depend on personal relationships to manage civil-military affairs. Rather than use the opportunity for reform provided by the 1999 Asamblea Nacional Constituyente, the Chávez administration has chosen to insulate the armed forces constitutionally from civilian control. This approach maximizes the president's personal authority over the military. As the only elected official with any direct constitutional relationship to the military, President Chávez occupies an unequalled position of political power vis-à-vis opposition parties and civil society. Yet he is in a weak institutional position in relation to the the armed forces. While this pattern of military reforms is an understandable reaction to the dysfunctional nature of the civil-military institutions operating from 1958 to 1999, it also represents a move away from democratic civilian control.

As a former military officer, President Chávez may have the ability to exercise personal authority over the armed forces successfully. But the re-orientation of security forces toward internal roles and missions has traditionally been a leading indicator of civil-military conflict and authoritarian rule in many countries (Trinkunas 1999, 8–12). Moreover, the current level of military participation in economic development and internal security is likely to expose the armed forces to substantial corruption. Military partici-

pation in staffing traditionally civilian bureaucracies and running for political office is likely to increase partisanship within the officer corps. Similarly, military discontent with the regime is likely to develop as the interference of the Chávez administration in military promotions and assignments increases, primarily through the rapid turnover in senior officers. President Chávez may have the skills to manage this level of military politicization and discontent, but it seems unlikely that any of his elected successors will be able to follow suit. This trend in civil-military relations bodes ill for future regime stability and democracy in Venezuela.

REFERENCES

AGÜERO, FELIPE

1993 "Las fuerzas armadas y el debilitamiento de la democracia en Venezuela." In *Venezuela, democracia bajo presión*, edited by Andrés Serbín et al. Caracas: INVESP and Nueva Sociedad.

1995 "Debilitating Democracy: Political Elites and Military Rebels." In GOODMAN ET AL. 1995, 136–64.

ARCENEUAUX, CRAIG

1996 "Dramatic Consolidation or Reconsolidation?: Military Doctrine and the 1992 Military Unrest in Venezuela." *Journal of Political and Military Sociology* 24 (Summer): 57–82.

BIGLER, GENE

1981 "La restricción política y la profesionalización militar en Venezuela." *Politeia* 10:85–142.

BURGGRAFE, WINFIELD, AND RICHARD L. MILLETT

1995 "More than Failed Coups: The Crisis in Venezuelan Civil-Military Relations." In GOODMAN ET AL. 1995, 54–78.

CAPRILES AYALA, CARLOS, ET AL.

1992 *Diccionario de la corrupción en Venezuela*. Vol. 3. Caracas: Consorcio de Ediciones Capriles.

CAPRILES MENDEZ, RUTH, ED.

1990 *Diccionario de la corrupción en Venezuela*. Vol. 2. Caracas: Consorcio de Ediciones Capriles.

COPPEDGE, MICHAEL

1994 *Strong Parties and Lame Ducks: Presidential Partyarchy and Factionalism in Venezuela*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press.

CRISE, BRIAN

1998 "Lessons from Economic Reform in the Venezuelan Democracy." *LARR* 33, no. 1:7–41.

DANIELS H., ELIAS R.

1992 *Militares y democracia*. Caracas: Centauro.

FARCAU, BRUCE

1996 *The Transition to Democracy in Latin America*. Westport, Conn.: Praeger.

GIL YEPES, JOSE ANTONIO

1978 *El reto de las élites*. Madrid: Tecnos.

1992 "De 1976 a nuestros días." In *Política y economía en Venezuela, 1810–1991*, edited by Alfredo Boulton, 293–376. Second edition. Caracas: Fundación John Boulton.

GOODMAN, LOUIS W., JOHANNA MENDELSON FORMAN, MOISES NAIM, JOSEPH S. TULCHIN, AND GARY BLAND, EDS.

1995 *Lessons from the Venezuelan Experience*. Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press.

GOTT, RICHARD

2000 *In the Shadow of the Liberator*. London: Verso.

GRUBER ODREMAN, HERNAN

1993 *Insurrección militar del 27-N-1992*. Caracas: Centauro.

- HERNANDEZ, CARLOS RAUL**
 1995 *El motín de los dinosaurios*. Caracas: Panapo.
- JIMENEZ SANCHEZ, IVAN**
 1996 *Los golpes de estado desde Castro hasta Caldera*. Caracas: Centralca.
- KARL, TERRY L.**
 1986 "Petroleum and Political Pacts." In *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Latin America*, edited by Guillermo O'Donnell, Philippe Schmitter, and Lawrence Whitehead, 196–219. Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press.
 1997 *The Paradox of Plenty: Oil Booms and Petro-States*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- LEVINE, DANIEL, AND BRIAN F. CRISP**
 1995 "Legitimacy, Governability, and Reform in Venezuela." In GOODMAN ET AL. 1995, 223–51.
- MACHILLANDA PINTO, JOSE**
 1993 *Cinismo político y golpe de estado*. Caracas: Italgáfica.
- MANRIQUE, MIGUEL**
 1996 *La seguridad en las Fuerzas Armadas Venezolanas*. Caracas: Fondo Editorial Tropykos.
- MARTZ, JOHN D.**
 1995 "Political Parties and the Democratic Crisis." In GOODMAN ET AL. 1995, 31–53.
- MCCOY, JENNIFER**
 1989 "Labor and the State in Party-Mediated Democracy: Institutional Change in Venezuela." *LARR* 24, no. 2:35–67.
- MCCOY, JENNIFER, AND WILLIAM C. SMITH**
 1995 "Democratic Disequilibrium in Venezuela." *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs* 37, no. 2 (Summer):124–25.
- MCCOY, JENNIFER, AND HAROLD TRINKUNAS**
 1999 "Venezuela's Peaceful Revolution." *Current History* 98, no. 626 (Mar.):122–26.
- MONALDI MARTURET, FRANCISCO**
 1999 "El novedoso fondo para la desestabilización: ¿Jugada maestra del Presidente Chávez?" *Venezuela Analítica* (July), website <www.analitica.com>.
- MÜLLER ROJAS, ALBERTO**
 1992 *Relaciones peligrosas: Militares, política y estado*. Caracas: Editorial Tropykos, APUCV, and IPP.
- NAIM, HUMBERTO, AND RAMON PIÑANGO**
 1989 *El caso Venezuela: Una ilusión de armonía*. Caracas: Instituto de Estudios Superiores de Administración (IESA).
- NAIM, MOISES**
 1993 *Paper Tigers and Minotaurs: The Politics of Economic Reform in Venezuela*. Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.
- NORDEN, DEBORAH**
 1998 "Democracy and the Military in Venezuela: From Subordination to Insurrection." *LARR* 33, no. 2:143–65.
- ROMERO, ANIBAL**
 1994 *Decadencia y crisis de la democracia*. Second edition. Caracas: Panapo.
 1997 "Rearranging the Deck Chairs on the Titanic: The Agony of Democracy in Venezuela." *LARR* 32, no. 1:7–36.
- TARRE BRICEÑO, GUSTAVO**
 1994 *El espejo roto: 4F 1992*. Caracas: Panapo.
- TRINKUNAS, HAROLD A.**
 1999 "Crafting Civilian Control of the Armed Forces in Emerging Democracies." Ph.D. diss., Stanford University.
- U.S. ACDA (ARMS CONTROL AND DISARMAMENT AGENCY)**
 1984 *World Military Expenditures and Arms Transfers*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office.
 1996 *World Military Expenditures and Arms Transfers*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office.
- VENECONOMIA**
 1995 *Perspectivas económicas, políticas y sociales de Venezuela, 1995–2000*. Caracas: Venconomia.

VENEZUELA, ACADEMIA MILITAR DE

n.d. "Plan Andrés Bello, 1990–2000." In-house document, Academia Militar de Venezuela, Ministerio de la Defensa, República de Venezuela, Carácas.

ZIMMERMAN, EKKART

1983 *Political Violence, Crises, and Revolutions: Theories and Research*. Cambridge, Mass.: Schenkman.