

CIVIL MILITARY RELATIONS IN THE MODERN DEMOCRATIC ARGENTINA ERA: ARMY SOLDIERS AS MILITARY PROFESSIONALS VERSUS CIVILIANS IN UNIFORM

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UNIFORM**

by

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ABSTRACT

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CIVIL MILITARY RELATIONS IN THE MODERN DEMOCRATIC ARGENTINA ERA: ARMY SOLDIERS AS MILITARY PROFESSIONALS VERSUS CIVILIANS IN UNIFORM

Was the word *Afghanistan* meaningful for American soldiers 20 years ago?

Probably it would have been quite hard to locate the country on a map. Today, it is a deeply significant spot for the world and in the history of the United States, not only for the military but for all the American people. Similarly, nothing other than full-spectrum operations were even conceived by the Argentine government until 1993 when Argentina deployed, for the first time ever, an infantry battalion to Croatia in support of a peace operation.

The exclusive mission of the armed forces around the world, from the "levée en masse" until the late twentieth century, has been the preparation for conventional warfare, for a conflict between national armies. This concentrated all efforts of nations to organize, equip and train their military organizations. However, in today's era beyond conventional warfare, it is possible to witness the multiplicity of functions that the military can bring into play, especially given its high capacity for complex problem solving, flexibility to set up ad hoc organizations, organization and discipline. The missions entrusted to militaries today range from domestic disaster relief missions to peacekeeping operations under the United Nations mandate, and from full spectrum operations to law enforcement operations logistic support.

As the employment options for the world's militaries continue to expand, it is necessary to recognize that the relationship between the highest political authorities and senior military leaders have also experienced similar adjustments. This can be especially challenging in those countries with young democracies. In particular, the

civil-military relationship may have suffered a dramatic shift, as resentment and tension may linger after years of recurrent failed democratic governments, conscription, and perhaps an ignominious cycle of military coups. Argentina is an example of this. As the global and regional strategic environments have substantially changed, it is imperative to reestablish the roles of the Argentine Armed Forces, as well as the relationship between the military and civilian authority, in order to give adequate responses to the present – and future – challenges.

A key aspect of the dilemma of how these roles are assigned to a newly professional military organization is the relationship between elected national officials and military leaders. There is not a clear distinction between both responsibilities while shaping national defense policy and strategy, as both have the potential of overlapping tasks and missions. The military might refrain from influencing civilian leaders during the decision-making process, but it is uncertain whether it is imperative to totally defer to the military leaders for their expertise in planning, conducting and controlling military operations. While Congressional members and other political leaders have to trust in military expertise in the practical application of “hard power”, it is also remarkable that the Executive Branch exerts a decisive influence in the military planning when defining the defense budget and advising the President about the implications of a military action.¹The level of autonomy that civil authorities and military leaders should exert in their respective roles of public service is a main topic in this relationship.

As a derivation of these issues, and as a consequence of all military involvement in coup-d'état, the modern Argentine democracy also needs to refine the meaning of the individual citizen's role as a member of the Armed Forces. Particularly in the Army,

leaders should not only re-connect the institution to the people; moreover, leaders must reestablish an idea with the national government: a soldier is a professional of arms, with unique skills and values, who does not work for a particular ruler, but for achieving the highest national objectives. Soldiers should not openly profess any particular political affiliation nor serve a sole civilian leader, but serve the Nation as a whole, its Constitution, and its legitimate officials. And the Army has a distinctive way of certifying each individual in order to meet the required standards of the profession. Although this assertion may sound strange to American readers, it is part of the core debate in Argentina's defense forums.

This paper will briefly describe the recent political and military history in Argentina in order to understand the reasons for the sustained mistrust between civil and military leadership. Next, it will define the current missions for the Argentine Armed Forces and the characteristics of military relations with the political power of that country, and then describe the modern foundations of the emerging profession of arms in democratic Argentina, providing some insights about the need of mastering expertise and institutional values.

If this approach helps some readers to become more enlightened about the meaning of the profession of arms in modern Argentina, the paper's purpose will be accomplished.

Civil military relations in Argentina have undergone radical changes along its tumultuous history. Since the independence from the Spanish Crown in 1816, turmoil has often characterized the Argentine political scene. Only after an elected government rose to power in 1983, could the Executive branch finally run the constitutional

attributions with both continuity and stability. A full set of laws and norms were set, which at the present delimits the roles of the Armed Forces. But it is crucial to review the recent history of Argentina in order to understand its current civil military relations, as the last century witnessed the rise and dawn of “the most scenic and colorful, and certainly the most enigmatic” country in South America² and with that, an ignominious recurrent succession of failed governments.

At the end of the nineteenth century, international opinion had predicted that Argentina would develop into one of the world’s leading nations. Its natural resources, its size, and its lucrative trade with Europe provided what seemed to be a solid foundation. However, the endless cycle of military rule and decades of economic chaos placed major burdens upon the country and its leaders until the end of that century.³

The increasingly gloomy economic situation attracted a military coup in 1930, when elected President Hipólito Yrigoyen was ousted from power. This triggered the beginning of the period of Argentine history known as the “Infamous Decade”. Over the following ten years, electoral fraud, government corruption, violent persecution of political opposition and the continuing effects of the Great Depression sent the Argentine political and economic machine into a dramatic, downward spiral.⁴

The 1940s witnessed one of the most influential and controversial figures in the history of Argentina rising out of the political chaos. Colonel Juan Domingo Perón became president in 1946, and his ideology shaped the country’s political landscape for the rest of the century. In a fascist style, he imposed strict censorship and persecuted political opposition on one hand, while promoting trade unions, expanding voting rights (particularly to women), and opening university and health care to all citizens on the

other. *Peronism*, as his movement was named, subsequently injected a dangerous fanaticism into the political arena. This polarized the country and the Army as partisanship was introduced in the latter, and led to decades of violent, radical politics. This, in turn, pushed Argentina to alternating swings between military dictatorships and corrupt elected governments.

After Peron's replacement in 1955, Argentina became divided over the challenge and the legacy of Juan Domingo Perón. The Armed Forces, at this time comprised of an elitist officers' corps, a wide, hardworking and disciplined non-commissioned officers' structure, and a massive base of draftees, were considered one of the most powerful political forces in Argentina. Some factions within the Armed Forces, angered by the actions and broken promises of the Peronist movement, effectively banned the deposed President from participating in the political process, which led to a cycle of military revolutions and political unrest. Peron was imprisoned after his overthrow, and then exiled to Spain for the next 18 years. During the 60's and 70's, Argentina faced mounting political and economic challenges. Peron's supporters had been denied the right to create and back any organization connected to their leader, but ultimately found strength in the union movement. Through the unions, Peronists found they could paralyze the political system that blocked them from participation.⁵ During that period, weak democratic governments, feeble national institutions and the lack of tradition in military subordination to civil authorities resulted in uncountable coup d'états. In 1973, Peron returned from exile, won general elections, but died shortly after. His young, incapable third wife, Isabel Perón, inherited a fractured government and it was not long until the military stepped in again. That coup of 1976 marked the start of one of the

darkest chapters in Argentine history - the “Dirty War”, or War Against Subversion (WAS), which held the pretended aim of annihilating Marxist-Leninist guerrillas that attempted to seize part of a remote rural area, foster general uprisings and finally, take over the national government. The military dictatorship, under General Jorge Rafael Videla, led a ruthless campaign of violence and terror. The Armed Forces, in coordination with Federal and Provincial Police forces, ‘disappeared’ (arrested and secretly executed without trial) most insurgents and supporters, but in so doing also arrested innumerable students, professors and labor unionists, many of whom had little or nothing to do with the violent guerrilla movement. While 8,960 people were still missing in September 1984, one year after restoration of democracy in Argentina, human rights groups estimated that over 30,000 persons ‘disappeared’ from 1976-1983.⁶

The dictatorship was eventually brought to its knees in 1983. In the wake of a disastrous military campaign fought against Great Britain for sovereignty over the Falkland Islands (Islas Malvinas), the discredited junta found itself forced to both lift bans on political parties and reinstate basic political liberties. In the elections that followed, Raúl Alfonsín became president, and constitutional rule was restored. Democracy was strongly re-established over the next few years and a great amount of faith was restored in the political machine,⁷ even when President Alfonsín had to resign five months before finishing the legal presidential term, because of political pressures, unions’ agitation, and economic stagnation. At the very least, democratic continuity was granted through new presidential elections. It was the first time in more than fifty years that two elected presidents ruled the country consecutively.⁸

Under Alfonsín, two deeply controversial pieces of legislation were passed in 1986 which attempted to pull society and government out of the heavy shadow of the past, but were formative in fostering a sense of legitimacy in how the Argentine government served the civilian populace. Ley de la Obediencia Debida (Law of Due Obedience) initially protected junior officers from prosecution on crimes against humanity during the “Dirty War”⁹ with the argument that these junior officers who had committed atrocities were only following orders from above. Even more unpopular was Law No 23,492, commonly known as Ley de Punto Final (roughly translated as Full Stop Law) passed on 24 December 1986. This law directed the end of investigation and prosecution against people accused of political violence during the dictatorship, up to the restoration of democratic rule on 10 December 1983. Its text is very short; it has seven articles. Article No. 5 excluded the cases of identity forgery and forced disappearance of minors from applying the law. The Ley de Punto Final was extremely controversial both in its time and afterwards. It was proposed by the administration of President Raúl Alfonsín as a way of containing the increasing military discontent.

After Alfonsín’s administration, Carlos Menem’s presidency was characterized by a major economic overhauling, a wide privatization process of state-owned companies, an unprecedented solid relationship with the United States, a drastic reduction of the Armed Forces and the crush of several failed military revolts. In conjunction with those factors, improved accountability methods, the discredit suffered by the Army about the War Against Subversion, and the Malvinas Islands war, President Menem reinforced civilian control over the military institution.¹⁰

However, it was not until August 2003, during President Nestor Kirchner's administration that the Supreme Court overturned these extremely controversial amnesty laws, which then allowed proper judicial procedures to be restarted, prosecuting and convicting dozens of former military leaders in the following years. This action led to some tensions between the military leadership and the Executive on the one hand, but the final outcome was a stronger sense to subordinate to civilian officials, and a clear distinction between those who had to face the courts and those who had nothing to hide.

As a result of a more mature society in political terms, a sustained economic growth, a visible manifestation of "due process" against former military leaders which reinforced credibility to both Judicial and Executive officials, an increasing professionalization of the Armed Forces, and the consolidation of democratic institutions, the likelihood of military intervention into the political process in Argentina dropped dramatically. When the Executive nurtures its legitimacy in such a way, as a basic condition for governing, by encouraging the rule of law above all issues, popular support, strengthening of institutions, and military subordination are reaffirmed.

The meaning of professionalism in the Argentine Armed Forces needs explanation, as it is a key component of civil military relations. Professionalism is described as a vocational life-long call, which possesses a special branch of knowledge and skills, a social responsibility, with no financial motivation but certainly remunerated, and a sense of corporate activity, where professional achievements are distinguished both by ranks and assignments.¹¹ The identity of a military officer is comprised by four dimensions: the purely "military technical" expert knowledge, the moral and ethical

aspect of the profession, the general universal knowledge achieved through liberal education –human development-, and the political-cultural knowledge and awareness that allows to understand the environment the officer has to work within.¹² Thus, the common ground to all military officers, disregarding services or branches, is that their primary function is to plan, organize, direct, operate, conduct and control the most lethal state organization, in order to be successful in combat and other operations.¹³ The legal, ethical and expert application of violence, and management of resources to accomplish tasks conducted by national authorities, clearly distinguishes professional armed service from any other civil profession or public service.

But if military professionalism is important to the Nation's stability and survival, its supreme virtue is obedience. Adherence to law, military competence and commitment to serve under the rule of legitimate, elected authorities must be in a permanent balance. Starting with legal national authorities, it may be accepted that there are several similarities between the US and Argentina concerning the Constitutional attributes of the Executive Branch, the balance provided by the Legislative body and the norms relating to National Defense. From its very inception as an independent country, and particularly from the 1853 National Constitution, the President of the Argentine Nation is also the commander-in-chief, provides for the military posts of the Nation, meaning that he grants posts or ranks for the higher officers of the Armed Forces with the consent of the Senate; and on his own account, he has the same entitlements during wartime. He has control of the Armed Forces and is in charge of their organization and distribution, in accordance with the analyzed needs of the Nation. The President also is responsible for conducting National Defense with all elements of

national power, and the Armed Forces, as he is the Commander in Chief. He has also the responsibility to declare war and to order reprisals with the consent and approval of Congress¹⁴, and with the advice and assistance of the National Defense Council. This organ, which includes all members of the national cabinet of ministers, the Secretary of National Intelligence, the Chief of Joint Staff and each of the Services Chief of Staff, has the responsibility of determining possible conflicts, and adopting necessary national strategies and plans, and coordinating all efforts to address them. Reinforcing the idea of the elected officials' control of the military, the National Parliament intervenes in the National Defense System as directed by the Constitution, through the Senate and the House Defense Commissions, which balances the powers of the Executive. Meanwhile, the Armed Forces Joint Staff assists the Minister of Defense with military strategy, conducts strategic military planning aligned with the President's directives through the Minister of Defense, prepares joint doctrine, and conducts joint planning and training.

The Argentine National Defense System includes and coordinates all elements of power for solving those conflicts that require effective use of military forces. This may take either a dissuasive or kinetic form, in order to face any external aggression. The Armed Forces' final purpose is to permanently protect the nation's sovereignty and independence, its territorial integrity, and its self-determination capability. National Defense Law is aimed to protect the life and freedom of Argentine citizens, regardless of their location or status, by planning and executing any necessary action to succeed in those conflicts.¹⁵ One of the fundamental topics to fully understand how elected officials exert control over the military in Argentina is related to the explicit prohibition to conduct internal security operations, which are regulated by the Interior Security Law. However,

in case that security forces – National Gendarmerie (Gendarmeria Nacional) and Coast Guard (Prefectura Naval Argentina), along with Federal and Provincial Police Forces- were overrun as a result of a serious revolt, major natural disaster or other emergency, the law also allows the President to commit military forces in order to restore public order and enforce laws¹⁶. This concept has been included in the 1994 Constitutional reform, and since then, the military has changed its training and doctrine substantially. Before that constitutional amendment, which repealed the doctrine of the *de facto* governments, established that any further attempt at breaking the constitutional order was to be deemed illegal. Severe penalties were imposed for the perpetrators and the right to resist a coup d'état was validated. This is purely intended to deter military leaders from raising the excuse of “serious public unrest” and generalized internal disorder to overthrow an elected President. The formerly alleged right of the Armed Forces for enforcing laws as a last resort, as it happened in the past, is now definitely buried.

Traditionally, the Armed Forces considered themselves as the “Fatherland’s moral reserve”. That sentence was even written in diverse doctrinal field manuals throughout the 70’s and 80’s. However, today, after several decades of democracy, military forces in Argentina have a different approach, neither so extremist nor so prone to “save the country” from internal unrest or misgovernment. The core mission of the military instrument is now to repel and defeat all external military aggression from any State, in order to protect national vital interests, its sovereignty, independence, and self determination, territorial integrity, and the life and freedom of its inhabitants.¹⁷

As a result of this core mission, the military instrument has had to adjust its shape, organization and equipment for facing conventional warfare, and also its quality; in other words, become a professional force. But apart from the core mission above, new subsidiary missions have been addressed to achieve political goals mainly aimed at improving international peace and security, and reinforcing the armed forces commitment to help in national development. This dual purpose is considered an important factor for the design and determination of its military capabilities, specifically as they relate to the development of the minimum standards required for participating in a multinational and interagency arena. Argentina's participation in multinational forums has led to a more significant role in the international arena, mainly in the shape of United Nations Peacekeeping forces. After a deep reorganization of the Argentine Armed Forces in 1998¹⁸, matured through several administrations, other formerly "non-traditional" missions are now also on the shoulders of the military: Support Operations to National Community (Humanitarian Assistance or Development and Reconstruction Activities), Humanitarian Assistance to partner countries, and the construction of a Sub-Regional Defense System with continental allies, such as Chile and Brazil.¹⁹ As all these major adjustments have been implemented under the rule of democratically elected authorities, the result is a more confident Army, as it has become a more flexible, adaptable, and less bureaucratic organization.

Aside from improving the quality of military leaders and organizations, there has to be a parallel development of the profession itself. A primary factor that prevents military intervention in politics in the past years, while enhancing the civilian control of the military, is the professionalization of the officer corps.²⁰ The less aristocratic and the

less discretionary the promotion system, posting assignments, military skills evaluation, and accountability is, the more professional and supportive to democratic values that army becomes. Even up until 1983, most Army and Navy officers came from the rural or industrial oligarchies, and just those who belonged to accommodated families from the economic elites had a clean path to flag ranks. Hence, it can be alleged that the disposition to intervene in the political arena in the past, not only in Argentina but in some other Latin American countries may be explained by that clash of class interests.²¹

Development of professionalism is a sign of modern, democratic armies, as it creates a distinction between the roles of the Armed Forces leaders and politicians. In the former Argentine aristocratic military, issues from national policy-making down to tactical combat skills were all on the hands of soldiers²². Nowadays, the roles of civilian officials and military leaders are clearly recognized. Therefore, it can be deduced that professionalization of the officer corps, highlighting its role of advisor on the wide military scope, complements the civil control of the armed forces. Military members must meet high standards of technical competences in order to demonstrate solid moral conditions and strict adherence to law. In this sense, the career turns into a well respected, talented and qualified activity, with its own regulations, culture, ethics and expertise. Qualification for joining the Army is related to equal opportunities, a primary value in democratic regimes, as every citizen at the age of 18 may become a professional soldier. But more important than the certification of technical skills and leadership capacity, unique for this profession, is the final outcome of becoming a professional, as their members are educated, trained and deployed throughout their lives to ensure success in its call to duty. That creates a popular shared belief that being

a soldier is something related to a social service, with a particular culture based on sacrifice and ethical standards. Therefore, soldiers are tied by the rule of law, under civilian authority, as a service to the people of the Nation and to its fundamental law, the National Constitution. This sense of social commitment of the military profession is particularly seen during humanitarian relief operations, every time a natural disaster occurs within Argentine borders or abroad. All three Services' officers are viewed as loyal and trusted agents of the legitimate national authorities, proving the rule of democratic values in the current Armed Forces, and projecting those virtues onto the society.

Certification of those who aspire to become a professional of arms is related with formal education, both military and civilian. An officer has to study and train during the first four and a half years at the Military Academy, and attend different training courses along his entire career. Furthermore, officers have to achieve a Bachelor of Arts degree, demonstrate second language skills, while attending and conducting military training within their units. And for being considered eligible to higher positions, they have to achieve at least a Masters degree, after attending a Staff School or similar. Every given step ratifies their ability to perform the military duties.

Civilian control over the military is a cornerstone in stable democracies. It is wise to note that a system of civil-military relations may also be built over a shared responsibility on defense and security issues. Civilian authorities rely on military advisors not only for obtaining specific technical support and conducting combat operations, but for controlling the Armed Forces as well. Along the Army's hierarchy, this cooperative system is clearly marked, for example, in the Constitution of the United

States of America, since the obligation to defend the Nation goes from the individual Soldier all the way up to the Commander in Chief himself.²³ An identical situation is implied in the Argentine Constitution, as it describes the obligation of every citizen to bear arms in defense of the Nation, under the elected officials' direction in the form of National laws or Executive Orders. In the description of the Executive powers, civilian authorities have the core responsibility in providing the necessary resources for defending the Nation, but still with considerable assistance from the uniformed branches. Therefore, one can assert that shaping the defense strategy of the Nation is a matter of shared responsibility between elected officials and military senior leaders, involving a complex and sometimes entangled balance of power, where both exert significant influence and authority.²⁴

Compounding the complexity of this picture, as the nature and the shape of armed conflicts are mutating, the military is also developing a unique professional competence. Closely working with civilian authorities, often with overlapping responsibilities, the necessary control over the uniformed services involves recognizing and accepting both roles. And while complicated and complex, ultimately there is no risk in this. Hybrid conflicts like the current war in Afghanistan, those where forces conduct traditional military operations against an enemy, while they simultaneously—and decisively—attempt to achieve control of the combat zone's populations by securing and stabilizing them²⁵, have proven that leaders at every level carry on tasks with political implications. When does that junior officer need to be trained in the relation between tactical skills and the requirements of international relations? The answer is: from the very beginning of his/ her career, at the military academy.²⁶ After all, the

responsibilities towards the State are various, like representing the external security of the Nation, the advisory function to the Executive and the commanding function, on behalf of the Commander in Chief, and he will have to exert all of them throughout his career. “Technical”, purely military decisions often have political implications. Again, the line is quite blurred, but still, the rule of civilian control is clear, as the military profession serves the ends of the Nation.²⁷

Professionalism in Argentina, like in first-world armies, is closely characterized to war fighting skills and expertise, to leadership and vocation, to partisan neutrality, to national service and social responsibility, and voluntarily attachment to a disciplinary code. Corporate loyalty to fellow practitioners is also a non-written value, and a shared sentiment among soldiers.²⁸ For instance, the sense of belonging to the US Army as a “corporation” is explicitly written in The Soldier’s Creed and other documents, and that feeling is perceived to be as strong as the commitment to defend the Nation itself²⁹. Just to make an analogy with the Argentine Army, another emerging democracy such as Brazil has recently recognized the distinctive features of the profession of Arms in an official document³⁰, and shares most concepts with the Argentine military. Unlike any other employ, threat to life is by nature a quintessence in military activity. Soldiers are in jeopardy, during war and peace, like many other professions, but none of them offer a permanent challenge to personal security. Rigid discipline and hierarchical organizations also rule personal and professional life; military careers beget exclusiveness too, impeding the execution of any other remunerated activity. It also requires a 24 hours a day, 7 days a week availability, without any chance to be compensated by additional wages, while civilian workers enjoy that benefit, and they are

not forced to work round the clock. Soldiers and their families often suffer the Army assignment process, as they are compelled to move periodically, sometimes with very short notice, as they may be reassigned to serve in any part of the country or the globe, at any moment. Moreover, as a way of certifying their qualification for the job, they have to demonstrate physical and psychological fitness and their ability to execute military tasks in war or peace. In addition, military personnel must go through regular and compulsory health and fitness tests, which condition his permanence in active duty. Members of the armed forces must attend specific training courses and continuous professional improvements through a distinctive education system, which allows them to acquire, refresh or polish specific skills and knowledge in different steps along the profession, in order to maintain and update standards of performance. The risk in not being continuously trained and educated lays on the certain chance of not being promoted, and therefore, being ousted from the Army.

Soldiers also voluntarily give up some basic rights, inherent to any given citizen, such as partisan involvement, participation in unions, working rights and to some extent, part of freedom of speech. The Argentine Armed Forces members are also banned from participating in political activities. As a rule, the military profession prohibits active duty military personnel to take part in party activities. That prohibition includes the inability to join unions in order to claim social or working benefits, as it is considered unacceptable that members of the military might be somehow “opposed” to the institution to which they belong, and to which they owe unrestricted allegiance. At least in Argentina, Brazil, and surely in most South American armies, officers do not enjoy the same universal working rights other citizens do. Just to list some of these civilian rights and

entitlements, for example, higher pay for night work, working hours limited up to eight hours daily and 180 hours monthly, paid weekly break, overtime compensation for working more than eight hours daily, and a minimum twelve hour rest between working days are not taken into account in the Armed Forces.³¹ This should not be interpreted as a unionist claim, but stated as a clear sign of distinction between the meaning of being a soldier or a “normal” citizen.

Another topic is the endless linkage to the profession, its history, heritage, and legacy. Military retirees remain committed to their profession by integrating the first line of the Armed Forces reserves, as they may be recalled to active duty until the age of 65. Lastly, consequences for the family also highlight the demands of the military profession. All family life, as the education of children, the exercise of remunerative activities of the spouse, and the family heritage building is particularly difficult. In addition, military families find it difficult to establish long lasting personal relationships because of the soldier’s high mobility. Therefore, the “citizen in uniform”, as the German Bundeswehr concept expresses, is a double edged sword. On one side, soldiers are to enjoy all the rights regular citizens are entitled to; on the other, they have to accomplish those heavy responsibilities that only soldiers can. Then, the idea of being a citizen that “works” in uniform, at a job like any other, is hard to swallow in the Argentine Armed Forces, though its essence is acceptable. The idea of “internal self guidance”, expressed in that German concept meaning a voluntarily adherence to respect the Constitution, and to defend national citizens from external aggressions, restraining themselves from becoming part of a political tool, is embedded in every Argentine Armed Forces soldier and it has become part of the military virtue, because that is also

part of every citizen's duty and right: fidelity is due not to a person, but to law, to the Constitution and to the Nation as a whole.³²

Male and female "professionals of arms" are public officials, as their client is the Argentine society, which has entrusted the Armed Forces with the task of protecting the highest national interests. Every act of Argentine soldiers has to be considered as a service to the citizens, with the distinctive characteristic that elected political officials control designated military agents.³³ They develop their profession under the state's core mission of providing for the common defense, setting their actions to uphold the Constitution and laws. In that sense, all citizens in uniform who comprise the military instrument of the Nation are subject to respect for democratic institutions and the subordination to civilian authorities legally elected. They reconcile their military duties with the rights and obligations as a citizen, and must refuse to obey unethical or unlawful orders. However, for all the reasons described above, the profession of arms cannot be equated with any other public service, recognizing that the obligations of the profession are distinctive and unique, along with its inherent prerogatives and entitlements.

Professionalism in the modern Argentine Armed Forces has enhanced the relationship between elected officials, at the Legislative and Executive branches and the military. Strict respect for Constitutional order, subordination to civilian control and military efficiency softens the normal tensions between both, and the overlapping responsibilities are better understood and leveraged. If the main aim in war is to achieve a better peace, in the Clausewitzian sense, and war is total chaos and therefore has to be avoided, the essence of statecraft is the combination of diplomacy and force,

and other elements of power. Both military and civilian officials must work together, in a clear understanding of their roles and expertise.

In the current volatile strategic environment, there is no room for a clear distinction between military and civilian officials' roles, as they both need to fully understand the range of their decisions. The belief that policymakers just wage wars, while the military commander just fights battles or conducts campaigns is out of fashion. There is a bridging zone, an area of mutual interest, where politicians and soldiers must work together. Politicians in modern democracies have to be educated in the art and science of war, even when their interests and backgrounds are far away from this area. And the military officers, even when they have been educated to "stay in his lane", advising only on the best use of military force, should expand their thinking and educational preparations to provide advice broader than just "technical". In Argentina, defense advisors to the Ministers of Defense, Foreign Affairs, Security, and other national agencies should be invited to attend the Joint Staff School and the National Defense School, to educate them in the military side of the national defense. And the military professional development system should produce, from the early stages of the career, officers with the skills and abilities to adapt to uncertain future challenges. That might be acquired through degree and postgraduate education, at national or international universities, to broaden their scope of knowledge.

Testimony of senior military leaders before Congress should be enforced in the Argentine political system. Although the legal framework for calling a public official does exist, there is no regulation that may compel a flag officer to inform the Congress and the public opinion about military issues. The main reason rests in the fact that the

military chain of command ends in the President's office, through the Minister of Defense, who in turn is in charge of giving testimony about defense issues before the different committees. However, public appearance of a senior military officer might produce a deep impact in the people's and Congressmen's minds and will, and might oblige military officers to exert their heavy responsibilities with extreme concern. That would help to get a better understanding of the military profession, to a better relation with the civilian decision-makers, and to provide the citizens with first hand information about the defense of national interests.

Lastly, the responsibility of formulating and executing defense policies is a shared task between all national security professionals, and there are many overlapping areas. The necessary functions and competences come from both political and military knowledge and expertise. Therefore, the need for sharing information openly, formally and informally, between civilian and military officials, in a daily interaction where trust is the common currency, is crucial for succeeding. Civilian and military officials should develop their careers serving together at different levels in the hierarchical defense organization. Argentine junior officers should test their leadership abilities, at least once before – and as a condition for - being promoted to Captain, in United Nations operations, along with civilian representatives from the Ministries of Defense, Foreign Affairs, Security and from other national agencies. This might broaden junior officers' understanding of the socio-cultural dimension of conflicts, educate them in dealing with complex problems and enhance their interpersonal skills and negotiation capabilities, truly necessary competences in higher ranks. Defense civilians should be allowed to take classes at the Joint Staff School, to start providing their perspective and expertise

in defense issues, while absorbing the military culture and the military decision making process. Senior education, at the National Defense College and other educational institutions should be granted to all selected officials, both military and civilian. Field officers should serve at least once at the Joint Staff or the Ministry of Defense, as a condition for being promoted to the rank of Brigadier General. Bonds that are fastened as a consequence of daily, interpersonal relationship, not only sharing professional information, but also expectations and visions, will create a positive synergy of actions. That is imperative to flatten differences, in order to enhance cooperation and to obtain high efficiency. Where clear political objectives are supported by wise, candid professional military advice and execution, the output of their joint commitment results in a better defense system, a stronger democracy, and a greater country.

Nations trust their military forces under the elected authorities command, for their survival and evolution. Soldiers serve in silence and with courage and true military spirit. When they stand for their core values, and improve their effectiveness measures to become even more professional, they prevent themselves and the people they are obeying from disintegration and defeat. The Argentine Armed Forces have evolved into a respectful democratic institution. That is beyond any discussion. In the years to come, Argentine society as a whole will widely recognize the sacrifices of soldiers of all ranks, in protecting the Constitution and national interests as directed by elected officials.

Endnotes

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