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HISTORY AND POLITICAL THEORY OF CIVILIAN-MILITARY RELATIONS IN VENEZUELA¹

ABSTRACT This paper examines a set of conditions that have allowed the existence and development of praetorianism, and the absence of effective civilian control over the military in Venezuela. This study is based on the analysis of the theoretical parameters laid out by Domingo Irwin, S.E. Finer, in contrast to the works of U.S. author, Gene Bigler.

KEY WORDS Venezuela, Civilian-Military Relations (relaciones civiles y militares), Praetorianism (pretorianismo), Democracy (democracia), Civilian Control of Armed Forces (control civil de las Fuerzas Armadas), Political Theory (teoría política).

“Civilian-military relations in Venezuela” have traditionally been a very controversial topic. The origin of this controversy is complex, but it is related to a historical problem concerning the political relevance that military forces have played in the State structure and the position they should occupy inside the society. In the Venezuelan academic studies on civilian-military relations, we find several approaches by

¹ This article was submitted for publication before the death of Hugo Chávez.

domestic² as well as by foreign authors.³ Nevertheless, specialized studies on the theme are relatively recent and scarce. This is especially true if we consider the bulk of studies on this subject we can find in the rest of the Latin American continent, particularly in the Southern Cone.

There are some reasons that could explain why Venezuelan academic community, with a few exceptions, did not have among its priorities the rigorous research on civilian-military relations, strategic studies, and State security and defense. The main reason is that Venezuelan democracy, even with its problems and limitations, was considered to be politically stable, with enough natural and financial resources, in which military uprisings at the end of the twentieth century were condemned to failure. This way, Venezuela, its strategic problems, its democracy, and the civilian-military relations studies did not get to attract much interest among social science researchers. In general, research and study of civilian-military relations was not a relevant issue among the academic segment until the crisis became evident inside that area.

A new interest in investigating these areas that had not been researched before arose and gained force because of the attempt to implement a set of reforms and corrective measures during the second term of president Carlos Andrés Pérez and its impact on Venezuelan democracy future (1989-1993), especially with the February 1989 crisis⁴, and the February 4th and November 27th 1992 military uprisings. Additionally, the study of civilian-military relations and the armed forces, pursued by Venezuelan researchers, from an interdisciplinary perspective, is becoming a more prominent research topic.⁵

The approach of Venezuelan military in relation to society and the State has been a prevalent topic in studies conducted by reputable domestic researchers, especially on strategic thought, and security and defense as a matter of public policy.⁶ These studies are of great value and contribute to understand the conditions needed to arrive to a real and effective civilian control of military forces in Venezuela. More importantly, these

² D. Irwin, 'El Control Civil y la Democracia (conceptos teóricos básicos)' in D. Irwin, F. Langue (coords.), *Militares y Sociedad en Venezuela. Un manual sobre las relaciones civiles y militares, el control civil y referencias metodológicas sobre la historia inmediata. Cuando la calle arde y el aula reflexiona*, Caracas 2003, pp. 149-224.

³ H. Castillo, 'Textos Angloamericanos sobre las relaciones civiles y militares venezolanas' in D. Irwin, F. Langue (coords.), *Militares...*, pp. 73-104.

⁴ I.M. Guardia Rolando, G. Olivieri Pacheco, *Estudio de las relaciones civiles militares en Venezuela desde el siglo XIX hasta nuestro días*, Caracas 2005, p. 103. In February, 1989 the "Caracazo" or "Sacudón" (Shake-up) took place. Stemming from the public transportation fares increase on the 27th and 28th of that month, a series of citizens' protests erupted in Venezuela's prominent cities. There was pillage and destruction in different commercial areas, many deaths, injuries and disappearances. Many people were killed and buried in mass graves, and the exact number of those disappearances are yet unknown. These events caused a situation of anomy and anarchy, because violence became the mechanism through which people expressed themselves. This warranted the constitutional guarantees suspension and the country's militarization, which had not happened in Venezuela since the 70s.

⁵ H. Castillo, M.A. Donís Ríos, D. Irwin (comps.), *Militares y Civiles. Balance y perspectivas de las relaciones civiles y militares venezolanas en la segunda mitad del siglo XX*, Caracas 2001.

⁶ A. Romero (ed.), *Seguridad, Defensa y Democracia en Venezuela*, Caracas 1980.

studies are relevant to a society in which the undertaking of these topics was considered taboo and in certain way perceived as dangerous, reserved to the military sector, where academic researchers were exposed to certain risks, and required courage and valor to publish their research. This was true even in the case of highly theoretical studies because all in-training was considered to be legally secret.⁷

Civilian-military relations in institutionally underdeveloped democratic societies get dramatic connotations, this is generally the case in Latin America, where Venezuela is located. This is because, among other institutional problems, the place that armed forces should occupy inside the society and the role they should have in the State appear to be historically and politically blurred. B. Loveman, in one of the most complete studies on the armed forces political role historical evolution in Latin American societies, covers from colonial times until the end of the Twentieth Century.⁸ Unfortunately, this study does not deal in detail with the Venezuelan case.

In the Venezuelan situation, the origin of praetorianism, in other words, the secular institutional problem of military abusive intervention in politics and its doctrinal origins in the 20th century, starts, according to Straka as cited below:

Praetorianism stems out from the conviction that it is the army who should lead the country to greatness. Not just, and more humbly, as López made the effort to clarify the army functions are providing the country with the peace needed for industries to flourish and defending the nation's laws and institutions, but making them flourish directly, even dictating laws. Imposing order there where the rest of society evidently could not. Taking (usurping) its functions, then. However; not militarizing society, like in Japan since the war with China and until Hiroshima, where everyone had to wear a uniform; but steering from the military quarters what the rest of common people do. By inventing the tradition that links the nowadays army to the republic liberators, the army was given an ideological load which was far away from the good intentions (we insist: nothing indicates the contrary) that López Contreras always had.⁹

It can be stated that praetorianism in Venezuela has its historical origins in the belief exaltation of the army role played during the independence war and in the creation of the National State. Bigler, who was one of the foreign researchers in initiating academic studies on the Venezuelan civilian-military relations, stated that the beginning and consolidation of new patterns in the civilian-military relations after the military regime of General Marcos Pérez Jimenez decade basically focused on two aspects: the military professionalization on one hand, and on the other the sociopolitical system within which the military acted.¹⁰ Moreover, Bigler establishes five basic factors that

⁷ J.C. Rey, 'El Secreto de Estado y Libertad de Información. Dos patologías de los gobiernos: propaganda y el secreto', *Resumen*, Nº 404, 2 de agosto de 1981, pp. 14-16.

⁸ B. Loveman, *For la Patria. Politics and Armed Forces in Latin America (Latin American Silhouettes)*, Wilmington 1999.

⁹ T. Straka, 'Guiados por Bolívar López Contreras, bolivarianismo y pretorianismo en Venezuela', *Tiempo y Espacio* (Caracas), Nº 40 (2003), pp. 19-52.

¹⁰ G.E. Bigler, 'La restricción política y la profesionalización militar en Venezuela', *Politeia* (Caracas), Nº 10 (1981), pp. 85-142.

provided the institutionalization basis for the civilian control over the military after 1958, these are:

Civilian antimilitarist culture, military institution deep division, elites cohesion and civilian leaders prestige as opposed to military failure as presidents, contributed to the State and society new vision established in the Punto Fijo Pact "Pacto de Punto Fijo".¹¹ This new vision was then consummated in the 1961 Constitution, which excluded the praetorian opposition from the political arena. Finally, the threat presented by the Cuban Revolution and its communist subversion support contributed to establishing the basis for the loyalty to the democratic experiment recently initiated and to the 1961 Constitution. Especially, it helped to reorient the role that the military should play in the State.¹²

Finally, Bigler¹³ calls the attention to four areas of tension and conflict affecting the civilian-military relations in Venezuela, as follows:

1. Borders Defense, in which military had veto power.
2. The very little scrutiny, supervision and control that civilian institutions and public opinion could have on themes related to security and defense, and the functioning of the military in general.
3. The political right restitution to the military.
4. The socioeconomic situation.

The civilian-military relation characteristics that Bigler assigned to Venezuelan democracy were factors and circumstances that allowed maintaining the military within the institutional mechanism framework of the democratic system.¹⁴ However, this does not mean that there was a real and effective civilian control over the military. A true, effective and institutional civilian control over the military and its institutions has never existed in Venezuela. Saying that during the democratic era there was such control is just being politically naive.

If civilian control over the military in Venezuela never existed or has never existed, then, a question that arises is what permitted that the Armed Forces remained within and even supported the democratic political project.

First of all, the factors that according to Bigler supported the basis of civilian control over military after 1958 institutionalization are the most relevant aspects and constituted the official discourse central argument to try and explain military institutional behavior strength in democratic regimes and the presence of a supposed civilian control. But these arguments do not constitute the definitive exercise of an effective civilian control over the military institution, as we will try to demonstrate.¹⁵

Secondly, it is necessary to accept that during the subversive communist violence years in the 1960s in Venezuela, the factors above mentioned contributed to the con-

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid., G.E. Bigler, 'Professional soldier and restrained politics in Venezuela' in R. Wesson (ed.), *New military politics in Latin America*, New York 1982, pp. 175-196.

¹³ G.E. Bigler, 'La restricción política...'; idem, 'Professional soldier...'

¹⁴ Idem, 'Professional soldier...'

¹⁵ Idem, 'La restricción política...'

trol and order preservation in the country. Moreover, the military were also incorporated to the new political system. But what we want to show is that these factor conjunction did not mean that there was an effective civilian control over the military, just because they achieved important results and prevented the situation from going out of control, in addition to recruiting the military support to the new democratic model.

Bigler omitted from his analysis the crucial factor to make possible that any developed democratic State reaches the implementation of an effective institutional and political civilian control preventing the military excessive intervention in politics, in other words, the elimination of praetorianism from the political system in any of its forms and manifestations. Even more, after the military successful contribution in the struggle against the armed insurgency in the 1960s in support to Venezuelan democracy, the military political intervention was kept according to the system framework.¹⁶

Let us remember, the *sine qua non* condition for a civilian control existence is the praetorianism subordination, that is, the supremacy of civilian society over its military. And in Venezuela, until now, this fact has not been accomplished. The problem is essentially that praetorianism stays viable in institutional frailty, non-governmental organizations in civilian society weakness, when the military institutions are too big regarding the rest of the State, and when there is a poor political culture in relation to the military role in the State and in society.¹⁷

It is important to reiterate at this point that the factors mentioned by Bigler¹⁸, do not necessarily indicate or establish the required conditions for the exercise of an effective civilian control over the military for the following reasons:

1. Making more technical many military activities is a process that cannot be called professionalization, in a rigorous and strict sense, but rather *professional orientation*. This process was paired up with an intensification of threats, at the same time that military privileges, immunities and political power increased. These circumstances eroded professionalism and transformed military into praetorians.
2. Venezuelan Armed Forces praetorian sector was in remission after the failure of the military dictatorship that lasted ten years, which reinforced the military sector with the emergence and strengthening of *professional orientation*. Nevertheless, praetorians and professionals found themselves supporting the democratic project that started at the beginning of 1960s and confronting the communist subversion threat. At a strictly theoretical level, the fact that in

¹⁶ Idem, 'Professional soldier...'

¹⁷ S.E. Finer, *Los militares en la política mundial*, Buenos Aires 1969, p. 221. In this context, we are referring to a low or medium political culture as S.E. Finer (1969) uses in his theoretical model about the civilian-military relations. According to this model, in these political culture levels, civilians can govern allowing military total autonomy and institutional immunity. That is to say, the legitimacy of civilian authorities is important but fluid or refractory to the military. Idem, 'The Morphology of Military Regimes', in R. Kolkowicz, A. Korbonski (eds.), *Soldiers, Peasants, and Bureaucrats. Civil-Military Relations in Communist and Modernizing Societies*, London 1982.

¹⁸ G.E. Bigler, 'La restricción política...'

Venezuela after 1958, all military uprisings and rebellions failed, could indicate, among other things, that whoever raised in arms against democracy misjudged the circumstances which the country was going through, nor they considered the high political costs of failing in their attempts, as it actually happened. Thirty years had to pass, since "*el portañazo*", for certain socioeconomic conditions to re-emerge in the political system which made possible the February and November 1992 military uprisings.

3. The existence of an anti-militarist tendency in Venezuelan society, among other things due to State mismanagement and the repressive and tyrannical role traditionally played by military, does not mean or imply political and technical civilian control, even though the anti-militarist feeling could act as a cultural barrier against attempts to overthrowing the government.
4. In spite of high level civilian leadership's cohesion and prestige concerning the democratic political project, it did not have the vision to assign important control functions to political institutions, among them the parliament, to have an effective control over the military. The democratic political project also missed to include these techniques in the Constitution and the law, but to the contrary, it incorporated them to the military political power structure.¹⁹
5. The adherence of military to the National Constitution does not necessarily imply the effective existence of a civilian control over them and their real subordination to civilian power. In this sense, the 1961 Constitution practically did not have major or specific control mechanisms over military; nevertheless, it was respected and defended by them. On the other hand, there can be several reasons other than those associated with the professional military performance to enforce the Constitution and the law for, among other reasons the Constitution could be defended just due to praetorian military opportunistic political reasons.

Ultimately, following the great amount of North American political research effort tendency done in Venezuela, Bigler²⁰ does not take into consideration, and in certain way undervalues deep historical forces, such as, Venezuelan military praetorian cultural inheritance rooted at the beginning of the 20th century. In a few words, the civilian-military relation reality and history in Venezuela are more complex and perhaps they have more important factors than must be brought to light.

In Venezuela, the political functioning and the role that was supposed to be played by military in the democracy was embedded in "Punto Fijo Pact" and the 1961 Constitution just established that the civilian control system was centralized, on one side, on the President; and on the other in keeping a profound administrative division inside the armed forces. But at the same time, it permitted the military an exaggerated autonomy degree and an abusive interference in politics.

¹⁹ H. Castillo, 'El Congreso de la República y la política de seguridad y defensa del Estado venezolano durante el gobierno de Rómulo Betancourt, 1959-1964', *Politeia* (Caracas), N° 21 (1998), pp. 257-315.

²⁰ G.E. Bigler, 'Professional soldier...'

In this context, the set of institutions in the political system whose role was to exert an effective civilian control over military, among them the parliament, were neutralized and limited to symbolic activities such as the authorization of military promotions. In this particular aspect, the new 1999 Bolivarian Constitution makes this situation even more extreme by concentrating the decision and authorization of military promotions in the president's hands.

As a consequence, the praetorian threat to democracy and society, with all its advances and manifestations, has been historically present. This has interfered with the consolidation of a definitive institutional civilian control over the military. Regardless of the existence of a strong indication of anti-militarism in society, the praetorian tendency has not been completely eradicated from the political culture and the military ideology. And even more problematic, praetorianism in the democratic Venezuelan has been incubated, developed and consolidated, among other things, due to the leniency, tolerance, theoretical and conceptual ignorance, and despise of the political leaders and the capacity and destructive power than military can exert.

In the end, civilian control means the civilian society supremacy over the military institution, that is to say, the eradication of the abusive intervention of military in politics.

About the power of the military in Venezuelan society and particularly about its intervention in State politics, Irwin²¹ sustains that in the twentieth century there was a historical phenomenon, called indistinctively, connivance, fusion, unwritten agreement, symbiosis, civilian-military understanding (in that same order), partially negotiated affected and conditioned civilian control, between civilian leaders and the military institution:

*Directly or indirectly, the military sector exerts primacy or hegemony within this mutual agreement. It is politically expressed, for which it is also a military-political relationship, where a military, a military group or the military institution, achieve an advantageous and even dominant power relationship over the civilian society. The result of this military-civilian symbiosis is the failure to an authentic civilian control consolidation in the Venezuelan political reality in the 20th century. The 21st century challenge is, then, to procure the civilian control consolidation in Venezuela. We maintain that, in the mid and long runs, the historical tendency points to the military professionalism strengthen and an even more reduced political influence of this sector in the Venezuelan political 21st century reality.*²²

But what is important to underline is:

But, fundamentally, a community of interests flourishes from the reformist political parties' government and the military to confront a common enemy: the Marxist-Leninist guerrilla supported logistically from Cuba by the government of Fidel Castro. This situation confirms the American influence, reinforces the officers' professional orientation tendency and contributes to neutralize the praetorian military leadership political protagonism. Political parties and Armed Forces redefine their influence and competence areas,

²¹ D. Irwin, *Relaciones civiles-militares en el siglo XX*, Caracas 2000.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 10.

*during 1958-1962. The secular symbiosis of power between the military and civilian enters a new phase of rearrangement, however it does not disappears. The traditional military politics finds new ways of expression; it leaves on the side its condition of visibly protagonist, but remains as a central power factor.*²³

That is to say, there is an “alliance among equals,” but civilian control does not exist, and even less subordination to the civilian sector. There is a rearrangement that, due to the civilian sector reciprocity, the military victory over the subversion, and later the military loyalty to the democratic system, a series of institutional privileges, autonomies, immunities, permissiveness, influence areas and monopolistic control both administrative and bureaucratic started to be instituted and consolidated gradually, by the military.

The political sector, after difficult resistance years and political parties’ clandestine struggle against the dictatorship Gen. Pérez Jiménez (1948-1958) was mainly represented by Acción Democrática (AD) y COPEI, and also URD. These organizations emerged as the democratic system recently instituted main civilian political institutions. Even though the Venezuelan Communist party (PCV), had played an important role in the dictatorship overthrown, just like AD, PCV was excluded from the “Punto Fijo Pact” because of inherent reasons to its political philosophy, which opposes democracy in support of the “proletarian dictatorship.”

Once the military were removed from power in 1958, the “Punto Fijo Pact” and the 1961 Constitution in addition to significant oil revenues, contributed to the bipartisan political system institutionalization, for a forty-year period. This system was representative and strong enough to restrain the overt military intervention in the political system during the period between 1958 and 1998. These conditions were present until the electoral victory of Lieutenant Colonel Hugo Chávez and the approval of 1999 Bolivarian Constitution. However, in spite of a strong and representative bipartisan political system institutionalization, during those forty years, there was never a true and effective civilian control over military.

Nevertheless, in the civilian leadership, especially in AD, there was a complete political awareness of the role that military had played in Venezuelan history. It was not only the weight of the clandestine activities, persecutions, prison, torture, death and all kind of sacrifices during the dictatorship they had contributed to overthrow, but also the experience of the triennium 1945-1948, what inhibited them to apply civilian control broad and strong measures over the Venezuelan military. To the aforementioned it is important to add that there is a politics conception, where the leading political class thought that the military situation could be manipulated at will. There is a common expression attributed to some of those year political leadership who maintained that in order to keep the military happy and avoid uprisings it was necessary to build houses, military clubs for them, and even allow them to smuggle some liquor. This notion is pejorative toward the military, in addition to mean a grave error in relation to their management and control.

²³ Ibid., pp. 98-99.

Once the dictatorship was overthrown, the political leadership implemented a series of measurements aimed toward military subordination but not for control. Similarly, instead of intensifying and deepening even more the application of civilian control techniques and mechanisms, they started to grant a series of privileges and prerogatives in detriment of civilian control. This way the military started to gradually regain levels of influence and political power. As a matter of fact, in the new democratic experience initiated in the country, the military did not exercise directly and overtly political power as in the dictatorship period. They did so through coercion to the civilian sector, as will be seen later when we analyze the theoretical model of civilian-military relations developed by S.E. Finer in the "second order of political culture". But the worse error is that Venezuelan political system assigned military the political arbitration role in the new democracy, meaning the same as presented by Perlmutter²⁴ and Nordlinger.²⁵

The anti-subversive actions created a series of connections between *professional orientation* and praetorian military, facing a common threat. They also created a series of interests, bonds, complicities, alliances, etc. among military in general, praetorians and *professional oriented*, and the AD and COPEI political leadership who governed the country.

*The military structure received economic privileges and gained status as immediate reward for defending the democratic system, these privileges and status gained were jealously defended and guarded and even widened by the domestic military.*²⁶

These privileges, which the military are still receiving, geared to achieve an effective civilian control over military and to strengthen the 21st century civilian society are the ones to be dismantled, without affecting the professional and institutional roles and functions of the military.

It is crucial to make a civilian the Ministry of Defense, because it is not just to appoint a civilian defense minister, but also to change the whole administrative and bureaucratic security and defense structure. Even though, the 1961 Constitution allowed the designation of a civilian for such position, one was never appointed. Paradoxically, having a civilian as the security and defense head would allow depoliticizing the military upper ranks and focusing them into the technical functions related to violence in its respective professional fields. When the 1999 Bolivarian Constitution was passed, José Vicente Rangel, a civilian, was appointed as defense minister.

In fact, in democracies where there is civilian control of the military, forces commanders must not be military. Similarly, the General Comptroller of the military must be subjected to some type of supervision by a political institution, especially on the area of equipment, weapons and technical system acquisitions, which has been traditionally a source of corruption. In these matters, parliament must have inherence in relation to the strategic convenience discussion of whether buying a determined brand or weaponry system.

²⁴ D. Irwin, 'El Control Civil...', pp. 18-19.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 40 and p. 151.

²⁶ D. Irwin, *Relaciones civiles-militares...*, p. 17.

In general, parliament must have both broad and specific, budget control legal faculties in security and defense affairs beyond strictly symbolic and formal ones, with the purpose of controlling military expenditures and investments.

The budget and financial military administration is a closely guarded realm, kept beyond civilian scrutiny. Any type of expense related to security and defense is considered secret and only the President, as Commander in Chief, has access to this information. These expenses are considered to be State secrets. In relation to budgetary procedures and mechanisms, defense expenses control by civilian public authorities is practically inexistent. The vigilance over the way the defense budget is administrated has only internal controls that escape public scrutiny.

Another privilege that the military gradually consolidated, as a Cold War confrontation product, was to classify as secret of State or military any type of training related to security and defense, even the most commonplace. Venezuelan legislation, in regard to this aspect, is lagging behind in time. Moreover in the internet and global communication era and this has brought as a consequence, among other things, that the studies on civilian-military relations, the strategic thought, and security and defense remained almost an exclusive realm of the military sector. Actions such as experts and civilian specialist training in these fields, as well as the interdisciplinary groups and study team organization, planning, research and even academic development by civilians, were extremely difficult. These activities, with a few exceptions, have been reserved almost exclusively to military training institutions.

This situation has reached such levels that the decision making in areas as international borders and limits appears to be affected by a veto power by the military. And they also threaten to invade and monopolize fields such as research and studies on terrorism, drug smuggling and traffic, and guerrilla, among others.

Besides all this, the military had reserved for themselves a series of very important top positions in public administration, especially in Foreign Relations and the Ministry of Infrastructure and Communications. This situation metastasized and reached paradoxical dimensions after the passing of the 1999 Constitution, with Hugo Chávez government, where practically the central and decentralized public administration has been "militarized."

During the struggle years against subversion in Venezuela, the civilian leadership made extreme efforts to please and even improve the military socioeconomic conditions, after all they were the ones exposed to harm defending the society and the democracy. But gradually these accomplishments made them become a very privileged sector, compared to the rest of professionals in the Venezuelan society.²⁷ For example, presently, with the Bolivarian Constitution, the military are above and beyond the social security national system that applies to all public employees.

On the other hand, the functioning of intelligence services autonomy has been absolutely and totally discretionary during democratic government. Independently, of each government, the intelligence services and the military information have been out of

²⁷ Ibid., pp. 149-150.

control, audit, professionalism and civilian supervision. There is no legislation to control and limit these services functioning. All military forces and components have their own intelligence offices, which act entirely on their own. These services operate and have activities that reach fields that can overlap any realm of public life, including companies and private citizens. This way, there are scandals over power excesses and abuses, which in some cases, have transcended to the media and public opinion. These irregularities started to form as part of the demands made throughout the struggle against the subversion during Rómulo Betancourt and Raúl Leoni governments and they were not corrected on time.

Another privilege area for military is the military law application to civilian jurisdiction crimes, when those crimes are committed by military officers. On the other hand, civilians are usually subjected to military law for political reasons. When military commit crimes associated with administrative corruption, they are subjected to the Military Justice Code, even when in reality it is not strictly a crime of this type.

Finally, an important aspect for professional training and democratic values among military is the supervision and control of the curricular content administration in their educational institutions at all levels, because they have been traditionally out of all kinds of control and vigilance by national civilian educational authorities.

*Venezuelan praetorianism has its origins in the preservation of a set of myths inside the military training schools and in Venezuelan cultural education in general that deal with artificial relation foundation between the role played by the armed forces in territorial integrity and national sovereignty defense and the democracy preservation, with Simón Bolívar struggles in his era, for example, among others, when in reality, rigorously, those situations have nothing to do with each other, the army created by Gómez and the armed forces that followed after that have nothing to do with Simón Bolívar's army.*²⁸

With the Hugo Chávez presidency the situation has reached such extreme that the Cuban military salute: "Patria, Socialismo o Muerte" was imposed to the Venezuelan military. And the National Armed Forces Organic Law (LOFAN) has been subjected to reforms in four opportunities, where among other important changes; the condition of Bolivarian was added, transforming them into Fuerzas Armada Nacional Bolivariana (FANB). All these changes have occurred without major debates by institutions or the Venezuelan civil society about the impact and significance they might have and a complete lack of clarity and enormous difficulties to obtain training in, beyond what gets published in *Gacetas Oficiales*. Nevertheless, from the very little news that come out to the public in official documents, major changes in the administrative structure, content, and doctrinal orientation and ideology of the Venezuelan military education can be deduced.

In the context of the Military Education Integral Plan (PIEM) and the First Socialist Development Plan Simón Bolívar 2007-2013, the precursors and independence heroes' thoughts and action, Simón Bolívar, Simón Rodríguez, and Ezequiel

²⁸ D. Irwin et al., 'Comentarios sobre la génesis de las instituciones educativas militares en Venezuela. Del siglo XVIII a 1830', *Anuario de Estudios Bolivarianos* (Caracas), Año 7, N° 7-8 (1998-1999), pp. 31-50.

Zamora become the Venezuelan military education foundation, with programmatic objectives such as anti-imperialism, anti-capitalism, anti-colonialism and socialism. However the proposal that military education becomes axis to the basic and secondary education, administered by the Bolivarian Militia, confronted national rejection from public opinion, nongovernmental organizations (ONGs), media, specialized sectors, pressure groups, professional associations, and parent associations, in such a way that its application seems so unlikely that, at least by now, the idea has been postponed or even cancelled.

Consequently, as Irwin states, the official discourse thesis about civilian-military relations and the existence of an effective civilian control and subordination of the Venezuelan military to the political power of the 20th and 21st centuries seem to be practically unbearable.²⁹

Whether in Venezuela there has not been civilian control over the military, what have we had? In theory, the bulk of the answer can be found in what S.E. Finer (1962) calls "political culture second order." In this order, civilians can govern allowing the military total autonomy and institutional immunity. That is to say, the civilian authorities' legitimacy is important to the military.

The "political culture second order" functioning crucial aspects are blackmailing and connivance, rivalry, intimidation, no cooperation threat, and even violence threats against civilian authorities as military intervention means. The connotation of blackmailing in Finer's model, is coercion, which does not imply the use of physical force, rather it means threats or psychological pressure to gain certain privilege types.³⁰

Political extortion goes beyond pressure or psychological threat; it implies the use of force, not to obtain advantages, dividends or prerogatives, but for the usurpation. In effect, political blackmail is subtle, extortion is direct and aggressive. Then, political blackmail fits the explanation of the Venezuelan civilian-military relation principal characteristic, and especially how without the existence of civilian control over the military in the political system and Venezuelan democracy, the military frame their historical and political performance within legal and constitutional parameters.

In addition, S.E. Finer defines as mature the "political culture first level", because civilian authorities legitimacy is of utmost importance and inaccessible to the military. In this level, military influence politics through institutional mechanisms.³¹

Thus, the military influenced constitutional mechanisms absence or weakness in the political system, does not allow placing the Venezuelan military in the political culture first level as defined in S.E. Finer's model. Since the mechanisms of influence for military intervention in politics were and continue being centralized in the President's hands. As a consequence, after the first attempt of Gen. Castro León there were a variety of military uprisings of all sorts, with the intention of intervening in politics and controlling the State. These uprisings, although not always expressing an institutional

²⁹ D. Irwin, *Relaciones civiles-militares...*

³⁰ S.E. Finer, *Los militares en la política...*, p. 221.

³¹ Ibid.

legitimacy and representation, always manifested a strong violent vocation against legitimately established civilian authorities.

Retaking the S.E. Finer argument line, we find that the third level of political culture corresponds to a low political culture order. Thus, although legitimacy is relatively important, it is fluid, which means that political legitimacy is not decisive for the third political culture level. The military intervention way in this political culture level, is expressed through the refusal to defend civilian authorities against violence; there can even be no cooperation threats common to the second level political culture, but there can be as well direct violence actions. At this level, the political intervention can achieve the displacement of the civilian cabinet.

The fourth level corresponds to minimal political culture, where legitimacy has no importance and the intervention form is violence and the civilian regime replacement. This is the most brutal military intervention in politics.

The subordination and adherence of the military to civilian control require military professionalism, but they also require sharing values and a vision about the future and the political democratic society culture. Furthermore, it requires that these values and vision of the future must be an integral part of the military institution convictions and beliefs and each individual in it must share these vision and values.

This way, the Venezuelan military sector autonomy, became very significant to the political system, beyond the expectations of the Punto Fijo Pact. That is, the tacit agreement between the civilian sector, represented by the political party elites: AD, COPEI y URD, among others, and the military, It consisted on giving total and absolute autonomy to the military institution. Based on this autonomy, the civilian sector did not have any inherence, either in trivial issues or those vital for the society survival. This total autonomy, in an environment where the institutions and civilian control mechanisms are weak or inexistent, presents tremendous difficulties for the democratic system survival. The autonomy ends up separating the military from the values and vision of the society future. More importantly, the civilian sector looses the military institutions control.

One of the most characteristic mechanisms for the civilian society and the military separation, which is extremely dangerous in societies with low political culture levels and fragile institutions such as Venezuela, is that the military start building their own theories about their role in the country development. Especially, theories referred to State security and defense oriented toward the justification of their intervention in politics and the search for the State power. The 1999 Bolivarian Constitution, in article 328 regarding the military missions, introduces one of the political viruses with political damage largest potential, when it states: *The Armed Forces constitute an institution (...) organized by the State to guarantee the independence and national sovereignty and to assure the geographical space integrity, through military defense, cooperation in the public order maintenance and its active participation in the national development.* This is pointed out by Richard Kohn, when he states that the military are for the society and the State defense, not for developing theoretical, political or economical definitions or any other type of definitions, in the society to which they belong. The function of the

military is the implementation of an operative military defense. The political definitions and strategies correspond to the civilian sector.³²

Military intervention in these areas with their interpretations opens the door for rejecting their subordination and adherence to civilian control. Theories about national development are usually complemented with distorted interpretations of the history of a country. The interpretation that Hugo Chávez has, as a military, of the role played by Simón Bolívar, in Venezuelan history shows where these interpretations can lead a country.

Summarizing, the problem of the military political intervention and praetorianism in general, has its origins in the training and education process, at this moment the development of these theories creates a separation and establishes differences among categories, such as obligation and moral duty, obedience and loyalty to the nation, the military institution, the government, the Constitution, the executive branch and the people, among others. All these factors begin to create favorable conditions for praetorianism. This is to say, in this moment the military insubordination and the civilian authority disregard virus is being sowed. Not recognizing civilian authority and the military lack of adherence to the civilian control; will express itself later in political power seizure through the use of violence. Therefore, the lack of ideological cohesion as well as the military responsibility expansion beyond their natural field lead the military to division and disintegration, but also threaten the civilian society existence.

For Samuel Huntington, society has two basic forms of securing civilian control of the military. On one hand, through subjective control, which is achieved through constitutional and institutional measures, and even personal development ways. On the other hand, through objective control that can be achieved by military professionalism. In addition, Huntington proposes military professionalism as a warranty against military political intervention.³³ However, in Latin America and in general in societies with political culture low levels and institutional and political frailty, as in the Venezuelan situation, the military intervention problem in politics appears to transcend the theoretical military professionalism parameters formulated by Huntington. This is one of the central argument issues between Huntington and Finer. Nevertheless, the Huntingtonian framework of civilian control over the military appears to function better in democratic societies in industrial countries and not in institutionally underdeveloped societies. *What differentiates politically mature democracies from the limited ones is precisely the civilian control over the military. This is one of the characteristics, probably the most important, between modern and developed democracies and the rest of democracies of the civilized world.*³⁴

³² R. Kohn, 'An essay on civilian control of the military', 1997, at <www.unc.edu/pepts/diplomat/amdipl_3/kohn.html>, 20 October 2012.

³³ S.P. Huntington, *The Soldier and the State. The Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations*, Cambridge 1957.

³⁴ H. Castillo, 'Textos Angloamericanos sobre las relaciones civiles y militares venezolanas' in D. Irwin, F. Langue (coords.), *Militares...*, p. 104.

Historical evidence, from this part of the world, appears to be on Finer's side, because in certain circumstances depending on the society political culture level, "*professionalized military*" can be subject of political intervention. This is especially true when they start formulating theories that, subliminally and sometimes also overtly, establish differences from the Nation the Constitution and the government objectives. Similarly, when they make certain biased interpretations of politics and economy based on the role that they have played in history. These theories lead to, sometimes in a subtle way, the non-recognition of controls and of subordination to civilian supremacy.

According to Huntington, one cannot state in an absolute and universal way that military professionalism is the key variable to secure civilian control since it has not been demonstrated historically for all cases. Moreover, professionalism does appear to be a definitive guarantee to prevent, limit or even eliminate the forces politization and its different praetorianism forms. We can find situations in which there are different levels of professionalization and diverse types of military intervention in politics that can go from high levels of professionalism and politization to low levels of both variables.

However, any form of the relationship between military professionalism and politization, attempts against institutional and civilian control. In Latin America the situation of countries such as Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Peru, and even Venezuela, among others, is illustrative of this. Not to mention numerous cases in other parts of the underdeveloped world. Thus, as stated by Finer, it is insufficient to explain civilian control mainly in terms of military professionalism.

Taking into account the power and Venezuelan military political involvement characteristics and an effective civilian control absence, rigorously one cannot state that the Venezuelan Armed Forces have reached high levels of professionalism nor they have been under civilian control. If we have not had an effective civilian control and nevertheless, the military have remained within the legal and constitutional framework to the point that the military uprisings after 1958 have been defeated with the same Armed Forces resources, then what type of military have we had in Venezuela? In relation to the Venezuelan situation, Perlmutter's theoretical parameters, although he does examine the situation in detail, emerge to offer some arguments to attempt an explanation: Once Praetorianism fails in the military government between 1948 and 1958; Venezuela has had a latent praetorian military; which has been an army that has been an arbiter.³⁵ In other words, civilian political leadership allowed the appropriate conditions for a concealed praetorianism development, as it effectively occurred after Hugo Chávez's electoral victory. We share Irwin's theoretical position, which sustains that after 1958 Venezuelan civilian political leadership pretended to know about civilian-military relations and civilian control, when in reality they ignored all about them and they were incapable of managing the problem. *The unwritten mutual agreement, between the elites of AD y COPEI and the mili-*

³⁵ A. Perlmutter, *The Military and Politics in Modern Times. On professional, praetorians, and revolutionary soldiers*, New Haven-London 1978.

*tary leadership, supposed they had the capacity to favorably control the always present potential protagonism of the military sector.*³⁶

Let us recall that Perlmutter considers armies as the main instrument of praetorian power and classifies them as arbiters or governors, so we can conclude that Venezuelan military has acted as an *arbiter praetorian army*, that is, they perceive themselves as not being directly prepared for exercising State political direction, while the praetorian governor armies perceive themselves as being prepared to State political direction.³⁷ Following Nordlinger theoretical model, Venezuela has had a moderator praetorian army.³⁸

That is, those which:

*Constitute a powerful pressure group that exercises veto power over civilian authorities but without any attempt to take over political power directly. They are typically conservative, and they defend the status quo, there is a civilian government supervised by the military.*³⁹

Venezuelan civilian political leadership did not have, and has not had so far, the capacity, interest, will, political eloquence, conceptual consistency, doctrinaire conviction, and the need to implement a set of mechanisms and techniques to exercise an effective civilian control over historical praetorian potential of Venezuelan military. In relation to Civilian-military relations in Venezuela, after the failure of praetorianism of Marcos Pérez Jiménez, there has been no real civilian control over military. What we have had is a tacit agreement, a fusion, an alliance, and a civilian-military symbiosis, which has been operative and effective. After centuries of barbarian, historical lag and lack of civility, one can hope that the 21st century will be for Venezuela the century in which the virus of praetorianism will be definitely eradicated and that Venezuelan civil society will finally achieve civilian supremacy over military and its armed institutions.

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³⁶ D. Irwin, 'Pretorianismos y Control Civil en la Evolución Histórica del Siglo XX Venezolano. Un comentario bibliográfico y educativo' in D. Irwin, F. Langue (coords.), *Militares...*, p. 203.

³⁷ A. Perlmutter, V.P. Bennett, *The Political Influence of the Military. A Comparative Reader*, New Haven 1980.

³⁸ E. Nordlinger, *Soldiers in Politics. Military Coups and Government*, Englewoods Cliffs 1977.

³⁹ D. Irwin, 'El Control Civil...', p. 40.

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