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Latin American Politics

For a great student and hopefully friend too  
Carlos Parodi

Congratulations on a job well done and a reward well earned  
John

Congratulations on an excellent paper!  
Alan Thompson

" causes of Military Interventions in Latin America"

( Argentina, Brazil, and Chile After World War II )

Paper to be presented to the Political Science Conference

April 1993

Поздравляю Вас!  
Ronald R. Pace

A fine paper!  
Congratulations on your award.  
J. J. Gordon

Good paper presented  
I am glad to have you  
as a graduate student in our  
department  
Thompson

**Ye Myint**

**“Causes of the Military Interventions  
in Latin America”**

(Argentina, Brazil and Chile after the WWII)

**(Paper presented to the Political Science Conference held at  
ISU in 1993 and won the Prize for Graduate-Level Research  
and Analysis Category)**

## **"Causes Of The Military Interventions In Latin America" (Argentina, Brazil and Chile after World War II)**

In Latin America, there was a popular saying that the highest military rank is the "Presidency." In fact, Mexico and Costa Rica are the only two exceptions that escaped the grip of the military in modern Latin America. In light of this fact, it is undeniable that the military has been one of the most dominant political forces in Latin America. In a wider perspective, this phenomenon of military interventions can be attributed to the tumultuous political development in the Third World where economic development and political stability, even though widely cherished and pursued, are rarely compatible. Without a constitutional tradition of peaceful political change, which is better complemented by economic development, some form of violence is virtually inevitable. Historically, the alternatives for such a change have been reform coups or revolutionary wars or revolutionary coups.<sup>1</sup>

Since World War II, military interventions took place more frequently than revolutionary wars in the Third World. The military intervened in the political arenas of approximately two-thirds of more than one hundred underdeveloped countries since 1945.<sup>2</sup> Due to the high frequency of military interventions and their nature as significant forces of change, it is safe to say that the study of military interventions in a particular country or region in the Third World, will provide a good understanding of the political phenomenon of that area. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to obtain some objective insight into Latin American politics by studying the the military

interventions in the area, especially identifying and analyzing the factors which induced their occurrence.

Because of the complex nature of the politics in the Third World, including those of Latin America, where political manoeuvres of interest groups are compounded by a host of political ideologies, the causes of the military interventions are also complicated and possess a multi-faceted nature. In sorting out these causes for a systematic analysis, this paper is designed to include four parts. Conflicts of class interests which is the most salient cause of the military interventions in the region are discussed in the first part. The development of national security doctrine in Latin American armies, which is closely inter-related to the problem of class conflict, is discussed in the second part. In the third part, discussions regarding the institutional interests of the military are allocated. In the last part, economic crises and political instability in the region, which military forces conveniently attribute to the inefficiency of civilian governments in place, are emphasized. In conducting comparative case-study on three selected countries of Latin America (Argentina, Brazil and Chile) where military politics was the most prominent, this paper will concentrate only on those military interventions that took place after World War II and entailed significant political consequences. Those coups d'etat staged by the military as concomitant actions to effect former coup or coups will be briefly discussed in order that all discussions of this paper fit into its limit.

### **(I) Conflict of Class Interests and the Role of the Military**

Before going on to discuss the conflict of class interests as the magnetic force attracting the military to intervene in the political arena, it is appropriate to contemplate briefly on the geneses of the military forces and social classes in the region as well as their interactions through history so as to highlight their political significance in a wider perspective.

The military in Latin America played a key role in the nation-building process immediately after independence from Spanish rule. Rivalries among local armies headed by local land owners (Caudillos), who took part in the independence wars, entailed weak central governments in the nineteenth-century Latin America. The formal armies which were then weak and poorly institutionalized had to put down these local armies in the national integration process of Latin American countries.<sup>3</sup> After the formation of nation-states in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, Latin American armies also facilitated the expansion of capitalist productive forces by conquering or securing territories rich in raw materials or possessing commercial routes. Examples of such conquests are the wars of Chile with Peru and Bolivia, the war between Ecuador and Peru, and the war between the Triple alliance of Argentina, Uruguay, and Bolivia against Paraguay.<sup>4</sup>

Until that stage, Latin American societies were based on two main social classes : landed oligarchy and peasants. With the rapid integration of Latin American national economies into world market in the second half of 19<sup>th</sup> century, a new social class composed of exporters and importers, small industrialists, professional men and civil servants, emerged. This new class, known today as the middle

class, gradually expanded economically in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century because of urbanization, technological advances, and industrialization. Until this period, the armed forces served as the guardians of landed oligarchies who monopolized economic and political power. Later in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, with the support of urban working class that came into existence shortly after the middle class, the expanding middle class started to press demands for recognition of its legitimate right to play a part in political process.<sup>5</sup>

In this development the middle class began to enjoy political participation because their aspirations were satisfied by the instrumental role of the military.<sup>6</sup> In Argentina, Yrigoyen came to power in 1916 as the leader of the Radical Party (UCR) in which the large part was composed of the middle class members. Officer corps supported Yrigoyen's coming to power by aborting a preventive coup hatched by the oligarchy-dominated senate. In Chile, the Alianza Liberal party, in which Chilean middle class found their expression, came to power with the military support. In Brazil, Getalio Vargas, who was supported by both the middle class and lower class, came to power in 1930 thanks to the decisive part played by the Tenentismo (the young military officers' movement).<sup>7</sup> The support of the military for Vargas was reaffirmed in 1932, with the defeat of the attempt to restore the landed oligarchy.<sup>8</sup>

In brief, Latin America's military forces are seen supporting the upward mobility of the middle class against the ruling landed oligarchy in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Regarding this trend, Nordlinger has argued that:

"the political direction of military interventions is shaped by the particular political and socioeconomic context. In the

presence of a minuscule middle class, a powerful agriculturally-based upper class, and an insignificantly politicized lower class - three conditions that are commonly found together - the growing middle class at some point will oppose the traditional oligarchy. Military intervention within this context is more than likely to benefit middle-class attempts to enhance its political power and economic opportunities."<sup>9</sup>

In the late 1940's the alliance between the lower class (especially the urban working class) and the middle class was replaced by open conflict as the middle class became politically and economically established, often aligning with a weakened upper class (the landed oligarchy), while the lower class (peasants and workers) was politicized through unionization and by the leftist ideas. The nature of this conflict was over the distribution of political power, access to education and desirable jobs, the allocation of public funds, and the redistribution of the middle class's liquid and landed wealth.<sup>10</sup> When there was threat to the interests of the middle class in such context of politicized lower class, the established middle class and weakened upper class, the military forces tended to defend the status quo in favor of the middle class against the politicized workers and peasants.<sup>11</sup>

This behavior of the military, as the defender of the middle-class interests, was considerably visible and is regarded as the major cause of military coups that took place after the World War II. The fact that Latin American armies were acting as the guardian of middle-class interests became obvious since after the World War II is supported by Needler's data on the successful military coups that took place between 1935 and 1964. Between 1945 and 1954, after the middle class had become well-established but threatened by the increasingly

powerful, politicized lower classes, the change-oriented reformist coups ranged from 17% to 23% of the total number of the coups while status-quo-oriented coups were the rest of the percentage.<sup>12</sup>

The class conflict between the lower classes on one side and the middle and upper classes on the other side in the third world after the WWII basically reflected the intense ideological rivalry between the two diametrically opposed super powers . This competition between the leftist and rightist powers projected more vividly into the political arenas of the third world in those days. As the leftist ideas spread into the third world with increasing degree, most of the developing and underdeveloped countries saw agitation of politicized working classes for more political participation and social equality. In view of the rightist powers during the Cold War, this development was apparently tantamount to a grave threat to their strategic interests, and ultimately the very viability of their own political systems - which was more true so in the case of Latin America strategically situated in the backyard of the United States. In the "Cold War spirit," President Truman made it clear in 1947 that:

"internal security in the hemisphere (Latin America, North America, and Central America) entailed solidarity measures to repel armed attacks from outside the continent, as well as attacks from within launched by the growing menace of internal communism."<sup>13</sup>

The U.S. identified popular movements (whether led by communists or not) with the communist threat and tolerated any type of government which was other than the leftist ones. The military forces in Latin America were encouraged and, in some cases, supported by the U.S. to intervene in politics whenever there was a real or perceived threat from the left as in the cases of Chile and Brazil. The "Cold War

mentality" of the United States therefore helped bring about more coups in the region than it might have been otherwise after the World War II.

In order to expound the hypothesis that coups in Latin America were effected by the class conflict between the middle classes and the lower classes, relationship between the military interventions and such a conflict will be established in the following part referring to the political developments that preceded those military interventions in Argentina (1955, 1962 and 1967), Brazil (1964) and Chile (1976).

**(a) Argentina (1955, 1962 and 1976)**

Latin America's largest middle class, as well as the largest and most extensively politicized working class, is found in Argentina.<sup>14</sup> The relationship between class conflict and military intervention is therefore most vividly illustrated by the nations' recent history. Colonel Peron came to power in Argentina in 1946 and held on to presidency until 1955. At first the middle class supported his ascension to power due to his industrialization efforts. Argentine workers also lent support for him because he enhanced their political and economic status.<sup>15</sup> However, Peron's interclass balancing began to break down in the early 1950's.

To establish an extensive political base in the urban working class, Peron increasingly raised wages of Argentine workers. He was

able to bring about a significant reallocation of economic benefits in favor of the urban working class. The wage and salary share of the national income in Argentina, which by one measure fluctuated around 45 % in the decade prior to 1946, reached an unprecedented height of 60 % in the years from 1949 through 1954.<sup>16</sup> This kind of economic redistribution resulted in a grave zero-sum game. Increased benefits for labor came at someone else's explicit expense. Before 1949 when Argentine economy was in better shape due to favorable international economic atmosphere, this burden of Peron's pro-labor socioeconomic policies fell on the agricultural sector.

Rural land-owners were forced to sell their agricultural commodities and meat to the government-controlled agency, Institute for Export Promotion, at prices apparently lower than the world market prices. The differential between these two sets of prices gave the government a good profit which Peron spent for increasing labor wages and social welfare programs for workers.<sup>17</sup> Rural land-owners dearly suffered from this policy which resulted in a 27 % decline of agricultural income between 1946 and 1949.<sup>18</sup>

Beginning in 1949 and continuing through the early 1950's, Argentina began to face a long-term economic crisis. To salvage the economy, Peron introduced the economic plan of 1952 which offered new price incentives for agriculture. To finance this plan, Peron attempted to carry out a major redistribution of income away from the urban

working class by freezing wages. But, what in relative terms the agricultural interests actually gained came not from worker, but from the urban self-employed. Many of them were industrial entrepreneurs.<sup>19</sup>

It was thus evident that Peron's attempts at reallocation of income for his political ends affected, first, the land-owners and , then, the members of the middle class. Though the Argentine middle class seemed to benefit from Peron's industrialization policies just after he came to power, the policies he adopted after 1952 proved to be seriously disastrous to the middle-class interests.

Politically, Peron's politicization of the working class posed a serious threat to their privileged position in the eyes of the upper class and middle class. Peron was one of the military officers of the military administration which deposed the conservative government in 1943. Understanding the expanding strength of the urban labor due to industrialization, he purposely took over the post of the Secretary of Labor and started an active campaign for working class support. Since that time, he saw it that wages were raised substantially and that the existing ameliorative labor legislation was enforced for the first time. He presided over the formation of new trade unions that increasingly rose in number. For example, under his influence, membership in textile workers' union grew from 2,000 to 84,000.<sup>20</sup>

In the 1946 elections, Peron was elected by the overwhelming vote from the labor. As president, Peron continued to do a great deal for

the working class, both materially and psychologically. The process of unionization was continued, wages and fringe benefits were dramatically increased.<sup>21</sup> As discussed before, there was a lop-sided income distribution in favor of wage-earners. Since he came to power, his remarks and rhetorics regarding capitalism (which is the basic economic orientation for the middle class and the upper class) had been harsh. He claimed "Until now the economy has been in service of capital. Form now on, capital will be in the service of the economy."<sup>22</sup> Peron believed that "the capitalist system is an abuse of property," and he set about to correcting this situation in Argentina.<sup>23</sup>

He nationalized foreign-owned land , later, local-owned telephone companies. Gas companies also suffered the same lot.<sup>24</sup> Peron's nationalizations were perceived as threat by the privileged upper and middle class who had been already worried by the proliferation of labor unions and their political mobilization. To reinforce their fear, in 1945, a militant Peronist street crowds attacked the Jockey Club which is the bastion of the Argentine aristocracy.

In sum, it is my contention that Peron's regime was perceived by the middle class and the upper class as economically unfavorable and politically hostile to their interests. The military coup that deposed Peron in 1955 can be seen as a military attempt to reverse this situation. There are historical evidences to support this assessment, which can be found in the measures undertaken by General Amburu's

military regime in 1955 and 1956. Former property owners hit by Peronist expropriations had their holding restored. Crackdowns on Peronist labor union leaders immediately followed the military coup.<sup>25</sup>

In Argentine history after the WWII, the military interventions in 1962 and 1966 characterized the military's staunch anti-Peron stance. Having witnessed Peron's economic policies and political manoeuvres unfriendly to the privileged classes, the military was sensitive to any possibility of Peron's or Peronists' return to power. At the same time, the military's favoritism to the middle class political parties which were counter-balancing their common enemy, the Peronist party. Under the civilian regime of Frondizi, who came to power after striking a deal with Peronists that their political legitimacy would be restored in return for their support for Frondizi, Peronists were allowed to run in the 1962 elections.<sup>26</sup> Frondizi believed that the *Peronista* elements had begun to forget their erstwhile leader. He calculated that his Intransigent Radical Party and Popular Radical Party, both were moderate, middle-class-dominated parties, were now strong enough to capture most of the pro-Peronist vote. To the disappointment of Frondizi and the military, the Peronist party won 35 % votes while middle class radical parties secured 22 % and 28 % respectively. The military's response to the polls was not surprising. The generals deposed Frondizi and annulled the election results which would not bring middle-class parties to

power.<sup>27</sup>

In the 1963 elections which was held under General Amburu's military regime, the military decided that any candidate who received Peronist support would not be allowed to run in the elections. When elections were held, Popular Radical party's Auturo Illia won. As discussed, the party was a middle class party. Though General Amburu, who was a presidential candidate in the elections, did not win, the military did not interfere with the ascent of a middle class politician to power. But, later, Illia's government was assessed by the military as being too soft towards the Peronists. He tried to allow the Peronists to participate in politics. He believed they would be offset by his Popular Radical party. Because of the military's sensitivity to Peronism, this idea finally led to Illia's removal from office by the military in 1966.<sup>28</sup> The military seemed to be determined to protect the privileged classes, including the middle class, from Peronism even at the cost of a middle class politician.

Only the last military intervention in Argentina of 1976 took place without any relation to the military favoritism to the middle class and upper class. After a triumphant come-back in 1973, Peron seemed to have reversed all of his policies. This time, he took up a heavy hand on the leftist movements. His government decidedly moved to the right. After Peron died in July in 1974, his second wife, Isabel Peron, succeeded him because she was Peron's vice-president. Because

of her weakness as a president, corruption, violence and political assassinations became rampant, which were compounded with acute economic crisis. All these factors finally attracted the military to intervene again as these native factors constituted a good justification for an intervention. In 1976 March, Isabel was removed from power.<sup>29</sup> Since Peron came to power for the second time in 1973, he did not involve in working-class politicization anymore. All of his policies against the upper and middle class had been reversed. Therefore, this military coup of 1973 was the only occasion when the military acted against an elected government in Argentina after the WWII which did not endanger the interests of the upper and middle classes. The grievances the Argentine military had were political violence, economic crisis and inefficiency of Isabel's government to deal with these problems.

**(b) Brazil**

Class conflict as a significant factor to induce the military intervention was more evident in the case of Brazil's 1964 coup d'etat when vested interests of the middle and upper strata were threatened by both the urban and rural proletariat. The coup d'etat of 1964 overthrew President Goulart, a populist, who ascended to presidency as the legal successor of President Quadros after the latter's resignation in 1961. To appease the military's objection to Goulart's ascent to power, the

Brazilian government made a compromising solution by creating a parliamentary system by which Goulart and his cabinet were accountable to the congress. But in the 1961's plebiscite, full presidential system was restored.<sup>30</sup>

By the time Goulart took office in 1961, the Cuban revolution had already renewed the strength of popular forces all over Latin America. In Brazil the impact of the Cuban revolution drew the embryonic Peasant League into an unprecedented mass movement for agrarian reform, and strengthened the radical forces within the working class.<sup>31</sup>

In 1962 Goulart started to clash with the Congress on his nomination for Prime Minister post of a Brazilian Labor Party (PTB) leader, Santiago Dantas. It was because his former prime minister resigned as a protest against Goulart's attempt to legislate agrarian reform which had been a focal demand of popular movements. When the Congress blocked the nomination, labor unions called an unprecedented general strike to support Goulart. This manifestation of the new strength of the organized labor led Goulart to seek the left's support for his own plans. In 1962, he allowed the formation of the OGT (General Workers' Executive), an independent political leadership uniting all trade unions and workers' organization, though illegal in the strict interpretation of the labor laws.<sup>32</sup> In 1963 he encouraged the formation of peasants unions which emerged with the same spirit as the industrial workers' unions. In December 1963 the National

Confederation of Agricultural Workers (CONTAG) was formed as the umbrella organization for all peasant unions.<sup>33</sup>

Meanwhile the president's position, beginning from the early 1964, became increasingly untenable as a result of the stalemate between himself and the antagonistic congress. With the government hopelessly inefficient and seemingly powerless to take remedial actions, inflations grew rampant (8 % per month) and economic crisis ensued. To reverse this situation, Goulart chose to break through the stalemate with the congress by enhancing his power through forceful introduction of reforms despite the congress' resistance.<sup>34</sup>

In early March, 1964, the president embarked on a bid to alter the basis of his political power. He demanded that the constitution be changed so that the illiterates, the disenfranchised half of Brazil's population, might have the political voice due them. He then began to stir to action the lower-income elements, both urban and the rural, throughout the

nation. In the second week of March, he attempted to launch, by decrees, an agrarian reform. He ordered expropriation of all lands within six miles of all important national communication arteries. At a March 13 rally of urban laborers in Rio de Janeiro, Goulart promised that the government would enforce price controls on business to protect the poor from runaway inflation. At the same rally, his brother-in-law, Leonel Brizola, urged a national plebiscite calling for the dissolution

of Congress. Thus encouraged, the General Confederation of Labor threatened to launch a general strike to force acceptance of the President' reform program. Added threats to business came from the President's decree nationalizing private oil refineries and from his curbing of Bank of Brazil credits to private banks that were uncooperative with, or unfriendly to, the President's program for reform.<sup>35</sup>

Both the upper and middles sectors therefore contemplated with alarm the apparent breakdown of the republican institutions created in 1945-46 and an impending threat of terminating their social positions. The upper and middle classes now began to take on defense. Throughout rural Brazil, landholders gathered, many of them armed, to plan the defense of their property rights both against the government appropriation without immediate cash compensation and against possible peasant invasions. The middle class resistance in the urban areas was symbolized by a hastily organized public march on March 19 in Sao Paulo which numbered up to 500,000 and jammed the streets to protest Goulart's Rio rally of March 13. On April 1, 1964, President Goulart was deposed by the military at the height of the conflict between lower classes on one side and the middle class and upper class on the other.<sup>36</sup>

**(c) Chile**

The military intervention in Chile of 1973 vividly demonstrated the military's inclination to protect the middle and upper class strata from the threat from the below. The popularly elected leftist socialist government resting on the support of industrial proletariat and the rural poor was overthrown by the military. In Chilean election since 1964, the leftist parties' campaigns overtly called for transformation of Chilean society to socialism. Their candidate was Salvador Allende. Though defeated, the left secured considerable percentage of vote in 1964. In the 1970's elections communists and socialists consolidated their strength under the banner of *Unidad Popular* (Popular Unity) party and nominated the same leftist candidate, Allende. to the alarm of the rightist parties, Allende won in the elections foreshadowing an impending threat in their eyes.<sup>37</sup> Allende's inauguration as president represented for the first time that a coalition dominated by the Marxist parties took control of the executive office.<sup>38</sup>

Allende's government made it clear from the outset it's pro-proletariat leftist stance in the announcement of the economic program. Implications of the program were that Chilean socialism would be characterized by (1) state ownership of important sectors of the economy, (2) state planing and (3) popular control.<sup>39</sup> With the unanimous consent of the congress, U.S. interests in the copper mines were nationalized. Resorting to executive powers, the government purchased

or took over a broad range of industries as well as the private banking sector and, employing agrarian reform law, accelerated expropriation of farm land. Workers and peasants were instigated by the extreme leftist militants to take over the factories and lands. This phenomenon was further aided by the overall political climate created by the Allende government, which favored rather than repressed working-class action.<sup>40</sup> Sharp rise in political mobilization was undoubtedly brought about by the fact that the popular masses were aware of the government's sympathy towards them for their economic and social improvements, as well as due to the fact that government had announced that it will not use force to deal with strikes or occupations.<sup>41</sup>

In addition, the government quickly set in motion a plan to raise wages, salaries and benefits particularly for the lowest-paid workers, and to increase the social services in poor communities. These action can be regarded as attempts to strengthen the government's electoral support as well as to satisfy the expectations of the working class bases.<sup>42</sup>

Over time, Allende's leftist policies and encouragements to the political mobilization of the proletariat became a nightmare for the privileged classes. By October 1972, the upper and middle classes began to respond to the threat of the proletariat : doctors abandoned hospitals, shops were closed down, truck-owners shut down transportation businesses and mobs of the middle class students tried

to take over the downtown area of the capital city. But, this effort was thwarted as hundreds of thousands of workers occupied their factories and kept them running, set up distribution networks and prepared for armed combat.<sup>43</sup>

By 1973 the situation was over-heated. In August the economy had begun to deteriorate because of the intense social and political conflict. The shortages of essential food items had begun to adversely affect the living standard of working classes. The struggle over increasingly scarce resources in a polarized class situation reached to the point of violence. Workers insisted on rationing and tried to take over the means of transportation, especially privately-owned trucks. Their actions were violently responded by the rightist group, "Patria Libertad." Over 500 attacks were launched between July and August by the group against bridges, railroad tracks, power facilities, oil pipelines, stores and trucks which were under the control of militant workers then.

By the late 1973 the conflicts between the working class and the privileged reached at the peak. The rightist opposition parties blocked all reform legislations, passed a congressional resolution calling on the government to resign because of incompetence, launched impeachment proceedings against the members of the cabinet, and openly urged the military to take over key posts in the government.<sup>44</sup> It is logical to make a point out of these political developments that the

opposition of the middle class and the upper class to President Allende's policies, projected in the rightist terrorist attacks, finally led to the military's violent intervention on September 11, 1973.

In explaining the class conflict as the major cause of the military interventions in Latin America, it has so far been established that the military intervened in the interest conflicts in favor of the middle class, which was aligned with the weakened oligarchy, against the working classes. At this point, it is necessary to raise a question: *why did the military in Latin America always take on the side of the middle class in the interest conflicts with the lower classes after the WWII ?*

To answer this question, it will be helpful to look at the fact that military officers in the third world, including those of Latin America, were recruited from the middle class. Stephan pointed out that " the fathers of today's officers (in the third world) typically held such middle-class positions in countries as socially and politically diverse as Brazil, Peru, Argentina, Chile, Egypt, Iraq, Turkey, India and Nigeria."<sup>45</sup>

For example, among those cadets who entered the Brazilian Academy between 1941 and 1943, 20% came from the traditional upper class, 70% from the middle class families, and 4% from the lower classes. In light of social background, it can be assumed that military officers

acted to some extent out of sympathy for their fellows of the middle class when the latter was threatened by the lower classes.<sup>46</sup>

Even though the military's social attachment to the middle class can be blurred by their institutional orientations, the military's favoritism to the middle class was reinforced by their common opposition to the rise of the proletariat after the WWII. It is my contention that the military and middle class have common interest in opposing the mobilization of the lower classes for political power and economic equality. To the middle class (as well as the weakened landed oligarchy), those kinds of mobilizations tantamount to a greave threat to their privileged positions in the society, which could finally lead to the leftist take-over as happened in Chile. To the military, lower class mobilization inspired by the leftist ideas constitutes, in the ultimate sense, the harbinger of the specter of communist expansion which was overshadowing Latin America since the Cuban revolution in 1959.

Under a communist regime, the military would lose its institutional privileges and political clout because traditional army is harnessed by the political commissar system and offset by the militia under such a regime. Moreover, armed forces must always place the interests of the communist party in the first place under a communist regime. It was therefore no wonder that the military was always staunchly against the lower class mobilization to usurp

political power. All in all, it is my point of view that, due to the coinciding interests of the military and the middle class in opposing the lower class political mobilization, the military in Latin America took on the side of the middle class most of the time when there was a class conflict between the two.

### **(II) National Security Doctrine**

Connected to the cold war atmosphere was a new doctrine among Latin American officer corps regarding the role of the military. It was based on two arguments: one, that security was only assured through economic strength that provides basis for an adequate military defense; and two, that threats to security are not only external but also domestic subversive and guerilla movements. From this perspective, the military can only fulfill its security mission if the economy grows and the country is well-managed. This argument easily becomes the doctrine (national security doctrine) that it is the duty of the armed forces themselves to take charge of the government both to bring about economic development and to properly manage the country so that their obligations to defend the nation's security can be fulfilled.<sup>47</sup>

Brazil is a good example to illustrate the development and materialization of the national security doctrine. After the WWII, Brazilian officer corps seemed to be preparing to give life to this

doctrine. Starting in the 1950's the Higher War College of Brazil offered a course of study that extended far beyond the usual military curriculum. Three of seven academic divisions were devoted to political subjects, psychological-social studies and economic affairs. The middle-and -high ranking officers who attended the college studied inflation, agrarian problems, banking reforms, electoral laws, transportation and education. They dealt with the political, economic and social conditions facilitating the growth of radicalism and violence among workers and peasants. National security doctrine was the most important subject at the Higher War College of Brazil.<sup>48</sup>

Thus, Brazilian military officers gained new skills (known as new professionalism) necessary to rule the country in order to materialize the doctrine. Since national doctrine is basically intended to implement socioeconomic development of the country, the military officers assumed that it is their responsibility to take control of government if elections and civilian governments failed to bring about development to the country. National security doctrine and new professionalism of the military officers were also developed in the military institutions of Argentina and Chile.

### **(III) Threat To The Institutional Interests of the Military**

Another cause of the military interventions in Latin America is often cited as the actual or possible threat to the institutional interests of the military by incumbent governments. In Argentina,

Peron had been encroaching upon the military's institutional viability since 1952. After the coup attempt of 1951, Peron reshaped the armed forces. He removed the Argentine Coast Guard from navy supervision and placed it under the ministry of Interior. By the end of 1952, he increased police up to 150,000 men, more than double that of the Army (70,000), to counterweight the Army in case of civil strife.<sup>49</sup> He also moved to strengthen the labor sector and revive the Army's haunting fear of civil war. In 1952 Eva Peron (Peron's wife) purchased arms for the workers of CGT (Confederacion General de Trabajadores) through the Social Aid Foundation. The Argentine firm of Ballester Molina delivered 5,000 pistols and 2,000 carbines to arm militant CGT members.<sup>50</sup> It was evident that Peron was purposely trying to weaken the Army.

In the case of Brazil, president Goulart managed to bring about his own down-fall by trespassing on the military domain. Goulart influenced promotions and assignments as a means of ensuring the military's political loyalty with greater frequency than his predecessors. In the years before his presidency, 34 out of 73 line officers promoted to the rank of general had graduated first in one of their military classes. During his four years, only four out of 29 officers had the same military education, apparently indicating that promotional criteria had been significantly politicized by Goulart. Many senior officers resented this interference because it adversely

affected the military's high professional standards and hierarchical relations at the top. The officers passed over for promotion must have resented Goulart's interference in their tradition.<sup>51</sup>

Moreover, the Brazilian officer corps were alarmed over the politicization of the non-commissioned officers in the ranks. Afraid that he would be overthrown because of his leftist policies and connections with the militant trade unions, Goulart attempted to prevent coup d'etat by openly seeking support among sergeants. In return, he promised to back their demands for greater political rights and increased material benefits, such as the provision of special housing.<sup>52</sup>

The coup was finally triggered by Goulart's interference with military discipline. His reaction to a sailors' mutiny was instrumental in bringing the moderates within the officer corps to support the activists who had been waiting for some further action that would finally discredit the president's asset of constitutional legality. The navy minister ordered the arrest of a sailor who was attempting to organize a leftist union within the navy. The order triggered a revolt of over one thousand sailors from the Sailors' Association. Rather than supporting the minister, Goulart replaced him with a compliant retired admiral proposed by the leaders of the national trade union movement. The new minister granted a full amnesty to the revolting sailors - a move that hit officer corps like a bombshell. Manifestos were issued

denouncing this action as an attack upon military discipline and the hierarchical principle. If this was not enough, a week later Goulart spoke to a televised gathering of sergeants where he refused to disassociate himself from the sailors' revolt.<sup>53</sup>

A critical factor in the Chilean armed forces' overthrowing of president Allende in 1973 was the arming of his most radical supporters. Believing that the military constituted the greatest danger to the socialist government, the Movement of the Revolutionary left and other extreme leftist groups armed themselves and factory workers in the urban areas. Organizing and arming to resist a coup, the government and its radical supporters helped it bring about. Apart from sharp policy disagreements with the government, within the officer corps as a whole was an exceptionally pressing concern that the expansion of parallel armed organizations were undermining its monopoly of force. It was feared that if the armed radicals would try to take over power, the military would be unable to control them short of a civil war. The defense of institutional interests was at least as important as opposition to Allende's reformist and progressive policies in motivating the coup.<sup>54</sup>

#### **(IV) Economic Crises and Political Instability**

A government's economic record is a critical performance criterion since economic growth is highly valued in every country and all governments are held at least partially responsible for the

economic health of a nation. Even when the actual cause of a economic downturn is beyond governmental control, the incumbents are often blamed. Therefore, economic crises are usually cited by the military forces as one of their justifications for the interventions.

It was more so in the case of Latin America where economic crises were more rampant than other parts of the world. Economic problems were usually cited justifications in the Latin American coups. For instance, the Brazilian military issued a manifesto on April 9, 1964 which mentioned economic problem in the first place.

"The Institutional Act that is decreed today by the Commander-in-chief of the Army, Navy and Air Force, in the name of revolution that saw the victory with the support of almost the entire nation, is designated to guarantee to the new government indispensable means for the work of **economic, financial**, political and moral reconstruction of Brazil in a manner in which it will be responsible."<sup>55</sup>

It is notable that the number of Latin American coups was 60% greater in deterioration years.<sup>56</sup> Economic crises marked the years when most of the military interventions took place in Argentina, Brazil and Chile. In Argentina, before Peron's downfall in 1955, the nation's economy was not in good shape. It's GNP declined sharply after 1948 and reach nadir in 1952. By 1955, it was still below the levels of 1947 and 1948.<sup>57</sup> In 1975 before Isabel Peron was deposed, the inflation rocketed to 335 % and the economy was out of control.<sup>58</sup> In the case of Brazil, inflation and balance-of-payment deficit had grown even more difficult to deal with for the government in 1963-64. Inflation rate in Brazil then was 55% and 85 % in 1962 and 1963 respectively.<sup>59</sup>

In Chile, there was a runaway inflation rate averaging a 15 % monthly increase in June, July and August of 1973.<sup>60</sup>

Apart from economic crises, political instability which used to mark the pre-coup periods in Latin America also helped the military justify their actions. All governments are faced with greater or lesser political opposition and discontent. They differ significantly in their ability to deal with it. Governments are poorly performing when their unresponsiveness, ineptness or excessively arbitrary actions foment widespread disorder and violence among the discontented people. In such a situation they are appraised as being unable to fulfil their basic responsibility : the preservation of public order and the protection of life and property.

If armed forces in a Third-World country were waiting for the most auspicious moment to launch military take-over against an elected government, the time when degree of political stability plunged through the bottom would be as good as economic crises in order to make up moral justification for their action an elected government. Out of 105 successful Latin American coups that occurred between 1907 and 1966, almost two-thirds of them took place during the periods of public disorder.<sup>61</sup> Out of seven coups which are covered by this paper, four of them were preceded by periods of political stability.

In 1954 Peron, the president of Argentina, angered the Roman Catholic Church by legalizing divorce and taking parochial schools out

of the Church's supervision and placing under the ministry of Education. When the Pope excommunicated Peron's government, several Cathedrals were burnt down by Peronists. The whole country was in a volatile state due to Peron's anti-Church campaigns until the coup in 1955.<sup>62</sup> The period before the 1976-coup in Argentina was characterized by political violence too. The leftist guerrillas provocatively attacked the police and the military, bringing off some dramatic assassinations. The rightist organization such as the Argentine Anti-Communist Alliance equally responded, and fear of terrorists took hold of the populace.<sup>63</sup>

Before the Brazilian coup of 1964 occurred, the same volatile situation dominated. In 1963, both the left and right camps in Brazil were trying to arm themselves in anticipation of a civil war. Frustrated with the pace of Goulart's reforms, leftist reformers began to argue for a revolution while Goulart's advisor, Brizola, spoke of the need to form clandestine armed groups (*the groupos de onze*). Conservatives prepared to defend themselves by force too. In the countryside, landowners armed themselves in preparation for a civil war.<sup>64</sup>

The most deteriorated political scenario was seen in the case of Chile in 1973. Workers formed Industrial Belts (*Cordones Industriales*), within all factories in an area to coordinate the worker's resistance to a possible coup. When "Cordones" tried to take over the means of

distribution and transportation, such as trucks and railways, the rightist groups responded resorting to violent terrorist attacks, as discussed earlier. The army launched some raids on the "Cordones" to uncover alleged stocking of arms.<sup>65</sup>

This paper has covered four major causes of the military interventions in Latin America : the class conflict, the national security doctrine and new professionalism, and economic and political instability. To draw a conclusion regarding their workings in inducing military coups, it is necessary to shed light on how each of these causes particularly generated and interplayed in the pre-coup periods .

As argued at length, class conflict between the middle class (aligned with the weakened landed oligarchy) and the lower classes is cited as the major cause of the military interventions this paper examined. The only exception is the Argentine coup of 1976. The national security doctrine which developed after WWII in Latin American armed forces provided the officer corps a well-established ideological justification for their direct participation in politics. New professionalism developed along the lines of the national security doctrine seemed to have made these officer corps confident of themselves to run the country after taking over the political power.

In most of the cases, even though the threat from the lower classes to the privileged classes had already existed for some time,

the military interventions did not seem to have taken place until threats to its institutional interests emerged. Historical evidence for this consideration are the Brazilian and Chilean cases. President Goulart's overbearing interference in the navy revolt and the alleged attempts by Brizola (his advisor) and himself to arm workers immediately caused an alarm among the officer corps of Brazil regarding the viability of their institution and set off the military intervention.

In the case of Chile, overt arming by the leftist groups and the militant workers prompted the military to preempt a dangerous guerilla war against it. Only deviant case was the coup that deposed Peron of Argentina. The coup took place only after a few years Peron had been encroaching upon the military's domain. Explanation for this exception can be based on the fact that Peron's political stance had not been weakened enough at the time. Peron was then enjoying the support of the urban proletariat and was commanding enormous political power as a charismatic leader. He had not created powerful foes, such as the Roman Catholic Church, at the time yet. It would have been a political suicide if the army staged a coup which could be harshly responded by Peron and Peronists. Once Peron's political was eroded enough, the army was quick to put Peron down and reasserted its institutional rights from 1955 to 1958 by General Amburu's de-Peronization efforts.<sup>66</sup>

In the following years, Argentine army launched hastened

interventions in 1962 and 1966. Each occasion demonstrated the army's established fear of the return of Peronists which would jeopardize their personal and institutional interests. They have already witnessed Peronist destruction of their institutional strength. Moreover, for the officers who staked their careers and lives in the campaign against Peron, a Peronist resurgence might carry vengeance in its wake. In sum, it is generalized that actual and possible threats to the military's institutional interests acted as the triggering factor in the military interventions in Latin America.

Concerning the political and economic instabilities, It has been established that, though they are not the major causes which made officer corps reach a decision to forcefully intervene in politics, these factors apparently constituted the inefficiency of incumbent governments in the eyes of the public, and thus conveniently exploited by the military conspirators as the moral justifications for their unconstitutional act.

## **Conclusion**

In light of the four major factors which caused the military interventions in Latin America, it is concluded that ***class conflict was the underlying cause, the national security doctrine and new professionalism (new skills of managing a government acquired by the officer corps) were the ideological justification and the source of***

***self-confidence to take over political power, and possible and actual threats to the military's institutional interests worked as the triggering factor while economic and political instabilities were exploited by the military as moral justifications.***

In concluding the paper, I would like to point out that, in today's international political environment in which the Cold War ceased to exist , communist threat waned (except in Peru) and developmentalist officer corps had to admit their doctrine to be a complete fiasco, military interventions are nowadays outmoded in Latin America. Most possible reasons for this change, it is believed, are the weakening of the leftist guerilla movements and that of the leftist political parties' appeal to the Latin American people, just as elsewhere in the world. The impracticability of communism has been proved by the experiences of former USSR and the Eastern Europe. This development apparently reduced the politicization of lower classes by the left against the interests of privileged classes, thus dissipating class conflicts and military interventions. The evident results are the lower frequency of coups d'etat in Latin America and the return of democratic in the region in the 1980's.

**END NOTES**

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2. Nordlinger, Eric (1977). P-6. He made an extensive study on the frequency of military coups in the third World.
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4. Varsa (1985). P-7. Varsa elaborated three main functions of the Latin American armies in the past : (1) the foundation of nation, (2) support for the expansion of dependent capitalist productive forces and (3) generalization of private interests.
5. Nun, Jose (1967), P-68. "The Middle Class Military Coup Revisited," in "The Latin Armies i n Latin America," edited by Abraham F. Lowenthal and J. Samuel Fitch.
6. Ibid. P-68. Jose Nun ardently argued that the military coups in the third world are carried out in favor of the middle interest.
7. Ibid. P-83.
8. Ibid. P-83.
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10. Ibid. P-82-83.
11. Ibid. P-83.
12. Ibid. P65.
13. Frandez, P-74.
14. Nordlinger, Eric (1977). P-83.
15. Ibid. P-84.

16. Smith, Peter (1974). P-104-105. Smith discussed in detail, providing regression and correlation analyses, the distribution backlash in Peron's Argentina. He found out that the resolution of distribution preference for workers directly led to a distribution crisis for other sectors of the society especially the upper and middle classes.
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46. Nordlinger, Eric (1977). P-33.
47. Needler, Martin C., P-42-43.
48. Nordlinger, Eric (1977). P-51-52.
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