

Remarks of Ralph A. Dungan before
the Subcommittee on Western Hemisphere Affairs
of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee
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Mr. Chairman and members of the subcommittee, I am greatly honored by your invitation to participate in this difficult, but most important, exploration of United States military policies and programs in Latin America. I am hopeful and confident that your hearings will be more fruitful in bringing about change than many others that have been held over the years.

Before I begin discussion of the specifics, let me make clear a few of my assumptions or prejudices.

1. I believe that however improbable, incapable, or wrong-headed we believe a country to be, it has a fundamental right, with which neither we nor anyone else may legitimately interfere, to work out its own political, social and economic destiny. It's a rather old principle which even antedates our own Declaration of Independence, but it bears remembering and reiteration as we approach the topic under consideration.

2. The basic thread running through U. S. policy toward Latin America since the latter days of the Eisenhower Administration has at least formally--and I emphasize formally--been favorable to drastic, even radical social change. A corollary to this policy is that one can expect in the process of such change instability and even violence, hopefully short lived.

3. As a democrat (small and large "D"), I believe that the interests of most men in organized society are protected best within a legal and constitutional framework which provides for effective (and periodic) participation in governance by the population. Conversely any action or policies having the effect of disturbing, suspending or subverting such processes, however justified, are self-defeating and contrary to our own as well as any other country's national interest.

So much for the fundamentals. Let me also enter a disclaimer at this point. I do not believe that I have ever encountered in my governmental service a military man who was not operating in a manner best calculated to serve the interests

and policies of his country as he saw them or they were laid out to him. Certainly there are dull and limited men in the military service as there are in every group, but seldom does one find venality or purposeful subversion. So when one criticizes policies, programs or methods it certainly does not imply personal or group condemnation.

I do not believe that one can evaluate the effect of the U. S. military presence and its programs in Latin America without considering, at least briefly, our general military posture as seen by Latin Americans. I regret very much to say that I believe that most Latin Americans view the United States as a major military power committed to using its military force to arrange the world in such a way as to be most conducive to its own interests. As the left wing and not so left wing Latin American sees us, we are an imperialist and militarist power. This inference is very easy for a person to draw, of course, when one looks at the very substantial part of our national budget which is committed to war and the preparation for war and without doubt in recent years has been influenced by our seemingly total commitment to the war in Vietnam so well publicized by the foreign press. There is no shaking the prevailing Latin conception of the United States as a society dominated to a very large measure by "The Pentagon." This perception is widely shared across the political spectrum and is seen as a threat by some and a source of salvation by others.

Perhaps no single action which the United States has taken, including the Bay of Pigs fiasco, was so significant in confirming the view of the United States as a nation willing and ready to use its vast military power unilaterally in its own interest as the unfortunate invasion of the Dominican Republic. Thus, it seems to me most important to recognize that in considering the effect of any particular action, program, or policy under the aegis of the U. S. military in Latin America, we must take into account the fact that the Latin American already sees the United States as a militaristic power disposed to use that power at will.

Kinds of U. S. Military Presence in Latin America

As the members of the subcommittee know, there are basically three types of U. S. military presence in Latin America.

(1) The military missions which are directly attached to the U. S. Embassy and maintain formal liaison with military elements within the host government;

(2) The Military Assistance Group whose function it is to administer the military assistance program and to provide technical assistance; and

(3) Special military purpose missions usually of a short term and directed to some special purpose.

In this category of military presence, one would find the activity of the Army Mapping Service, military sales missions, visits by high ranking U. S. officers, special aviation or Naval activities, military sponsored music or cultural presentations or finally, U. S. military activities directly related to some military program or interest of the United States as such. An example of the latter kind of activity would be requests by the United States military of certain countries in Latin America to station air-sea rescue teams in connection with the wasteful MOL (Manned Orbiting Laboratory) program recently terminated under pressure by the Congress.

I think it is very important to note that while the U. S. military or the United States Government sees each of these programs or activities as having peculiar and legitimate ends and as separate activities, the Latin Americans, except those who are familiar with our military folkways, see them as one large military presence constantly probing and seeking some advantage or another.

The Military Assistance Program

The present day military assistance program is the lineal descendant of military training missions organized on a service-to-service basis as far back as the late thirties. Current programs involve the sale (on generous credit terms) or grant of military hardware and technical training provided by resident U. S. military personnel or Mobile Training teams which are in country for relatively short periods of time to perform specific training duties.

The objectives of the program from our point of view are:

(1) To contribute to internal security by providing material and training to enhance counter-insurgency capability;

(2) To strengthen relations with host country military and of lower priority since 1961;

(3) To enhance Latin American capability to contribute to hemispheric defense.

From the Latin American military point of view, I believe that the presence of our military advisors has been tolerated by and large in order to obtain arms on a grant or cheap credit basis. As equipment previously furnished to Latin American countries becomes obsolete and spare parts unobtainable, and as military aid budgets are cut, interest in U. S. military assistance missions tends to wane.

I do not believe that our objective of seeking to strengthen counter-insurgency capability is either valid or successfully being attained for the following reasons:

(1) If our basic policy is to promote social change, then to some extent we are promoting instability. And one man's instability is another's insurgency.

(2) Insurgency is, and by and large has been in Latin America, a political problem not a problem of military tactics or equipment. If it is not met with sufficient indigenous political will, then no amount of training or equipment will counter it.

(3) Obviously, in some cases our support of so-called counter-insurgency forces has served to perpetuate, not deliberately of course, regimes without broad support or worse.

(4) As so-called Nasserite military regimes emerge-- and this is a subject which deserves attention--our counter-insurgency efforts may turn out as they have in the past to be instruments of insurgency.

(5) A commitment to assist local forces in maintaining internal security inevitably involves our military in a kind of implicit commitment to insure that internal security is in fact maintained, even if that involves certain risks for the U. S. There is an inevitable tendency in any group to have its efforts crowned with success. Some institutions can accept compromise or even defeat as a normal outcome. But this is not so generally with military organizations which are quite properly oriented toward victory.

This brief speculation is by way of warning that our commitment to Latin American internal security has within it the seeds of rapid and uncontrolled escalation especially when

ready forces are poised for deployment. I must say that there is an argument to be made for not being in a position to react quickly.

My basic contention is that the maintenance of civil order is pre-eminently a function of an indigenous government. It is a matter which we should stay out of.

How we got into the business is interesting in itself. To vastly oversimplify, I believe that our present preoccupation with counter insurgency as the major thrust of U. S. military aid policy is nothing more than an incomplete evolution of an intention on the part of the Kennedy Administration to eventually disengage from significant military activity in Latin America.

You will recall that in an attempt to get away from tanks, planes and ships allowable under the hemispheric defense concept of the fifties, President Kennedy refocused the military assistance effort on counter insurgency and civic action. This weaning away from major armaments was partly a reflection of Washington's perception of the security problem as it existed at the time but partly a conviction that we ought to encourage a concentration on the developmental problem as the root cause of instability. Thus was born civic action which had such a highly publicized but minor and short-lived impact.

But the basic defect in the stability-counter insurgency tactic as perceived by the U. S. military generally is that somehow stability is an end in itself and that it matters little in whose hands or under what conditions stability exists--or what means are used to obtain it. Again, this is not to posit inhumane or undemocratic attitudes or values to our military. The problem is that the prevailing mode of action of the military is pragmatic, and neutral from the standpoint of value. Military men are not amoral and valueless, on the contrary. But their approach tends to be objective oriented and short term in outlook.

The Direction and Supervision of Overseas Military Activity

This leads to a comment which does not relate directly to the question of either policies or programs. As I see it, one of the principal reasons why our peacetime military efforts in Latin America and elsewhere around the world have been counter-productive--even disastrous--is the system of direction and operational control--emphasis on operational control and supervision from Washington.

The prevailing view of the military side of the Pentagon, seldom made explicit, is that the implementation of certain aspects of U. S. policy is assigned to various agencies operating overseas. This conception holds that it is the agency responsible for goal achievement that has the choice of means and timing. Thus, for example, even though hemispheric defense was a very low priority objective in Latin America in the early 60's, that period was marked by constant efforts on the part of or with the willing collaboration of U. S. military personnel to expand major weapons procurement. For instance, there was a mission dispatched to South America to drum up sales of the C-130 which at that time was going at about \$5 million a copy with spares. This was justified, believe it or not, under the internal security rubric. I suspect that the real reason was to keep the production line going in Georgia.

Activities are undertaken, missions dispatched, plans concocted by any number of officers and elements in the line of command, many of which are never examined at a sufficiently informed and authoritative level to insure internal consistency.

The point is that while there is adequate authority vested in the Ambassador in the field to supervise and direct activities of constituent elements of the overseas missions, there is no comparable mechanism at the Washington level.

In all candor, I must say that this is very largely due to a strong disinclination on the part of even the highest authorities in the Department of State to assume any responsibility for supervision of operational programs. This, I believe, is based on the mistaken notion that policy papers and traditional diplomacy are the heart of the matter. However important, I seriously doubt whether they ever were that important. But in contemporary situations, what is said and done and by whom in the field of foreign affairs, is vastly more important than the nuance of a policy paper.

When President Johnson appointed General Maxwell Taylor to look into the direction and organization of foreign affairs in 1965, I think his purpose was to clearly define where operational authority and direction in the field of foreign affairs should reside. General Taylor's recommendations, later embodied in a NSAM, were most perceptive and clear. But their thrust was effectively neutralized by the oldest of bureaucratic dodges--the construction of a plethora of committees. Now these too have been dismantled and no doubt this is for the best.

But the fact remains that there is no one in Washington really charged with seeing to it that programs operated by various agencies really do serve a defined purpose and are not merely the result of an interpretation of one or another policy developed in some executive agency with some overseas interest.

The annals are full of stories illustrating this point and they range from those which have the most serious consequences to those which merely impede or make more difficult the attainment of our principal objectives.

To some degree, I understand, military missions in Latin America have been streamlined after years of pressure and because of budget austerity imposed by Vietnam. I hope this trend continues, not only because these large missions are costly far out of proportion to their utility, but because they have so often been counter-productive from a political point of view.

Indeed, if there is any valid generalization to be made about U. S. military policies and programs in Latin America, it is that, on the whole, they have been disastrous from a political point of view, whatever the intentions of the Government or those directly involved.

They have been based on false military and political assumptions and significant amounts of time and political capital have been expended to force a kind of ritual acceptance of our preconceived notions. For instance, based on a false or outmoded conception of external threat, we stage an anti-submarine exercise called UNITAS, involving U. S. and Latin Navies. This exercise is designed to demonstrate that there is solidarity if it ever came to war and that, indeed, there is real naval anti-submarine capability.

Both propositions are false and each year there are elaborate preparations, large political hub-bub and expenditures by Latin Navies on fuel and ammunition which they can ill afford. In short, the whole affair is a farce.

But the important point is that it costs us heavily politically and it demonstrates more forcefully than any policy paper that we encourage the growth of substantial naval capability with no reference to the implications for other policies directed toward the conservative and allocation of resources for economic and social development.

But some speculation about the future may be more productive than to rake over the past, the mistakes of which have been documented rather well by others.

The Future

The Latin American military man of the future, at least in the more mature and larger countries, is likely to be less concerned about support and loyalty to any particular class of society. He is also less likely to be attached to the preservation of any pre-existing social or political system and more likely to adapt to popular and even radical national ideologies, partly because he more readily identifies with them and partly in order to preserve a position for himself and his service or social group in the emerging power structure.

Thus, the basic political assumption of our military in the past is no longer true -- that the military in Latin America are a good bet to preserve stability -- that is, the status quo. While it is still too early to judge, recent events in Peru seem to support this speculation.

Moreover, the notion that a close relation between U. S. military professionals and Latin American military is the best way in which to maintain contact with this important sector of Latin society is unsound. I believe that not a few of our difficulties in the past have related to the fact that we have tended to rely on our own military personnel as channels of communication to Latin American military leaders.

All of this is by way of saying that we have dealt programmatically and conceptually in the past as if the Latin American military establishments have the basic characteristics which we assume of our own - that is, a professional cadre subject to civil constitutional authority. This is not a fact. The military in Latin America have an independent, albeit shifting, political role. It is a mistake to believe that we can relate creatively to it if we insist in pretending that somehow it is, or can be transformed into, our quite theoretical conception of the role of the military in a constitutional democracy.

These final observations, Mr. Chairman, will sum up my remarks.

1) Based as it is on a host of faulty assumptions about the nature of the security threat, the political characteristics of Latin American society, etc., our present method of relating to the military society should be abandoned immediately. This means an immediate end to our military assistance program and the large missions which are justified by it.

2) I suggest immediate curtailment if not abandonment of joint military exercises with the Latin American countries. They generally have had a negative political value and, being based on an unsound strategic concept, have almost no military utility.

3) Continue to maintain friendly relations with the military in Latin America as we would with any other social or political group through appropriate members of the Ambassador's staff - I suggest an office of Defense Attache' with no direct relations with any U. S. military entity, at least for command purposes.

4) Continue to entertain requests for military hardware and short-term training, but only if requested by the host government through the Ambassador. It is not feasible or desirable to just eliminate armaments in Latin America. It is possible to reduce the parties to the negotiation and possibly to put the matter of armaments on the political rather than the technical level where they have tended to be.

5) The Executive Branch and, specifically, the State Department have for too many years resisted becoming the executive agent of U. S. foreign operations. As a result, foreign operations have become the tail wagging the foreign policy dog. Several Presidents have recognized the problem but have thus far only treated the symptoms of the problem by providing stronger coordination at the field level through the Ambassador. What is needed is a radical restructuring of the machinery of foreign affairs and most especially the will to make the machinery work.

6) And finally, Mr. Chairman, I reiterate my general plea for a reassessment of our own choice of means; for the abandonment of a policy in Latin America in which we impose practically no restraints on the use of force in the attainment of our own objectives. I submit that if there is a "problem" of militarism in the Latin American countries, we bear a heavy burden for its existence.