

In defense of national sovereignty

Venezuelan Rear Adm. Hernán Gruber Odreman analyzes the role of the armed forces in the defense of the state and the honor of its people.

Admiral Gruber is currently imprisoned in Venezuela for his role in leading the November 1992 military uprising against the government of Carlos Andrés Pérez. Last August, Admiral Gruber published a book entitled The Military Insurrection of Nov. 27, 1992: For the Honor of the Armed Forces, in which he denounced the United States' plans to employ multilateral forces to impose a false "democracy" in Ibero-America. In one of the book's chapters, Admiral Gruber wrote:

"A study carried out by the Aspen Institute in the United States reveals how a series of retaliatory measures would be taken against any government which overthrew Latin American democracy, under the auspices of the Organization of American States (OAS), but as an undisguised initiative of the United States.

"If the intention were to preserve what in its original definition was known as democracy, the initiative might be accepted and, if necessary, even supported.

"But what is the democracy whose defense requires the use of multilateral forces, with the ensuing violation of national sovereignty? What type of democracy justifies for its defense diplomatic, economic, and military measures which destroy the nation? Are we speaking of a democracy enforced by a government which has systematically violated the constitutional principles of equality, justice, and well-being? Who is invoking the sacred name of democracy to save a government rejected by its own people? Which dark interests hide behind the constant interference and threats made by the U.S. ambassador?"

A translation of Admiral Gruber's article follows. We have added subheads.

One of the highly controversial issues under debate today has to do with the interest on the part of certain world powers in redefining the traditional concept of sovereignty.

It has been claimed that the advances of the modern world, new economic relations, cultural interchange, and so forth all demand the elimination, or at least reduction to its most minimal expression, of the concept of sovereignty.

Many have denounced this view as inappropriate and prejudicial to the highest interests of the republic. I add my voice to this chorus because the laws of military honor demand it, and because the venerated memory of my revolutionary forefathers—whose blood nourished the birth and

growth of a free and sovereign nation—demands it.

It would be very easy for me to propose to a neighbor lacking in economic, technological, law enforcement, and military resources to make a pact that would eliminate barriers such that I could enter his territory in many different ways, and he mine. I would be able to do so whenever, however, and wherever I chose, but my neighbor would be limited to watching everything I did on his property with his arms crossed. Elementary logic tells us that this is bad business for my neighbor, but good for me. And this is exactly what we would be exposing ourselves to, if we allowed ourselves to be enchanted by false expectations.

National sovereignty is a vital question for the survival of a state, and one cannot weaken it without running the risk of seriously harming the security and defense of the fatherland.

Note the fact that without having agreed to yield anything with regard to the sovereign exercise of the state, its territory and authority have been violated by forces which make use of their power; what would happen if the limitation of our national sovereignty were completely accepted?

The targeting of the armed forces

At the same time, and here lies the crux of the problem, among the results of limited sovereignty is the reduction or elimination of the armed forces. As justification for this, it has been claimed, among other things, that the United States has been dismantling—withdrawing—a part of the huge overseas military apparatus with which it maintained the balance in the Cold War that the East-West conflict posed, a conflict now gone, as is the Soviet Union. But the questions remain: Should we Latin American countries proceed to eliminate our armed forces because of the simple fact that the United States has withdrawn a large portion of its NATO forces? When were we Latin Americans committed militarily, as a group, to NATO and against the Warsaw Pact? Has U.S. military power declined with regard to the relative combat power necessary to safeguard its national interests? That is, is the United States capable of reducing its Armed Forces to a level that would only admit a moderate margin of superiority over the military power of its neighbors as a logical measure of protection? Who would really be giving up their armed forces, those who have only that necessary to safe-

guard the constitutional objectives of peace and banning of war as a means of obtaining a political goal, or those who have maintained an overwhelming military machine as an instrument of policy? Who, finally, would have an armed forces capable of imposing—by means of military violence—the wishes of a superpower?

As justification for reducing Latin America's militaries, it has been argued that the savings that would result from this reduction of defense expenditures would be reassigned to social programs. This is a utopia, because the armed forces can in no way be blamed for those failures in the social order which have left their imprint on the course of so many Latin American nations.

Many questions need to be asked. For example, didn't immense financial resources assigned to social programs get flushed down the sewer of corruption? Who can guarantee that sacrificing the armed forces by allocating its budget to other purposes, will not meet the same fate? Who, in the midst of this moral breakdown, would dare to assure it? In the case of Venezuela, is it or is it not justified to have an Armed Forces capable of protecting and guaranteeing full enjoyment of national territorial and maritime wealth for today's generations and tomorrow's? Or in the case of Peru, is it or is it not justified to have a Navy capable of defending its maritime wealth as a primary economic resource? And what can one say of Brazil, or Argentina?

Our liberty and economic development

One cannot and should not accept as an excuse for eliminating Latin America's armed forces the fact that social categories require funds now allocated to the military. If the armed forces by chance bear some responsibility for the sea of calamities in which our countries are sinking, seek an explanation from those responsible for the economic and social deterioration of the Ibero-American countries, namely the International Monetary Fund and World Bank.

The armed forces have been, and continue to be, the fundamental support for the development of Latin America's nations. This is not mere rhetoric; it is a tangible fact that can be seen in the quality of education given in the military training academies and which contrasts, as in the case of Venezuela very lamentably, with the intellectual deterioration of youth tossed onto the trash heap by those who today demand for themselves the economic patrimony of the military institution. This fact can also be seen in the technical, agricultural, and livestock training programs in the military academies, which show a certain degree of contribution to socio-economic development. And what can be said of those thousands of youth who, upon returning to civilian life after having completed their military service, bring with them positive accomplishments which will serve them well in their new role as citizens?

There is no denying that the germ of corruption has appeared within the armed forces as well, but the institution cannot

be blamed for this evil. Instead, one must seek the blame among those politicians who penetrated it out of their own personal interests, even managing to turn it in certain cases into a kind of Pretorian Guard, and whose contemptible circumstances should not in any case affect the corps in general, but the corrupt command which by omission, commission, or sheer negligence allowed the forces to be thus degraded.

I do not believe that the spirit of our forefathers would be at peace today to see their work of sovereignty and liberty so threatened. I do not believe that future generations would be satisfied when, in reviewing our glorious history, they would come across the blank page representing the death of an institution which gave life to the fatherland, which upheld the tradition of honor, the armed guarantor of its security and its future.

Whoever rules in his own house must impose the law within the framework of social coexistence with the other peoples of the planet.

In suppressing the concept of sovereignty, Venezuela would be risking everything—in exchange for what?

The Latin American armed forces are an essential part of their people, they are the essence and life of the nation, and no power on earth should dare to raise its sword against an institution which, flag in hand as in the case of Venezuela, has sown freedom in its victorious march across the fatherland.

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