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The politics of defense revival in Argentina

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In marked contrast with previous decades, defense issues in Argentina have started to receive increasing political attention over the last few years. The main goal of this article is to account for this new found interest in defense policy. The article contends that this revival could be accounted for by both the implementation of a neo-developmental strategy and a type of control that emphasizes civilian oversight over the armed forces. Both factors have promoted the implementation of policies that favored an increase in the military budget, the reconstruction of the defense industry and the establishment of a new military doctrine. This article evaluates the impact of factors that have not been previously considered by the literature on defense attention in South America.

Keywords: defense; Argentina; deficit of attention; revival of defense; neo-developmentalism; civil control

Introduction

Defense issues in Argentina have started to receive increasing political attention from the government in the last few years: military spending has considerably increased since 2005, the arms industry has been reactivated and a new national defense strategy, for the first time since the return of the democracy in 1983, has been defined.¹ This new political interest is in marked contrast to previous decades, since 1983 politicians and society have exhibited a remarkable “deficit of attention” to defense.² The Argentine case was defined as a “unilateral disarmament” because of the systematic reduction of the armed forces’ budget, the dismantling of the military industry and the absence of a defense doctrine.

The “attention deficit” in defense, which Argentina had experienced between 1983 and 2003, was not only connected with the orientation of civilian control during that period but also with the presence of structural and social factors.³ The implementation of a particular type of control and the lack of interest are closely linked. The agenda of civilian control during the first years of the new democracy was mainly oriented toward reducing the material power (in terms of resources and size) that the military had accumulated during 50 years of political hegemony. One of the factors, which helped maintain that kind of power during the previous decades, was the enduring conflict hypothesis with Brazil and Chile. For this reason, the new democratic leaders perceived the preservation of these conflict scenarios as the functional basis for maintaining military strength.

President Alfonsín (1983–1989) eliminated this conflict hypothesis as a means to reduce military power.⁴ This strategy led to the settlement of border disputes with Chile and launched a process of economic integration with Brazil. This meant that Argentina deactivated the two most important scenarios of war, which had diverted vast material resources toward the military

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during the previous century. With them, however, the pillars of defense policy that existed during the previous 100 years also disappeared. In short, Argentina's defense policy languished under the demands of democratic consolidation: the attention deficit had begun.

Furthermore, structural and social factors have also contributed to promote such a deficit. Structural approaches argue that politicians have a greater interest in defense when the state experiences threats to its security.⁵ Conversely, the absence of threat is a factor favoring the civilian lack of interest. In this context, the civilian leadership is less likely to attend to national security affairs because the state has assured its survival.⁶ In this regard, Argentina has not suffered threats to its security in the past two decades, leading it to question the very existence of its armed forces.⁷

The social approaches depart from the assumption that politicians are driven by the interests of their constituents and parties.⁸ In this way, their interest in defense matters would be determined by the political advantage they could obtain from their commitment to these issues. This tends to happen under two different conditions: first, when there is a right or center-right constituency that supports the existence of armed forces that are properly equipped and trained. In this case, it is possible to expect the presence of political parties representing those sectors. This is not the case of Argentina, whose society continues to express a sharp anti-militarism which dates back to 1983, when the military relinquished power and left behind a severe economic crisis, massive human rights violations and the first military defeat in Argentina's history. This ominous legacy has resulted in a persistent social condemnation of the armed forces. It is noteworthy that Argentina society's trust in the military has collapsed and remains the lowest of all the Latin American countries.⁹ Certainly, the low social interest in defense is not a favorable scenario with which to attract political attention to those issues.

The second condition, which has a long theoretical development, is the existence of a military-industrial complex. According to this perspective, the presence of a defense industry represents a strong incentive for politicians, because the social sectors that benefit from its existence turn to what is effectively an extremely attractive constituency for them.¹⁰ The maintenance and/or expansion of the domestic purchase of arms are seen, therefore, as a tool with which to attract voters. The fact that the military-industrial complex in Argentina has had little relevance since 1983 is another factor that has encouraged the political lack of interest in defense.¹¹

The conditions that encourage the deficit of attention did not prevent, however, the revival of defense issues in recent years. The doubling of the military budget between 2005 and 2012, the reconstruction of the arms industry and the development of a new defense strategy suggest a change in the relationship between politicians and those issues. This change can be striking, especially considering the persistence of the three conditions that prompted a lack of interest. Indeed, Argentina had not experienced imminent threats to its security; political parties continued to show little interest in defense issues and society perceived the military as a less than reliable institution in the country.¹² This apparent paradox represents a challenge to the traditional literature, which emphasizes that attention to defense issues is generally determined by those factors.

How, then, is it possible to explain the new interest in a context where it should not be present? The main goal of this article is to account for the new interest in defense. Since the new political attention cannot be accounted for structural or social reasons, it is necessary to search for alternative explanations. The article contends that the revival of defense could be explained by two variables: the implementation of a neo-developmental strategy, and by the pursuit of a new type of civilian control. These factors have promoted the implementation of policies that favored a growth in the military budget, the reconstruction of the defense industry and the establishment of a new military doctrine. In this sense, this article evaluates the impact of factors that were not previously been considered in the literature on South American defense.

The revival of defense

In the case of Latin America, the literature on the politics of defense is scarce and more or less limited to the article by Trinkunas and Pion Berlin.¹³ Both authors define the concept of “attention deficit” as a situation in which “civil and political societies are relatively silent on the issues of national defense”, and “civilian politicians show little interest in investing resources and expertise in defense.”¹⁴ In this regard, the idea of “political attention to issues of defense” can be defined by opposition to the concept of “attention deficit”; for example, a situation where politicians invest resources and expertise in such matters. A classificatory criterion for the determination of an “attention deficit” could possibly consider the existence of public policies that would benefit defense in both their material and doctrinal dimensions.

In this regard, a key indicator of political interest is the allocation of a budget to maintain reasonably equipped and trained armed forces. Another indicator is the development of a defense strategy, which identifies threats and defines missions for the military. Finally, state support for the development of a military industry could be taken as a dimension that reinforces the idea of political commitment to these issues, especially considering that in most peripheral countries this type of industry is not competitive in global terms and therefore must be supported by the state. In Argentina, these three dimensions of political concern have experienced changes in recent years.

The reconstruction of Argentina’s defense industry

In 1984, the General Directorate of Military Industries was a complex structure made up of more than 30 companies with several thousands of employees. However, throughout the late 1980s, it began to experience a drastic reduction of its budget, which would eventually lead to a virtual paralysis of its overall activities. The crisis deepened in the 1990s, when President Carlos Menem included it in the strategy of comprehensive privatization of state enterprises. From 1993 to 2005, only five facilities remained in a condition of minimum production of ammunition for the armed forces.¹⁵

In 2005, one of the main goals that the President assigned to the Defense Minister, Nilda Garre, was the rebuilding of the military industry. As Garre explained: “the rebuilding of the defense industry and their centers of research and development was one of the main political directions given by the central Executive to the Ministry of Defense.”¹⁶

The recovery process of the defense industry has been developed in four main areas: (1) the nationalization and modernization of different companies that were privatized during the 1990s; (2) the introduction and development of programs to modernize the existing military equipment; (3) the design and building of new military equipment with different levels of technological complexity; and (4) the establishment of a governmental institutional structure to support the development of a public and private defense industry.

The first measure adopted in 2007 was the recovery of emblematic companies, namely, the shipyards *Almirante Storni* and *Tandanor*, which comprised the Argentine Naval Industrial Complex (CINAR). CINAR is undertaking numerous projects, such as the mid-life modernization of the submarine *San Juan*; the reparation of the *Almirante Irizar* icebreaker; and the construction of a series of four ocean patrol boats. The nationalization of these shipyards has allowed for the recuperation of industrial capabilities, which were lost when it was privatized. For instance, the mid-life modernization of the submarine *Santa Cruz* (twin of *San Juan*) was undertaken in Brazil in 1999. It has recently been announced that the main projects of the Navy will be the creation of a nuclear submarine and the modernization of 10 MEKO combat ships.¹⁷

Similarly, the Military Aircraft Factory (MAF) in Córdoba, which was privatized in 1995, was re-nationalized in December 2009. Currently, it is dedicated to the production of 40 Pampa

aircraft and the modernization of the Pucara. Other current projects include the design and manufacture of a training plane and the production of the KC 390 transport aircraft, under the signed agreement with Embraer. Additionally, Embraer has signed an agreement with China for the production of 40 Z-11 helicopters.¹⁸ The budget for MAF has grown 230% since 2009 and has received one billion pesos in 2012.¹⁹

Moreover, since 2006, the government has started modernizing the military industries' 31 facilities, which includes the acquisition of advanced technology and machinery of various kinds. Since 2009, the military industries' budget has increased 210% and received 630 million pesos in 2012.²⁰ The various companies that belong to this military–industrial complex are also carrying out programs of their own to modernize the military equipment of the armed forces. It is worth mentioning the modernization of the Argentine medium tank in cooperation with the Israeli company, Elbit, and the upgrading of both the heavy artillery and UH-1H helicopters. There has also been a revival of the production of artillery ammunition and the development of various kinds of military equipment, such as the CALIV light cannon, the VC-30 multiple rocket launcher, and the MARA rocket-propelled grenade launcher.²¹

Other private and state companies, in collaboration with the research centers of the armed forces, are in the process of designing or building advanced military technology, including, for instance: (a) the building of long-range surveillance radars for military use (INVAP); (b) the re-launch of the rocket program for civilian (Tornado) and military purposes (Gradicom); (c) the construction of a nuclear submarine; (d) the building of communication and observation satellites; (e) the design and manufacture of Unmanned Aerial Vehicles of tiers II and III; and (f) the program of modernization of both the Aspide and Exocet missiles and the construction of a cruise missile (Dardo C).²²

Finally, in 2007, an Agency of Scientific Research and Technological Development was created under the Ministry of Defense. Its main objective is to coordinate all agencies and resources from the public and private sectors in order to strengthen the scientific and technological system of defense. The Agency administers the Research and Development Program of Defense created in 2008, which has funded about 100 research projects in the area since 2011.²³

The growth of the military budget

The recent increase of the Argentine defense budget breaks a cycle of decline that began with the return of democracy and which will be extended until 2005. Notably, the military budget had reached 4.2% of gross domestic product (GDP) in 1982, during the last military dictatorship; this had duplicated an historical average of 2%.²⁴

The first phase of reduction of military spending occurred during the Presidency of Raul Alfonsín. The reduction from 3.5% of GDP in 1983 to 1.9% in 1989 was one of the largest for any country whose defense budget exceeded 100 million dollars.²⁵ As a result, the number of military personnel dropped by 60%, from 175 000 in 1983 to 78 000 in 1989.²⁶ The arrival of Carlos Menem to the Presidency in 1989 did not arrest the downward trend in military spending; on the contrary, neo-liberal adjustment implemented in the 1990s further reduced defense spending to 1.2% of GDP by 1999. From 2000 to 2007, the defense budget stabilized at around 1% of GDP.²⁷

The main change from 2006 and beyond has been that the defense budget has grown in both absolute and relative terms, although in the case of the latter, its growth was not very significant – from 0.9% to 1% of GDP in 2012. However, it has grown 190% in absolute terms since 2003, from 1.7 billion dollars in 2003 to 5 billion in 2012. This increase draws attention to the stability of the defense budget in relative terms, which should be analyzed in connection to the level of Argentina's overall economic growth. In this way, the absolute variation could be reduced in

times of low or normal economic growth. During times of exceptional growth, however, it is possible that a lack of variation in relative terms can hide this exponential growth of the budget. Such is the case of Argentina, which, since 2003, has experienced the highest economic growth in its history – 80% between 2003 and 2011.

A new defense strategy

A cycle of strategic planning typically involves: the identification of threats or risks to national security; the establishment of missions for the armed forces based on those perceived threats; and the allocation of resources to fulfill them. Before 2006, Argentina lacked a process with these types of characteristics.

Raúl Alfonsín passed the Law on Defense in 1988 primarily aimed at the establishment of a legal limit to military action. It did not to identify threats to the country's defense.²⁸ In fact, the concept of defense in Alfonsín's Law restricted the role of the military to the deterrence of external aggression from other states. As argued above, the need for controlling powerful armed forces prevailed at that time over the design of a defense strategy that, according to the political sentiment of the time, would have contributed to the strengthening of the military. Huser contends that, "the Alfonsín Administration's concern with what the military had done had prevented an analysis of what the military should do . . . it was more notable [The Defense Law] for what it excluded than for what it included."²⁹ The fact that the Defense Act was regulated only in 2006, 18 years after its approval, is further evidence of the low political interest in the design of a defense strategy.

The so-called Cycle of National Defense Planning (CNDP) began in 2006, when it finally regulated the National Defense Act and thereby further defined the concept of defense. Decree 727 introduced a revolutionary conceptual change by deepening the role of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, who became responsible for the use of the military in time of peace, giving them functional control over the Army, Navy and Air Force.³⁰ This was the most relevant institutional change in the realm of joint action adopted since the return of democracy and was based on the lessons learned from the Malvinas conflict, summarized in the Rattenbach report of 1982.³¹ More importantly, this Decree brought together, for the first time in its creation in 1987, the National Defense Council (CODENA), which had to make a "comprehensive diagnosis of the strategic situation", and marked the first step of the CNDP.

At the same time, the Directive on Organization and Operation of the Armed Forces (Decree 1691/06) was published, which introduced the concept of "planning by capacities." This represented an important innovation in terms of the defense doctrine and would be further developed in the National Defense Policy of 2009. The Decree 1.691/06 also established that the strategic planning by capacities should replace the model of conflict hypothesis, which in fact had been abandoned in the 1980s without being replaced by another military planning mechanism.

One year later, Decree 1729/07 officially introduced the CNDP and standardized a planning cycle that culminated in 2009 with the Presidential approval of the first Directive of National Defense Policy (DNDP). This document is based on the diagnosis requested from the CODENA in 2006. The DNDP is a traditional national defense report, which makes a diagnosis of the international context and defined in terms of "increasing complexity" and "a marked asymmetry in the military capabilities of states." It defines the South American region "in terms of a synergistic process and the presence of a generalized dynamics of distention, dialogue, cooperation, coordination and integration among the states in the region, particularly among the nations of the Southern Cone." However, the DNDP warns, "the consolidation of practices of cooperation has not led to the renunciation by any country to deploy and organize a military force that would ensure an autonomous defense capability."³² In particular, this planning

process aims to determine the military capacities required to fulfill the mission and objectives assigned to the military in the short-, medium-, and long-term. It is based on an assessment of the regional and global strategic situation, which includes the risks and threats to Argentinean national interest.

The DNDP is the first official document on defense strategy since the restoration of democracy. It affirms the need to examine the risk and threats to national interest in relation to the overall strategic situation. It also highlights the necessity to adapt the military's mission to such threats and to provide them with the necessary resources.³³ The perspective that emerged from the DNDP depicted the region as a zone of peace without a clear or present threat to Argentina's security.³⁴ In this sense, the disappearance of traditional threats eliminates the need for conflict scenarios based on the presence of easily identifiable actors. However, this benign interpretation of the regional defense context is complemented by a more realistic evaluation, which highlights the maintenance of a "defensive strategic attitude"³⁵ against the "uncertainty regarding the type of aggression that may be arising in the future."³⁶

The DNDP also established that joint military planning should be based on the criterion of capacities, which was a response to the strategic military environment present in Argentina. Accordingly, planning by capacities only identifies generic threats and prioritizes the development of flexible skills. In this way, the coexistence of a high level of certainty, with respect to regional peace and uncertainty, regarding the extra-regional threats that may arise in the future, has led to the DNDP's support for an original military response. On the one hand, the organization, doctrine and weaponry of the armed forces should not be oriented to defend against a particular state, since none of them represents an immediate threat. On the other hand, this should not prevent the development of the necessary capacities to:

Autonomously carry out the full range of operations that are required by all standard generic forms of conventional military aggression, of external origin, provoked by state actors . . . Military planning should focus on the selection of scenarios and the definition of a set of skills to deal with threats that may arise in a broader spectrum of possibilities. Without being able to know in detail the kind of conflicts that can demand state participation, it identifies a matrix of capacities needed to confront them, so as to improve the adaptation of the military.³⁷

The Decree 1729/07 establishes the general guidelines for the development of the planning cycle, the ultimate goal of which is the elaboration of the Military Capacities Plan (Plan CAMIL) that identifies the needs for military equipment.³⁸ The first planning cycle was completed by the end of 2011 with the elaboration of the Plan CAMIL. It is worth noting that although the Plan CAMIL is a secret document, it is possible to infer from the emphasis given in Presidential and Ministerial speeches that the defense of natural resources has become the main perceived risk and that the planning by capacities included in the Plan CAMIL is a response to such a scenario.

In this regard, President Cristina Kirchner has repeatedly emphasized the importance of protecting natural resources. "I'm going to build the national defense system that requires the world to come, which is not a world divided between ideologies, but on the contrary, where the point is the defense of our natural resources."³⁹ This emphasis has been reiterated by the President in all "camaraderie" dinners with the armed forces,⁴⁰ and was even incorporated into the 2010 White Book of Defense:

Any aggression against a country of our region because of their natural resources affects the strategic interests of our country. South America has 44 per cent of the natural reserve of water on the planet, 25 per cent of the cultivated land and approximately 26 per cent of the reserves oil and gas. Therefore, the armed forces should be on alert to protect sovereignty.⁴¹

Since 2003, Argentina has witnessed a major shift in its developmental strategy as a result of the failure of the neo-liberal model and its tremendous social consequences. Indeed, the crisis of 2001 resulted in over 40 civilians dead, a poverty rate of 56% and 26% of the population unemployed. This devastating human tragedy placed social issues as the main concern for the governments of Nestor Kirchner (2003–2007) and the current-day President, Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner. In view of this experience, the reduction of unemployment became the main stimulus for the adoption of a neo-developmental model, the main objective of which was the recovery of the industrial sector as a way to stimulate economic growth and reduce poverty.⁴² Kirchner propelled this strategy for growth through domestic industry in 2003 arguing that “it is imperative the promotion of an aggressive industrial policy . . . for creating jobs quickly. The re-industrialization is the key.”⁴³

Neo-developmentalism entails a new form of state activism, which becomes essential for establishing the macro-economic conditions that allows industrial expansion. The main stimulus for industrial recovery was the maintenance of a competitive exchange rate, the establishment of imports barriers and the implementation of policies that favored income distribution, mainly through substantive wages increases, in order to strengthen the domestic market.⁴⁴ The aim of this strategy was to reproduce the old virtuous circle of rising wages, a growing demand for industrial goods and increasing levels of employment.

The sustainability of neo-developmentalism depends on the strength of the industrial sector. In a peripheral country, which had experienced the onslaught of neo-liberalism, this view led inevitably to a strategy of import substitution, one perceived as being crucial to maintaining the pace of both industrial and employment recoveries. Certainly, neo-developmentalism values import substitution in terms of gaining autonomy from foreign sources, especially in those areas where the country has competitive advantages or an historical background.

In this way, the implementation of a neo-developmental strategy has had a positive impact on the reconstruction of the defense industry, since the rebuilding of this sector was perceived as an area that could contribute to job creation. The idea of defense as a promoter of economic and social development can be traced to past Presidential candidate Nestor Kirchner in 2003. “The military” he claimed, “can be an engine of development . . . in the framework of the implementation of a neo-Keynesian policy of productive reactivation.”⁴⁵ In the same line of argument, former Minister of Defense Nilda Garre sustained that, “in the political tradition from which I come, the defense cannot be excluded from the general welfare of the population.”⁴⁶

The strategy of import substitution has also included various defense sectors where Argentine has had previous experience, such as satellites, rockets, missiles, radars, and naval and aircraft construction. The command of these technologies is perceived not only as promoting autonomy but also as areas of expertise, which can also be used by civil industry. The potential of a military industry for the civilian sector is highlighted in the White Paper 2010, which states that, “defense industry should become an expansive instrument of productive capacities of the country.”⁴⁷

It should be emphasized that the perception of the positive impact of a defense industry for social and economic development is complemented by strategic considerations that highlight the importance of increasing autonomy in the design and command of advanced military technology. In this sense, the concentration of military and technological power is perceived by the neo-developmentalists as a factor that exacerbates the asymmetries in the international system. Although the reconstruction of the defense industry was mainly triggered by social concerns, the need to reduce the technological gap with major powers is also present.⁴⁸

Furthermore, the implementation of neo-developmentalism has promoted the increase in the military budget by way of the spillover effect, created by the need to expand aggregate demand. Neo-developmentalism involves substantive wage increases as a tool to increase aggregate demand, which is an essential condition to boost the internal market and industry. One of the

main indicators of this policy has been the revival of signed collective bargaining agreements, which in Argentina increased from 76 in 2000 to over 1600 in 2010.⁴⁹ Wage increases included in those agreements between 2003 and 2010 reached 700% in the textile sector, 560% in construction, and 421% for metalworkers, whereas state employees had an average increase of 400%.⁵⁰ Certainly, salary increases granted to state employees have also been applied to members of the armed services. For this reason, the budgetary impact of these increases has been significant, especially when the number of military and civilian personnel (more than 100,000) are taken into account, and the fact that 75% of defense spending goes on wages.

It should be noted that although wage increases have been the main factor accounting for the growth of the military budget, other considerations have begun to favor the rise of spending, such as the need to reverse the material deterioration caused by years of a lack of investment.⁵¹ This is related, in part, for the need of a military instrument adequate enough to confront the new conflict scenarios identified by the new defense doctrine. Accordingly, a reorganization of the defense budget is currently in motion, the main objective of which is to increase the availability of funds for weapon acquisition. This latter goal is going to be achieved not only by increasing the military budget but also through the reorganization of budget items. In line with this approach, the government recently announced Plan CAMIL, which increases the defense budget to 1.5% of GDP by 2020.⁵² There is also the policy of reducing the distortion between budget items (wages, operations, and acquisition of weapons). Certainly, 97% of the expenditure was allocated to pay wages and operations until 2003, a distribution that left few resources for acquisitions. Since then, the weight of the item, “wages”, in the budget has declined, reaching 76% in 2009 and 70% in 2012. The goal is to reach a proportion of 60% for wages, 15% for operations, and 25% for acquisitions by 2020.⁵³ If this plan is accomplished, there will be significant resources for the acquisition or local development of new military equipment.

The neo-developmental model is useful to explain two aspects of Argentina’s defense revival: the growth of the military budget and the reconstruction of the defense industry. The adoption of a new defense strategy, however, cannot be attributed only to that conception. In fact, neo-developmentalism has promoted the revival of defense in an indirect way: both the reconstruction of the defense industry and the growth of military spending have been the result of the implementation of a development model which is not primarily concerned with defense issues. In this way, the Argentine version of neo-developmentalism has not systematically established an approach for evaluating the risks or threats that the country may face.

A variable that may explain the revival of the cycle of defense is a particular type of civilian control which has been implemented since 2003. It should be noted that the relationship between civilian control and national defense has been, traditionally, a subject analyzed by theorists of civil–military relations. For instance, Huntington asserted that subjective civilian control jeopardizes security, whereas objective control tends to maximize it.⁵⁴ This conceptualization did not contemplate the possibility that the implemented type of control was the main cause for the absence of a defense strategy, as both subjective and objective civilian controls take for granted the existence of such a strategy.

The classification of types of civilian control developed by Harold Trinkunas could be useful to account for the relationship between civilian control and presence/absence of a defense strategy. Trinkunas discerns two types of civilian control: by containment; and by oversight. The first is defined in terms of, “governments with high leverage over the armed forces but low regime capacity.” In this kind of context, governments, “will not be able to create sophisticated mechanisms for overseeing military activities but will rather choose to confine these activities to narrow jurisdictional boundaries.”⁵⁵

Conversely, the civilian control by oversight only, “exists when politicians and bureaucrats are able to determine defense policies and approve military activities through an institutionalized

defense bureaucracy.”⁵⁶ In this sense, “governments are likely to institutionalize robust strategies to ensure both the exclusion of the armed forces from political activities and the active civilian supervision of military affairs.”⁵⁷ This kind of control requires the existence of a Ministry of Defense headed by civilians who can design, implement and oversee both the military and defense policies. This demands the development of an organizational structure within the Ministry that provides the institutional framework for the effective exercise of that control.⁵⁸ Conversely, in the case of control by containment, civilians tend to leave the design of missions and defense strategy in the hands of the military. The civilian role is confined to the approval, the rejection or the freezing of military plans.

Until 2003, Argentina’s military was considered to be controlled by containment. Patrice McSherry explains that during the 1990s the government granted a significant level of autonomy to the military for the management of its internal affairs.⁵⁹ This control was resented even more because of the institutional weakness that the Ministry of Defense suffered after the State’s reforms during the mid-1990s. This implied that the government delegated to the armed forces, among other things, the task of designing a defense strategy, even though it did little to promote or approve strategies designed by the military.⁶⁰

This type of civilian control began to be contested in 2003. The vision of the new Administration was that, “For years the management of defense issues was performed by civilian authorities that exerted the command in a formal way, leaving the real direction in military hands. This meant that the military was entrusted with the design of defense policies.”⁶¹ One of the major deficiencies identified by the incoming authorities was, “the absence of a strategic planning which linked the assessment of the international context with a national strategy of insertion and a model of military instrument for the medium and long term.”⁶² The political response given to such diagnosis was the implementation of “an effective civil government of the defense”, which would allow, in a second stage, the modernization of the whole system.

In this context, the introduction of the cycle of defense in 2006 can be understood as a policy response rooted in a new conception of control, whose main objective was the restoration of civilian oversight of all military activities. In this sense, decrees 1691 and 1729 can be analyzed as norms of control, which put into the hands of a civilian bureaucracy, within the Ministry of Defense, the responsibility for designing and implementing the planning cycle. This, in turn, became, as far as it was developed, a tool for the consolidation of civilian control. In other words, the need to reduce the degree of autonomy of the armed forces led to the launch of the cycle, which has become both a tool for supervision and civilian leadership of defense planning. Consequently, civilian control was institutionalized through the establishment of a regular practice: planning cycles driven by a Ministry of Defense and expanding substantively its monitoring capacities.⁶³

It should be noted that although the need for oversight may be useful to explain the establishment of the defense cycle, it is not helpful to account for its orientation. In this way, the type of control implemented does not explain why the defense of natural resources has become the focus of planning. It is contended that the emphasis on natural resources was adopted because it provides a response to three policy challenges in the area of defense: (a) the deficit of threats;⁶⁴ (b) the emerging needs of the process of regional cooperation of defense; and (c) the tensions existing between the Minister of Defense and the President.

Argentina has been experiencing a marked reduction of threats as a result of the peaceful resolution of all conflicts with neighboring countries. Moreover, the strategy toward the Malvinas’ issue is confined to the diplomatic realm and, finally, to worsen the deficit, its internal laws prohibit the participation of the military in domestic security. In a context where threats are hard to identify, the defense of natural resources solves the lack of an external threat problem, by incorporating a new mission for the military. This new mission does not contradict internal laws, nor affect relations with neighboring countries.

Moreover, the protection of natural resources is also functional and convergent with the process of regional cooperation in the realm of defense. South America has recently established the South American Defense Council (SADC), which is part of the Council of the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR). One of the goals of the SADC is the creation of a South American defense identity, including sub-regional and national interests.⁶⁵ To this end, the SADC created the South American Centre for Strategic Studies for Defence in Buenos Aires, which aims to, “promote the building of a common defence vision.”⁶⁶ Indeed, the UNASUR and the SADC have identified the protection of natural resources as one of the issues that could boost the process of regional cooperation in defense.⁶⁷ By adopting natural resources as the core of its defense doctrine, Argentina can actively participate and be a prominent protagonist in the process of regional defense cooperation, without negatively affecting its own defense. On the contrary, it could strengthen it.

The incorporation of natural resources in the case of Argentine can also be explained from the point of view of the tensions that normally arise between the Minister of Defense and the President. Although the Ministers have, “a near-monopoly” in policy design,⁶⁸ they are not always certain about Presidential preferences on specific issues. This is particularly true in matters of lesser importance for governmental action, where Presidential opinion or preferences are less well known, as in the cases of Nestor Kirchner and Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner regarding defense issues. Although the Ministers of Defense have an evident interest to design policies that will converge with Presidential preferences, this assumption requires their knowledge of Presidential views. In this way, the knowledge of the political career of the Presidents and its relationship with defense issues can be critical to Ministerial survival and to promote good relations.

The reconstruction of the Presidential political career can be useful for establishing the level of exposure to defense issues that Presidents have had. This in turn can be taken as an indicator of a more or less predisposition to certain defense topics. The level and type of exposition to defense matters may have determined the orientation taken by the cycle of defense, assuming that the Ministry of Defense knew that Presidential trajectory. In particular, the political experience of Nestor Kirchner and Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner during the 1980s and 1990s led them to develop a vision that favors the protection of territory and natural resources, especially in the Patagonia region. This was due to both leaders having spent the bulk of their political careers in the province of Santa Cruz, an area that had been exposed to war scares and territorial disputes over the last century. This is a vast region with a significant presence of military units, which had experienced the impending conflict with Chile in 1978 and intensively suffered during the Malvinas War in 1982, because of its geographical proximity to the theater of operations. It is also a zone that has been the subject of numerous territorial disputes with Chile, the last of which was resolved in 1994.

It is noteworthy that during that year, Nestor Kirchner led a campaign against the signing of a peace agreement with Chile on the basis of the defense of territory and protection of natural resources. Moreover, protecting the land and its resources has been present in the Kirchner campaign speech in 2003:

The *santacruceños* have always defended the land, and at times we feel that we were forgotten by left-wing sectors ... it seems that for some urban liberalism the discussion on our territory was a discussion of the last century, old and outdated ... when the *santacruceños* debated the issue of glaciers, they were not only defending the heritage of Santa Cruz, but of all Argentines.⁶⁹

On the importance of water as a natural resource Kirchner held that:

The state of poverty of a large percentage of world population is both a symptom and a cause of the water crisis ... only 2.53 percent of total water is sweet ... we can say that the amount of water for human uses has become scarce and this leads to a water crisis.⁷⁰

It can be claimed that the experience of both Presidents as politicians of a Patagonian province, sparsely populated and protected, with a history of wars and border conflicts and with vast natural resources may have contributed to the development of a favorable view on defense anchored in the importance of territory and the protection of their resources. In this way, it is possible to argue that the cycle of defense planning was forwarded by the Minister of Defense under the premise that it would be approved and welcomed by the President.⁷¹

The new interest in defense issues in Argentina cannot be accounted for by traditional variables. Although structural and social factors would have promoted the lack of interest in the past, their current persistence cannot explain the revival. This work has shown the importance of variables such as the ideology of the government or the type of civilian control, which have not previously been analyzed in the literature.

It could be argued that the recent increase in the diplomatic tension between Argentina and Great Britain for the Malvinas issue could be a structural cause for the new interest. This hypothesis, however, has several shortcomings. First, neo-developmentalism was implemented long before the current crisis; second, Argentina has consistently implemented a strategy of peaceful recovery of the islands since the return of democracy in 1983; and third, Argentina has not announced the purchase of relevant military equipment, despite having the financial resources to do so. Taken together, these factors indicate that the Malvinas issue cannot explain the new interest.

Perhaps one of the most plausible questions to ask is about the sustainability of the revival. Argentina is a country that has experienced severe difficulties in maintaining long-term policies. The neo-developmental strategy can therefore be quickly abandoned by a new government. If this happens, it is possible to expect that social and structural factors will again promote a lack of defense interest. In other words, the new interest may last as long as neo-developmentalism.

Notes

1. Defense issues are defined as the set of actions taken by a state to ensure its survival against perceived threats. In this regard, defense policy has normative and material dimensions. While the first is related to the establishment of a strategy or defense doctrine; the second is concerned with the material consequences of the first, for instance, in terms of the deployment of new military units or the acquisition of weapons. D. Norden, 'Civilian Authority without Civilian Dominance? Assessing Venezuelan Political-Military Relations under Chávez', *Nueva Sociedad* 213 (2008): 213.
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