

1987

The Military in South American Politics

Russell W. Ramsey

George Philip

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review>

Recommended Citation

Ramsey, Russell W. and Philip, George (1987) "The Military in South American Politics," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 40 : No. 2 , Article 35.

Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol40/iss2/35>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Naval War College Review by an authorized editor of U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. For more information, please contact repository.inquiries@usnwc.edu.

The study is generally convincing in its analysis but somewhat disappointing in its conclusion. It yields to the temptation to seek easy answers in the realm of theory and idealism, and fails to grapple with those real-world alternatives essential to a viable solution. The formulation and acceptance of a body of international law is the primary proposal offered to the dilemma of how to eliminate competition over natural resources as a source of international conflict. Although a noble ideal, it ignores the fact that war is traditionally preceded by the violation of laws and treaties. A nation deprived of the resources it perceives to be essential to its survival will not be deterred by mere rhetoric, however binding it may appear to the world at large. Only when that nation can be persuaded that cooperation in the preservation of natural resources is in *its* national interest will it abide by international law.

For those who seek confirmation through data and analysis that world resource competition sows the seeds of conflict, this study merits review. Of particular value are the appendixes that provide a bibliography, a review of wars and skirmishes involving natural resources and various international treaties.

BETTY J. PRICE
Major, U.S. Air Force

Helm, Ltd., 1985. 394pp. \$37.50

Professor Edwin Lieuwen wrote, in 1960, that "on the general subject of militarism in Latin America no important books have yet appeared." Six years later, Professor Lyle McAlister agreed with him when he wrote in the *Latin American Research Review* that "The Political role of the military [in Latin America] was acknowledged, described and deplored, but its institutional and societal bases were not regarded as worthy of [by scholars] or susceptible to systematic analysis. Under these conditions, it is hardly surprising that no 'important books' appeared."

An important book by Professor George Philip, of the London School of Economics and the University of London's Institute of Latin American Studies has appeared. His first two chapters summarize previous articles, books, and intellectual main currents, reinforcing McAlister's point of two decades before, that North American scholars view the military forces of Latin America as historically invalid institutions which retard the growth of democracy, often with help from the Pentagon. Professor Philip then offers chapters in which he argues compellingly that the military institutions are unique within the region and that specific historical patterns, which he portrays as socioeconomic trends, caused these military institutions to exist and adapt to change. The final section is a country-by-country portrayal of the military institution, written to show the counterpoint between socioeconomic challenge and military insti-

Philip, George. *The Military in South American Politics*. London: Croom

tutional response which is the author's thesis.

The sections on Cuba, Nicaragua, and Panama are brilliant, deriving a subset of institutional variables for the Central American region. The sections on South America focus heavily on Brazil, Argentina, Chile, and Peru. Collectively, they portray the author's "corporatist" model for the South American military forces, in contrast with the "partisan ethic" which he considers determinative in Central America.

Mexico and Colombia are sadly absent. Few statistics are offered on such topics as Latin America's admirably minute history of border wars, protracted wars, and mass mobilizations in comparison with other world regions. The influence of the European military missions and the internal sharing of that influence among the South American countries receive treatment from Professor Philip, but the early Hispanic ethic of the military priesthood, a la Alcántara, Calatrava, and Santiago, is absent.

For American readers the book needs to be retitled *The Military in Latin American Politics*, since Central America and the Caribbean are excluded from the notion of "South America" as Europeans view it. For all students of the Western Hemisphere south of the Rio Grande, the book is required reading—historiography, institutional history, political science, and economics all require it.

Things may have changed in the United States since sociologist Edward B. Glick wrote, in 1971,

"Conventional [U.S.] campus wisdom to the contrary, studying the military . . . does not automatically make you a Dr. Strangelove." The anti-intellectual emotionalism evidenced among U.S. academics on current military events in Central America since 1977 suggests that analytical scholarship on the western shore of the Atlantic significantly trails its counterpart thrust on the east bank. So Professor George Philip's book is also required reading for all U.S. Government officials who deal with foreign policy, and for the general citizenry who care.

In my early days of doctoral study on Latin America, I remember Professor McAlister, that doughty self-proclaimed descendant of Scottish shepherders, saying, "Some of my colleagues forget that the Latin American countries are entitled to have armies if they want to." Now, from London, comes Professor George Philip, telling both how and why with meticulous facts and sound reasoning.

DR. RUSSELL W. RAMSEY
Albany, Georgia

Alvarez, A. *Offshore: A North Sea Journey*. Boston, Mass.: Houghton Mifflin, 1986. 190pp. \$15.95

Send a poet/*New Yorker* writer to the North Sea oil patch and you expect a diatribe about oil company rapine, oil spills, and the like. Instead, *Offshore: A North Sea Journey*, by A. Alvarez, is full of the fascination men have for large-scale technological marvels—the awe inspired in a five-