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CURBING MILITARISM IN MEXICO

By EDWIN LIEUWEN*

PROBABLY no country in Latin America has suffered longer and more deeply from the curse of predatory militarism than Mexico. More than a thousand armed uprisings plagued this unfortunate republic in her initial century of nationhood. Here were compounded nearly all the evils and vices associated with undisciplined, irresponsible armed bodies of men on the loose. The word "army" in the popular mind more often than not was equated with criminality, delinquency, ignorance, robbery, violence, and corruption.

The sword and the rifle were the weapons of politics as opportunistic officers ruptured the Constitution and the law with impunity and provoked civil wars. The political turmoil engendered economic chaos—rampant speculation of public funds, disequilibrium in the national budget, bankruptcy for the state, and the loss of public credit abroad. The vigor of the private sector of the economy, especially small industry and incipient commerce, was sapped by burdensome taxes and duties, confiscations, monetary mismanagement and the loss of public confidence. Thus the parasitic military caste made appreciably more harsh the already deep social miseries of the Mexican people.

Mexico has been able to rid itself of the shackles of militarism. No Latin American army was more political until a quarter century ago. Today the armed forces are virtually apolitical. Mexico has thus moved from one extreme to the other.

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Although militarism was not actually born until after Mexico achieved independence, the seeds were sown and the gestation period was well advanced by the end of the colonial era. The Spanish monarchs had long fostered the growth of a military caste by generally restricting commissions to men of social position and by endowing the officers' corps with special legal privileges. Clever and ambitious young men of limited material means utilized the career of arms as an opportunity for self enrichment.¹ Officership was not a profession, it was a privilege. A late Eighteenth Century observer noted:

. . . the king had more officers than privates . . . [and] that most of the former purchased their place to mock justice, to escape paying debts, to indulge in gaming and live a life of libertinage under the protection of the epaulettes. . . .²

In such an army standards of military honor could mean little, so it was an easy matter for the leaders of the independence movement to get a large fraction of the officer corps to betray their sworn allegiance to the king in exchange for quick promotions and new opportunities for graft. Many young captains in the Spanish army were advanced to the rank of general in the Mexican army as a reward for persuading a large number of privates to desert with them.³ Thus did the revolutionists succeed on May 18, 1821.

However, with the dissolution of royal authority, the breakdown of discipline in the armed forces was accelerated. Three months after independence was declared, an audacious young officer led a march on the constituent Congress and set himself up as Emperor Augustín I. Thus there began the tragic pattern of undisciplined, irresponsible, opportunistic and ambitious army officers competing amongst each other for short-cuts to wealth, power, and influence.

1. Lucas Alamán, *Historia de méjico* (Mexico City, 5 vols, 1849-1852), IV: 445-448.

2. Hipolito Villaroel, *México por dentro y fuera bajo el gobierno de los virreyes, o sea enfermedades políticas* (Mexico City, 1831), p. 170.

3. Alamán, *op cit.*, V; Ernest Gruening, *Mexico and its Heritage* (New York, 1928), p. 289-291. Lyle N. McAlister has concluded that the "privileges granted the army of New Spain were probably the most important factor in the creation of the praetorian tradition." See his "*Fuero Militar*" in *New Spain* (Univ. of Florida Press, Gainesville, 1957), pp. 14-15.

For nearly sixty years the political processes were dominated by military violence. Hundreds of barracks uprisings and rebellions, led by army officers and backed by the political out-groups, occurred. Incumbent regimes were toppled by military force at an average of better than once per year.⁴ Predatory militarism was rampant. In 1821, there were nearly five thousand officers for the eight thousand enlisted men stationed in the capital. In 1823, when the total government revenues were five million dollars, the armed forces budget was nine million. During Mexico's first quarter century of independence, the military budget exceeded government revenues two out of every three years.⁵

The armed forces were completely beyond civilian control. Their legal privileges and exemptions of the colonial era continued in force. On threat of rebellion, they demanded and got the lion's share of the budget. The philosophy that predominated among the ambitious is described by Gruening as follows:

. . . good faith, merit, constancy and hard work were not only unappreciated but detrimental to an ambitious young man. Chicanery brought richer rewards. A lieutenant who participated in half a dozen *cuartelazos* [barrack uprisings] almost certainly emerged a general. A successful *levantamiento* [uprising] erased a previous defalcation. The risks were not great—except for a few hours—and far preferable to years of patient drudgery. Thus was the atmosphere of public life vitiated. Honorable men had no chance in it, for the successful tricksters wanted men of like stamp to further their common base ends. Even civilians were given high army commissions. So the officer caste grew, exempt from and above the civil law, an arrogant coterie of debauchées, reveling by night and conspiring by day.⁶

The most notorious of these predatory military adventurers was General López de Santa Anna. For over a quarter of a century, he capriciously made and unmade governments. In fact, the political narrative of Mexico up to 1855 can practically be written as the history of General Santa Anna's revolutions.

4. Frank Tannenbaum, *Peace by Revolution* (New York, 1933), pp. 75-76, 92-93.

5. Alamán, *op. cit.*, V: 499; Francisco Bulnes, *Las grandes mentiras de nuestra historia* (Mexico City, 1904), pp. 210-211.

6. *Op. cit.*, p. 26.

In the 1850's and 1860's, a group of civilians led by Benito Juárez began to make some progress in curbing militarism and subordinating the military to civil authority. After a generation of conflict over this issue, a military man, General Porfirio Díaz, finally established control over the army and achieved political stability. Frank Tannenbaum explains he did this "by replacing instability and disorganized violence with tyranny and organized violence."⁷

Pacifying and disciplining the hitherto untractable officer corps took patience, astuteness, and application of a liberal variety of Machiavellian techniques. Those rivals too dangerous to crush immediately, Díaz quieted by providing them with unlimited opportunities for graft and plunder. Those he was prepared to tackle, he deliberately offended, then crushed and exiled them. Gradually, but steadily, he ousted one quarter of the army's one hundred generals and dismissed some four hundred officers of lower rank. He attempted to purchase the loyalty of the remainder by granting them generous salaries and expense accounts and providing them with opportunities for self-enrichment. To further insure their fidelity, he established a system of shifting commands in the nation's eleven newly organized military zones. To prevent any officer from gaining the personal allegiance of a large body of enlisted men, he extended this periodic change of officer duty down to the regimental level. Potential rivals were "promoted" to governorships or cashiered on charges of corruption. By 1892, after a dozen years of effort, the army was finally under Díaz's firm control.⁸

That Díaz was able to accomplish the miracle of disciplining the Mexican army was certainly a tribute to his courage, astuteness and administrative talents, but it was largely the great influx of foreign capital in the late nineteenth century which came in partly as a result of Díaz's initial pacification that enabled the dictator to provide his would-be rivals with the material benefits so essential to keeping subdued their latent aspirations for political power.

7. Frank Tannenbaum, *Mexico; the Struggle for Peace and Bread* (New York, 1950) pp. 81-82.

8. Carleton Beals, *Porfirio Díaz* (Philadelphia, 1932), pp. 223-255, 237, 289; Hubert Herring, *A History of Latin America* (New York, 1955), p. 342.

In addition, the rapid development of modern communications made it far easier to stamp out incipient rebellions. Also, much of the material gain of the officer corps was at the expense of the enlisted men. The latter were a miserable lot of conscripts, virtually imprisoned in the barracks, poorly fed, ill-housed, and subjected to cruel punishment and crude exploitation. Thus, the problem of disciplining the officer corps aside, Díaz really brought about no intrinsic change in Mexico's armed forces.⁹ They were adequate, along with the *rurales* (mounted constabulary) for performing police functions and quelling isolated disturbances, but when the popular revolution broke out in 1910, the vaunted capabilities of the Díaz army and the asserted loyalty of its officer corps proved to be fictitious. The army in reality proved to be but a fragile shell.

On the eve of the 1910 revolution when the total population was about fourteen million, the Mexican army consisted of some four thousand officers, twenty thousand enlisted men, and four thousand rural mounted police. The army was organized on a definite caste system. It was generally officered by upper and upper-middle group white officers, most of whom were graduates of the Chapultepec military school, which turned out about sixty cadets annually. Contemporary observers were impressed with the quality of the school and character of its cadets. However, it ought to be noted that although there was some incidental French influence and German equipment in the army, Mexico did not employ a foreign military mission and rarely sent her officers abroad to study. Consequently she was backward in modern military techniques and equipment. The ranks were predominantly filled with primitive Indian stock generally brought in by forced conscription, and they included a goodly number of miserable vagabonds, beggars and criminals. The small navy was weak and insignificant.¹⁰ Ostensibly, the mission of the armed forces was to repel foreign invaders; its actual mission

9. Gruening, *op. cit.*, pp. 301-302; Herring, *op. cit.*, p. 342.

10. Chas. M. Jerram, *Armies of the World* (London, 1899), pp. 206-207, 299; Thomas A. Janvier, "The Mexican Army," in *The Armies of Today* (New York, 1893), pp. 366-396; Percy A. Martin, *Mexico in the Twentieth Century* (London, 2 vols, 1907), II: 42-43.

was to crush all internal opposition to Díaz and perpetuate the dictator in power. It really lacked the capabilities for doing either.

The storm that broke in 1910 was not just another local rebellion or barracks revolt, but rather a fundamental social revolution with broad popular participation. Ultimately it was to bring about sweeping social and economic change, as well as political change. All the same, Mexico was to return once more to the chaotic pre-Díaz military conditions. Again irresponsible militarism was to hold sway over politics and to prey upon the nation's economy and society.

The 1910 electoral dispute was the spark that set aflame the latent popular antagonism to the Díaz regime. Generally under the leadership of middle group citizens who gathered small bands of followers about them, uprisings began to occur spontaneously in scattered areas, and the movement began to snowball. When the weakness of the regular army became apparent, an increasing number of officers deserted the regime and joined the revolutionary forces. They were impressed both by the power of the revolutionary forces and the pressure of public opinion. Their object obviously was to emerge on the winning side.¹¹ With the help of the regulars, the Díaz regime was thus overthrown and Francisco Madero assumed the presidency. Almost immediately, however, he was plagued by the problem of the army. Only the regulars loyal to Díaz had been crushed, but most of the army had joined in ousting Díaz and now claimed their rewards. However, they were challenged by revolutionary citizen-generals who were demanding to be made generals in the regular army.¹² Madero made the mistake of siding with the regulars and disbanding the revolutionary army. His reward was assassination at the hands of former Díaz henchmen, and General Victoriano Huerta thereupon attempted to reimpose a Díaz-type regime.

This action not only outraged and stirred to action the former revolutionary generals but stimulated the rise of new

11. Gruening, *op. cit.*, p. 302; Tannenbaum, *Mexico; the Struggle for Peace and Bread*, pp. 62-63.

12. Charles Cumberland, *Mexican Revolution; Genesis under Madero* (Austin, 1952), pp. 159-160; Silva Herzog, *op. cit.*, pp. 28-29.

leaders as well. And thus the Constitutionalist army was formed in March of 1913. In this force one found almost no regulars, but rather civilian leaders like Alvaro Obregón who displayed a natural talent for soldiering, and skilled military adventurers like Pancho Villa. A former state governor, Venustiano Carranza, assumed command of the movement. The revolutionary force drove down from the North, virtually annihilated the regulars and took command of the capital.

But the citizen-generals were no more immune to political rivalry and ambition than their old class-conscious predecessors. Almost immediately, the victors were squabbling over the spoils. Militarism returned to Mexico with vengeance as Pancho Villa, whose private army was even larger than the entire regular army had been under Díaz, challenged Carranza's authority. Only by making use of apolitical, professional regular officers, and by enlisting the support of popular labor and agrarian forces through promises of real social reform, was Carranza able to crush Villa in March of 1915.

Though Carranza was now the dominant force, he by no means had absolute control. The nation was armed to the teeth and equipped with a superabundance of improvised generals. The regular army had disappeared, but there was no real national army to take its place. Instead there were a whole series of separate revolutionary armies, each claiming a large degree of autonomous power.

Carranza had tried desperately to establish firm centralized control of the army but was finally forced to sanction a certain measure of regional autonomy. Then too, he was overly tolerant of the excesses committed by a large, irresponsible group of "loyal" young officers in the capital. This, along with Carranza's attempt to dictate his successor, turned Generals Obregón, Calles and the bulk of the army against him. He was driven from office and murdered by one of his closest military colleagues.¹³

1920 is a key year in the evolution of Mexico's armed forces. It marks the last successful military coup in Mexico's

13. Gruening, *op. cit.*, p. 311-315; Tannenbaum, *Mexico; the Struggle for Peace and Bread*, pp. 62-63.

history. The militarism of the revolutionary period had reached its high point; and ever since it has steadily declined. The Mexican army, one of the most political and unprofessional in all Latin America in 1920, evolved gradually into one of the most apolitical and professional by the year 1940. Credit for this reform must go mainly to four strong revolutionary generals (Obregón, Calles, Amaro, and Cárdenas) who together spent an entire generation accomplishing this extremely difficult task.

What was the army like in 1920? After ten years of revolutionary turbulence the curse of militarism upon the Mexican political scene was worse than ever. Carranza had been unable to bridle the generals. Around 80,000 men, or more than double the number of 1910, were under arms. The army still consisted of poorly organized and badly disciplined, semi-autonomous revolutionary bands and was notoriously overstaffed. The ranks were filled by a motley volunteer assortment of adventurers, vagabonds, bandits, and loyal personal followers of various revolutionary leaders. There were no regulation uniforms, arms, training, or tactics. The size of the army rose and fell in response to political ambitions of the revolutionary leaders.

The officer corps, a most unprofessional body, was headed by the scandalously young, bellicose generals of the revolution. Though there were some Díaz trained professionals scattered through the various units, they wielded relatively little influence in comparison to the victorious political officers of the revolution. The latter, of course, were completely without professional training and were ignorant of modern military science and orthodox techniques of training, tactics, organization and discipline.¹⁴

The main tasks facing the central government were somehow to curb the regional caudillos, to cut down on the heavy annual military expenditures, to reorganize the army, to begin building it into a truly national institution. To inaugurate this difficult program there was probably no better man than General Obregón, one of the best of the revolutionary gen-

14. Vicente Blasco Ibañez, *El militarismo mejicano* (Valencia, 1920), pp. 177-192; Virginia Prewitt, "The Mexican Army," in *Foreign Affairs*, Apr. 1941, pp. 609-612.

erals and the man who succeeded Carranza as president. His heroic role in the revolution had gained him a broad popular following and great prestige in the army. He alone commanded sufficient respect combined with the necessary force of character to have a chance of tethering the young mustang generals of the revolution. He somehow had to convince them that the army was no longer a revolutionary instrument, and that henceforth their careers depended upon their loyalty and service to the incumbent government.¹⁵

Obregón moved cautiously but deliberately to establish control at the center. His first major move was to incorporate all the revolutionary generals into the regular army and put them on the federal payroll. However, these attempts to extend his authority provoked resistance among a number of generals who believed their real interest lay in a continuance of semi-autonomy and unbridled militarism. The Obregón government was very nearly toppled by the de la Huerta-led generals' conspiracy of 1923.¹⁶ However, Obregón promptly followed up his narrow victory by a thorough purge of all suspects. Many officers were shot, others were sent into exile, and a number of the vacancies were filled by young professionals coming out of the newly organized officer training school. For Obregón, in addition to curbing militarism, had energetically promoted professionalism. Already under Carranza, in 1917, he had set up a general staff school, in which officers of the revolution received technical training from Díaz regime officers. And when he became President in 1920, he reopened the old Colegio Militar at Chapúltepec for new young officers. A three-year curriculum was established offering specialization for infantry, cavalry, or artillery officers.¹⁷ In addition he began dispatching promising young officers to Spain, France, Germany, and the United States to study modern military methods and techniques. He also succeeded in easing the military burden on the federal budget

15. Tannenbaum, *Mexico; the Struggle for Peace and Bread*, p. 63; Gruening, *op. cit.*, pp. 319-322; Prewitt, *loc. cit.*, p. 612.

16. Gruening, *op. cit.*, pp. 319-322; Tannenbaum, *Mexico; the Struggle for Peace and Bread*, p. 63.

17. Prewitt, *loc. cit.*, p. 613; Fritz Epstein, *Foreign Military Missions in Latin America* (Manuscript in Library of Congress, Washington, 1944), p. 206.

by reducing the size of the army and curbing graft and corruption. Expenditures for the armed forces were reduced from 142 million pesos in 1921 to 117 million in 1924. Obregón had thus made progress in resolving the army problem, but militarism was to remain a major problem for his successors, for in the course of crushing the Huerta revolt, he found it expedient to promote twenty-three generals and create fifty-four new ones in order to insure their loyalty.¹⁸

General Calles' views on the army problem, though similar to Obregón's, were somewhat more advanced than those of his predecessor. Obregón had operated on his backlog of personal prestige capital, but Calles, who was far less of a personal hero among the revolutionary officers, initially sought to de-emphasize *personalismo* and instill in the army a sense of professional, apolitical patriotism. This, he correctly believed, was the only real cure for the disease of militarism. The man he selected as his Secretary of War to transform Mexico's still semi-feudal army into a truly national body was Joaquín Amaro, a young Indian general of the revolution whose pro-professional and anti-militaristic zeal was unmatched.

For six years, War Minister Amaro was given a free hand to straighten out the army, and he did a truly remarkable job.¹⁹ Wisely avoiding a direct challenge to old revolutionary generals he was ultimately determined to break, he began his reforms in the ranks by inaugurating a government-sponsored program to improve recruiting standards, living conditions, and military equipment. He also launched an educational and recreational program. He hoped this would pay off in patriotism and loyalty to the central government rather than to the regional caudillos. One method used by Amaro was to disband the most unreliable armed groups as well as the least desirable individuals within groups. In this manner he was also able to achieve his aim of curbing military expenditures. By 1930, he had reduced the size of the army from about 75,000 to 50,000, and military expendi-

18. Gruening, *op. cit.*, pp. 322-323.

19. Carleton Beals, "The Indian who Sways Mexico's Destiny," in *New York Times*, Dec. 7, 1930, V:3.

tures from 107 million pesos to 70 million. He also put the army to work by employing the troops on road building and other public works projects.²⁰

Of course, to discipline and organize the armed peasants so that they would be a dependable military asset in times of internal crises, the cooperation of the officer corps was necessary. Again General Amaro avoided a direct onslaught on the revolutionary generals; instead he bored in from the bottom. He stepped-up the training of young officers abroad and sent missions to France, Spain, Italy and the United States to study foreign military organization and methods.

These officers, upon returning to Mexico, became Amaro's advisors, and they assisted him in the job of building up a more efficient general staff organization. The first step toward this end was taken in 1926 with the creation of a Commission of Military Studies, the final one in 1932 with the organization of a War College, under French professional influence, to train the superior senior officers for general staff duty.²¹ Meanwhile, the newly organized Colegio Militar was being rapidly improved as the officer trainees began returning from abroad to provide modern technical instruction to the cadets. The latter, upon receiving their commission, would be deliberately assigned to regiments of doubtful loyalty, the obvious object being to impose this loyal government officer between the revolutionary general and his private army.²²

Once all these reforms were well advanced by Amaro, General Calles was ready to challenge the generals. He deliberately provoked them by launching a policy of shifting commands. This was the crucial step in breaking the force of *personalismo* and militarism amongst the revolutionary generals. There was resistance to this policy, as Calles and Amaro expected, but they were ready for it. The first conspiracy came in 1927 and the regime promptly crushed it and dis-

20. *Ibid.*; Prewitt, *loc. cit.*, p. 613; Gruening, *op. cit.*, p. 322; Mexico. Ministerio de Guerra y Marina, *Memoria*, 1930/31 (p. 10), 1931/32 (p. 10).

21. Epstein, MS cited, p. 206; Mexico. Min. de Guerra y Marina, *Memoria*, 1930/31, pp. 9-10; Mexico. Min. de Guerra y Marina, *Dirreccion General de Educacion Militar, Los estudios de la escuela superior de guerra* (Mexico City, 1934), pp. 24-25, 65, 73-175.

22. Tannenbaum, *Mexico; The Struggle for Peace and Bread*, p. 91; Beals, "The Indian who Sways Mexico's Destiny," *loc. cit.*, p. 8; Virginia Prewitt, *Reportage on Mexico* (New York, 1941), p. 76.

missed all the conspiring generals. Another revolt came in 1929, the so-called Escobar rebellion, and the result was the same. Thousands of loyal peasant troops came quickly to the government's assistance.²³

The success of the Obregón-Calles reforms is revealed by the declining magnitude of officer defection. In the 1923 outbreak, nearly half supported the rebels, but in 1927 less than a quarter did, and when the final major attempt occurred in 1938, the rebelling caudillo received practically no outside support. Calles thus had broken the power of the regional caudillos. The most dangerous hurdle in bringing about a genuine military reform had now been completed. To his successor, General Lázaro Cárdenas, would go the task of completing the job. There was still much to be done, but the key obstacle had been overcome. The day of the military chieftain, the regional caudillo, had passed.

After Calles crushed the Escobar rebellion, he rapidly consolidated his dictatorship, arranged for a figurehead to succeed him, and he remained the real power behind the scenes until 1934. Since General Cárdenas was also hand-picked by Calles, most people expected the Callista dictatorship to continue. But the new president, also a general of the revolution, soon asserted and won his independence. Essentially the source of the trouble was that Cárdenas insisted on deepening the revolution by sweeping land, labor, and social reforms, whereas Calles saw the government's task as simply that of pacifying the country and consolidating the completed revolution.

The break between the two revolutionary generals came in June 1935, when Cárdenas openly refused to accept Calles' suggestions on economic and political policies. The outcome depended primarily on the army. Calles still had the support of most of the active revolutionary generals, but Cárdenas had the backing of a few of the more influential generals, plus that of most of the young elements in the army—both officers and men. In addition he had much the broader popular backing. The tension continued to mount in the latter half

23. Prewitt, "The Mexican Army," *loc. cit.*, p. 13; Beals, "The Indian who Sways Mexico's Destiny," *loc. cit.*, p. 8.

of 1935 until December 15, when Cárdenas suddenly began dismissing pro-Calles senators and top generals, including General Joaquín Amaro. The victory was completed in April of 1936 when Calles himself and a number of supporting generals were forced into exile.²⁴

Cárdenas knew he had little chance of getting the army's cooperation with respect to his plans for land and labor reform. For one thing, many revolutionary generals had utilized the opportunities of the post-1914 turmoil to make themselves large property owners and big businessmen. Naturally they would be antagonistic to reforms that might affect their vested interests. Then there was the growing natural conservatism of devoted professionals like Amaro, who felt that Cárdenas' radical policies would give rise to domestic disturbances and thus undo the great progress already made to pacification of the country and consolidation of the revolution.²⁵ Thus in anticipation of expected army resistance to his policies, Cárdenas began to build up powerful labor and agrarian organizations to serve as counterpoises to the army. He played down the role of the military as the guardian of internal order, instead put the emphasis upon the army's pedagogical and public works functions. He refused to increase the size of the regular army, instead proposed to organize all agrarians into reserves for the Federal army and supported the formation of an independent labor militia. He revealed his apprehension over ambitious generals by shifting commands frequently, by building up support in the ranks through new material and educational benefits, and by providing promising young soldiers the opportunity to become officers.²⁶

Cárdenas also did his utmost to spur professionalism and remove the army from politics. In 1934 he inaugurated a six-year program for "the moral and professional advance of the

24. *New York Times*, June 23 (IV:11), Dec. 16 (p. 21), Dec. 22 (IV:6), 1935, & Apr. 11, 1936 (p. 1); Tannenbaum, *Mexico; the Struggle for Peace and Bread*, pp. 74-76, 82-84.

25. *New York Times*, Dec. 22, 1935, IV:6; Frank Kluckhohn, "The Army Keeps Hold in Mexico," in *New York Times*, May 29, 1948, IV:6.

26. Kluckhohn, "The Army Keeps Hold in Mexico," *loc. cit.*, IV:5; *New York Times*, July 18 (p. 7) & Aug. 17 (p. 2), 1935; Prewitt, "The Mexican Army," *loc. cit.*, p. 614.

army." The following year, all infantry officers below the rank of colonel were given examinations in military science, and those who failed them were sent back to school. In 1936 he made competitive technical examinations a requisite for officer promotion, and that same year he issued a reglamento which specifically proscribed all forms of political activity for officers. The following year, he made it mandatory that officers on active duty give up all civilian employment.²⁷

His master stroke at the army's political power came in December of 1937 when he organized a new federated revolutionary party composed of four equal sectors—labor, peasant, military and popular. When his critics accused him of bringing the army into politics he replied: "We did not put the army in politics. It was already there. In fact, it had been dominating the situation, and we did well to reduce its influence to one vote out of four."²⁸ Thus the army could now be always outvoted. Cárdenas and the party leaders could curb its accustomed political strength by balancing it off against the other three sectors.²⁹

The President's military reforms and his radical land and labor policies provoked a certain amount of rightist reaction. General Nicolás Rodríguez, leader of the "Gold Shirts," an incipient Fascist movement in northern Mexico, tried to start an uprising but could get no army backing. The movement was easily crushed by the Cárdenas regime and the general was arrested and deposed. Similarly General Laura Rocha's "Anti-soviet" campaign in the west, in the states of Guadalajara and Jalisco, against Cárdenas' socialistic agrarian and education plans were more annoying than dangerous to the stability of the regime.³⁰ A far more serious threat came from General Saturnino Cedillo, the last of the regional caudillos. Breaking with Cárdenas in 1937, over both personal and policy differences, Cedillo resigned from the cabinet and returned to his native state of San Luis Potosi and began

27. Ministerio de Guerra y Marina, *Memoria*, 1933/34 (pp. 10-13), 1934/35 (p. 14), 1935/36 (p. 16); Mexico. Presidente, *Reglamento general de deberes militares* (Mexico City, 1936); Prewitt, "The Mexican Army," *loc. cit.*, p. 614.

28. Wm. C. Townshend, *Lázaro Cárdenas* (Ann Arbor, 1952), p. 216.

29. Prewitt, *Reportage on Mexico*, pp. 167-169.

30. *New York Times*, Feb. 11 (p. 4), Mar. 24 (p. 8), Aug. 12 (p. 2), 1936.

drilling his personal army of an estimated 8,000 to 15,000 armed peasants. But again, army defection was not forthcoming, and Cárdenas, taking personal command in the field, had little trouble in crushing the uprising in the spring of 1938, thereby enhancing the prestige and authority of the central government.

Despite their unwillingness to join an armed revolt, a number of the top revolutionary generals and a certain number of the new professional officers continued to balk and protest against Cárdenas' radical land and labor policies. They were especially apprehensive about the extremist new breed of labor leaders like Lombardo Toledano and about the formation of a uniformed workers' militia which outnumbered the army by nearly two to one. A congressional bloc, led partly by revolutionary generals, bitterly fought the Cárdenas-sponsored legislation proposing to strengthen the agrarians and the labor unions.³¹ The army's fear of the rising power of labor was revealed in the following public statement released by a group of army colonels on June 29, 1938:

Lombardo Toledano cannot hide now that he seeks the dissolution of the revolutionary army, and one proof of this is the formation of the so-called workers' militia in order to install a proletarian dictatorship in Mexico. The army is tired of the anti-army calumny by labor leaders like Lombardo who are seeking to fool the workers into starting a fight like that in Spain. The Mexican public may have the secure knowledge that the military officers will put an end to the calumny and violence of perverse leaders who are exploiters of the working class. In good time the army officers will answer their aggressors. We wish it to be known that if our brother officers, in defense of our armed institutions, punish Lombardo we are not guilty since we have been provoked.³²

Army-labor tensions seemed to be moving towards a crisis in the summer of 1938. In a very real sense the issue was one of control of the party, the revolution, and the state. The battle was between the old Revolutionary army generals in the north, who had been dominant since Carranza's victory in

31. *Ibid.*, May 2, 1938, p. 2; Kluckhohn, "The Army Keeps Hold in Mexico," *loc. cit.*, IV :5.

32. *New York Times*, June 30, 1938, p. 15.

1914, and the rising new political elements (the agrarians, or peasantry, and the urban workers) at the center. The latter had grown to maturity during the mid-1930's and were now, with Cárdenas' backing, challenging the generals. Toledano's central Confederation of Labor boldly attacked General Juan Yocupicio, the anti-labor military governor of the State of Sonora, and demanded his dismissal. The Revolutionary Party, no longer controlled by the generals, since Cárdenas reorganized it into four equal sectors in late 1937, moved to expel congressional generals, like Ramon Iturbe, who seemed to be resisting labor-agrarian advances. The CTM's aggressiveness in Monterrey, Mexico's leading industrial center, prompted General Andreu Almazán, the regional military commander, the highest ranking officer in the army and one of the ablest of all the old revolutionary generals, to call on Cárdenas and urge him to curb the activities of labor.³³

Cárdenas refused to intervene in behalf of his old colleagues, and the lines were thus drawn up for the 1940 political battle. On one side, now outvoted and therefore outside the official party, were ranged the old leaders of the revolution and the conservative landed and business interests. Their candidate was General Almazán. Thirty-four high ranking officers, mostly old generals of the revolution, took leave from active service to campaign for him. The official party also had a general as candidate, Avila Camacho, Cárdenas' Secretary of Defense. But Camacho was no revolutionary hero; instead he represented new labor and agrarian forces. Cárdenas chose Camacho to run because the latter's hold over the younger professional officers gave him the best chance of combatting the army support still enjoyed by the old revolutionary generals' clique.

General Almazán and his supporters were well aware that they had no chance of winning elections managed by the incumbents. Consequently, he began making charges of electoral fraud early in the campaign. He accused the Cárdenas regime of "imposition" of an unwanted official candidate on the people. He issued various warnings and made veiled

33. *Ibid.*, July 17 (p. 22), Aug. 11 (p. 6) & Oct. 16 (p. 33), 1938.

threats at revolt, but the bulk of the army, in contrast to the past, seemed thoroughly bored by politics. The result was that the election was no contest at all, and the threats of Almazán and his supporters were empty ones. General Camacho and the labor-agrarian backed official party won handily over the revolutionary generals and their conservative backers. Several minor post-election conspiracies by the losers were easily quelled.³⁴ Thus the shift had been completed. Control of Mexico's politics had been taken away from the generals of the revolution and placed in the hands of the new, popular labor-agrarian forces. Camacho delivered the final blows to the political generals soon after his inauguration when he eliminated the military sector from the official party, broke up the military block in Congress, and placed a number of revolutionary generals on the retired list.³⁵

Militarism finally throttled, and internal order no longer a serious problem, the Mexican Army could now throw its emphasis upon the more orthodox function of modern armies—namely to protect the nation against possible foreign enemies. And it was primarily for this purpose that the armed forces build-up, with United States assistance and cooperation, occurred during World War II. Under President Camacho, the armed forces were further reorganized, modernized, and professionalized. With the general stability, the accelerated economic development, and the increasing strength and influence of middle class and professional groups, military officers played an ever declining role in public affairs.

In 1946 and 1952 the official party put up civilian candidates which easily defeated the still present and ever "threatening" political generals of the opposition.

Considering the situation in Latin America as a whole, the Mexican army is today a model institution. In accordance with the constitution, it devotes its principal energies to its two fundamental, exclusive functions: 1) the maintenance of internal peace and 2) the provision for external defense.

34. *Ibid.*, Jan. 4 (p. 11), Feb. 12 (p. 3), July 4 (p. 4), Aug. 11 (p. 16), Aug. 20 (p. 3), Sept. 14 (p. 5), Oct. 2 (p. 1) & Oct. 3 (p. 9), 1940.

35. Howard Cline, *The United States and Mexico* (Cambridge, 1953), p. 276.

It also performs the important and useful incidental function of collaborating in the country's public works program. It builds barracks, schools, and hospitals, manages reforestation and irrigation projects, and helps keep the roads in good repair. It does not assume its internal security function autonomously, as in so many Latin American countries, but acts only under the orders of the president and the authority of Congress as provided in the Constitution.

In accordance with the law, its personnel in active service surrender their political rights. They may neither participate in public political discussion or meetings, venture public opinion on political matters, nor attempt to exercise political influence over their subordinates, on pain of punishment and dismissal from the service.³⁶

The armed forces are by no means completely apolitical, however. Each of the commanders of the nation's thirty-three military zones are political instrumentalities in the sense that they are centralizing agents of the regime at the center. They keep the state authorities in line and preserve order during elections. However, the growing strength of parties independent of the central government reveals that the tyranny of the zone commanders over the state governor and army manipulation of elections is rapidly becoming a thing of the past. Although there are still a number of top armed forces officers who are very influential in the Mexican government today, the military men are in the minority. Only seven out of twenty-nine state governors and only two of eighteen cabinet ministers (Defense and Navy), are military men.³⁷ Inside the ruling party and inside the government itself, civilian professionals predominate and are the real policy-makers. The army is under their control. They have the power to act without consulting the armed forces on issues that do not concern the military establishment, and they can and do at times, oppose it on military issues. For example, despite the armed forces' desire for assistance and modernized equip-

36. Javier Bazan Pérez, *El ejército en la constitución y en la política* (Mexico City, 1952), pp. 11-54; William P. Tucker, *The Mexican Government Today* (Minneapolis, 1957), p. 194.

37. Tucker, *op. cit.*, p. 193; Walter Mallory (ed.), *Political Handbook of the World, 1957* (New York, 1957), pp. 134-135.

ment, the civilian authorities were able to overrule the military and reject the signing of a Military Defense Assistance pact with the United States because of popular political pressures.³⁸

In accordance with the armed forces' limited function and influence, the civilian authorities have deliberately kept the armed forces small and stationary, around 50,000 over the past quarter century, while the rest of the nation has grown rapidly. Consequently, the armed forces have been receiving a declining percentage of the total national budget (only about 12 per cent today compared with twenty-one per cent in 1940), and they absorb a smaller percentage of the total Gross National Product than the armed forces of any other Latin American country except Costa Rica.³⁹

Though the Mexican army ranks very low with respect to its relative political influence in Latin America, its professional rating is high. Modern orthodox methods of organization, instruction and discipline are in use. In general the United States armed forces have served as Mexico's model since the beginning of World War II. This is true with respect to its organization, arms, instruction methods and discipline.⁴⁰

The officer corps, only 3,500 strong, comes mainly from conservative middle class families. The competitive entry examination and the 500-peso admission fee screen out the uneducated and the poor. Officership is now an established and respected profession. The young men plan their careers carefully and obtain their high promotions through dint of *expertise*, professional competence, and merit rather than through political influence as in the past. No longer are their aspirations blocked by the revolutionary generals, who had no knowledge of modern military methods and held down all the top posts largely because of their political records during the revolutionary upheaval of the 1910 and 1920 era.

The capabilities of Mexican armed forces are obviously extremely limited, not only because of their small size, but

38. *Hispanic American Report*, Sept. 1950, p. 13, Jan. 1952, p. 8, July 1953, p. 10.

39. *Inter-American Statistical Yearbook*, 1940.

40. Prewitt, "The Mexican Army," *loc. cit.*, p. 612; Tucker, *op. cit.*, pp. 193-194.

because of equipment shortages and needs. But its capabilities are adequate for fulfilling its overriding mission—preserving internal order. For defense against threats from a major foreign invader, Mexico knows it can count on United States assistance.

What is important about the armed forces institutions in an underdeveloped country that is trying to modernize is that the army neither act as a serious drag on the economy by its inflated budget requests nor pervert and corrupt politics. In this sense, the Mexican armed forces cannot be condemned. Discipline and control is firmly in the hands of a civilian dominated government and party. Inasmuch as the political influence of the officer corps has continued to decline and professionalism to rise over the past quarter century, it is difficult to see how militarism can become a problem in Mexico again in the foreseeable future. The counter-trends are firm and steady and unlikely to be reversed. Mexico is over the hump. She, fortunately, has solved her armed forces problem. It is one major reason why she has become one of Latin America's most advanced, progressive, developing nations.