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Militarization of the drug-trafficking control in Argentina?

Section: MILITARY STUDIES

Scientific and technological research article

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¿Militarización del control del narcotráfico en Argentina?

Militarização do controle do narcotráfico na Argentina?

Militarisation du contrôle du trafic de drogue en Argentine?

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Abstract. The process of militarization of drug-trafficking control in Argentina during the period 2015-2017 is discussed in this article. The political analysis of the issue of public security and drug trafficking establishes an existing tension between the militarizing drive and the economic adjustment (2013-2017), concerning the political consensus, which favors military participation in the control of drug trafficking. It is concluded that this government has enabled the Air Force's intervention in the surveillance of the country's aerospace and the possible thwarting of irregular flights in the national jurisdiction, as well as a set of initiatives and discourses aimed at enabling military involvement in internal security.

Keywords: Armed Forces of Argentina; drug trafficking control; militarization of internal security; national defense; public security.

Resumen. En este artículo se discute el proceso de militarización para el control del narcotráfico en Argentina durante el periodo 2015-2017. El análisis político del problema de la seguridad pública y el narcotráfico muestra una tensión entre la militarización y el ajuste económico (2013-2017), con respecto al consenso político que favorece la participación militar en el control del narcotráfico. Se concluye que en este gobierno se habilitó la intervención de la Fuerza Aérea para la vigilancia aeroespacial del país y la eventual conjuración de vuelos irregulares en la jurisdicción nacional. Así mismo, se llevó a cabo una serie de iniciativas y alocuciones tendientes a habilitar la participación del Ejército en labores de seguridad interior.

Palabras clave: control del narcotráfico; defensa nacional; Fuerzas Armadas de Argentina; militarización de la seguridad interior; seguridad pública.

Resumo. O processo de militarização do controle do narcotráfico na Argentina durante o período 2015-2017 é discutido neste artigo. A análise política do problema da segurança pública e do tráfico de drogas mostra uma tensão existente entre o militarização e o ajuste econômico (2013-2017), no que se refere ao consenso político, que favorece a participação militar no controle do narcotráfico. Conclui-se que este governo possibilitou a intervenção da Força Aérea na vigilância do espaço aéreo do país e o possível conjuração de voos irregulares na jurisdição nacional, bem como um conjunto de iniciativas e discursos que visam permitir o envolvimento militar na segurança interna.

Palavras chave: controle do tráfico de drogas; defesa nacional; Forças Armadas da Argentina; militarização da segurança interna; segurança pública.

Résumé. Cet article traite du processus de militarisation du contrôle du trafic de drogues en Argentine au cours de la période 2015-2017. L'analyse politique du problème de la sécurité publique et du trafic de drogue établit une tension existante entre la militarisation et l'ajustement économique (2013-2017) concernant le consensus politique qui favorise la participation des militaires au contrôle du trafic de drogue. On en conclut que ce gouvernement a permis à la Force aérienne d'intervenir dans la surveillance de l'aérospatiale du pays et la éventualité de vols irréguliers dans la juridiction nationale, ainsi qu'une série d'initiatives et de discours visant à permettre la participation militaire à la sécurité intérieure.

Mots-clés : contrôle du trafic de drogue ; défense nationale ; Forces armées de l'Argentine ; militarisation de la sécurité intérieure ; sécurité publique.

Introduction

In September 2015, the Republican Proposal (PRO), led by Mauricio Macri –then head of government of the City of Buenos Aires and presidential candidate of the *Cambiamos* coalition– presented their party platform to “End drug trafficking,” which it sustained was the “main threat to the security of each Argentinean.” Prominent among the fundamental goals in the matter was the “crucial control of our borders and airspace to impede any illegal flights” (Macri, 2015). Just like in Kirchnerism, the interdiction of the border stood out in the document as the only action of control.

The inception of the governmental administration was met with a report by the Ministry of Defense informing that the Kirchner administration had left a debt of 140,000,000 Argentine pesos for the pending payment of per diems of 1,700 Army personnel who had participated in the actions of Operation *Escudo Norte* (Northern Shield). According to the ministerial portfolio, at the beginning of that operation, some 1,500 Army members participated in surveillance and control tasks on the northern border, and another 200 operated the Army’s radars. However, in the last year, because of budget cuts, the total strength of the Army was 800 (De Vedia, 2016).

However, the Macrists’ vision concerning the control of drug trafficking was reflected in Decree 228/16 (Argentina, Ministerio de Finanzas Públicas, 2016) through which the Government announced the “emergency of public safety” in the “entire national territory” to “reverse the situation of collective danger created by complex crime and organized crime,”¹ which affected the country, according to their considerations.

In Title II of the cited regulation (“Border Operations and Strengthening the Control of Ports, Waterways and the Argentine Sea”), the Macrista government established a series of provisions that involved the intervention of the Armed Forces in internal security tasks.

Firstly, considering that Operation Northern Shield had not yielded the “expected results,” it was transformed into the *Operativo Fronteras* (Border Operations) without any modification to its objectives, goals, or prescriptions, meaning it continued to be the same but with another name.

Then, the adoption of measures and the necessary acquisitions for the “material and technological control of the border area” were arranged; the “radarization of the northern border” by the Ministry of Defense to achieve “an efficient control and effective availability of information regarding the occupation and daily traffic that

1 With this, the Government made reference to the production, trafficking, and commercialization of narcotics; the smuggling of arms and narcotics; the activities of an illicit criminal, terrorist or political or racial association; fraud and other crimes against public administration; the prostitution of minors and child pornography; the financing of terrorism; extortion; tax crimes and human trafficking.

is deployed within the sovereign airspace”; “The surveillance and control in the area of the fluvial border and waterways [...], as well as in the ports and maritime spaces of national jurisdiction” and; the establishment, by the Federal Agency of Public Revenues,” of “the security standards and regulations concerning the primary customs zones” to coordinate the security work there. However, the parameters, criteria, and specific measures to carry out these objectives were not established.

Regarding the “protection of the airspace” to combat organized crime, the Aerospace Protection Rules were approved and the military confidentiality of the Rules of Engagement for Aerospace Defense was lifted, both provisions approved by Decree 2415/14².

In the “management levels,” these rules made the president the “responsible national authority” and, from there, differentiated two levels of power. First, the “enforcement authority,” which was responsible for the “supervision and general direction of the operational activities carried out in compliance with the assigned mission”; this responsibility fell on the Joint Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces, the Chief of the General Staff of the Argentine Air Force, and the operational commander of the Joint Chiefs of Staff of the Armed Forces. The second authority, the “executing authority,” was in charge of the “planning, management, and execution of the operations of the Territory Aerospace Defense Sector”; the commander of the aerospace defense sector of the territory of Argentina headed this responsibility.

These rules also authorized, in the presence of an “incursion vector”³ (unauthorized aircraft or one that is unresponsive to the instructions of the authority), the development of a series of sequential actions to counteract the event, such as the identification of the aircraft (with radars or other aircraft); the issuance of warnings or orders to the aircraft (if communication can be established) to abandon a jurisdiction, land or any position; the demonstration of force and the use of intimidating force to hinder, prevent, or stop the aircraft’s action; the use of force to strike down or destroy the aircraft; the development of Active Electronic Measures (AEM); and the execution of assessment and reconnaissance tasks with aerial means.

2 Decree 2415/14 of December 2014, provided for “the installation and activation of the Paraná Aerospace Defense Sector (SEDAP),” charged with “guaranteeing the the airspace defense security within the limits determined by military strategic planning, centered in the Paraná Terminal Area (TMA PAR), from the ground level and without an upper limit, from December 12 to December 19, 2014. Its aim being to cooperate with the security measures to be implemented during the development of the Summit of Heads of State of Mercosur and Associated States”; it was integrated with elements and means of the Armed Forces.

3 In the rules of reference, an “incursion vector” is any aerospace mechanism (manned or not) identified or not, used for purposes that contravene those established by national and international aeronautical law. Mechanisms circulating in the airspace in violation of the rules and regulations in force, unresponsive or non-compliant with the instructions of the air traffic control services, and unresponsive or non-compliant with the directives of the military aeronautical authority responsible for the sector’s aerospace defense.

Discussion

The macrista government extended the application of the rules of procedure established in Decree 2415/14 to prevent or counteract air attacks on presidential summits (terrorist attacks); the strike-down of aircraft illegally transporting drugs, people or merchandise, paying no heed to the operational exigency in collating all furtive flights with flights connected to drug trafficking; and human trafficking or smuggling, disregarding the striking down of an illegal aircraft unintending to commit a terrorist attack would be unwarranted. Even worse, the decision to shoot down a furtive aircraft was designated to the intervening military authorities, exclusive of judicial intercession or intervention by the political authorities of the Ministry of Security or Defense.

Not only is the Internal Security Law violated [...] by allowing the Armed Forces to participate in internal security undertakings, but they have been allocated the power to no less decide when to shoot down an airplane even in situations of “unlawful seizure” (that is, even in situations concerning a passenger plane with innocent people on board), without any kind of control of the civil authorities. [...] The plane may be flying below the minimum altitude or performing erratic maneuvers because it is carrying out an illegal flight and does not want to be detected, but that does not mean that it is terrorists. On the other hand, even in the case of terrorists who hijacked an airplane, they may not intend to crash it. That is, we have a protocol designed to allow the shooting down of airplanes of “narcos,” abruptly articulating that annihilation is only allowed when it is a terrorist attack, but which alludes to situations of, of [sic] such a level of vagueness, creating the risk of confusion between an imminent attack and the commission of any other illicit, infraction or, even, a mere technical malfunction. (Cano, 2016, pp. 149-150)

As stated by jurist Daniel Cano, “when it comes to the shooting down of planes used by drug traffickers to transport drugs [...], there is no justification whatsoever for overruling the right to life of alleged criminals, obtruding a breaching death penalty through an extrajudicial execution, as well as violating the guarantee of due process” (Cano, 2016, p. 153).

Even with these juridical and institutional anachronisms, Macri issued the Armed Forces the task of monitoring and controlling the illegal incursions of furtive aircraft in the airspace to counteract the actions of organized crime, in particular, drug trafficking.

Not unlike all the previous administrations, the Macrista government failed to complete a comprehensive diagnosis of drug trafficking in the country and, especially, on the illegal drug trade from abroad to Argentina. The government ignored how and how much drug was being introduced into the country, as well as the number of irregular flights occurring across the northern border and, essentially, whether these

furtive flights were linked to the smuggling of goods or drug or human trafficking, among others. It was also unaware of the extent and diversification of international drug trafficking organizations operating in the country or their processes.

However, Macri, at the request of the security minister, Patricia Bullrich, announced that organized crime was a “collective danger” and used a set of procedures and military protocols for the aerospace defense that had been designed and used in previous years to back security during the presidential summits in the country.⁴ Within this framework, he opted for an *air interdiction* strategy aimed at trying to hinder the entry of drugs into the country using air interdiction flights and excluding any terrestrial, fluvial or maritime interdiction actions. Also, overlooking that the Argentine Air Force did not have the necessary intercepting aircraft to carry out the approved aerospace defense protocol. Everything was limited to a great disclosure of measures and unfulfillable objectives.

When the head of the Cabinet of Ministers, Marcos Peña, appeared in April 2016 before the Argentine Chamber of Deputies to report on the government’s progress, he maintained that Decree 228/16 did not violate the current legislation on internal security, but he did it through erroneous legal references.

[...] By no means does Decree No. 228/2016 violate Internal Security Law No. 24,059 and National Defense Law No. 23,554. The authorization of the use of force by means of the Aerospace Defense System to neutralize vectors purportedly carrying out illegal or criminal activities within the framework of the “Public Safety Emergency” is covered by the Internal Security Law, as armed forces are employed in the restoration of internal security within the national territory, in those exceptional cases in which the Internal Security System described in the referred Law is, at the discretion of the President, insufficient for the protection of the inhabitants’ freedom, life, and property, their rights and guarantees and the full force of the institutions of the representative, republican, and federal system founded by the National Constitution, as established in articles 2 and 31 of the Law of Internal Security. (Jefatura del Gabinete de Ministros, 2006)

As indicated previously, according to Article 31 of Law No. 24,059 on Internal Security, “the use of combat elements of the armed forces for the restoration of the normal internal security situation” was of an “exceptional” nature and required the “previous declaration of a state of siege,” a significant detail overlooked by Peña.

On March 11, the Minister of Defense, Julio Martínez, received the Canadian Ambassador, Robert Fry, and spoke about the “exchange of capabilities, training, and

4 As established in the recitals of Decree 228/16, between 2005 and 2016, these aerospace defense rules were used on new occasions, but limited exclusively to the geographical scope of the reference summits and for the duration of these meetings.

joint participation in United Nations peace operations.” The Minister also highlighted the interest in receiving support in the “fight against drug trafficking.”

We are interested in exchanges in training, cooperation for emergencies, and in the fight against drug trafficking. (Ministerio de Defensa de la República Argentina, 2016)

Incidentally, these focuses were strongly influenced by the perspectives and positions held and formulated in this regard by the military group of the United States Embassy in Argentina.

During the visit of US President Barack Obama to Argentina at the end of March 2016, the Argentine government sealed a set of cooperation agreements on “security and defense” with the northern country. Overlooking the legal and institutional distinction between defense and security existing in our legislation, the countries “agreed to work together to fight organized crime and drug trafficking” (Embajada de los Estados Unidos en Argentina, 2016b).

On April 14, Minister Martínez met with the Assistant Secretary of Arms Control and International Security of the US Department of State, Rose Gottemoeller. After the meeting, the Argentine official said that it had been a “very positive and crucial” meeting in which they had agreed to address, among other issues, the “fight against drug trafficking”: “We are moving forward on a series of issues that includes participation in peace missions, the Antarctic issue, and the fight against drug trafficking.” (Ministerio de Defensa de la República Argentina, 2016c)

The government did not specify a clear institutional position on the matter, but it gave signs in favor of the intervention of the Armed Forces in matters of internal security. That happened again on May 29, the Day of the Argentine Army, when President Macri indicated, at the National Military College, indicated the need for the Armed Forces to confront, among other challenges, the “threats of terrorism.”

We need the Armed Forces to adapt to the demands and requirements of the 21st century, first helping our foreign policy by participating in peace missions and second, because of climate change, the Argentine people need their Armed Forces there, ready to react quickly and assist. We also need to work together against the threats of terrorism. (Télam, 2016)

In line with this speech, on June 16 of that same year, the Argentine ambassador to the United States, Martin Lousteau, sent a note to Congressman Peter Visclosky, of the Democratic Party of the State of Indiana, in which he requested the possible procurement of American military equipment for Argentina. Specifically, he requested the representative’s cooperation to include the financing for the incorporation of mi-

litary equipment in the 2017 fiscal budget, particularly under the item, “Department of State, External Operations and Related Programs.”

The communication indicated that the request for material for the Armed Forces was for “defense” and “peace missions.” However, the document cited the role of Argentina in cooperation with Washington in everything related to “urgent global threats,” such as the “fight against terrorism, and the financing of terrorism, drug trafficking, and organized crime.” The list of weapons included F-16 fighter jets, tanks, attack helicopters, tactical and training transport aircraft, amphibious armored vehicles, medium and long-range missiles, and portable missile launchers. The request for security armament was also highlighted, such as 50,000-volts X26 Taser guns (Amorín, 2017a, 2017b).

A series of speculations about a possible modification of Decree 727/06 of the National Defense Law, favoring the enablement of military participation in internal security tasks began to circulate in the governmental and parliamentary sphere since then.

On June 28, 2016, Minister Martínez met with Admiral Kurt Walter Tidd, head of the US Southern Command. During this meeting, they agreed to designate an Argentinian “liaison” at the headquarters of this command in Miami. They also agreed on the resumption of exercises and bilateral training in the framework of regional and international maneuvers, after these activities had ceased during the Kirchner administrations because, to a large extent, they involved actions to confront the so-called “new threats” –renamed by the US Southern Command as “multifaceted security challenges,” which were prohibited by domestic legislation– (Aguilera, 2016).

Concurrently, Admiral Tidd, in a presentation at the 2016 South American Defense Conference held in Montevideo, gave an account of the “changes of the military’s role in the region.”

[...] The global security environment is the most complex, volatile, and unpredictable in at least the last 50 years [...]. We are no longer dealing simply with conventional conflicts that displace millions of people and destabilize entire regions; we are also facing complex threats, threats that arise in networks, such as transregional crime and violent extremism that goes beyond borders and limits. (Ommati, 2016)

In January 2016, when Admiral Tidd was placed in charge of the US Southern Command, the Secretary of Defense of the United States, Ashton Carter, marked the priorities of this command, which had nothing to do with defensive-military issues, but with criminal issues.

[...] We cannot tolerate the activities of criminal organizations that poison so many communities throughout the American continent, whether it is trafficking in narcot-

ics, human lives or extremist ideologies, these criminal networks are threats to all of us. [...] These groups should not find any refuge in this hemisphere. I know that Admiral Tidd shares this unwavering commitment. (Sánchez-Bustamante, 2016, p. 16)

Overall, for the North American government and, in particular, for the US Southern Command, the military priorities for our region were exclusively focused on the control of complex criminality, particularly, concerning drug trafficking.

On July 7, Minister Martínez, with a prolific agenda of international relations, met in Buenos Aires with Colonel General Oleg Salyukov, Commander-in-Chief of the Land Force of the Russian Federation. On this occasion, Martínez expressed the need to incorporate new equipment for the Argentine Armed Forces and “exchange knowledge on issues related to the fight against terrorism and cyberdefense.” (Ministerio de Defensa de la República Argentina, 2016d)

Meanwhile, the opposition’s view in this regard was also seemingly unclear. At the beginning of September, Diana Conti, Kirchnerista national deputy and member of the Interior Security Commission of the lower house, indicated that the Armed Forces’ participation in controlling drug trafficking was “an issue that had been [coming] for a long time” and construed that it was inscribed within the legal bases in force because drug trafficking constituted an “external attack” and the task of the military forces is to manage the borders and impede that type of event.

The Armed Forces’ mission is to manage the borders or defend the country from external attacks. As an international organized crime, drug trafficking can be considered a type of external attack. [...] What Macri said is correct, within the legal framework. (El apoyo de Diana Conti, 2016)

In keeping with this, in September 2016, the former Army chief, General César Milani, aware that the Macrista government had canceled the deployment of the Army on the northern border, made a high-sounding criticism of that decision. He argued, at that time, that the national government lacked a “strategic plan” concerning drug control on the northern border.

[...] What is being witnessed is the complete lack of a strategic plan; there is considerable improvisation. Important concrete actions are also lacking and [there is] lack of suitability in some ministries. There is involution in some areas [...]. What has been done now? The Army has been withdrawn, which had deployed 1,500 men on the northern border. Our plan was to increase that to 4,000 men, [which afforded it] a real capability and a significant deterring power on the northern border. [...] Now they have completely withdrawn it. They have left some radar and some aviation elements

to make interceptions, but this does not grant any power or dissuasive capacity. The deterrent capacity is given by the presence of force at the border. [...] The reason why this has been overturned confounds me, but there is really a notable lack of a strategic plan, of an overall vision, and patches are being applied, and nothing more. (Milani, 2016)

Later, he reiterated his criticisms of the national government in the same tenor.

I would advise the government to stop the undue political marketing and political propaganda of all kinds and concentrate more on management. What is missing is management, and security management, in drug trafficking, is having strategic plans, having means and not what they are doing now, simply patches; they are [deploying] a greater portion of the Gendarmerie in Rosario [...], in some urban areas, and the northern border [is] a colander [...] We had 1,500 Army men deployed there, and we had a plan [...] with Daniel Scioli to increase this to 5,000 men on the northern border [to] exert a critical deterring power against drug trafficking [...]. Well, all that was dismantled; there is no one there, a few radars [...]. They removed the Army; they completely removed the Army. So, what was left? There were some Gendarmerie posts [...]. We would have to ask Patricia Bullrich [why the 1,500 Army troops were pulled from the northern border], and the minister [Julio] Martínez, we should ask him why they took the Armed Forces from the northern border, why they pulled them out completely. (Milani, 2016)

Milani also held that, in 2015, together with the presidential candidate chosen by Cristina Fernandez as her successor (Daniel Scioli), they had arranged the increased deployment of the Army on the northern border to partake in the control of drug trafficking. However, he provided convoluted explanations when justifying the intervention of that force in these efforts, which undoubtedly belonged in the sphere of internal security.

[...] [Daniel] Scioli planned to take 5,000 [Army] men to the northern border [to action] on the border. We are not talking here about the Army participating in drug trafficking or internal security issues; we are talking [about the Army] on the border. [...] The development of the Army's skills to goad a significant deterring power in the northern border is more than optimal to begin to solve the problem of drug trafficking in Argentina. (Milani, 2016)

Thus, Milani publicly acknowledged that the Argentine Army, under his leadership and with the consent of President Cristina Fernández, had carried out operational tasks to control drug trafficking that they were disallowed to carry out legally.

In this framework, by October 2016, the Macrista government had finalized a project of institutional reform to interlace all the national, provincial, and municipal

organisms with an incidence in the national “border security zone,” focused on developing a strategy “against drug and human trafficking, smuggling, and transnational crimes.” To this end, the project proposed a structural reform of the border control system, in which the National Commission of Security Zones was transferred from the Ministry of the Interior to the Secretariat of Borders of the Ministry of Security. This last entity would centralize the tasks of criminal intelligence and the police effort against crimes committed in those areas and would count on the logistical support of the Armed Forces through the provision of information obtained by military radars and, eventually, the support of Air Force airplanes to deter aircraft suspected of smuggling or drug trafficking (Dinatale, 2016a; Murano, 2016).

These formalities and successive governmental formulations prompted a group of intellectuals, political and social leaders, ex-civil servants, and civil society organizations, led by the Center for Legal and Social Studies, to produce an extensive collective document entitled *La riesgosa política del gobierno para las Fuerzas Armadas* (The Risky Government Policy for the Armed Forces), which framed the willingness of the Macrista government to involve the Armed Forces in internal security efforts.

Military involvement in internal issues has been encouraged by the United States as a policy for Latin America since the fifties. [...] The current redefinition of military missions and their legitimacy be based on the need to face “new threats,” including drug trafficking, from a war perspective. In Argentina, the idea that “the development of drug trafficking” is the main security problem –although there is no significant research to confirm it– justifies this perspective. From this, an expansion of the main role of the Armed Forces and the militarization of the police intervention strategy, as a solution to insecurity, is promoted. (Colectivo, 2016, p. 3)

After presenting the negative consequences of the Armed Forces’ involvement in the control of drug trafficking in some countries of the region, in particular, Mexico and Colombia, the authors highlighted that the most serious institutional consequence of the actions undertaken by the Macrista administration, framed in the “overlap between the security agenda and those who fight for militarization,” has been the “increasing interaction between the Ministries of Security and Defense, under the format of ‘coordination of actions’ among high-level officials related to security public,” as well as the “unceasing meetings of exchange and cooperation of the Ministry of Security with officials” from the United States. Similarly, the signatories indicated that decisions were taken aimed “to weaken or transgress the principle of demarcation between the areas of security and defense and expand the functions of the Armed Forces.”

The return of the Armed Forces to internal security missions violates the current legal framework and contravenes the broad multiparty agreement that produced it. The

involvement of the Armed Forces in matters of internal security subjects them to a deep de-professionalization, generates conditions for greater political intervention, and brings with it serious violations of human rights and institutional degradation, as emerges from experience compared with other countries. (Colectivo, 2016, p. 15)

In December, the suggestions in favor of enabling the intervention of the Armed Forces in internal security actions renewed. Faced with this, the Secretary of National Security, Eugenio Burzaco, acknowledged that the possibility of issuing a Necessity and Urgency Decree to authorize the Armed Forces to guard hydroelectric dams, nuclear power plants, and other strategic objectives was being studied. Members of the National Gendarmerie were carrying out this work and, if the Military Forces replaced them, they would be deployed at “the border and critical areas.”

To this end, Minister of Security Bullrich requested the Minister of Defense make available 1,200 members of the National Gendarmerie assigned to the protection of “strategic objectives,” such as the Atucha I and Atucha II nuclear power plants and the hydroelectric dam of El Chocón, among others. The written request suggested the possibility of assigning these safekeeping duties to members of the Armed Forces, and redirecting the gendarmes from the surveillance and patrolling tasks in the border area –as indicated by Burzaco– to the metropolitan areas where other troops of that force were already deployed to carry out crime prevention and control social protests. Martínez replied that he had “troops ready” for these tasks, but that he required the military personnel to have “legal coverage” beforehand because current legislation precluded that possibility.

[One cannot engage in] the same irresponsibility that the ex-army chief, General César Milani, did, with the endorsement of the government of Cristina Kirchner, of sending troops to patrol the borders without any legal backing. (Santoro, 2016)

As a result, Martínez requested that the possibility of reforming Decree 727/06, regulated by Law No. 23,554 of National Defense be studied, claiming that the ministerial team considered the premise that “the defense system [should] be oriented structurally and organizationally towards preventing situations of external aggression perpetrated by armed forces of another State” as “restrictive and outdated.” The officials of that ministry stressed that the initiative did not aim to use the Armed Forces to fight terrorism, but (invoking former Minister Horacio Jaunarena, a reference for the militarization of security), in the face of a terrorist attack, “the response of the Argentine state must be proportional to the magnitude of the attack” (Santoro, 2016).

The government’s position generated criticism from the opposition. The former defense minister of the Kirchner government, Agustín Rossi, rejected the prospect

of the government's authorization to involve the Armed Forces in the protection of strategic objectives.

If the Defense Law is modified, we are entering a dangerous area [...]. With the current system of law of Defense and Internal Security, it is a situation in the limit of legality. The feeling is that this is one more step, gradually involving the military in matters of internal security, which is not a point of arrival but departure. It is one more step towards the idea of the government to reformulate the laws of Defense [and Security]. (Militares podrían custodiar..., 2016)

However, the national government's concerns responded to reasons different from those outlined by Rossi. Since October, the authorities of the Ministry of Security considered the possibility that, towards the end of the year, there would be protests and social mobilizations against the government based on the growing social unrest in the large urban centers. The need to increase the presence of troops of the National Gendarmerie in the metropolitan regions, especially in Buenos Aires, responded to this fear.

It was in this context that the Minister of Security and her counterpart from the province of Buenos Aires, Cristian Ritondo, signed a memorandum of commitment at noon, on December 12, with about forty mayors from the suburbs to reinforce security in the municipalities with troops from the Federal Forces (Militares podrían custodiar..., 2016).

The goal is to have a better security service for the populace. We are making a considerable effort by sending troops to the places that need it (Montenegro, 2016).

It was learned, the following day, that the Ministry of Defense had signed an agreement with the National Guard of the State of Georgia, United States, through which Argentina became part of the State Partnership Program of the US Department of Defense of the North American Ministry of Defense. This signing allowed the National Armed Forces to carry out joint activities with the National Guard of the State of Georgia, as operator of the US Southern Command, to provide cooperation and materialize the sale of materials to the Argentine Republic. (Dinatale, 2016a).

The news spread from the Ministry of Defense that it was a "humanitarian aid agreement" aimed at "assisting in the face of natural catastrophes and humanitarian aid" (Ministerio de Defensa de la República Argentina, 2016b). Martín Lousteau, Argentine ambassador in the northern country, also gave an account of the agreement in the same terms.

The cooperation between Argentina and the United States, primarily, by our country will be to attend natural disasters, aviation programs, cooperation at the borders, the care of the environment, in military medicine, in a network of education to distance and peace missions (Dinatale, 2016a)

However, that was not entirely true. During the Embassy of the United States in Argentina's announcement, it was indicated that President Macri had requested the inclusion of our country in the State Partnership Program at the beginning of 2016 and that the objectives of the North American assistance were broader than humanitarian aid and permeated to issues of "security."

The relationship between the United States and Argentina progressed significantly when, at the beginning of 2016, the recently elected President Macri requested the inclusion of Argentina in the SPP [State Partnership Program]. Since then, the Georgia National Guard has demonstrated a diversity of capabilities that will help respond to Argentina's security needs and solidify pre-existing security collaboration. The SPP between the State of Georgia and Argentina will lay the foundations to develop a long-term successful relationship by sharing experience in emergency situations and disasters, strengthening border security and cooperation and preparedness in peacekeeping operations. (Embajada de los Estados Unidos en Argentina, 2016a)

As indicated by Montenegro, "the contemporary military device of the United States is organized based on two types of organizations: the Armed Forces and the National Guard." The latter is a "force at the same time federal and state." On the one hand, it constitutes "a military corps framed as the reserve of the Armed Forces and, in that role, has a direct dependence on the Federal Government through the Office of the National Guard of the Department of Defense." On the other hand, simultaneously, "it is an armed body dependent on the government of each State that makes up the country," responsible for "contributing to preserving security and public order in the territory of each State together with the other agencies and police and security forces." For this, it maintains "a direct dependence on the governor of the State, through the political authority that he designates, on whom the deputy general depends, and who is the maximum military authority of each State's National Guard." Thus, this body is structured and deployed territorially in the state jurisdictions that make up the United States and, at the federal level, is satisfied with the National Guards of each one.

[The National Guard] has on the one hand the ability to carry out security missions of a militarized type, that is, "weightier" missions in which a security device with greater firepower, logistics availability, mobility, and operational flexibility is required; [and], on the other hand, [it is a] reserve force of the Armed Forces,

[which] has the capacity to carry out eminently military, combat, and combat support activities. (Montenegro, 2017)⁵

Likewise, the State Partnership Program belongs to the North American Department of Defense, which is administered by the National Guard and executed by the different states of the federation to establish a cooperative relationship with the military and security forces of other countries concerning “disaster preparedness and crisis management,” “leadership development for officers and non-commissioned officers,” “military defense and modernization reform,” “border, port, and aviation security,” “critical infrastructure and resource protection,” and “control of narcotics trafficking,” among other tasks (National Guard State Partnership Program, 2016).

Thus, the agreement of the Ministry of Defense with the National Guard of the state of Georgia reinforced the suspicions of sectors of the opposition concerning the true volition of the Argentine government to militarize public security. They anticipated that the agreement was a general framework whose real objective was enabling the involvement of military personnel in internal security tasks.

The Military Center for Democracy denounced that the agreement implied a return to the Doctrine of National Security and demanded that the National Congress “not approve this nefarious ‘agreement.’”

Enabling the possibility of re-employing military personnel in internal security grossly contravenes the explicit prohibition of what is determined by the National Defense and Internal Security Laws. [...] Multiple agreements of this type have recently been established in African countries with disastrous results [...]. The mobilization of political and social organizations requesting that the National Congress not approve this nefarious “agreement” because of the dangers of its validity will represent a return to the internal military repression established by the Doctrine of National Security; now, through the service door from where foreign military forces captained by the infamous Comando Sur enter. (Escalada & Roconi, 2016)

This hub of retired military and experts in national defense also responded to the informal versions stirred by sources from the Ministry of Defense; “[The agreement] strategically links the country with the state of Georgia, which has more than 500 companies of the aerospace industry and eight of the ten main contractors of the North American Air Force in its territory.” (Militares argentinos alertan..., 2017)

The interest of the administration of Cambiemos are the possible investments that can be achieved in the airspace sector, but in exchange, the territorial-military sovereignty

⁵ This work develops the topic of the North American National Guard and its institutional anchoring in the defensive and security system of the United States adequately.

and internal security are delegated, which can have consequences of serious impact within the Argentine territory, at the dawn of the Trump era (Federico, 2016).

For his part, former Minister Rossi, also critical of the official initiative, indicated that “because of its magnitude and because it involves security and defense tasks, [the agreement] must clearly undergo a parliamentary debate and have approval from [National] Congress” to be valid. Overlooking the adventures of General César Milani during his ministerial administration, he added that behind all of this was the government’s intention to involve the military in the control of drug trafficking.

The Comando Sur’s central policy for Latin America is to try to involve the armed forces in matters of internal security. One of its objectives, after the military dictatorships, was to convert the doctrine of National Security into one of new threats, considering above all drug trafficking. The invocations of catastrophes and humanitarian aid have been two of the axes on which it has always operated with the same objective: to remove the Armed Forces from their primary mission. Border security is the task of the security forces; therefore, the agreement is impugnable [...] Argentina has an internationally recognized training center [in peace operations], in Campo de Mayo, so I do not see the point of a United States security forces training Argentine military personnel. [...] Since the agency of Nilda Garré we presented proposals to reformulate the cooperation and collaboration agreements with the United States, very imbued with the ideology of the ‘90s, but they never accepted them. (Un convenio que viene..., 2016)

The political scientist Juan Gabriel Tokatlian was also critical of the agreement and noted that, on this occasion, the government has once again opted for “covertness and opacity.” He also construed that the initiative was “within the broader framework of the weakening of diplomatic sensitivity and the rise of the military muscle of US foreign policy since the end of the Cold War.” He also shed light on an unknown aspect in the local debate, when he indicated that the State Partnership Program had its origin at the end of the Cold War with the purpose of “providing assistance and training, through agreements between different state national guards and former republics formerly part of the Soviet Union.” As enshrined in 2012, in a report of the United States Government Accountability Office to the US Congress, between 1992 and 1993, it had been chosen to “involve the national state guards” because “it was ‘less provocative’ towards Russia than the presence of ‘formal military’ in nations of their former area of influence.”

Now, as it was in the nineties at another conjuncture, the argument is similar, to relatively lower the profile of involvement of the US armed forces in specific military tasks abroad and advance the participation of national guards on issues that diffuse the boundaries between security and defense. (Tokatlian, 2017)

Thus, Tokatlian indicated the firm suspicion that the government, through this agreement, aimed to advance covertly in the gradual involvement of the military in matters of internal security.

Meanwhile, at the beginning of 2017, the decision made within the Ministry of Defense to make significant expense cuts within the jurisdiction was publicly known (Aguilera, 2017). In March, a presentation elaborated in that portfolio to be presented to the Chief of the Cabinet of Ministers was publicly leaked, which estimated a drastic cut in expenses (of at least \$4,474 million) destined primarily to the operation and re-equipment of the Armed forces. That report specified, among other cuts, the “withdrawal of 1,800 troops deployed in the framework of Operation Escudo Norte,” which would amount to an adjustment of \$160 million. A commitment was also made to produce the “fallback of the Rasit radar system,” that is, the “ground surveillance radar system for detecting small mobile targets” by withdrawing them from the Fronteras Operative; this would imply saving another \$160 million. Similarly, the non-execution of the “contract with INVAP for the modernization of transportable radar (TPS 43)” was established, which generated a saving of \$268 million (Iñurrieta, 2017; Ministerio de Defensa de la República Argentina, 2017).

The inference was that, contrary to what was indicated by the Macrista administration at the beginning of its administration, the deployment of troops and operational means of the Army and Air Force, within the framework of the Frontera Operation, focused on the control of drug trafficking and organized criminality in the border areas, had continued.

Therefore, between May 8 and 12, 2017, a delegation of the Argentine Navy participated in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in the 2017 Bell Buoy annual military exercise, organized and carried out by the Maritime Trafficking Working Group of the Pacific and Indian Oceans, which is a consortium of the armed forces with influence in the area. Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, the United States, Paraguay, Peru, Mexico, and Uruguay participated in this event. The objective was to exchange experiences concerning “new threats” to maritime security, among which “cases of piracy, drug, weapons, and people trafficking, and illegal immigration and terrorism” were featured (Barreto, 2017).

According to Brazilian ship captain Paulo Rohwer Santos, responsible for the planning of the exercise, during the event “accidents situations during navigation, sabotage of port infrastructure, seizure of ships, invasion of an oil platform, environmental pollution, piracy, migratory crisis, fight against epidemics of infectious diseases, and terrorism” were addressed. Regarding terrorism, he stressed, “the observation of what is happening in the world, together with the particular national characteristics, helped to design the terrorism situations that the military members of

the 2017 Bell Buoy faced.” The latter included the infiltration of armed terrorists into passenger ships, attempts to board merchant ships by extremists on board speedboats, as well as the pursuit of terrorists intending to board and damage an oil platform. In the words of Rear Admiral Viana Rocha, all of these are “threats presented by agents of clandestine organizations (not necessarily associated with a State), often, with simple techniques and a weighty ideological component.” (Barreto, 2017)

In June 2017, a government plan was revealed for the restructuring of the central administration, fundamentally based on cutting down some ministries and eliminating others, through mergers and organic and functional reforms. Among other details, this reform included the elimination of the Ministry of Defense, the transfer of its most central units to the Ministry of Security and its merger with the Ministry of the Interior (Bonelli, 2017).

Discussion

During the first two years of administration, the Macrista government promoted a process of militarization of internal security marked by an *exacerbated discursive emphasis* and driven by the official indisposition to strengthen the deteriorated military structure and increase the squalid military spending. As a result, military intervention in these issues was envisioned as a *viable functional alternative* without the willingness to invest in it or, better, to adjust the military budget to unprecedented extremes.

All this occurred in a framework in which, for the Macrista government, defensive-military issues are matters of little relevance. Mariano Bartolomé pointed this out in July 2017. He pondered that “ideology” had permeated the Kirchner administration and, as a result, no “genuine resources” had been invested in the area. With despair, this intellectual, linked to the military world, argued that, after eighteen months, the Macrista government had failed to “develop a concrete plan to address the situation facing the defense sector.” This shortfall was reflected in the low investment made by the administration in the sector.

The reason behind this lethargy may be that the Casa Rosada does not fully understand the importance of Defense and, the allocations of budget items are conceived more in terms of “expenses” than investments. No plan is evinced; none can exist if we do not set a course. The national defense needs a plan. Acquiring means for defense demands planning that includes its execution in a clearly established time horizon. Do we want to count on the Armed Forces to do what? How much money are we willing to invest to achieve it, in how much time? (Bartolomé, 2017)

Ensuing, Bartolomé posits, making unnecessary discursive feints, the need for the Armed Forces to interfere in matters related to internal security.

The global field is prodigal in complex, dynamic, transnational, and volatile situations, and—concerning violence—asymmetric, that escape entirely the “extreme limitation” that mark our normative plexus concerning the use of the military instrument. I am referring to a limitation that is not given by the sharp division between internal and external fields raised in the 1988 Defense Law, but by the law of the restructuring of the Armed Forces of 1998 (when speaking of the essential state nature of the aggressor) and the controversial regulation of the Defense Law, imposed in 2006 by decree and without parliamentary consensus (referring to the military nature of the aggression) (Bartolomé, 2017).

Indirectly, it seems to associate the lack of military resources and budget with the prohibition of intervention in matters of internal security that weighs on the Armed Forces; put another way, it seems to postulate that the only alternative of investment is in the military involvement in the fight against drug trafficking and terrorism.

Will we adapt our military institutions to the parameters of international security of the 21st century or will we show ourselves impervious to them? Our “extreme limitation” seems to guide the response to the second option. However, all the nations of the hemisphere seem to manifest the first alternative absolutely; even the models most similar to the Argentine, corresponding to the other countries of the Southern Cone, exhibit remarkable degrees of flexibility compared to ours. The Executive Branch must transcend its poor performance of isolated measures to formulate public policies based on a medium-term plan. It is essential that this action is based on a solid analysis of the global situation regarding security, its evolutionary patterns, and probable trends. In this sense, it is convenient to halt the “extreme limitation” that marks our normative plexus and rethink what the law of restructuring of the Armed Forces indicates and modify the current regulations of the Defense Law. (Bartolomé, 2017)

The odd thing is that Bartolomé did not say this directly but relied on euphemisms to do so.

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