

## EDITORIAL

### MILITARISM IN THE AMERICAS

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Generally speaking, militarism has been defined as the belief or desire of a government to maintain a strong military capability and be prepared to use it aggressively to defend or promote its national interests. But militarism extends beyond the presence of a strong military to engage in the threat of or the actual involvement in conflict and war. It is also an ideology that influences civil society to view authoritarian and militaristic answers as the most appropriate recourses to resolve social, economic, and political problems, both in foreign and domestic affairs. The actual manifestations of militarism vary from country to country, and from one historical period to another, but it often includes a rise in military expenditures, an increase in military personnel both with active duty soldiers and reservists, a strong influence of the military on civilian affairs, a preference for the use of force and authoritarian control as a way of addressing societal issues, and a positive outlook of the military in institutions of social control, such as mass media and schools.

In this issue we have sought to address three different instances of militarism manifested currently in the Americas. The first one focuses on the United States and the expansion of the military-industrial complex that was overtly criticized by U.S. President Dwight D. Eisenhower in his farewell speech in 1961. As Roberto J. González explains in his article “From *GI Joe* to America’s Army”, a more accurate portrayal of the military-industrial complex referred to by Eisenhower 50 years ago is to view it as a highly elaborate web that permeates virtually all aspects of civilian life, including the public and private industry, State and Federal Congresses,

universities, K-12 schooling, and entertainment in general, including TV, movies, and children's toys. Using as a point of departure a popular toy in the U.S., the GI Joe soldier, González makes the case that the United States, as an empire with worldwide presence and overwhelming influence behaves in a manner similar to that of previous powerful empires, such as those represented by ancient Sparta, 13<sup>th</sup> century Mongolia, and Aztec society. An immense challenge now is to attempt to “decommission” U.S. culture by exploding such myths as those related to U.S. exceptionalism and the viewing of war as harmless entertainment.

A related article is offered by Alberto Arenas through “School Textbooks and their Representation of the Iraq War.” Arenas examines the coverage that five of the most popular history textbooks at the High School level in the United States did of the 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq and post-invasion period. The article makes the case that history textbooks are important artifacts of culture in that they reflect an alleged national consensus. Thus, textbooks are not just teaching tools, but they reflect the dominant cultural knowledge and values that members of a society want transmitted to their children. History textbooks not only provide a new generation of citizens with a sanctioned view of the past, but they are also highly politicized, ideological tools that shape the mass of people. Supporting González's contention of the widespread militarism in U.S. culture, Arenas concludes that the textbooks offer a highly sanitized version of events related to the invasion and occupation periods, and they never invite students to question the horrors of war.

A second instance of militarism that we cover in this issue, is the one experienced in Colombia and Mexico (as well as the U.S.-Mexico Border), resulting from unrelenting cycles of violence and impunity that have affected these countries, in the case of Colombia since at least the 1950s, and in the case of Mexico since at least the 1990s but that has reached frightening levels in Mexico since Felipe Calderón's presidency of 2006. Marcela Vásquez-León and John Lindsay-Poland argue in “Will Common Sense Ever Prevail? Lost Lessons, Militarization, and the Establishment of Cycles of Violence and Impunity in Colombia and Mexico” that military intervention, justified by the Wars on Drugs and Terror, has too often resulted in gross violations of human rights and national sovereignty. By using Evo Morales' Bolivia as a counter-point, these authors explain how Bolivia has shown success in avoiding the bloodbaths that have been

experienced in the other two countries by de-emphasizing militarized approaches to social and economic problems. The article has two main purposes: First, to criticize a militarized approach that has been disconnected from complex local realities and that ends up hurting the civilian population the most; and second, to demonstrate that it is possible to create alliances between national governments and civil society that lead to peaceful alternatives which mitigate the reigning impunity enjoyed by violators of human rights.

A related article by Josiah Heyman and Howard Campbell entitled “The Militarization of the United States-Mexico Border Region” also makes the case that transnational social processes such as those of drug trafficking, gun trafficking, and coercive social control through military means are present in this part of the world, with the added complication of unauthorized migration from Mexico into the United States. The authors make the case that while direct intervention of the military and military-like police agencies is greater in Mexico than in the United States, in both sides of the shared border the process of militarization is not an omniscient and omnipotent strategy of control, but rather a repetitive and somewhat clumsy template used by U.S. and Mexican political elites to address dynamic and disruptive challenges in Latin America and related regions of the United States, with disastrous results in terms of violence and human rights violations.

A third instance of militarism explored in this issue is the one being experienced in the favelas (slums) of the city of Rio de Janeiro through the implementation of *Unidades de Polícia Pacificadora* (UPPs), a program started in 2008 under the governorship of Sérgio Cabral Filho. UPPs, which include the setting up of a police station in the favela itself, intense police patrolling of the favelas, and the provision of social and cultural services for favela residents, were established to curb the power of drug gangs and private militias. The first article on this topic, “Neoliberal Accumulation Strategies and the Visible Hand of Police Pacification in Rio de Janeiro,” written by James Freeman, argues that UPPs need to be understood in the context of Rio de Janeiro’s capitalist entrepreneurial strategy in which the favelas become the most recent territory to be conquered both militarily and economically. Despite the fact that UPPs do offer a vital respite of security to favela residents, it comes at a very high price. This high price includes the gentrification of the favelas and a process of selective removal, alongside a loss in self-determination and democracy in deciding the type of urban development that the favelas could create. Freeman employs the theoretical insight of “accumulation by dispossession,” developed

by famed geographer David Harvey, to explore the new urban development in Rio de Janeiro's favelas.

A related article on the creation of UPPs is offered by Chris Yutzy in "Increased State Presence Through the *Unidade de Polícia Pacificadora* in Santa Marta, Rio de Janeiro". Yutzy's article complements that of Freeman's by focusing on one specific favela, Santa Marta, which was the first favela in Rio to receive a UPP. By means of in-depth interviews with Santa Marta residents, Yutzy uncovers the sense of increased safety that residents do feel now that the UPP is in full operation in the favela, but it also highlights problematic issues that the UPP has brought about, including a rise in prices of real state and public services, along with a loss of a sense of autonomy. Yutzy even raises the possibility that the increased police presence is only a temporary measure that will expire as soon as the 2014 World Cup and the 2016 Olympic Games in Rio are completed.

These six articles offer just a glimpse of the numerous manifestations of militarism in the Americas. We hope that together they offer insights and clarification on such a vital civil and human rights issue. Boa leitura!

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