

David Pion-Berlin, *Military Missions in Democratic Latin America*

(New York: Palgrave Macmillan; Springer Nature, 2017), pp. xiii + 218, \$105.00; £71.00, hb.

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This book offers an important corrective to a prevailing consensus in Latin American studies, which holds that the contemporary armed forces are at best a necessary evil and an anachronistic appendage of state formation processes, and at worst a drain on budgets and development, agents of corruption, human rights abuses and imperialism, and an ongoing threat to democracy. The most specific alarmist scenario involves the military being handed internal security missions, for example those associated with counter-narcotics and counter-gang operations, and using these as a springboard toward renewed political power and societal repression, such as during the era of bureaucratic-authoritarian coups (pp. 22–3, 73, 145–6). It is precisely this mechanism that David Pion-Berlin sets out to disarm, by exploring what Latin American militaries have actually been doing in the areas of defence, internal security, disaster relief and public goods provision over the past two decades (defining missions as ‘those primary and permanent roles, usually codified into law, which states assign to their armed forces’, p. 12), and evaluating their consequences for civil–military relations. From Mexico to Venezuela to Brazil to Bolivia to Chile, Pion-Berlin presents compelling and reassuring narratives of domestic activities by Latin American armed forces that were (or could have been, with better policy design and management) conducted with great professionalism and for national benefit. One might have subtitled the volume, *pace* Stanley Kubrick, ‘Or, How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Armed Forces’. As such, this is not only a useful book for scholars because so few other sources explore these operations and cases, but also a valuable and accessible counterpoint for class syllabi on the role of the military in democratic Latin America.

Although Pion-Berlin is careful not to delegitimise the ‘justifiable fears’ civilians have ‘based on haunting memories of the past’ (p. 72), and although the book aims more to show that military missions vary widely in their consequences (pp. 6, 25, 74) rather than to argue that the armed forces should be the trusted policy tool of first resort, the book may push the pendulum a bit too far, and this has consequences for its interpretation of Latin American policymaking. The book faults, for instance, Michelle Bachelet’s hesitation in authorising military responses to a catastrophic earthquake in 2010 (pp. 27, 114, 122, 124–6), a delay that seems partly driven by concerns about a slippery slope and memories of the Pinochet era; it seems perplexed by the failure of Argentine, Peruvian and Ecuadorian civilian leaders to improve their forces after battlefield

underperformance (p. 47) and broadly frustrated by civilians' lack of engagement in defence policy (pp. 5, 8, 31, 66). These historical scars might be enriching rather than impairing judgment, though; policymakers are not necessarily the rational calculators of means and ends that Pion-Berlin depicts (pp. 3, 7), and that could be a good thing. (Also, just because an operation ultimately worked out does not mean that the *ex ante* perceived risk was overblown.) This perspective also leads to a surprising take on collective security institutions in the region – by building trust and enhancing security (and perhaps shoring up democracy), Pion-Berlin almost sees them as undermining defence (pp. 42, 47–9, 56). Would Latin American states really be more effective at defending democracy and sovereignty through a retreat to bilateral deterrence and increased military readiness and force modernisation? Pion-Berlin's discussion (p. 153) of Colombian and Venezuelan preparedness for their 2008 standoff curiously inverts the values that many scholars and policymakers might suggest – 'whereas Colombia was focused on warfare, Venezuela was focused on welfare' – but is a warfare focus really the approach to endorse elsewhere in the region?

Pion-Berlin regularly brings up brief alternative examples, and some of the most persuasive parts of the book involve comparative cases or contextual data to get beyond a narrative of a specific policy success or failure (pp. 100, 116, 119, 131–4, 153–4, 164–70). However, given the book's thematic structure, the more extended country case studies at times seem more illustrative than probative, and the reader might wonder what the broader list of potential cases looks like and how generalisable the findings are. For instance, Venezuelan civic action under Hugo Chávez looks initially successful, but then turns into a long-run failure, and Pion-Berlin highlights at least three sources of that failure, but then determines that some of these were not individually necessary or sufficient for the outcome (pp. 144, 153, 157, 161). To really test the impact of these factors (deployment size, duration and authority structure), multiple cases or deeper process tracing would help. This is also almost entirely a South America and Mexico book – however, the leading edge of concerns about human rights abuses, internal security missions and democratic collapse is arguably Central America. It is not necessarily clear that the successes of Mexico's special forces in kingpin operations and the Bolivian army's effective distribution of household stipends for children's school enrolment should greenlight more extensive use of Honduran and Salvadoran troops in domestic security missions.

The book's central thesis is that congruence between assigned missions and organisational culture drives policy success and protects democratic civilian rule (pp. 3, 6, 11), and that civilian authority can be further protected when military missions are limited in size and duration (p. 183), when civilians hold policy-making and budgetary authority (and exercise oversight) rather than delegating these to commanders (pp. 34, 129, 151, 169–70), and when operations have specific target lists or are conducted away from population centres (pp. 80, 89, 97, 185). However, an alternative driver of policy success (and one perhaps less correlated with civilian authority) is military capacity, which makes the case selection issue somewhat more problematic. Given Chile's successful regional outlier status in so many comparative studies of state capacity in Latin America, its successful response to natural disaster seems unsurprising whether or not the mission had been a good

fit for the armed forces. And given the prevalence of disasters in Latin America, how have poorer states, smaller states, and states with less professionalised and equipped militaries responded to similar challenges? These alternative country cases, if plotted on Pion-Berlin's chart (Fig. 7.1, p. 184), might take up positions all across the horizontal axis, but would probably be confined to the bottom half of the vertical axis — in other words, mission fit might be necessary for successful performance, but is hardly sufficient. Conversely, the failed cases Pion-Berlin discusses involve the Venezuelan and Mexican armies after years of rent-fuelled corruption from petroleum and narcotics (encouraged by a ruling party) — is the problem here the nature of the mission relative to traditional army roles, or is it the specific handicaps of the assigned organisation?

Lastly, by playing up the distinction between law enforcement and the military with respect to organisational cultures, ontologies and operations (pp. 80–4, 90, 103), the book may have missed an opportunity (and future research should be encouraged) to analyse a particularly salient grey area in between: counter-insurgency. Pion-Berlin talks about civic action and mentions its Cold War roots (pp. 148–50), and is bullish on its national payoffs, but does so in the context of public goods provision such as educational stipends, healthcare and school construction; internal security features in a separate chapter. Cold War counter-insurgency blended these two, where development activity sought hearts and minds (and gathered intelligence) against specific adversaries while expanding the state's territorial and societal reach in both urban and rural areas. Again, educational stipends in Bolivia and anti-poverty efforts in Venezuela are one thing, but endorsing civic action missions more broadly (in contexts where state authority is contested by armed groups) carries with it further historical legacies and risks that this book may downplay in its arguments (pp. 74, 133, 182) that the Cold War and its polarised political climate are behind us.

doi:10.1017/S0022216X19000488

Cynthia E. Milton, *Conflicted Memory: Military Cultural Interventions and the Human Rights Era in Peru*

(Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2018), pp. xv + 276, £74.95, hb.

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Cynthia Milton's new book, *Conflicted Memory*, could hardly be more relevant to the political situation in Peru today. In December 2017, after months of speculation, then President Pedro Pablo Kuczynski released another former president, Alberto Fujimori, from prison to serve the remainder of his 25-year sentence for