



UNIVERSIDAD DE BELGRANO

# Documentos de Trabajo

**Facultad de Estudios para Graduados**

**Cycles of civil-military relations in Argentina. A  
framework of analysis**

**Nº 125**

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Febrero 2005



In 2003, the Argentine Republic commemorated twenty years of uninterrupted democracy, the longest period since the installation of the secret ballot and universal suffrage in 1916. For the first time in Argentine history, both civilians and the military seem to dismiss the option of a military intervention as a viable solution to a political crisis. However, the Argentine political system suffered constant instability and uncertainty during much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. From 1862 to 1930, the country had 17 presidents or approximately one every four years. Between 1930 and 1982, it averaged one president every two years. Moreover, from 1930 to 1983 there were six successful military interventions and many more coup attempts.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, in 1983 began an era of democratic rule that has persisted until the present.

The Argentine political system experienced three cycles of civil-military relations, two of military subordination (1862 to 1930 and 1983 to the present, respectively) and one of interventionism (1930 to 1983). The idea of cycles simply refers to the identification of certain periods that share a common feature, in our case, the lack or presence of successful military interventions.

The classical literature on military interventionism and civil-military relations in Argentina has three main features. First, it has an historical scope; most of the works are more prone to analysing events and persons rather than processes and the causal interaction between variables.<sup>2</sup> Second, it is generally oriented to analysing short periods of Argentine history. There are few works on civil-military relations in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Although more has been written on the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the literature often adopts a synchronic approach, favouring the study of short periods instead of the *longue durée*. Thus, a comprehensive comparison of all cycles has never been undertaken. Lastly, while the study of military coups has embraced a wide range of approaches and analytical foci, the two most common explanatory categories involve questions dealing with two basic levels of analysis: the socio-political and the military spheres.<sup>3</sup>

The post-transition literature on Argentine civil-military relations has examined a large number of issues. However, it exhibits a tendency toward synchronic strategies and analyses only the institutional aspects of civil-military relations, such as military prerogatives, the empowerment of the Ministry of Defence, legislation restricting the role of the armed forces, and the building of legislative capacities to oversee defence matters.<sup>4</sup> This new wave of studies does not explain the political and economic prerequisites that underlie institutional building and that allow civilian officials to exert control over the military. It has unquestionably assumed the existence of a new democratic context without explaining the absence of successful military interventions. In brief, it has not focused on the roots of military subordination to civilian authorities.

The current lack of studies on civil military relations in Argentina can also be attributed to the decline of the armed forces as field of research.<sup>5</sup> From this perspective, the study of the armed forces is only important at the beginning of the transition process when they represent a threat to democracy. When the armed forces cease to be a threat, political scientists direct their attention to other issues. Accordingly, the concern about this issue is sure to revive if ever the military re-emerges as a threat to democratic regimes.<sup>6</sup>

The principal goal of this work is to outline a model that accounts for the causes and the dynamics of the civil-military coalitions that precede successful military interventions in Argentina. To this end, I will combine

1. We mean by successful intervention those that remove civilian presidents from office. There were six of those interventions during the 20<sup>th</sup> century: 1930, 1943, 1955, 1962, 1966 and 1976.

2. Examples of the historical view are: Robert Potash, *El Ejército y la Política en Argentina* 4 vol. (Buenos Aires, Editorial Sudamericana, 1995); and Miguel Angel Scenna, *Los Militares* (Buenos Aires: Editorial de Belgrano, 1980).

3. William Thompson, «Organizational cohesion and military coup outcomes», *Comparative Political Studies* 9:3 (october 1976): 255-274; and Peter D. Feaver, «El Control Civil en Democracias Pequeñas: La contribución de la Ciencia Política», en Kevin Casas Zamora (comp.), *Relaciones Cívico-Militares Comparadas* (San Jose: Fundación Arias para la Paz y el Progreso, 1998): pp.67-105.

4. The recent literature on civil-military relations in Argentina has focused on the analysis of specific issues such as the role of the military in the process of democratic transition or consolidation, the new roles of the armed forces, the military participation in peacekeeping operations and so on. See, for instance, John Samuel Fitch, *The Armed Forces and Democracy in Latin America* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), Richard Millett and Michael Gold-Biss (eds), *Beyond Praetorianism: The Latin American Military in Transition* (Miami: The North-South Center Press, 1996); Deborah Norden, *Military Rebellion in Argentina: Between Coups and Consolidation*

(Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996); David Pion-Berlin, *Through Corridors of Power: Institutions and Civil-Military* (Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998); and Paul Zagorski, *Democracy vs. National Security* (Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rien Publishers, 1992).

5. This decline has been described by Agüero in «Las Fuerzas Armadas en una época de Transición: perspectivas para el afianzamiento de la democracia en América Latina» en Rut Diamint (comp). *Control Civil y Fuerzas Armadas en las Nuevas Democracias Latinoamericanas* (Buenos Aires: Nuevo Hacer, 1999), pag. 71-76.

6. *Ibid.*

economic, political and military variables to account not only for the conditions associated with the most recent pattern of military subordination to civilian authorities (1983 to 1999), but also for civil-military relations from state-formation to the democratic transition in 1983. Hence, I will analyse and compare three cycles. The first, from 1862 to 1930, represents an earlier cycle of civilian supremacy and lack of successful military interventions, during which the country experienced an era of military subordination to civilian authorities. All the civilian regimes completed their terms in office. The second, from 1930 to 1983, was characterised by the predominance of military interventionism. Between 1930 and 1983, Argentine history was characterised by the recurrence of military interventions. Civilian forces considered the military to be a political faction, and all political actors accepted the military's participation in politics. The armed forces ruled the country for many years and exerted significant influence on successive civilian regimes. This military participation was incremental, not only at the level of the military control of the state, but also in the arbitrariness of their successive governments. In this sense, the last military regime (1976-1983) was the most militarised and violent in Argentine history.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, democracy during periods of civilian rule was far from consolidated; fraud and political persecution were normal practices during those years. The manifest effect of this particular situation was a high degree of conflict among the principal political, economic and social forces. Finally, the last period, from 1983 to 1999 (during the presidencies of Raul Alfonsín, 1983-1989, and Carlos Menem, 1989-1999), was again characterised by the prevalence of civilian regimes and by the lack of successful military interventions. Currently, Argentine democracy is considered a consolidated regime in the sense that political and economic actors routinely choose to pursue their objectives through democratic means.<sup>8</sup>

A historical overview of the topic will allow us to compare civil-military relations across time and infer conditions linked with military subordination or intervention. According to Ragin, the voluntaristic bias of case oriented research could be counterbalanced by historical comparisons. Even in single case studies comparative awareness and a longer span of investigation can reveal structural conditions surrounding different event sequences.<sup>9</sup> Ragin sees the special strength of comparative historical research «*in its particular attitude to deal with two phenomena –multiple causal paths leading to the same outcome and different results arising from the same factor or factor combination, depending on the context in which the latter operates. He sees this as a powerful advantage because he considers multiple and «conjunctural» causation as the major reasons for the peculiar complexity of social phenomena and specifically of large-scale social phenomena.*»<sup>10</sup>

Comparing these three cycles, two involving military subordination (1862 to 1930 and 1983 to 1999) and one involving interventionism (1930 to 1983), will allow us to identify the conditions related to both military subordination and successful military intervention. Another goal is to determine the systematic and non-systematic components of a successful military intervention, identifying which factors have remained constant during the six successful military interventions and which factors have changed during periods of military subordination.

### Explaining military interventions: societal or military-oriented accounts

The study of civil-military relations has produced a large volume of literature on military intervention in politics.<sup>11</sup> However, these explanations have a unidirectional emphasis; they tend to explain interventions stressing one set of causal variables. There are two groups of independent variables. The first group, and the

7. Andres Fontana, «Political Decision Making by a Military Corporation: Argentina, 1976-1983», Ph.D. Diss., University of Texas at Austin, 1987. Vicente Palermo y Marcos Novaro, *La Dictadura Militar, 1976-1983* (Buenos Aires: Norma, 2001).

8. See Steven Levitsky, «Argentina: From Crisis to Consolidation (and Back)», in Jorge I. Domínguez and Michael Shifter (eds), *Constructing Democratic Governance in Latin America* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), pags. 244-246.

9. Dietrich Rueschemeyer, Evelyn Huber Stephens & John D. Stephens, *Capitalist, Development & Democracy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), pag.33.

10. *Ibid*, pag. 34.

11. Excellent analyses on military interventionism are: John Samuel Fitch, *The military coup d'état as a political process: Ecuador, 1948-1966* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977); Eric A. Nordlinger, *Soldiers in Politics: Military Coups and Governments* (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1977); Jose Nun, «The Middle-Class Military Coup Revisited». In Abraham F. Lowenthal and John S. Fitch [eds]. *Armies and Politics in Latin America* (New York and London: Holmes & Meier, 1986); Amos Perlmutter, *The Military and Politics in Modern Times* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1977); Robert Potash, *El Ejército y la Política en Argentina* 4 vol. (Buenos Aires, Editorial Sudamericana, 1995); Alain Rouquié, *Poder Militar y Sociedad Política en Argentina* 2 Vol. (Buenos Aires: Hyspamerica, 1986); Alfred Stepan, *Rethinking Military Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988); and, Claude Welch, *No farewell to arms?: military disengagement from politics in Africa and Latin America* (Boulder : Westview Press, 1987).

most important in quantitative terms, focuses on exogenous variables and views military intervention in politics as a direct result of the interaction of forces and processes that take place *outside* this institution. Military interventions are seen as the consequence of societal and structural processes in which the armed forces play only a minor role. This kind of analysis has developed a variety of independent variables, including the level of institutionalisation of the political system,<sup>12</sup> the degree of political culture of a society,<sup>13</sup> the stage of economic modernisation,<sup>14</sup> and competing class interests and/or international pressures<sup>15</sup>. The second group favours endogenous variables. It tends to associate intervention with processes and perceptions that take place *within* the armed forces,<sup>16</sup> and to argue that the military itself develops features that determine interventionist behaviour.

During the 1960s and the 1970s, a number of approaches set out to explain militarism in Latin America on the basis of exogenous societal relations and processes that were seen as giving rise to military rule. Four perspectives have been influential in this debate: the institutional, the cultural, the bureaucratic-authoritarianism and the instrumental.

The first perspective is best represented by Samuel P. Huntington's *Political Order in Changing Societies*, which challenges the implicit progressive optimism of modernisation literature, contending that: «*military interventions are only one specific manifestation of a broader phenomenon...the general politicisation of social forces and institutions.*»<sup>17</sup> In his view, military intervention in politics is part of the increasing mobilisation of all groups. If specialised political institutions, most importantly, modern parties are inadequate for the elaboration and transmission of the aspirations of social groups, all such bodies, including the armed forces, become highly politicised. They exert continual pressure on the formal holders of political power, since there is a complete lack of intermediate institutions that collect, contain and transmit societal demands.

Huntington argues that military coups are principally instances of raw social conflict. He notes «*it is fallacious to attempt to explain military interventions in politics primarily by reference to the internal structure of the military or the social background of the officers doing the intervening*».<sup>18</sup> Huntington uses the term «*pretorianism*» to describe situations in which social mobilisation and economic growth were not channelled through legitimised political institutions. This leads each group to attempt to impose its will on the others, with the military ultimately achieving dominance. In such a pretorian context, each social group utilises the means available to it and the military intervenes. The incapacity of the political sector to deal with differing rates of social, economic, and political modernisation helps explain the existence of coups. In this scenario, it becomes necessary for the armed forces to impose order on turbulent, modernising societies. The book's main hypothesis is that countries with high levels of mobilisation and low levels of institutionalisation are more prone to military intervention than those with strong institutions.<sup>19</sup>

*The Man on Horseback* by Samuel Finer best represents the cultural explanation for military intervention. Finer categorises societies according to their political culture by evaluating their structure of government and respect for the rule of law. He found that in societies where this respect was low or minimal there was a greater likelihood for military interference and intervention in politics. Thus, citizen support for liberal democratic values represents the most important explanatory factor behind a military intervention. The higher the respect for the Rule of Law the lower the likelihood of a military coup.<sup>20</sup>

The bureaucratic-authoritarian (BA) perspective, developed by Guillermo O'Donnell, has influenced social scientists for many decades. O'Donnell argued that, in the Argentine case, social and economic moderni-

12. See Samuel P. Huntington, *El Orden Político en las Sociedades en Cambio* (Buenos Aires: Paidós, 1991), specially chapter 1.

13. Samuel Finer, *The Man on Horseback: The role of the Military in Politics* (London: Pall Mall Press, 1962) and Brian Loveman and Thomas M. Davies, Jr. *The Politics of Antipolitics: The Military in Latin America* (Wilmington: University of Nebraska Press, 1997)..

14. Guillermo O'Donnell, *Modernización y Autoritarismo* (Buenos Aires: Paidós, 1972) and *El Estado Burocrático Autoritario* (Buenos Aires: Editorial del Belgrano, 1982).

15. Michael C. Desch, «Soldiers, States and Structures: the end of the Cold War and Weakening U.S. Civilian Control», *Armed Forces and Society* 24:3 (Spring 1998): 389-406.

16. See Alfred Stepan, «The New Professionalism of Internal Warfare and Military Role Expansion,» In Alfred Stepan [ed], *Authoritarian Brazil, Origins, Policies, and Future*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973) pp.47-65; and, *The Military in Politics: Changing Patterns in Brazil* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971).

17. Samuel P. Huntington, *El Orden Político en las Sociedades en Cambio*, op. cit., pag.177.

18. *Ibid.*, pags. 175-213.

19. *Ibid.*, pag. 233.

20. Samuel Finer, *The Man on Horseback.*, op. cit., pag. 53.

sation led to authoritarianism rather than to the strengthening of democracy. O'Donnell established a causal link between specific political events and precise features of the economic landscape. He claimed that a strong elective affinity exists between higher levels of modernisation and the rise of so-called bureaucratic-authoritarianism. According to this view, the role of the military in the 1960s and beyond has been to guarantee the political conditions necessary for continued capitalist industrial expansion. The connection between the overall context of peripheral capitalism and BA rests upon an elaboration of the concept of threat. A crisis of accumulation, for instance, is one in which actions of the lower classes are perceived by the dominant classes as blocking the accumulation of capital.<sup>21</sup>

O'Donnell's thesis has provoked extensive discussion. The stress on vertical integration, or deepening, has been especially challenged.<sup>22</sup> Several authors note that, apart from Argentina, the actual policies that followed the military regimes coups were very far from this course.<sup>23</sup> It has also been pointed out that not only economic policies vary considerably among the various bureaucratic-authoritarian regimes, but other regimes pursued the directions in economic development that O'Donnell associates with BA, such as Venezuela, Colombia and Mexico.<sup>24</sup> O'Donnell's account explains much better the reasons of the intervention in the Argentina case than the causes behind the lack of it in other countries.

The instrumental approach holds that the primary role of the military institution is to protect and defend the interests of the dominant classes or those of the foreign countries.<sup>25</sup> This approach was heavily influenced by Marxism and emphasises the exogenous factors of international and domestic economic determinants.<sup>26</sup> Latin American social scientists were strongly attracted to Marxist-Leninist theories of imperialism to explain underdevelopment. In this scenario, the armed forces were seen as a willing instrument of international capitalism and its domestic class allies. The Latin American variety of this line of thinking -dependency theory- began to exercise great influence both in Latin America and in the US and Europe in the 1970s. The dependency of Latin America explained its underdevelopment, and the close links between the Latin American military establishments and the US military through the Inter-American Defence Board and the U.S. Mutual Assistance Program were related to the objective economic need of international capitalism to maintain control over Latin America for its raw material, markets, and exploitable labour. Reduced to its core, the instrumental approach sees Latin American armies as «programmed» by Washington, «simple appendages» of the Pentagon whose seizures of power respond to the needs of world capitalism to repress social protest movements and promote investment.<sup>27</sup>

The emphasis on professionalisation of the military for explaining military coups began with the book by Alfred Stepan, *The military in politics: changing patterns in Brazil*. Stepan analyses how the ideology of *new professionalism* arose and how it contributed to the expansion of the military's role in politics.<sup>28</sup> *New professionalism* appeared when modern armies defined defence against internal threats as one of their main functions, which in turn made it necessary for them to become experts in internal political matters.<sup>29</sup> The process that Stepan explains is the expansion of the political role of the Brazilian and Peruvian military establishments in the 1960s. The process of political involvement in Brazil began in the *Escola De Guerra*.<sup>30</sup> This institution trained officers in internal security matters, including virtually all aspects of social, economic and political life.<sup>31</sup> The principal assumption of Stepan's approach is that the causes of a military intervention are more related with changes in the nature of professionalism than with the socio-political environment.

These approaches highlight different causal variables and processes that surround a military intervention. As we noted earlier, they share a common flaw in that they fail to offer an integrated view of the interactions

21. Guillermo O'Donnell., *Modernización y Autoritarismo*, op.cit., pag. 134.

22. For an excellent critique of O'Donnell assumptions see, Karen L. Remmer and Gilbert Merks, «Bureaucratic-Authoritarianism Revisited,» *Latin American Research Review*, 17:2 (1982): 3-36.

23. See José Serra, «Tres tesis erróneas con respecto a la relación entre industrialización y regímenes autoritarios», en David Collier, *El Nuevo Autoritarismo en América Latina* (México: FCE, 1985), pags.104-168.

24. *Ibid.*

25. One of the most influential articles of this account was: Jose Nun, «The Middle-Class Military Coup Revisited», in Abraham F. Lowenthal and John S. Fitch [eds], *Armies and Politics in Latin America* (New York and London: Holmes & Meier, 1986) pp.59-95.

26. José Nun, «América Latina: la crisis hegemónica y el golpe militar», *Desarrollo Económico* 22:23 (Julio-Diciembre 1966).

27. This vision is held by Jorge Tapia Valdés, *El Terrorismo de Estado: La Doctrina de la Seguridad Nacional en el Cono Sur* (México: Editorial Nueva Imagen, 1980); and, Eduardo Luis Duhalde, *El Estado Terrorista Argentino* (Barcelona: Argos, 1983).

28. See Alfred Stepan, «The New Professionalism of Internal Warfare and Military Role Expansion», In Alfred Stepan, et.al., *Authoritarian Brazil: Origins, policies and future*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973);

29. *Ibid.* pag.57.

30. *Ibid.* pag.114.

31. *Ibid.* pag. 151.

between the internal dynamics of the military institutions themselves and the wider processes of socio-economic and political change. Exogenous approaches may turn out to be overly mechanistic insofar as they identify various explanatory factors without spelling out exactly how these affect the military decision to intervene.<sup>32</sup> Moreover, some of these perspectives, notably the instrumental, are both deterministic and reductionist. The military institution is invariably «predestined» to play a function as executor of the interests of the dominant classes or as an instrument of foreign states. Likewise, the bureaucratic-authoritarian explanation has been widely criticised for its determinism and lack of historical contextualization. Many authors have demonstrated empirically that modernisation does not always produce a bureaucratic-authoritarian regime.<sup>33</sup> In brief, while exogenous explanations tend to underestimate the importance of the armed forces behaviour and perceptions, the endogenous overestimates the relevance of the Armed forces as an autonomous force.

Our research design favours the move from unicausal and unidirectional theories to the study of inter-related processes; and from understanding change as a form of essentialist determinism between structures to reciprocal historical causation across economic, political, and social dimensions. This relationship among diverse processes is both empirical and historical. That is, every process has its own dynamic and its own actors, and the relationships between the processes and their outcomes are not scripted in definitive form. This requires an analysis of the different conflicts of interest within civil and political society. It also involves consideration of the armed forces as an actor with its own set of interests, which are not the result of external imposition but of the military's own interpretation of the surrounding political environment. In this perspective, the military is treated like any other social group, with its own interests, attitudes, and culture.

The focus is to account for the processes that induce civilian and military actors to take part in pro-coup coalitions that could eventually end in a successful military intervention against civilian regimes.<sup>34</sup> In other words, the aim is to elucidate why in some contexts different actors are «available» to join an interventionist coalition and why in other situations they are not. Successful military interventions were always preceded by the building of coalitions between sectors of the armed forces and groups from civil society.<sup>35</sup>

Successful interventions have three main features. First, members of the armed forces execute it; second, actors of the civil and political society support it; third, the outcome of the intervention is the removal of the civilian authorities previously selected in a national election. There were six such interventions in Argentina between 1862 and 1999: 1930, 1943, 1955, 1962, 1966 and 1976.

Therefore, our research strategy identifies the conditions that favour the building of these coalitions. This entails examining which features of the political and economic environments spur both civilians and the military to be allies in a coalition whose ultimate end is to carry out an intervention.

In this sense, this selection of variables represents a combination of factors not previously analysed in the literature. It complements the focus of the classical and post-transitional literature on Argentina civil-military relations. The research design seeks to integrate aspects of the exogenous and endogenous explanations by studying the process of pro-coup coalition building as the outcome of the interaction among four major variables: the orientation of government economic policies, the nature of the political regime; the civilian government treatment of the military institutional interest and the military role beliefs.

The first refers to the predominant direction adopted in government policies of the economic sphere. This orientation can favour free-market forces or those groups that depend on protectionism or other types of state interventionism. The second variable refers to the features of the process by which governmental authorities are selected; this process can be restrictive or unrestrictive. The third variable involves the treatment of the

32. Eric Norlinger, op.cit. pag.63.

33. See Jose Serra, «Tres tesis erróneas...», op.cit.

34. The concept of civilian regime is comprehensive, it indicate that the authorities of the executive and legislative powers are hold by civilians selected through elections. It does not necessarily means the existence of previous democratic elections. In fact, elections in Argentina has not always respected democratic principles in the sense of include a large proportion of the adult population and the existence of fair and competitive procedures. During a great part of the Argentina history, elections had not much democratic meaning. For instance, until 1916 only a 9% of the entire male population above 18 year had the right to vote and generally do it a minor percentage. Until 1983, most of the successive civilian presidents reach the government through elections in which the principal party of the opposition was banned. See, Darío Cantón, Elecciones y partidos políticos en la Argentina, historia, interpretación y balance, 1910-1966 (Buenos Aires: Siglo XXI, 1973).

35. This is not new, most of the literature on Argentine civil-military relations stress this feature of the military interventions.

Armed Forces institutional interest by civilian governments, in reference to the civilian sector's attentiveness towards military institutional concerns. Civilian treatment can favour or adversely affect institutional interests. Finally, military role beliefs refer to the military's conception of its role in politics. Role beliefs include explicit and implicit notions of the proper relationship between civilian authorities, the Armed Forces and society. Role beliefs can justify or legitimise a political role for the military or favour democratic stability.

A change in the perception of threat from those actors who joined the coalition normally precedes the building of a pro-coup coalition. The concept of threat perception refers to a subjective construction made by actors regarding specific actions or behaviour of other groups or institutions (state and civil society groups). It is a relational concept that links the actions of some actors with the reactions of others. It reflects how civilian and military actors evaluate or assess their context, especially, the policies implemented by the government through State structures. Although the construction of a threat remains a subjective process, it has visible consequences in the sense that perceptions alter strategies and policies of the actors who perceive the threat. Knorr has argued that perceptions vary irrespective of the objective environment. Threat perception is more of a «personal construct» that creates an image of reality that «focuses on some components of reality while screening out others.»<sup>36</sup> The stronger the image, the more influence it has on political behaviour.

The subjective construction of a threat could be justified, distorted or exaggerated; therefore, the existence of a threat perception does not necessarily mean that this threat existed. The main aspect of threats that concerns us is how actors perceive them. When a state is at war, it is difficult to argue that the threat is subjective. In peacetime, however, threats may indeed be subjective. In this pacific context, the analysis of primary and secondary sources is required in order to determine what a specific actor perceives as a threat.

The formation of pro-coup coalitions that lead to successful interventions can be linked to a change in the level of threat perception by armed forces and by civilian actors. Changes in the perception of threat are linked with different configurations of the four above-mentioned variables.

Certain conditions of the socio-economic environment are linked with an increase in the threat perception of both the dominant groups and of the political actors. Similarly, the government treatment of the institutional interest of the armed forces changes the latter's perception of threat whereas it is the military role beliefs that justify their intervention in politics. After a period, a pro-coup coalition is assembled with the purpose of organising and carrying out an intervention.

Taking into account the interactions of the four variables mentioned, the main argument of this work is that «*Cycles of military subordination or interventionism in contemporary Argentina are associated with the evolution and interaction of the orientation of government economic policies, the nature of the political regime, the civilian treatment of the institutional interest of the armed forces and the military role beliefs. These variables are linked with different perceptions of threat and with the probability of incorporation, or the lack of it (the availability), of the dominant groups, political actors and the military to interventionist coalitions.*»

## Main arguments and concepts

This section describes the set of variables that are associated with the presence –or the absence– of successful military interventions. I will spell out the conditions that regularly preceded a successful intervention and outline some general characteristics of the pre-coup coalitions, their nature and dynamics, how they are shaped and the interaction between the participating actors.

The Argentine experience indicates that successful interventions were accomplished by sectors of the Armed Forces or by the military as an institution, with supporting actors of civil society. The armed forces include the Army, the Navy and the Air Force, which was part of the Army until 1946. The actors who participated in each coup were not always the same. There were specific groups not only within the armed forces but also in civil society that played a major role in each intervention. For instance, during the first successful military uprising, on September 6, 1930, the Army carried out the intervention while the Navy

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36. See K. Knorr, *Historical Dimensions of National Security Problems* (Kansas City: University Press of Kansas, 1976), pag.112.



remained passive; similarly, the conservative and socialist parties and entrepreneurial organisations of the landed oligarchy and the industrial bourgeoisie actively promoted and supported the intervention.<sup>37</sup>

One of the principal features of advanced industrial democracies is that the main political, social and economic actors have reached and internalised a high level of consensus regarding basic functioning aspects of the system. Conflict exists, but it is confined within democratic institutions and procedures.<sup>38</sup> Conversely, one salient characteristic of Argentine political history is that, from the very beginning, political and economic forces did not agree on the most basic political and economic issues. Neither the elite nor the principal social forces were able to consolidate hegemonic regimes, where the rest of the society accepted their projects.<sup>39</sup> The antagonism between the agricultural and the industrial model, or the conflict between peronism and antiperonism has characterised the history of the country since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>40</sup> Many intellectuals have analysed this peculiarity of Argentine political history and according to a famous Argentine novelist, Argentina could be labelled a «society of rivals».<sup>41</sup> Nicolas Shunbay holds that the concept of consensus was practically absent from the Argentine political vocabulary due to the sharp division of Argentine society.<sup>42</sup>

The formation of successful pro-coup coalitions could be linked with specific configuration of four variables. The first two variables, the orientation of government economic policies and the nature of the political regime, are related to incentives that both the dominant and political actors have to adhere to in an interventionist coalition. The remaining two variables, the treatment of the military institutional interest by the civilian government and military role beliefs create the same effect on the military by fostering political intervention.

## 1. Conditions related to the economic and political context:

### (a) Orientation of government economic policies

The orientation of the policies implemented by a government through state structures allows us to understand which pattern of capital accumulation it supports. Capital accumulation is the process by which capital is invested in a process that enlarges production, so that accumulation entails the transformation of surplus value into capital. Groups that have control over the means of production carry out that process. Accumulation only really begins with reproduction on an expanding scale. The key to this expansion is that the capitalist does not really consume all the surplus value. As accumulation expands, so does production. There must in each new productive cycle be more raw materials, more instruments of production, more labour, and then new markets to sell the additional output, and so forth.

The relation between the orientation of government economic policies and military intervention has not been extensively studied. Most of the literature on classical political economy establishes links between economic performance, for instance the rate of growth, and political instability.<sup>43</sup> According to these accounts poor economic performance led to pressure on governments from civil society, which in turn led to authoritarianism and a search for compliance that drew the military into politics and finally into government.<sup>44</sup>

My aim is to elucidate how the orientation of government economic policies could be linked with the availability and participation of the dominant groups in interventionist coalitions.

37. Marvin Goldwert, «The Argentine Revolution of 1930: The Rise of Modern Militarism and Ultra-Nationalism in Argentina», Ph.D. diss, University of Texas at Austin, 1962.

38. See Adam Przeworski, «La democracia como resultado contingente de conflictos» in Jon Elster y Rune Slagstad, *Constitucionalismo y Democracia* (México: FCE, 1999), pag. 89-110.

39. The idea of a permanent argentine stalamate was developed by Guillermo O'Donnell in: «Estado y Alianzas en la Argentina», *Desarrollo Económico* 16:64 (enero-marzo 1977): 523-544.

40. See Tulio Halperin Donghi, *La larga Agonía de la Argentina peronista* (Buenos Aires: Ariel, 1994), pag.11.

41. Interview to Ernesto Sabato, *La Nación*, 22 de enero 1987; see also Juan Carlos Portantiero, *La Producción de un Orden* (Buenos Aires: Nueva Vision, 1989), first chapter.

42. Nicolas Shunbay, *La Invención de la Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Emece, 1991), Pag.11-30.

43. A good survey about this subject is: Alberto Alesina and Roberto Perotti, «The Political Economy of Growth: A Critical Survey of the Recent Literature», *The World Bank Economic Review* 8:3 (1994): 351-371.

44. The original formulation of this claim was formulated by Lipset in: *Political Man* (London: Mercury Books, 1960), specially chapter 2 and 3.

Governmental attentiveness to the interests of the dominant groups has been referred to as an essential condition for regime stability.<sup>45</sup> This requires an examination of the role played by governmental policies in the process of accumulation and of the reaction of the dominant groups to these policies. The political conduct of the dominant groups can be analysed through their interest groups, the so called, entrepreneurial organisations. The argument which follows from this is that the dominant groups and their entrepreneurial organisations will support civilian regimes when governmental policies do not contradict the fundamental interests of entrepreneurs. Yet, although the state tends to reproduce the conditions that allow the reproductions of capitalist accumulation, it can favour through its policies different factions of the dominant classes. In this sense, it can implement policies that contradict demands and interests of factions of the dominant classes, including the hegemonic ones.<sup>46</sup>

The evidence from the Argentine case shows that the systematic support by the government of certain modes of accumulation can encourage or discourage the incorporation of factions of the dominant groups to interventionist coalitions. It is possible to carry out two basic analytical procedures to determine the orientation of the governmental policies regarding a mode of accumulation. First, the identification of the relevant economic groups in each cycle; second, the description of the policies adopted by the government in the commercial, financial, labour, and fiscal spheres. Then, we can proceed with the analysis of the interest groups that were benefited or affected by these policies.

The orientation of government policies tends to be related to changes in the perception of threat of the dominant economic sectors. The examination of documental evidence from entrepreneurial organisations allow to establish links between government choices and variations in the perception of threat by these organisations. This perception can be evaluated analysing diverse sources, such as declarations of leaders of the principal economic sectors, articles in newspapers, public speeches and institutional documents of the entrepreneurial associations that represent the dominant groups, for instance the *Unión Industrial Argentina* (UIA- Argentine Industrial Union), the *Sociedad Rural Argentina* (SRA- Argentine Rural Society) and *Confederación General Económica* (CGE, General Economic Confederation). The analysis of primary and secondary sources permit to make inferences about the extent of agreement or opposition of the dominant groups regarding governmental policies.

The access of the dominant actors to the government decision making process will also be examined. A number of recent works have made the argument that this access tends to promote a better aggregation of the economic elites interest and hence the reduction of conflict with the government.<sup>47</sup> The most common form of access is the designation of members of entrepreneurial organisations as ministers in the government.

The relevance of this dimension comes from the availability of the dominant groups to take part in interventionist coalitions. This means that the participation of members of entrepreneurial organisations in the government tends to favour the bargaining strategies of these groups. This does not imply that this access always yields beneficial consequences for the interest of these actors. The argument here is that this kind of access improves their presence at the heart of the decision making process, making negotiations more attractive than confrontational strategies. The principal indicator for this dimension is the percentage of members of entrepreneurial organisations who are members of the government during the three cycles.

Argentine history shows that different economic orientations of the government seem to be related to cycles of military intervention or subordination. Argentine dominant groups perceived that civilian regimes offered scenarios where «one was worse than the next one» for the capitalist interests during a large part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>48</sup> For this reason, from the 1930s onwards, the political strategies of the dominant groups

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45. See Adam Przeworski, «La democracia como resultado contingente de conflictos» op.cit; and Dietrich Rueschemeyer, Evelyne Huber Stephens & John D. Stephens, *Capitalist, Development & Democracy*, pag. 62s.

46. See for example the work of Nicos Poulantzas, *State Power and Socialism* (London: Verso, 1978); Bob Jessop, *The Capitalist State* (Oxford: Martin Robertson, 1982); Peter Evans, Dieter Rueschemeyer and Theda Skocpol, *Bringing the State Back In* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); and, Christian Anglade and Carlos Fortín, *State and Capital Accumulation in Latin America* (Pittsburg: 1985).

47. Peter Birle, *Los Empresarios y la Democracia en la Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Editorial del Belgrano, 1997), pags.33-49.

48. This issue is the core of the argument developed by Carlos H. Acuña in , «Interes empresarios, dictadura y democracia en la Argentina Actual -O sobre por qué la burguesía abandona estrategias autoritarias y opta por la estabilidad democrática-», en Carlos H. Acuña (comp.), *La Nueva Matriz Política Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Nueva Visión, 1995); pags. 231-272.

were rather consistent: develop defensive actions that frequently led to incorporation in interventionist coalitions.<sup>49</sup>

This leads me to formulate the hypothesis that successful military intervention is more likely when the general orientation of government economic policies contradicts the fundamental interest of the dominant groups. Conversely, successful military intervention is less likely when that orientation does not affect the key interest of dominant groups.

The orientation of the government economic policies could be associated with: 1) different perceptions of threat by these groups; and 2) the type of strategies (strategies of bargaining, confrontation, or incorporation to coup coalitions), that they adopt vis-à-vis civilian authorities.

Both the modes of capital accumulation based on agricultural exports (1862-1930) and on entrepreneurial concentration through financial valorisation (1976-1999) are associated with a government policy that favours the accumulation of capital by the most relevant dominant groups. In this context, dominant actors have no incentives to participate in coup coalitions. On the other hand, the mode based on industrialisation through import substitution (1930-1976) was associated with a government policy that affected the process of accumulation of relevant dominant groups and with a perception of threat that stimulated these actors to participate in interventionist coalitions.

### **(b) The nature of the political regime:**

The purpose of this variable is to analyze the impact of the nature of the political regime on the probability that political actors (mainly parties) will integrate pro-coup coalitions. It is analyse one dimension of the political regime, specifically, how the level of restriction to political activities affects the collective action of political parties.

The concept of political regime has been used in many senses by social scientists. In the last thirty years, the literature has focused on different conceptualisations of political regimes to explain the breakdown of democracies, the nature of authoritarian regimes, transitions from authoritarian rule, and the process of democratic consolidation. The idea of political regime that underlies this argument refers to the method of selection of the government and representative assemblies. This definition is in line with earlier conceptualisation, «*The regime is the set of effectively prevailing patterns (not necessarily legally formalised) that establish the modalities of recruitment and access to government roles and the criteria for representation and the permissible resources that form the basis for expectations of access to such roles.*»<sup>50</sup> In this sense, a political regime is understood in terms of the choices of procedures that regulate access to state power.

Modern representative democracy has three defining properties. The first two are the two classic dimensions analysed in Dahl and in many other discussions of democracy in recent decades.<sup>51</sup> *First*, the head of government and the legislature must be chosen in open and fair competitive elections. Free and fair elections are a core ingredient of modern representative democracy. Fraud and coercion may not determine the outcomes for democratic elections. Elections must offer the possibility of alternation in power even if no actual alternative occurs for an extended time. Moreover, the result of the electoral procedures has to be respected by the authorities. *Second*, the electorate must include a sizeable majority of the adult population. If large parts of the population are excluded, the regime may be a constitutional oligarchy, but could not be considered a democracy. A *third* defining element is that democracies must protect political rights and civil liberties such as freedom of the press, freedom of speech, freedom to organise or the right to habeas corpus. Even if the government is chosen in free and fair elections with a broad suffrage, in the absence of an effective guarantee of civil liberties it is not democratic. A liberal component—the protection of individual liberties—is a necessary element of a democracy.

We classify the Argentine political regimes into four main categories following this general theoretical and methodological framework (see table 1). These categories are: constitutional oligarchy (that fulfils only the

49. Guillermo O'Donnell, *Estado y Alianzas...* op.cit.

50. Guillermo O'Donnell; Phillipe Schmitter, and Laurence Whitehead, *Transitions From Authoritarian Rule: Latin America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), first volume.

51. Robert Dahl, *La Poliarquía* (Buenos Aires: Tecnos, 1989), chapter 1 and 2.

third condition), limited democracy (that generally fulfils only the second condition, partially the first and last ones), military regimes (that generally ban all political activity) and full democracy (that fulfils all the three conditions). In the Argentine case, constitutional oligarchies were characterised by an extensive use of fraudulent practices and by the participation only of a limited electorate. This kind of regime normally guarantees civil liberties, especially the freedoms of press and speech. Limited democracies generally fulfil only the second condition and partially fulfil the first and third conditions. In the case of Peronism the freedoms of speech and press was severely limited. Similarly, coercion was present in all elections from 1946 onward, when an important proportion of opposition candidates were in jail during the elections. Limited democracies also employ non-democratic procedures to alter electoral results, including tactics such as federal interventions. Military regimes normally have a low level of respect for the three dimensions. A full democracy secures full political participation and exerts no regime controls on political activity.

**Table 1: Types of political regimes in Argentina**

Cycle	Period	Type of regime
First Cycle	1862-1916	Constitutional oligarchy
	1916-1930	Limited democracy
Second Cycle	1930-32	Military regime
	1932-1943	Limited democracy
	1943-1946	Military regime
	1946-1955	Limited Democracy
	1955-1958	Military regime
	1958-1966	Limited democracy
	1966-1973	Military regime
	1973-1976	Limited democracy
1976-1983	Military regime	
Third Cycle	1983-1999	Full democracy

This lead to the hypothesis that the nature of the political regime can be associated with the availability of political parties to participate in interventionist coalitions. Political parties tend to join a pro-coup coalition when the regime restricts any of the three defining properties of democracy.

## 2. Conditions related to the military:

### (a) Civilian government treatment of the armed forces institutional interest

The study of civil-military relations has traditionally focused on the balance of power between the military profession and the political authorities. As Huntington argued, «*the problem in the modern state is not armed revolt, but the relation of the expert to the politician*»<sup>52</sup>. Huntington's solution to this relation was the concept of objective civilian control. Civil-military relations could maximise military security with a minimum sacrifice of other social values if civilians recognize an autonomous sphere of military professionalism.<sup>53</sup> Bengt Abrahamson holds that the armed forces are like all other organisations, in that they are goal seeking and concerned primarily with growth, improvement and, ultimately, their own survival.<sup>54</sup> Similarly, Amos Perlmutter argues that the propensity of an officer of the armed forces to intervene in politics is linked to his corporate and bureaucratic roles and orientations. The military organisation strives for internal control of its profession and for protection from external political control. Perlmutter concludes that the military will intervene when its corporate or bureaucratic management roles are threatened.<sup>55</sup> Finally, Nordlinger holds that the defence or enhancement of the military's corporate interests is the most important motive for intervention.<sup>56</sup> For him, the most common and salient reason for intervention involves the defence or enhancement of the military's

52. See Samuel P. Huntington, *The Soldier and the State* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press, 1995), pag. 20

53. *Ibid.*, pags. 163-193.

54. See Bengt Abrahamson, *Military Professionalization and Political Power* (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1972), specially chapter 1.

55. See Amos Perlmutter, *The Military and Politics in Modern Times* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1977), pags. 1-17.

56. See Eric Nordlinger, *Soldier in Politics.*, op.cit. pags. 43-61.

corporate interests. Every public institution is concerned with the protection and enhancement of its own interests. They all share an interest in adequate budgetary support, autonomy in managing internal affairs, and the continuity of the institution itself. In this sense, the respect of the institutional integrity of the armed forces is an important condition for the stability of civil-military relations.<sup>57</sup> When civilians are responsible for the degradation of the integrity of the military, the chances of the military being encouraged to enter the political arena are greatly increased.<sup>58</sup>

To summarise, the armed forces as an institution have their own interests. Their core objective is to preserve if not enlarge their coercive capabilities, projecting them outward against foreign foes and, if need be, inward against domestic foes. To do so, they are motivated to maintain physical and material standards and organisational control reliant on such factors as budget, equipment, discipline and cohesion. For this reason, civilian government treatment of the institutional interests of the armed forces plays a key role in civil-military relations. That treatment can be measured by the analysis of four dimensions that represent areas of military interest. The treatment that civilian officials make of any of these areas can damage or improve the subordination of the military. The military policy of a government can benefit the institutional interest of the military through the instrumentation of incentives. An *incentive measure* is a specific inducement designed and implemented to influence actors positively. An incentive usually takes the form of a new policy, law, or programme. In the case of the military sphere, incentives were generally implemented to favour the military institutional interest. The evidence to be displayed in the subsequent chapters shows that the civilian management of these interests tends to alter the perception of threat of the military. The institutional interests of the armed forces can be damaged or favoured incentive in four principal areas:

*Professional:* Military personnel belong to a complex organisation that has developed not only rules and procedures for its internal management but also different standards for promotion within the institution. In this sense, the main objective of any of its members is to reach the upper echelons of the organisation. If they follow an established career-path, they will reach a higher position in a set number of years. This sequence is more predictable when the institution employs, as criteria for promotion, only professional achievement. In this sense, the maintenance of institutional autonomy in the managing of internal affairs is a fundamental goal. Even minor trespasses upon military reservation may be seen as attacks upon its professional integrity. The autonomy of the military excludes any attempt to penetrate the officer corps or the enlisted rank through the introduction of political ideas or personnel. Civilian interference has a negative impact upon the military. Principally, it increases the factionalisation of an otherwise cohesive officer corps.<sup>59</sup> The perceived level of threat is increased when civilian conflict or politics affect the professional integrity of the armed forces.<sup>60</sup> For instance, through the manipulation of promotions or when the president uses predominantly political criteria for promotions. In this sense, the maintenance of the integrity in this area is a precondition for professional development. The perception of threat rises as soon as the armed forces realise that civilians infringe on the established rules.<sup>61</sup> This can happen through the retroactive promotion of retired officers; changes in the lists presented by the Promotions Committee of the Army and the Navy, or, the supplementary promotions ordered in reply to personal requirements of particular officers.<sup>62</sup>

*Material or economic:* The performance of military missions and the modernisation of the institution are extremely important for organisational development. Therefore, any budget or salary cut would be perceived by the military as an action that undermines the organisation and restricts the professional prospects of the officers. Cuts in military budget and wages can increase the level of perceived threat. Conversely, any increase in the military budget is seen by the armed forces as a signal of support and understanding.

57. See R. Luckham, «A Comparative Typology of Civil-Military Relations.» *Government and Opposition* 6 (1971) pp.15-20.

58. Eric Nordlinger, op.cit., pags. 65-66.

59. In advanced democracies, however, the decisions on promotions and military budget are not an exclusive function of the armed forces. On the contrary, civilians under the military advice perform them. The relations between armed forces and the civilian authorities in this core area is regulated by laws and rules which establish limits and rights regarding promotion of officers. By contrast, in the Argentine case, the military enjoy an important level of autonomy regarding promotions. The rules establish that the decisions on promotions of warrant and commissioned officers of low and middle rank are exclusive prerogatives of the military. Instead, promotions of the highest rank (Colonels and Generals) need Congress' approval. In such case, there is a process of political negotiation for the approval of promotions in Congress. However, this factor does not increase the level of perceived threat for the military because the officers who reach the Congress negotiations are previously selected by the military institution through the Promotion Committee (which proposes officers for promotion).

60. Eric Nordlinger, op.cit., pags.63-68.

61. This issue was theoretically rise by Nordlinger, op.cit., pags. 71-75.

62. For the Argentine case see Potash, especially in his analysis on the military policy of Yrigoyen, *El Ejército y la Política en la Argentina, 1928-1945*, op.cit., pags.,53-76.

*Doctrinal:* One clear indicator of the orientation of the military profession is found in military doctrine and its materialisation in the internal military organisation.<sup>63</sup> Military doctrine can influence the structure of military institutions providing normative road maps for military behaviour. Doctrine determines which military resources will be employed and how. For this reason, the nature of military doctrine could affect the pattern of civilian control. For instance, the military culture -that is, the pattern of assumptions, ideas, and beliefs that prescribe how the military should adapt to its external environment and manage its internal affairs-, could create conditions for military intervention in politics or inhibit them.

The notion of military mission is the principal tactical derivation of military doctrine. The mission that a nation's military is assigned has a major impact on civil-military relations.<sup>64</sup> A military's mission denotes its primary task in terms of both the nature of the threat (military or non-military) with which it must deal and the location of that threat (internal or external).<sup>65</sup>

The government management of the military doctrine is thus important. A government could affect an existing military doctrine in several ways. For instance, by implementing doctrine that is not fully agreed upon by the military or conversely, it can incentivise the armed forces with the proposal of a new doctrine that fulfils their aspirations and contributes to strengthen their institutional interest.<sup>66</sup>

*Prerogatives:* the concept of military prerogatives has been widely used in the civil-military literature. It refers «to those areas where, whether challenged or not, the military as an institution assumes they have an acquired right or privilege, formal or informal, to exercise effective control over its internal governance, to play a role within extra-military areas within the state apparatus, or even to structure relationship between the state and political or civil society.»<sup>67</sup> This concept identifies areas of the state that are under military control and away from civilian accountability. I include in this concept, in order to avoid the overlapping with the former dimensions, only the institutional presence of the armed forces within the state. For instance, when the military has formal control of the Ministry of Defence, security forces or state owned industries such as those that produce weapons or oil.

Military loyalty is encouraged when the general orientation of a government toward the armed forces does not affect their institutional integrity in the four spheres previously described. By general orientation, I mean both a sound military policy and a sensitive position toward military concerns. In these cases, the institution is able to maintain its integrity and a sphere of exclusive autonomy on internal issues vis-à-vis civilian authorities. Military subordination is common in this kind of situation.

The government treatment of the professional, material, doctrinal, and prerogatives issues will influence the different perceptions of threat by the military and with their availability to carry out interventions

## **(b) Military role beliefs**

The literature has pointed out the importance of the military role beliefs in the shaping and justification of political action in South America.<sup>68</sup> Military role beliefs shape the extent to which the officer corps remains an important political actor. According to Frederick Nunn, the study of the military role beliefs is key to the understanding of subsequent political behaviour, including their subordination or propensity to intervene in politics.<sup>69</sup> Role beliefs include explicit and implicit notions of the proper relationship between civilian authorities, the armed forces and society. For David Pion-Berlin, the subject of military role beliefs «often escaped

63. On the importance of the military missions and doctrine see, Michael C. Desch, «Threat Environments and Military Missions», in Larry Diamond and Marc F. Plattner [eds], *Civil-Military Relations and Democracy* (Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1996); Michael C. Desch, «Soldiers, States and Structures: the end of the Cold War and Weakening U.S. Civilian Control», *Armed Forces and Society* 24:3 (Spring 1998): 389-406.

64. See Larry Diamond and Marc F. Plattner [eds], *Civil-Military Relations and Democracy* (Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1996), pag. 14-15.

65. *Ibid.*, pag. 13.

66. See Deborah D. Avant, *Political Institutions and Military Change* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), pages., 2-9.

67. Alfred Stepan, *Rethinking Military Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), pag.93.

68. See Frederick Nunn, *Yesterdays Soldiers: European military professionalism in South America: 1890-1940* (London: University of Nebraska Press, 1983), pages. 1-9, and, *The Time of the Generals: Latin American Professional Militarism in World Perspective* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992), pages., 1-7.

69. *Ibid.*

notice, particularly among North American experts.»<sup>70</sup> Pion-Berlin holds that «the availability of information through military journals and other sources suggest that for other scholars, the subject was simply not worthy of consideration.»<sup>71</sup> The analysis of military role beliefs is normally based on the examination of professional journals, speeches, political testimonials, and official histories and documents.

Military role beliefs are not static. The role beliefs of the Argentine military change continuously, they perceive themselves as makers of the state, defenders of the country, guardians of the nation and western culture or protectors of the constitution. Such self-definitions, especially when shared by key sectors of society, have contributed to the military becoming one of the most powerful political players in twentieth century Argentina.

Military role beliefs can be investigated at two levels: the level of the *defence role*, that is, orientation to external defence or to internal security; and, the level of the *political role*, that is, incorporation of notions that justify the displacement of civilian authorities through coups d'état.

The military evaluation of the conduct and behaviour of foreign actors (mainly neighbouring countries) moulded a role belief of need for external defence. For instance, at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Argentine armed forces believed in an imminent invasion from Brazil.<sup>72</sup> This perception oriented most of the military concern, doctrine and equipment toward the external scene. Similarly, the military perception of the internal conditions also contributed to the orientation of their role beliefs. Domestic unrest, actors excluded by the military from the political system, or the existence of «functional rivals» (a functional rival could be a militia, a regional army or guerrillas), are normally linked with the presence of an internally oriented military role beliefs.<sup>73</sup> A functional rival is an organisation or group that either potentially or actually affects the monopolistic control of the Armed Forces over the means of coercion.

The political dimension of the military role beliefs is the most relevant from the point of view of the interventionist coalitions. While the identification of the defence role is the first analytical step, the next is to identify the aspects that shaped the political dimension of the role beliefs. The mere identification of the defence role orientation is not enough to explain the political role of the military.<sup>74</sup>

Two factors help explain the political dimension of the military's belief regarding its role in society. The first concerns the agreement between civilians and the military on the role of the military. Evidence from the Argentine case indicates that the probability of intervention does not necessarily increase when the military believes its purpose is primarily internal security. For instance, an internal orientation perception can be associated with civilian control if the domestic role of the military is supported by the regime. This was the case during the internal war between provincial militias and the National Army between 1862 and 1880. The provincial militia chiefs were also the principal political adversaries of the Buenos Aires oligarchy. Therefore, the civilian government supported the military's internal orientation, because it contributed to the elimination of their adversaries.<sup>75</sup> Conversely, civilian control is weakened when there is a lack of consensus between the regime and the military about the proper role of the Armed Forces. If the government believes, for instance, that the presence of guerrillas has a degree of legitimacy, the result will be a weakening of civilian control. In this case, the Armed Forces can perceive a certain lack of political will to fight the functional rivals and justify the intervention. This was one of the justifications for intervention in 1976.

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70. David Pion-Berlin, «The National Security Doctrine, Military Threat Perception and the Dirty War in Argentina», *Comparative Political Studies* 21:3 (October 1988): pag. 382

71. *Ibid.*, pag. 382.

72. David Mares, *Violent Peace, militarized interstate bargaining in Latin America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), pags, 123-130.

73. See Edwin Lieuwen, *Arms and Politics in Latin America* (New York; Praeger, 1961), chapter 1; Martin Needler, «The Latin American Military: Predatory Reactionaries or Modernizing Patriots?», *Journal of Inter-American Studies* (April 1969); Alfred Stepan, *Brasil: los Militares y la Política* (Buenos Aires: Amorrortu, 1974), pag. 203-220; and Eric Nordlinger, *op.cit.*, pags. 53-61.

74. There is no agreement about the impact that military missions has over civilian control. One group sustains the argument that externally oriented military roles is a necessary condition for civilian control of the military; see for instance Michael C. Desch, «Soldiers, States and Structures: the end of the Cold War and Weakening U.S. Civilian Control», *Armed Forces and Society* 24:3 (Spring 1998): 389-406. Desch argues that militaries with primarily external roles are more inclined to civilian control than militaries with internal ones. Conversely, other scholars, notably Huntington, *The Soldier and the State*, *op.cit.* and Harold D. Lasswell, «The Garrison State», *American Journal of Sociology* 46 (1941): 455-468; sustains that in many cases an external role made difficult the maintenance of civilian control, and that political instability is more common in this kind of situation.

75. This idea is developed in chapter 2.

The so-called «military professional appraisal» is the other factor that affects the political dimension of the military role beliefs.<sup>76</sup> The negative impact of military interventions for professionalism has been a central concern for the military since the first radical revolt in 1890.<sup>77</sup> The evidence displayed in the following chapter indicates that the increased military involvement in politics after the 1930 coup intensified the military's concern about the professional and organisational consequences of this engagement. The necessity for maintaining the apolitical nature of the officer corps was raised continuously in official documents and discourses before and after a coup was thrown. In this case, the maintenance of professional integrity was at stake.

However, the negative consequences of interventions were considered as the lesser of two evils during most of the period of military interventionism (1930-1976). The military perception of certain threats (corrupt politicians, communist danger, or reestablishment of order) always goes beyond the military concern for professional integrity. The «military appraisal» is a logical operation that the military makes before an intervention is carried out. It consists in the evaluation of the costs and benefits that an intervention has for military professionalism. The analysis of military declarations, articles in professional journals and official documents can be useful to examine the assessment made by the military before an intervention.

In this conceptual framework, the following hypothesis will be posited:

The military's propensity to intervene is associated with the political dimension of the institution's role beliefs. Military interventions tend to be linked with role beliefs that embrace an unrestricted scope of military professional action, which include professional as well as political concerns.

### 3. The interventionist coalitions

Thomas Hobbes said that a crisis is never a lightning in a summer day; it is always the consequence and the conclusion of a persistent bad weather.<sup>78</sup> The fact that the state or the socio-economic context could represent a threat, from the point of view of relevant civil society or military actors, does not automatically lead to a military intervention. The process that precedes a successful intervention has several features that we shall group under the term «interventionist coalition.» An interventionist coalition tends to take place when sectors within the Armed Forces and civil society perceive a threat against their interests. These actors converge in a coalition that crystallises the opposition of different groups toward against the government. These actors co-operate because it is in the best interest of each party to do so. A coalition thus differs from a more formal covenant because it is a temporary combination of persons, parties, institutions, economic groups, or social groups, all with different interests.

Different groups perceive threats against their interests throughout Argentina. However, the problem is not the existence of these perceptions but their convergence in a coalition. There are several phases in the building of pro-coup coalition. *First*, it is fundamental that several groups from civil society and sectors of the military perceive a threat to their interests, generating a favourable environment for convergence. During this phase there are several manifestations of this threat perception; public speeches, institutional declarations or articles denouncing government attacks. During the *second* phase the actors who perceive the threat begin to organise the intervention. A growing process of interaction between civilian and military actors characterises this phase. Civilians and the military use many channels of communications for exchanging ideas and concerns, through civilian visits to barracks and open or secret meetings; meanwhile the campaign against the government increases its hostility. Normally, those within the military who are in favour of a coup look for civilian support for intervention. Civilians, including politicians who support intervention, strive for their own interests. Politicians try to reach a compromise with the military regarding the character of the intervention and the extent of military rule following the coup.

An interventionist coalition has a greater chance of ending in a successful military intervention when it is more inclusive, covering a major portion of the Armed Forces and relevant fractions of the dominant actors in society. Successful military interventions have varying degrees of organisation. Meticulous and careful

76. See Andrés Fontana, «El Calculo Profesional en las Fuerzas Armadas de Argentina», Working Paper 45, Fundación Simón Rodríguez, Abril de 1998.

77. The Editorial of the Revista Militar, the oldest of the Army, after the revolt of 1890 hold that: «we cannot allow new revolutions..... it is bad for the republic and worst for the Army.» Revista Militar, 23 (December 1890).

78. Thomas Hobbes, Leviatan (México: FCE, 1990), pag. 123.



preparations on the part of both the civilian and military groups precede some coups, particularly those of 1955, 1966 and 1976. In other interventions, such as in 1943, careful planning was far less evident. Although there were meetings with civilians groups, the degree of interaction between civilian and military actors before the coup was less important than in other interventions.

The pursuit of a maximum level of internal consensus is a condition that the military normally attempt to meet for carrying out an intervention. A level of acceptable consensus usually entails that the leaders of the coup guarantee the active or passive support of a majority of the units of the Armed forces.

An *interventionist coalition* is marked by events that catalyse interventionist forces and objectives. Those events encourage different actors, who were previously passive, to support a military intervention and accelerate the process of convergence between civilians and the military. Ultimately, it transforms a crisis into a count down to a coup. The characteristics of an interventionist convergence are:

1. The interaction of two actors (Armed forces and relevant actors in civil society) preceding a successful military intervention. Specifically, the interaction is between the internal dynamics of the military institution and the wider processes of socio-economic and political change.
2. The relationship among these diverse interactions is empirical and historical. That is, each of these processes has its own dynamics and actors.
3. An interventionist coalition is the result of the confluence of the perception of threats of the armed forces and of relevant groups of the civil society.
4. The groups that perceived a threat against their interest also perceive that the only way to protect it is through a military intervention. Civilians as well as the military perceive that the existing institution and rules bring to power those political groups that systematically affect their interests.

The actors who support intervention act in their own self-interest. In many coups, the only agreement between them is on the act of intervention itself. Since the only transaction in an interventionist coalition regards the intervention, the number of objectives is equal to the number of groups that support the coup. For this reason, these groups do not normally remain unified for a long period of time once the military regime is established.