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Ariel C. Armony. *Argentina, the United States, and the Anti-Communist Crusade in Central America, 1977-1984.* Athens: Ohio University Press, 1997. xxii + 301 pp. $26.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-89680-196-7.

Reviewed by Alex Taylor (University of Calgary)

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During the 1970s and 1980s, Central America experienced civil, military and political unrest unparalleled in its history. Relying on a wide variety of research, interpretative, and ideological methodologies, scholars from several disciplines have documented this dark chapter of the region's recent history. However, the majority have focused solely on delineating the mutually antagonistic roles played by the United States (as a supporters of anti-Communist forces),[1] and its rivals, the former Soviet Union and Cuba. It is within this context that Ariel Armony's exploration of the role played by Argentina and the United States, as allies in the anti-Communist "crusade" in Central America, offers an interesting, and welcome, alternative interpretation to traditional ones.

The unique nature of Armony's study is best expressed by Thomas Walker in his foreword to the book. He argues that Armony's findings challenge widely-held beliefs that "the United States created the first units of the Contra army" to fight against the Sandinistas in the 1980s; and that the Argentine's involvement was "nothing more than a failed ploy by Buenos Aires to win U.S. support for neutrality in the Malvinas/Falkland Islands War of 1982 [...]" Walker believes that Armony's study challenges the assumption that the Argentine military was acting as a U.S. surrogate (p. xii).

In his study, Armony attempts to demonstrate that the Argentines became involved in Central America in 1977, when they were alarmed that Jimmy Carter's human rights policies had betrayed the anti-Communist cause. Consequently, they felt obliged to fight on the "ideological frontier." The battlefield was Central America, where Communist forces, "appeared on the verge of victory." "Leftists" from the "Dirty War" had "begun to show up in Central America, especially Nicaragua" (p. xiii). Although the "Contra army would eventually become a wholly U.S.-owned, and operated, venture, [...] it was originally set up by the Argentines to promote their foreign policy interests" (p. xiii). Another component of Armony's thesis in regard to Argentine involvement in Central America is that the first Contras were remnants of Somoza's brutal National Guard, but their original international supervisors were agents of the Argentine Army Intelligence Battalion 601. That military unit was the same group that played a central role in Argentina's Dirty War.[2]

Armony's arguments regarding Argentina's involvement in Central America are persuasive, but not entirely. He succeeds, through interpretation and impressive research, in proving that Argentina did play a key role in shaping, for example, the events that led to the formation of the Contra forces and the establishment of Battalion 3-16 in Honduras. However, Armony doesn't convince the reader that the Argentine actions were not influenced by America's transfer of ideological indoctrination to Latin American military institutions–through the use of training instruments such as the U.S.-supported School of the Americas. In my opinion, the catalyst that led to Argentine involvement in the Central American crises of the 1970s and 1980s was the United States' success after 1946 in forming the ideological world-view of Latin American officers, including that of the Argentines.

A clear example of that success is the popularity of the National Security Doctrine among Latin American military officers. Among them are the names of individuals such as Guatemalan General Hector Alejandro Gramajo Morales, and Argentine Generals Leopoldo Galtieri, Reynaldo Bignone, Rafael Videla, all of whom were instrumental in conceiving the counterinsurgent strategies of their respective militaries. Additionally, it must be indicated that all of them attended, at one point or another, U.S.-sponsored military training programs in institutions such as Fort Leavenworth, the School of the Americas (in both Panama and the United States, and Fort McNair, in Washington D.C., for example. There are hundreds of ex-

amples that can be mentioned of Latin American officers being trained by the United States, who later went on to become famous, or infamous (depending on the analytical and ideological perspective), as the key figures behind the brutal counterinsurgent campaigns of the last three decades.

Although the Argentines may have set up the Contra army on their "own" initiative, whether or not the United States was the "key" ideological ingredient in shaping the nature of conflict in Latin American military institutions, is a valid concern that needs to be explored in further detail. It is for this reason, I believe, that Armony's work over-emphasizes the "autonomous" nature of the Argentine military's involvement in that region. Before engaging in further criticism or praise of Armony's work, it is important to provide a brief summary of its contents and major assumptions.

Armony's study focuses on the historical events that led to, and followed, the Argentine involvement in Central America, such as the Sandinista victory over the Somoza dictatorship on July 1979. A major result of the Sandinista victory was the "Contra War," which has been described by Armony and others as the "worst conflict of Nicaragua's history." The Contra War was an immediate result of an armed anti-Sandinista counter-revolutionary movement, made up of national guardsmen and "disgruntled" peasants who fled Nicaragua after the Sandinista victory. The war resulted in the death of over 30,000 Nicaraguans, combatant and non-combatants (p. xx).

This book attempts to explain "the extraterritorial" role played by national security forces in programs of state terror in their countries. The anti-Communist crusade led by the Argentine military in Central America in the late 1970s and early 1980s is an example, in Armony's view, of that extraterritorial role. He analyzes how the masterminds of the Argentine "Dirty War" exported their "model of mass repression" to countries like Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua; and looks at U.S. support of Argentine military efforts. This support is exemplified by the American endorsement, mostly by tacit approval, of "the brutal methods applied, and taught, by the Argentines in Central America" (p. xxi). Armony also aimed at "understanding the process of cooperation between state and non-state actors in the counter-revolutionary campaign in Central America, and to establish their responsibility for many of the atrocities committed in the name of anti-Communism." He believed that, "the confluence of Argentine Dirty warriors, Central American death squad leaders, and U.S. intelligence operatives in the fight against indigenous forces seeking to change their societies illustrates how counterinsurgency policy can be a catalysis of mass murder and terror ..." (pp. xv-xvi).

Argentina, the United States, and the Anti-Communist Crusade in Central America, 1977-1984 discusses U.S. foreign policy in detail, including the CIA's role, and relations between the U.S. and Argentine during the Carter and Reagan administrations (p. xxi), and seeks to bring "attention to the trans-national coalitions that resulted from complex linkages between ideological actors," as they were defined by "the international connections and dynamics of surrogacy on the anti-Communist side of the cold war" (p. xxi). Evidence is based on a wide variety of sources in Argentina, the U.S. and Nicaragua, that include interviews with relevant actors such as government officials, military officers, members of the Contra forces. The list also includes diplomats, journalists, and those he refers to as "strategic informants."

The main core of Armony's work is organized in five chapters. The first chapter deals with issues such as "state terrorism" in Argentina, the "security doctrines, the military intelligence apparatus, and the coordination of anti-dissident forces in Latin America." Armony explains how Argentina's armed forces "adapted and refined" the methods of counterinsurgency warfare previously applied by the United States and France in Vietnam and Algeria, respectively. He questions how this adaptation coalesced into the Argentines' own version of the National Security Doctrine.[3] This chapter also provides the reader with a discussion of how those developments helped "shape the nature" of state terrorism in Argentina.[4] Themes dealing with concepts such as the "doctrine of ideological frontiers" and the "rationale for extra-territorial operations ... and the coordination of anti-dissident forces in the hemisphere," are also the subject of this chapter (p. 4).

Chapter Two delineates the "the main features of U.S. foreign policy toward Central America and Nicaragua under the Carter and the early Reagan administrations." Here, Armony also discusses the nature of U.S.-Argentine relations during that period, and identifies the most significant features of those relations. He explains how global developments during those years contributed to what U.S. foreign-policy makers perceived as the threat of "international" Communism. Armony mentions the Cuban military activities in Africa, the fundamentalist revolution in Iran, and the July 1979 oil shock, all of which "affected the administration's strategic world view

and unleashed a wave of conservative pressure at home" (p. 37). The U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) played a special role in supporting Argentine covert paramilitary efforts.

The Argentine military role in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras during the Somoza years is explored in Chapter Three. Armony describes their "counterinsurgent expertise" in the battlefield, and suggests that military advisors played a role in promoting both domestic resistance and, fueling covert action against the Sandinista regime (p. 75). Sources of state violence, "no longer needed in Argentina for domestic control," were used by that country's military to strengthen state security in those Latin American countries that were "perceived as ideological allies by the Argentine military regime" (p. 75). The most impressive aspect of this chapter is the manner in which the author links figures such as Salvadoran Army Major Roberto D'Aubuisson, notorious for being one of the "founding fathers of the Salvadoran death squads," with the Argentine anti-Communist effort in Central America.

The relationship that developed between Argentina and the Nicaraguan Contras (1979-1984) and the "three-sided arrangement between Argentina, the United States, and Honduras" is the subject of Chapter Four. At the micro-level, Armony focuses on exploring the linkages that developed between Argentina and the Nicaraguan counter-revolutionary forces, the so-called "Contras," during the last years of the Carter administration and Reagan's first term in office. Here, he also explores in further detail the origins of Argentine military involvement in the Central American crises during the last years of the Somoza dictatorship (1977-1979). During those years, the Argentine military provided Somoza with military support. That support continued until the last days of his regime. After the Sandinista victory in 1979, Armony adds, Argentina's training of its Central American anti-Communist allies reached new heights. In turn, their involvement in the region's anti-Communist military and paramilitary operations "facilitated" the continuation of anti-Sandinista operations. This was accomplished by means such as the "establishment of Contra camps along the Honduran border with Nicaragua" (p.107). At the same time, Argentine interest in providing support for the region's anti-Communist crusaders would set the stage for the subsequent collaboration between Argentina and the United States. The main beneficiaries of that collaboration were the Contra forces (p.108).

In Chapter Five, Armony identifies the transnational networks involved in the counterrevolution, and discusses their impact on the Argentine State. He argues that "the clandestine nature of the cooperation between governments, and non-government interests, in the Central American counter-revolutionary efforts drove these political actors to establish ad hoc trans-national links ..." Although that cooperation was primarily related to the exchange of information and "the mobilization of economic and military resources," Armony writes, their "paramount result" was the creation of "an informal trans-national network itself" that included a wide variety of political, economic, religious, and "specific-issue"groups. The Contras, with the tacit, or direct, approval of some of their American and Argentine supporters, engaged in criminal activities, such as drug trafficking, in an effort to bankroll their anti-Sandinista military and political efforts. This chapter also offers the reader a brief analysis of the ways in which Israel and some members of the Miami-based Cuban exile community supported the Contra efforts (pp. 153-60).

In his conclusion, Armony states that "Argentina's extraterritorial operations were carried out by those elements of the authoritarian regime most directly involved in the clandestine repressive campaign of the Dirty War" (p. 171). He also suggests that the "transfer of repressive technology" was a major feature of the Argentines' extraterritorial activities (p. 172), and that the Argentine support of the Contra forces aimed at "promoting counter-revolutionary insurgency by deploying a relatively small number of advisers in the region" (p. 173). Furthermore, he writes, Argentine involvement in the counterinsurgent war in Central America was "facilitated by collaboration between states and trans-national non-state organizations" that engaged in the anti-Communist "crusade." Finally, Armony emphasizes the fact that the Argentine military leadership assumed that their country's support of the Contra effort would guarantee the neutrality of the United States during the Malvinas/Falkland Islands conflict with Great Britain.

Ariel C. Armony, a Ph.D. candidate in Political Science at the University of Pittsburgh, has worked as a journalist for the Argentine daily newspapers *La Razon* and *Sur* . He also served as a political commentator and co-producer of *Radio Belgrano.* In 1996 he provided valuable advice to the Human Rights Ombudsman of Honduras on the latter's request that the Argentine government surrender documents detailing Argentine operations there during the 1980s. His personal background also offers an explanation for his theoretical perspective on the is-

sue of Argentine involvement in Central America. Thus, it is not surprising that his study appears to be a combination of historical inquiry and political science, combined with investigative journalism. It can be suggested that it was Armony's exceptional abilities in tracing information and his skills as an investigative reporter that allowed him to gain access to highly sensitive sources in the United States, Central America, and Argentina. Furthermore, it can be argued that it is Armony's rare talent and his unique combination of highly valuable research skills that makes his interpretation of the events at the center of his analysis particularly strong.

However, that same mix of raw talent and dogged determination to get at the bottom of things has contributed to provide his study with its greatest weakness. Armony, for example, clearly understands that "the doctrine of national security emphasized the international dimension of the revolutionary war" (p. 12). But, he fails to explore in further detail, or simply downplays, the ways in which that characteristic of NSD may have resulted, ironically, in the"internationalist" nature of Argentine and American anti-Communism. In my opinion, that is the main reason why the reader must be cautious of Armony's assertion that the Argentine military "acted alone." In material terms, Armony may be right. In ideological terms, however, it is my opinion that without the U.S.-sponsored programs that contributed to shape the "minds" of Latin American military officers and their counterinsurgent methods,[5] the Argentine involvement in Central America during the 1970s and 1980s would never have taken place. However, such an argument would need further exploration from perspectives that rely on the study of ideas, rather than from perspectives that focus mostly on providing a political and military analysis of the events that are at the center of Armony's study. Moreover, given the nature of his sources, it is difficult to assess the reliability of some of them. This is due to the topic's own nature. As Armony himself acknowledges, when he went to Argentina to gather evidence for his work, he realized that it was still very dangerous to engage in such investigative procedures.[6] This problem, however, is only a matter of degree, and not of essence.

It is true, however, that Latin American military institutions did not need the U.S. advice or support to implement the brutal methods that they used in their counterinsurgent campaigns against leftist insurgencies and innocent by-standers from the 1960s to the 1990s. Given the sad history of the Latin American military institutions and their traditionally repressive nature, it is obvious that Latin officers could have committed those same atrocities on their own.

In summary, it is clear that Armony's study on Argentina, the United States, and the anti-Communist crusade in Central America represents a major breakthrough in a field of academic inquiry that has completely ignored the important role played by Argentina in those developments. Ariel Armony's work is a welcome, and much needed, complement to other rare works on the subject, such as Bishara Bahba's analysis on the role played by Israel in those same events.[7] Indeed, Armony's analysis demonstrates that on issues of foreign policy, whether they involve economic, political, or social factors, the processes of influence and counter-influence that develop between aligned, or competing, entities, are not unidimensional or two-dimensional. Instead, it is clear that those processes are multi-dimensional in nature. Finally, Armony demonstrates that the United States was not the only "right-wing" foreign power trying to influence some of the events that took place in Central America during that turbulent period. His ideas also prove that nations that shared their anti-Communist fervour, such as the United States and Argentina, had similar but sometimes conflicting interests and agendas. Armony's approach may or may not greatly influence the ways in which scholars view the events that he has examined in his work. And yet, it would be a shame if it does not.

Notes:

[1]. One of the best examples, if not the best, is Walter LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions: The United States in Central America.* Second Edition, London and New York, 1993.

[2]. Several scholars have dealt with this recent aspect of Argentine history. Some of the best works have been produced by individuals such as Cristina Caiati and Daniel Frontalini, Frank Graziano, Donald C.Hodges, Martin Edwin Andersen, Diana Taylor, and Horacio Verbitsky, among others.

[3]. According to Armony, "the National Security Doctrine expressed a conception of war, the state, and the role of the military in society with an emphasis on internal security. The Argentine doctrine formulated French and U.S. national security concepts according to the country's political culture, the institutional history of its armed forces, and the nature of civil-military relations." (p. 3)

[4]. For a clearer view of how the United States

contributed to mold the world-view of Latin American officers, see Frederick Nunn, *The Time of the Generals: Latin American Military Professionalism in World Perspective*, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992; and D. Michael Shafer, *Deadly Paradigms: The Failure of U.S. Counterinsurgency Policy* New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1988. It is important, however, to acknowledge the validity of Armony's suggestion that the NSD was modified by Argentine officers to suit their particular needs. A factor that contributed to the emergence of an "Argentine" NSD version was the particular historical experience of the Argentine right. For a further discussion of the development of that experience, see Sandra McGee Deutsch and Ronald H. Dolkart, (eds.), *The Argentine Right: Its History and Intellectual Origins, 1910 to the Present*, Wilmington, Del.: Scholarly Resources Inc., 1993.

[5]. For a more complete discussion of U.S. counterinsurgency policies, see D. Michael Shafer, *Deadly Paradigms: The Failure of U.S. Counterinsurgency Policy.* New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1988.

[6]. Another factor that affects the reliability of some evidence, when engaging into the types of academic inquiry such as Armony's, is the nature of covert operations. For a further discussion on covert operations, see Gregory F. Treverton, *Covert Action: The Limits of Intervention in the Postwar World*, New York, New York: Basic Books Inc., 1987.

[7]. Bishara Bahba, *Israel and Latin America: The Military Connection.* New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986.

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