

# POLITICS AND IDENTITY IN THE ARGENTINE ARMY: Cleavages and the Generational Factor\*

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Scholars and journalists have devoted considerable attention to analyzing the three military rebellions that rocked Argentine democracy in 1987 and 1988 (Borón 1987; Fontana 1988; López 1988; Stepan 1988). In addition to considering whether these revolts threatened the stability of the new political regime, academic and political interpretations have pointed to another issue stemming from the revolts: the emergence of a new generation of army officers with political goals and ideological values that differ from those prevailing in the upper levels of the Argentine military hierarchy.<sup>1</sup> According to some observers, the experiences of middle-ranking officers during the last authoritarian regime produced a breach within the army that led, in the extreme view, to “two opposing armies.” This argument asserts that the Argentine Army currently appears divided between the high command (“*oficiales superiores*” made up of colonels and generals) and middle-ranking officers, who encompass “*subalternos*” (lieutenants and captains) and “*jefes*” (majors and lieutenant colonels). The split seems to have stemmed from differing political goals and ideological affiliations. The question, however, has remained speculative rather than being subjected to analytical research.

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1. During the first insurrection, the rebels defined the events as embodying a generational view regarding the army's situation in a broader political context. According to their definition, they were “the army who fought in the [Malvinas] islands, not the ‘Proceso’ army. We are not Suárez Mason, nor Videla, nor Galtieri, and we do not side with Martínez de Hoz.” The “Proceso” alludes to the Proceso de Reorganización Nacional, the official name of the military dictatorship that seized power in 1976. General Jorge Videla was the first president of the “Proceso,” and General Leopoldo Galtieri presided during the Malvinas War. General Carlos Suárez Mason, a key figure in the first years of the military government, was accused of violating human rights. José Martínez de Hoz was the Finance Minister from 1976 to 1981.

The goal of this research note is twofold: to analyze the origins of a new generation of middle-ranking officers and to consider to what extent the emergence of such a generation indicates an ideological and political gap within the Argentine Army. My analysis is based on several sources: ten in-depth interviews with Argentine Army captains and majors (some of whom participated in the 1987 and 1988 rebellions); informal talks with professors at the Escuela Superior de Guerra in the province of Buenos Aires and with journalists and politicians personally connected with middle-ranking officers; and my examination of printed and video material produced by officers' groups that participated in the insurrections. The interviews were completed between July and September 1988, and in some cases, the interviewees alluded to events that were taking place at that time. Interviews lasted approximately an hour and a half and were conducted in the officers' homes or in offices provided by third parties.

### *Military Generations*

In the military context, the term *generation* refers to a group of officers who share a similar political culture (beliefs and values regarding military, social, and political issues) that is historically grounded in the officers' training process and cohort experiences. Alfred Stepan's study of generations in the Brazilian and Peruvian military institutions claimed that "actions as well as doctrines can create a military generation" (Stepan 1977). On the one hand, "bureaucratic routines, doctrines, and intense formal socialization systems via the military school" that define a specific mission for the armed forces may create a generational identity. On the other hand, the particular role played by a group of officers during formative experiences may also imprint "characteristic modes of thought in both attitudes and collective striving." In short, officers' socialization processes within a particular ideology and doctrinal formulation as well as shared past experiences may create a military generation.

The varying impact of training processes and past actions in molding officers' identity can lead to two main outcomes: a generation defined mainly by structural factors or one determined by generational factors. When the political culture of officers corresponds to values, ideas, and beliefs widely shared by the larger military institution, their identity is defined in structural terms, and it would therefore be reasonable to expect little conflict within the institution. In this case, institutional values solidify possible internal divergences among different echelons of the branch. But when a given group of officers, usually belonging to the same age-group or cohort, support a different (and even opposing) set of values and goals from those prevailing in the institution, a distinctive generational identity arises and intrabrand conflicts are very likely to occur.

*The Corporatism of Officers*

Military corporatism has been a classic feature of the Argentine Army as well as other Latin American armies (Druetta 1983; Nunn 1983; Potash 1980; Rouquié 1981). Numerous analyses have stressed the existence of a military corporate logic, which is exemplified by officers' perceptions of the army as having preceded the birth of the nation, of civilians as incapable of running the country, and of democracy as inherently chaotic. Manifestos issued after coups invariably justify military intervention by alluding to civilian ineptitude in solving the country's predicament. In most cases, these inaugural speeches distinguish civilians' inability to govern from the "patriotic spirit" of the armed forces, the only group capable of resolving chaotic situations.

The ideology of Argentine middle-ranking officers follows this corporatist tradition. Civil society is viewed as opposed to the goals of the military, a world completely alien to the military institution. Officers agree that civilians have never understood military rules, codes, hierarchies, and institutional dynamics. In their view, the position of civilians as outsiders and their misunderstanding of military problems have been manifest in recent events in Argentina.

Officers blame civilians for not having recognized the army's intervention in both "the elimination of subversion" and the Malvinas War. The desire of officers to become "contemporary heroes" is evident throughout the interviews and the supporting material reviewed. For example, in *Operación Dignidad*, the video made by rebelling officers, hurrahs and cheers were added to the images showing former President Raúl Alfonsín describing the rebellious officers as "Malvinas heroes."<sup>2</sup> Evidently, military men still demand from civil society not only recognition of their successful performance during the repression years but overt affirmation and eternal gratitude.

Civilian ignorance of military issues was also demonstrated in the way that trials for violations of human rights were implemented. Officers rejected civilians' rights to judge the army's past deeds and were convinced that the trials reflected a profound misunderstanding of basic military values. In the military view, the trials were not impartial but politically biased. One major stated, "For us [officers], things exist only in black and white. A judge is a judge, a politician is a politician. So how is it that former judges now became politicians? That shows again that civilians don't know who we are and who they are dealing with."<sup>3</sup>

2. The video *Operación Dignidad* describes the 1987 insurrection from the perspective of the rebel officers.

3. Interview with an anonymous major, 13 July 1988, Buenos Aires. The phrase "judges who became politicians" refers to two former judges who later played significant public roles. Dr. Ramos Padilla and Dr. Gil Lavedra resigned their judicial posts and actively participated in the Radical party.

Another example of civilians' unfamiliarity with basic military principles was evidenced when then President Alfonsín agreed to talk to former Lieutenant Colonel Aldo Rico (the leader of the two first rebellions) during the conclusion of the first insurrection. Several interviewees stressed that Alfonsín's willingness to visit Rico at Campo de Mayo (the army garrison that was the center of the first rebellion) demonstrated ignorance of elemental hierarchical codes: the commander in chief of the armed forces or any military superior should never "talk" to a subordinate.

Officers constantly asserted that civilian opposition to the army is revealed in the way that civilians run the mass media. Not surprisingly, the request to "cease the attack on the armed forces through the government mass media" was one of the four demands made by officers during the 1987 rebellion.<sup>4</sup> Officers also believe that "the combatants who triumphed in the Guerra contra subversiva, rather than being recognized by their fellow citizens (who were not unaware of the conditions of the battle), see the enemy [subversion] being forgiven in every radio and television program, in every award-winning film, in every successful play."<sup>5</sup>

According to the military perspective, those controlling the mass media are responsible for attacks on the army, as part of a broader cultural campaign intended to destroy the armed forces and subvert Argentina. One captain explained vehemently, "There is an attack on the army in the books and in literature in general. They [communists] penetrate into education, into songs with phrases meant to be sung by idealistic teenagers. . . . Now they don't want to bring about the revolution through armed struggle because they realized they cannot win. . . . Now they cite Gramsci, who says that the revolution must be accomplished through ideas, ideology, the mass media. In that sense, in contrast with the situation from 1973 to 1976, the subversive problem is now framed in cultural terms, which is extremely serious."<sup>6</sup>

Throughout the years of the dictatorship known as the Proceso de Reorganización Nacional, middle-ranking officers were convinced that civilians fully supported the army's performance, especially its repressive solution to the guerrilla problem. But since the advent of the democratic regime in 1983, in their view, the mass media have deliberately questioned the military's image of efficiency and success as well as the legitimacy of

4. The other three demands were to end the trials of military men, to apply only military justice in resolving the problems arising from the insurrection, and to refrain from persecuting the officers involved in the rebellions.

5. *Operación Dignidad*. Officers' understanding of the mass media is also reflected in the report by Lieutenant Colonel Julio Enrique Vila Melo. See "Lo que ocurrió en Semana Santa en la narración de uno de sus actores," *La Nación*, 16 Jan 1988, p. 4.

6. Interview with an anonymous major, 10 Aug. 1988, Buenos Aires.

the army's role in the past. One interviewee commented, "Something that was [previously] considered to be a professional success was suddenly labeled as criminal. They [the leftist party sector who control the mass media] tried to demonstrate that everything we did, and did rightly, was wrong."<sup>7</sup> Because of middle-ranking officers' scarce contacts with civilians, the mass media have become their primary source of knowledge about Argentine civil society. As two studies have already indicated, officers in Spain and Argentina have undergone a closed socialization within a military atmosphere in which their education, their family, and their closest friends all remain within the military sphere (Cardona 1983; Rouquié 1981).

In the officers' view, civil society differs greatly from the military sphere. They define civil society as a divided world, dominated by self-interest and disorder, and lacking in shared values. In the officers' opinion, the consummate embodiment of these features are politicians, who are incapable of developing an "authentic national sentiment" regarding *La Patria*. One officer questioned "how people who are divided by parties, internal political factions, religion, and the like are capable of thinking about the Nation, something that we Argentines all naturally share?"<sup>8</sup>

Military officers describe Argentina's current situation in apocalyptic terms: the country is on the road to ruin due to the political parties' inability to rule. Moreover, their profound misconception of Argentine priorities promotes disorder rather than democracy. Officers agree that civilians are concerned only with insignificant issues and ignore important matters such as "the Nation," the achievement of common goals, or the existence of alien threats. As one captain explained, "The issues of moving the capital to Viedma, the run-off election, constitutional reform, the election campaigns, and other problems that politicians worry about are not significant issues. They just confuse the people."<sup>9</sup>

For officers, the chronic dilemma is the absence of a governing class: Argentina lacks skilled politicians who can solve current problems such as general disrespect for the basic institutions, social violence, subversion, and "the drug issue." Nor do officers believe that politicians, regardless of party affiliation, are capable of solving the problems confronting the army and the armed forces in general. One major argued, "We don't expect anything from the politicians. They will never resolve either our situation as soldiers or the national crisis."<sup>10</sup>

Officers perceive the army's situation as a deep crisis resulting from limited budget allocations for the military, low wages for officers,

7. Interview with an anonymous major, 19 Aug. 1988, Buenos Aires.

8. Interview with an anonymous major, 2 Sept. 1988, Buenos Aires.

9. Interview with an anonymous captain, 28 July 1988, Buenos Aires.

10. Interview with an anonymous major, 31 Aug. 1988, Buenos Aires.

and the lack of dignity and martial discipline. The current situation is often described as “the worst crisis the army has ever faced.” One captain expressed the general sense among middle-ranking officers:

There is a psychological campaign [being waged] against the armed forces. Since 1984 a campaign against the armed forces has been aimed at destroying the military. . . . The [Radical] government, far from intending national conciliation, is attempting to rupture the country. . . . This government’s policy is one of biased assault that tends to establish greater separation between the military and civil society. Some examples of what I am describing are the trials [of military men accused of violating human rights], the government’s position vis-à-vis subversion, the modification of statutes on military justice, and the mass media. Everything is against us.<sup>11</sup>

The assessment of civil society as a divided world reinforces traditional military certainty that the disorder inherent in the civilian arena makes the army the country’s “*reserva moral*.”<sup>12</sup> But rather than attributing “aseptic, immaculate moral values” to the entire military institution, middle-ranking officers consider themselves the repository of such values. Their self-characterizations as “bright soldiers,” “exemplary combatants,” “soldiers of the Nation,” “warriors,” and “the stand-up army” clearly convey this self-assessment, especially in contrast with the “bureaucratic generals.”<sup>13</sup> In their view, the high command’s close contacts with civil society have tainted it with typical civilian defects like disorder, treachery, and falseness. As one interviewee said, the generals’ betrayal of agreements reached with the rebels following the insurrections reveals attitudes that “are alien to an officer.” The lack of “patriotic” civilians parallels the absence of “true soldiers” who are capable of commanding the army. According to middle-ranking officers, neither Argentine civil society nor the army has any leaders who can delineate policies and implement “vital national projects.”<sup>14</sup>

But although officers consider civilians inherently inept at solving the Argentine crisis, they do not envision any immediate possibility of military intervention. Active-duty officers expressed the view that the

11. Interview with an anonymous captain, 10 Aug. 1988, Buenos Aires.

12. This characterization is one of the traditional arguments cited by several Latin American military men as the *raison d’être* of various coup d’états. As Frederick Nunn has observed, when facing a situation where “democracy still looked chaotic, education a mess, individualism exaggerated, youth undisciplined, politicians corrupt and irresponsible,” the military response was that “the army remained a flickering light in a darkening world” (Nunn 1983, 23).

13. All these characterizations are used in the video *Operación Dignidad* and by various interviewees.

14. This opinion was stated in an article by former Lieutenant Aldo Rico. See “Reportaje exclusivo a Aldo Rico en la prisión militar de Magdalena,” *El Informador Público*, 8 July 1988, p. 28. It is also suggested in *Operación Dignidad*, which shows an image of the government house while the narrator describes General Héctor Ríos Erenu (the army chief of staff during the first insurrection) as “being involved in intrigues.”



armed forces do not want to take power, even though the current situation resembles the one existing before the 1976 coup in terms of economic crisis, a lack of political leadership, and civilian support for military intervention. In their view, military nonintervention is due exclusively to officers' refusal to intervene. One officer remarked, "For much less than what is going on today, we overthrew Isabel. But now [we say to civilians], 'Help yourselves. You created the problems, you must solve them.'" <sup>15</sup>

The perception of civil society as divorced from and opposed to the military has certainly shaped officers' sense of belonging to a special corporation by creating strong identification with the military institution and the "esprit de corps." Military corporatism was clearly encapsulated in an affirmation made by Noemi Crocco, the wife of former Lieutenant Colonel Aldo Rico: "The military family is never abandoned; it is always united and reinforced. It becomes a kind of fortress when we are insulted from the outside."<sup>16</sup>

### *The Period of the "Dirty War"*

The period of state terrorism known as the "dirty war" has become a central issue in the identity of Argentine Army officers. Its significance lies not only in its powerful theoretical legacy in the training process that incorporates young officers into the army *weltanschauung* (Comblin 1979; O'Donnell 1972) but also in the methodology used to repress the guerrilla movement and "suspicious citizens."

The repression plan was clearly designed to imprint officers' lives, as can be seen in the way it was executed in Tucumán (the Argentine province that was a major locus of the guerrilla movement). Officers' corps were rotated every thirty to forty-five days for several reasons: to implicate most of the active-duty officers in the repression, to avoid close contact between officers and guerrilla members (because the planners feared that "guerrilla ideological work" could subvert officers' "virgin minds"), and to preclude formation of an elite of veterans of the "war against subversion."<sup>17</sup>

The officers' experience in that process was highly significant be-

15. "Isabel" refers to María Estela Martínez de Perón, Juan Perón's widow, who was president of Argentina from 1 July 1974 to 24 March 1976.

16. See *El Informador Público*, 29 Jan. 1988, p. 4.

17. Some of my conclusions regarding the set-up of military actions in Tucumán come from Rosendo Fraga (1988). The generals' fear of interaction between the officers and *guerrilleros* was clearly expressed by former Interior Minister General Albano Harguideguy: "As in all long-lasting wars, there was interpenetration among the confronting sectors. Because of this interpenetration, subversion adopted some aspects of our doctrine, our norms, and our uniforms. At the same time, the legitimate forces assimilated some procedures used by subversives, and the disdain for human life . . . affected some of our men." Cited in Fontana (1987, 12-13).

cause the army's mission was no mere theoretical formulation within the institution's ideological repertoire. As one captain described it, the mission became a "real war where I participated and La Patria triumphed over the communist subversion."<sup>18</sup> For current middle-ranking officers, communism or subversion is no "ghost" or "threat" but a vivid, flesh-and-blood enemy that they confronted and defeated. As one interviewee explained, "When I was fighting subversion, I realized that all that I learned during my military schooling was true. . . . I saw communists in my country."<sup>19</sup>

Moreover, in the eyes of the military, the "Guerra contra la subversión" (as the period of state repression is defined by officers) was not only a real historical fact but also a source of legitimacy and social acknowledgement that showed an efficient army playing a central role in defending the country from "foreign enemies." Middle-ranking officers consequently believe that their successful performance reinforced their honor and their image as soldiers. In their opinion, the 1975 military intervention was demanded by all of Argentine society, and one consequence of the victory was civil society's acceptance of the indispensable role of military action in any unstable political situation. The repression period is thus typically viewed as "years when the army and the people were firmly joined. At that time, the people were proud of the army, and I was proud to be an officer."<sup>20</sup>

These officers' sense of pride should be understood in the context of their perception of the issues of honor and prestige in the years preceding the repression period. According to their understanding, the army had no prestige among civilian Argentines before the start of the Operativo Independencia in 1975.<sup>21</sup> Physical aggression and insults to military personnel during the inauguration of the third Peronist government in May 1973 signaled rejection of the army by a large portion of the population. Middle-ranking officers often contrast Argentine society's rejection of the army in 1973 with the acceptance of the military institution in 1975 when, in their perception, civil society called on them to intervene and eliminate chaos and applauded the outcome of the military's actions.

Yet while middle-ranking officers view the repression years as conferring on them the aura of a "glorious past," they also perceive in this period the destruction of a basic value and a fundamental pillar of the army: the breakdown of internal discipline. As Andrés Fontana (1988) has observed, the *fractura vertical* between top generals and middle-ranking

18. Interview with an anonymous captain, 10 Aug. 1988, Buenos Aires.

19. Interview with an anonymous major, 13 July 1988, Buenos Aires.

20. Interview with an anonymous major, 31 Aug. 1988, Buenos Aires.

21. "Operativo Independencia" refers to the 1975 law that allowed the armed forces to participate in the "elimination of subversion."



officers, which was fully exposed during the 1987 and 1988 insurrections, actually existed throughout the period of authoritarian government. Contrary to the common belief that internal discipline was ruptured by the rebellious officers, middle-ranking officers believe, as one said, that the "breakdown of the chain of command was not caused by the chiefs of 'Operación Dignidad' [the rebels' name for the 1987 insurrection]. The chain of command was broken earlier by the highest levels in the military hierarchies, who avoided assuming command in the 'Guerra contra la subversión' and instead allowed their comrades and subordinates in combat actions to be accused, humiliated, and vilified by the judges."<sup>22</sup> Except for the officers who participated actively in the revolts, the interviewees stated that the rebellions deepened the preexisting vertical fracture. Although they fully agree with the problems and demands highlighted by the rebellions, they reject insurrections against the hierarchy as "the most adequate" way to achieve common objectives. One officer declared, "I do not agree with the methods used by the comrades of *Semana Santa*, the "Operación Dignidad," but I have to admit that they obtained a great deal, and the government [the Alfonsín administration] is now more sensitive to military issues. Although the situation is still terrible for us, I think that the *Semana Santa* events [the first rebellion] were pretty successful."<sup>23</sup>

How did the period of state terrorism give rise to the so-called vertical fracture? Although the strategies for repression were designed in the upper echelons of the military, the middle-level officers had significant autonomy in carrying out repressive actions within the assigned zones. One young officer's statement illustrates this point: "In the *Guerra contra la subversión*, we were left in the hands of our own fate, something that frequently obliged us to act outside the law due to the lack of precise orders and the absence of operational control from the generals."<sup>24</sup> This remarkable margin of independence gave junior officers a special perspective and spawned an important division within the army.

The vertical fracture was thus a by-product of young officers' perception that the high command did not play a significant role during the repression. In their eyes, the high command neither directed the "war actions" nor defended them when the officers were later brought to trial. Middle-ranking officers view such conduct as resulting from the "politicization" of the high command and their choice of an "easy" life, traits "unbecoming" to military men. Many interviewees commented that "politics is no good for a true soldier." Moreover, although members of the

22. Lieutenant Colonel Angel León, "León grabó una proclama de hora y media en su celda de 'máxima seguridad' en Magdalena," *El Informador Público*, 19 Feb. 1988, p. 13.

23. Interview with an anonymous captain, 5 Aug. 1988, Buenos Aires.

24. Interview with an anonymous major, 2 Sept. 1988, Buenos Aires.

high command were involved in politics, they failed to fulfill their “political mission,” which was to provide a political solution, a “legal framework,” for the “dirty war” and to secure societal acknowledgement of the army’s role. Middle-ranking officers claim that “the political leaders forgot that combat actions were won by the lieutenants, the captains, and the sergeants, and that the political action was lost by the generals.”<sup>25</sup> One interviewee complained, “We won the war against the communist subversion militarily, and the generals lost it ideologically.”<sup>26</sup>

Finally, psychological consequences of the junior officers’ participation in repressive actions significantly affected their identities. Except for a few episodes in the early decades of the century, the 1970s brought the first massive experience of violence involving the whole Argentine Army. Unlike their older comrades, today’s middle-ranking officers have directly experienced shooting, killing, and being shot. Also, the psychological effects of carrying out typical dirty-war methods became considerable factors in officers’ mentality. Although such experience cannot be interpreted as a conventional war, the unusual actions carried out by officers produced consequences similar to those generated by a war situation where death is always present. Just as the consequences of death and repression are burdens that Argentine society still bears (Corradi 1985; O’Donnell 1984), the bloody experience of the officers has also generated complex emotions, actions, and self-identity.

### *The Malvinas War*

Officers’ participation in the Malvinas War did not create new characteristics of identity but reinforced generational aspects that originated during the repression period, specifically the officers’ rejection of the high command and their feeling of being isolated from civil society. The Malvinas experience actually had less effect on the identity of middle-ranking officers because fewer of them participated directly on the battlefield. Interviewees estimated that approximately 30 percent of the active-duty officers fought in the Malvinas, but a majority of the army troops participated in state terrorism.

Also, the Malvinas conflict had a different theoretical significance than that of the internal conflict (the “communist threat”). Since the so-called national security doctrine became central to the army’s training process, the importance of Argentina’s sovereignty over the Malvinas has been dwarfed by the army’s concern about the “fight against subversion.” Even today, active-duty middle-ranking officers define the army’s mission primarily in terms of solving internal conflicts. They consider the reemer-

25. *Operación Dignidad*.

26. Interview with an anonymous major, 22 Aug. 1988, Buenos Aires.

gence of guerrilla movements as the main “hipótesis de conflicto” currently facing Argentina (ranking possible armed confrontation with Chile over geographical limits or with Brazil due to economic issues as second, and the conflict with the United Kingdom in third place). Officers envision the other party involved in the “hipótesis de conflicto” in considerably different terms. While the guerrillas or communists are depicted as “enemies,” the British troops are mainly considered to be “adversaries”; guerrillas and communists threaten the “Nation” and La Patria, while the British menace only the sovereignty of the Malvinas.

The Malvinas experience also reinforced the middle-ranking officers’ criticisms of the high command. In the officers’ opinion, the high command’s role in the 1982 war resembled its performance during the repression period. The high command is often characterized as *generales de oficina* (bureaucrats) who did not fulfill their proper role during the war, in contrast with the military personnel “who fought in the Malvinas and did not participate in government decisions.”<sup>27</sup> One captain stated that the high command “sent us into a war without contemplating a political solution. That was the mistake made by the top command, and when they make a mistake everything goes wrong. The officers knew it was a bad order, and that deepened the rupture of discipline.”<sup>28</sup>

Both the interviews and the printed sources reveal that for the officers, the Malvinas War was neither an irresponsible decision nor a “crazy adventure.” Rather, it was based on a “just cause” but ended catastrophically due to the miscalculations of the generals. As one officer said, “When we went to the Malvinas, we expected to take over the islands and then wait for a political or diplomatic solution. We knew that a war against the British and NATO would be a disaster for our forces.”<sup>29</sup>

Middle-ranking officers nevertheless claim that the war strengthened their comradeship and solidarity against the high command as well as civil society. They blame the generals for “mistakes in the command and coordination of the combat actions.” They further accuse Argentine society of having treated them like “criminals and hidden them like stinking people” and of turning “the battle for national honor . . . into a forbidden issue.”<sup>30</sup>

### Conclusion

The preceding analysis suggests answers to the questions raised at the outset of this paper: is the identity of middle-ranking officers based on

27. *Operación Dignidad*.

28. Interview with an anonymous captain, 7 July 1988, Buenos Aires.

29. Interview with an anonymous captain, 5 Aug. 1988, Buenos Aires.

30. *Operación Dignidad*.

structural or generational grounds, and does a breach exist between these officers and the high command? As has been shown, the identity of middle-ranking officers, far from being in crisis or at a turning point, is strongly rooted in three sources: the classic corporate logic of the Argentine Army, the period of state terrorism from 1975 to 1979, and the Malvinas War of 1982.

As a result of the state terrorism and the Malvinas experience, middle-ranking officers express values and viewpoints critical of the generals' role in 1976–1983 and 1983–1989. These sentiments indicate that a vertical fracture indeed exists. But their identity is mainly based on structural values and ideas rather than on generational ones. The way in which the military institution defines its structural identity—in this case, around the army's tightly knit analysis of its performance during the period of internal conflict, is crucial in defining the identity of junior officers. Common viewpoints of the army's role in Argentine history delineate an institutional identity and defuse the blatant criticism of the high command expressed by junior officers. In sum, the identity of middle-ranking officers is grounded in a unifying idea shared by the entire military institution: the conviction that the Argentine Army continues to perform a custodial role as the guardian of domestic order by controlling the internal "threat," a role enhanced by "successful" army performance during the period from 1975 to 1979.

The prevalence of structural features over specific generational elements in solidifying existing breaches has been manifested in several recent events. First, the large majority of military troops demonstrated overwhelming solidarity with the rebellious officers by refusing to participate in the crackdown on the insurrections. This major support for the issues central to the arguments of the rebelling officers helps to explain why no combat action occurred during the insurrections between the loyal troops (representing the high command) and the rebels.

Second, since the beginning of the democratic regime, the Estado Mayor General del Ejército has continually sought to alarm Argentines by invoking an ongoing "threat of subversion." This agency has also reminded the public of the army's indispensable role in Argentine history. Since the 1987 rebellion, the high command has reiterated this conviction by underscoring two main demands made by the rebels: a halt to the trials against military personnel and vindication of the "glorious performance" of the army in eliminating the guerrilla movement.

Third, the military rebellions were clearly intended to end a problem evolving out of the repression years: the trials of military personnel. Although the two leaders of the revolts, Aldo Rico and Mohamed Seineldin, are usually associated with the Malvinas War and are not linked with some of the worst characters and episodes of the "dirty war," Rico and

Seineldin perceive their obligation as defending the army as an institution and resolving an issue stemming from the period of state terrorism.

This structural identity unifies two army factions that dispute different political strategies toward the democratic regime. Institutional values cement ideological differences evident between the high command (the current embodiment of the historical liberal wing of the Argentine Army) and middle-ranking officers who perpetuate mainstream perspectives within the military nationalist tradition. The traditional political and ideological differences that exist within the armed forces are veiled by an institutional perspective that considers the army not only the architect of the nation (an old military conviction ardently reiterated ad infinitum in Argentine history) but "la partera de democracia." The latter belief can be detected in the diagnoses of the high command and the rebels as well. In February 1987, two months before the first military insurrection, Lieutenant Colonel Aldo Rico stated, "Again the armed forces in general and the army in particular are the sacrificial lambs. The consequence [of all this] must be [that] more comrades [will be] arrested and humiliated, only because they won a legitimate war, one to which the present regime owes its existence."

In 1972 Guillermo O'Donnell observed that the Argentine armed forces displayed an "organizational concern" rather than a "democratic conviction." The current situation can be described in similar terms. The "organizational concern" is revealed in the army's intent to define and establish a certain concept of professionalism in terms of technical capacity, internal cohesion, and corporatist self-identification based on structural identity and revitalized after the dramatic recent years.

Although the identity of middle-ranking officers includes some distinctive generational components, it also displays the most obvious features of the army's structural identity. In contemporary Argentina, where political identities are still being redefined after a prolonged absence of political democratic activity, the identity of middle-ranking officers is firmly rooted in traditional army beliefs. As the events of recent years have shown, amidst old and new political identities attempting to secure a significant role in the country's political future, a staunch officers' identity is being reaffirmed in the context of Argentine democracy.

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