

Generalized War and the National Security Doctrine. German Military Thought in Latin America during the last third of the 20th century.

La Guerra generalizada y la Doctrina de Seguridad Nacional. El pensamiento militar alemán en América Latina durante el último tercio del siglo 20.

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Abstract: This paper analyzes the concept of *generalized war*, which played a key role in the development of the National Security Doctrine –implemented in Latin America during the last third of the twentieth century–. The interpretation of generalized war by theorists of National Security Doctrine mixed different previous ideas: absolute war –from Von Clausewitz–, total war –from Ludendorff– and atomic war –from Cold War times–. The confusing nature of such concepts could have distorted the development of the very concept of generalised war. And it is likely that the influence of two relevant German authors –Von Clausewitz and Ludendorff– in building the concept this study focuses on was more important than what can be thought at first sight. The theoretical misconceptions, along with the excessive enthusiasm that war generated among classical theorists and the forced interpretation of political and social realities, gave way to a justification of the excesses of the National Security regimes.

Keywords: Generalized war, Absolute war, Atomic war, National Security Doctrine, Armed Forces.

Resumen: Este artículo analiza el concepto de *guerra generalizada*, que jugó un papel clave en el desarrollo de la Doctrina de Seguridad Nacional –implementada en América Latina durante el último tercio del siglo XX–. La interpretación de la guerra generalizada por los teóricos de la Doctrina de Seguridad Nacional, mezcla distintas ideas previas: la guerra absoluta de Von Clausewitz, la guerra total de Ludendorff y la guerra atómica de los tiempos de la Guerra Fría. La naturaleza confusa de los conceptos podría haber distorsionado el desarrollo del concepto mismo de la guerra generalizada. Y es probable que la influencia de dos relevantes autores alemanes –Von Clausewitz y Ludendorff– en la construcción del concepto de este estudio, siendo más importantes de lo que puede pensarse a primera vista. Los conceptos teóricos erróneos, junto con el excesivo entusiasmo que generó la guerra entre los teóricos clásicos y la interpretación forzada de la realidad política y social, dio paso a una justificación de los excesos de los regímenes de Seguridad Nacional.

Palabras clave: Guerra Generalizada, Guerra Absoluta, Guerra Atómica, Doctrina de Seguridad Nacional, Fuerzas Armadas.

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Exordium.

Gaston Bouthoul, who first coined the term “polemology” to refer to the science that studies the forms, causes, and functions of war, believed it was impossible to agree on an univocal definition for the term “war”. The reason for that is the following: defining war would amount to understanding the whole phenomenon, and this, in view of the changing and winding nature of it, was –and is– clearly impossible. According to Grotius, the Greek word *polemos* comes from *poles*, which refers to large amounts of population; whilst the latin term *bellum*, which derives from *duellum* and was used by Horatio and Plauto to refer to war, meant *bis de duis* (Grotius, 2004). Be that as it may, Bouthoul, perhaps the most prominent scholar from the 20th century to have studied the phenomenon of war, gave the following definition of it: an armed and bloody fight between organized groups. War, he said, is a form of methodical and organized violence, always limited in time and space, and constrained by some legal rules – contingent upon time and space–. And when there are no casualties, it becomes a mere exchange of threats (Bouthoul, 1962: 35). Broadly speaking, that is war.

After this first approach to the concept of war, we will immediately focus on one of its many faces, the “generalized war”, applied to the National Security Doctrine, which was established in Latin America by the last third of the 20th century.

Generalized war or the confusing synthesis of absolute war and atomic war.

John M. Collins (1970: 31), paraphrasing the words of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff (U.S. Department of Defense, 2009: 225), defined generalized war as an “armed conflict between major powers in which the total resources of the belligerents are employed, and the national survival of a major belligerent is in jeopardy”³. That is, a war between the Soviet Union and the United States.

The notion of generalized war tried to merge two different concepts: the one that defines war according to its aims, and the one that defines war according to its means. The former, which follows the theories of Von Clausewitz, represents the concept of absolute war, i.e., a war for survival aiming to utterly annihilate the enemy⁴. The latter refers to atomic war, in which obliterating the enemy is not the ultimate goal, but it becomes unavoidable because of the savage means it deploys. The Mutual Assured Destruction (MAD), the most influential doctrine during the years of the “balance of terror”, meant –as the name indicates– the annihilation of both sides, that is, the destruction of between

³ For similar definitions see Morris, Christopher (1992). Academic Press dictionary of science and technology, San Diego (CA): Academic Press, p. 916; or Murray, Douglas & Viotti, Paul R. (1994). The defense policies of nations: a comparative study, Baltimore, Maryland: The John Hopkins University Press, p. 590.

⁴ Therefore the aims of this kind of war is to utterly obliterate the enemy. Following the classical difference between *bellum hostile* and *bellum romanum*, the war we talk about in this research is a modern and worsened version of the latter.



50% and 70% of their industrial capacity and between 33% and 40% of their populations (Martínez, 2001: 465-466). Peace became increasingly difficult, and war was more frightening than ever before. II World War hero Major-General Montgomery insisted that a confrontation between powerful States would only bring about negative consequences as it would only lead to complete obliteration of both sides (Pabón, 1971: 71). Those who studied atomic war issues were mainly Americans. French officers further enriched the nuclear debate by introducing a “third decision center”, the French *force de frappe*. And from the 1970s, Soviet officers also created their own nuclear doctrine (Martínez, 2001: 479). Authors like Brodie or Kahn in the United States, Beaufre or Poirier in France, or Marshall Sokolowski in the USSR were amongst the authors of this doctrine.

Truly speaking, merging the concepts of absolute war and atomic war was not such a big step forward. The reason for this is simple: whereas atomic war can produce total annihilation, absolute war can not, as it is not a real war, but an abstract concept from which we cannot find any factual examples throughout the history of mankind. What is more, merging atomic and absolute war does not seem to be very wise either, since the theories of Von Clausewitz became obsolete after the Second World War. His call for the decisive battle was simply not feasible during the nuclear balance period (Sohr, 2003: 13-14), as it might provoke the end to human mankind, something the Prussian officer never wished for. Therefore, the definition of generalized war was ambiguous, as it departs from classical definitions and distort them. In like manner, it is possible that –by the time

National Security Doctrine was being implemented– such ambiguity was at the heart of many ambiguities coming from Latin American officers (Comblin, 1979: 35).

It should be born in mind that an absolute war goes beyond political control because it leads to its own doom. In other words, it is a blind war in that it has no limits and cannot be controlled by any means. In fact, it represents unlimited and absolute –as an abstract concept– warfare. It is not limited by time, space or human resources. Aron stated that absolute war was a pure concept, a war that had been set aside from its origins and goals, a war that politics could not influence on, nor set a goal for. Absolute war can just stand as a concept, an ideal, as its essence is unreal (Aron, 1983: 64). Taking violence to the extreme would utterly annihilate one side, if not both. As Von Clausewitz puts it, a war abandoned to its own fate tends to be absolute, but real wars are not like that. Real wars confront groups, each one of them unified and acting as a single voice. Real wars are never completely offensive, nor utterly defensive, but a mix of both. Blind war is nothing but a collective suicide, and that is the reason why it should be controlled by politics, as it should be somehow constrained. Thus, generalized war –the one between the Soviet Union and the United States that was so feared during those years– would trigger the end of politics and, ultimately, the end of mankind itself.

Why then such an attempt to produce a hybrid definition of the generalized war? Probably because it legitimated those authoritarian regimes which spread the National Security Doctrine all over the Southern Cone during the 1960s and 1970s. It should be pointed

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out that if war would mean total annihilation for both sides, it had to be avoided at any cost, as it would bring nothing but absolute horror. Therefore, those means aiming to avoid that kind of war were reinforced. Those peculiar logics concluded that it might be better to permit some excesses than leaving the door open to that dreadful kind of war. It was preferable, they said, to transgress the law and kill some innocent people than letting the whole mankind disappear just because of what they considered stupid and irresponsible reserves. And, in order to guarantee security and future peace for all, there was just one possible answer to the Communist enemy which –as representatives of the National Security doctrine put it– infiltrated everywhere: harshness. That is how authoritarian regimes excused themselves.

Conceptual mistakes? The legacy of Carl Von Clausewitz and Erich Ludendorff.

Some might say Von Clausewitz himself was at the origin of many of these misconceptions (Comblin, 1979: 35), but it rather seems that his works and his thinking have been barely understood. Along with Marx and Darwin, Von Clausewitz was one of the most prominent figures of the 19th century. He was not a war supporter at all, but a researcher interested by its means, causes, and all its aspects (Bouthoul, 1991). Perhaps, the most unambiguous thought we may have learnt from his works is his definition of war: “an act of violence meant to force the enemy to do our will” (Von Clausewitz, 2008: 31). But, beyond that, his thinking synthesized all the intellectual efforts of a whole period,

with an aim to “make History intelligible and action rational, by adapting means to ends” (Aron, 1983: 231). Aron also states that Von Clausewitz belongs to the 18th century rather than to the 19th century⁵: “In his political opinions, his vision of the European family of States, he is faithful to the Enlightenment tradition even if he has also been impelled by the thunderclap of revolution into a spontaneous Discovery of nationalist passion, and into becoming the doctrinaire of *levée en masse*, the *Landwehr* and reserve divisions based on popular conscription” (Aron, 1983: 231). What is more, his ideas depict him more as a philosopher than as a military theorist. He cut himself off from the classical authors, because he believed Machiavelli’s war theory was far too influenced by ancient thinkers. Notwithstanding that, the Italian writer was a revolutionary in that he proposed a bond between war and policymaking (Gilbert, 1991: 31). A well-organized army, i.e., one formed by State subjects instead of mercenaries –he said– could achieve the policymaker’s goals (Machiavelli, 2003). Von Clausewitz considered that a competent military officer should abide by strict rules. Instead, he should have clear ideas about the absolute war in order to extract the relevant concepts from actual wars to know how to act in real cases⁶. That is precisely why *On War* is not a technical treaty, nor a guide for

⁵ Likewise, Aron believed Von Clausewitz had been influenced by Montesquieu’s (*On*) *The Spirit of the Laws*.

⁶ Lieutenant Colonel Fernando Leitao (2012: 150) says: “It is on operational art, and in the assumptions therein included, that Commanders materialize their attempt to overcome the fog of war”.



field officers, but a compendium of the illustrated military thinking. However, it became a brief strategic summary used in very different periods of History. Hence the postulates of Von Clausewitz were at the origin (Liddell Hart, 1931: 121) of the modern system of war concepts⁷. The outbreak of the French Revolution and the wars that started after that and developed during the Napoleonic campaigns led Von Clausewitz to distinguish between limited wars –those conducted by princes during the 18th century– and absolute wars –those that utterly obliterated the enemy–. The latter described much more accurately what revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars had brought in. Von Clausewitz said that “after the short prelude on the French Revolution, Bonaparte brought it swiftly and ruthlessly to that point (of absolute perfection). War, in his hands, was waged without respite until the enemy succumbed, and the counter-blows were struck with almost equal energy. Surely it is both natural and inescapable that this phenomenon should cause us to turn again to the pure concept of war with all its rigorous implications” (Von Clausewitz, 2008: 224). The Prussian officer was deeply marked by the brutality of the Napoleonic Wars, defined by Jefferson as a fight between the “tyrant on land” –

France– and the “tyrant of the ocean” – Britain– (Tucker & Hendrickson, 1990: 148).

Clausewitz believed these wars were the model to be followed in the future. However, he realized wars are never absolute but limited, no matter the amount of violence they display. Revolutionary wars –the first national and democratic wars– added new elements to warfare that seemed to change its very own essence. Frederick II the Great owed his success to tactics, but Napoleon –though he aimed at unfeasible political goals that in the end went against his own interests– succeeded thanks to his operations on the field.

The first new element added by revolutionary wars was total mobilisation. During the Ancien Régime, limited resources made it difficult to gather large amounts of men or weapons. After the French Revolution, wealth and power were concentrated in the State, hence the previous System was changed and there was an increase in the amount of resources and combatants. The achievements brought by agricultural and demographic revolutions made it possible to have men and food on a large scale. Besides, social and technical revolutions were about to take place. Interestingly enough, Napoleon failed in those places where these progresses were not made –Spain and Russia–.

In like manner, the “nation in arms” principle made the whole population of a State become committed to war. The revolutionary motto par excellence, “To arms, citizens, to arms!”, was the symbol of a new condition that revolutionary free men had achieved.

⁷ Which, at the same time, was perhaps mistaken to a certain extent, as Liddell Hart pointed out. On the one hand, Von Clausewitz spread the notion of war to the bitter end. But he also said that a State that fights to the exhaustion sentences its politics to weakness. And if the German officer considered war to be the continuation of politics by other means, the latter should be designed to make the most of the benefits brought by the postwar period. Then, isn't there a dangerous contradiction here?



Taking part in battles was a democratic achievement, because men were then citizens and war was a right and a duty for those who had that condition. Besides, peoples were then made to believe that this wars were about their own survival, rather than any material interest. Thus national wars were meant to be survival wars. War, within individual and collective psyches, was already absolute by that time. The French Revolution mobilized all the people to war, a kind of war which acquired extreme features and revealed the true nature of absolute war (Aron, 1983: 186). Nationalism in Europe ensued, the reason being that violence was exerted against peoples, and not against princes as in wars during the Age of Enlightenment. The idea of a whole society mobilising against the invader stresses the relevant role that violence played for incipient European democracies. In the Peninsular War, which the rest of the continent followed with great interest because of the implications it may have for their own survival, differences and peculiarities were set aside and national unity was emphasized. Von Clausewitz himself said: “In the eighteenth century, in the days of the Silesian campaigns, war was still an affair for governments alone, and the people’s role was simply that of an instrument. At the onset of the nineteenth century, peoples themselves were in the scale on either side. The generals opposing Frederick the Great were acting on instructions –which implied that caution was one of their distinguishing characteristics. But now the opponent of the Austrians and Prussians was –to put it bluntly– the God of War himself” (Von Clausewitz, 2008: 228).

As a result of these principles, the main conclusion we could come to is that

wars in the 20th century would be a kind of secularized crusade in which the survival of the “republic”, the institutions, or the beliefs meant the survival of the people. The wars were also going to be “absolute”, and would last until the obliteration of one of both sides –which was unfeasible, as noted before– or until one side unconditionally surrendered.

The Great War was perceived as a resumption of the Napoleonic Wars. From 1814 to 1914 Europe lived in peace, as smartly pointed out by Salisbury and Churchill. Top officers in the First World War said to have found inspiration in Napoleon and Von Clausewitz. At the same time, there seemed to be a preference for wars between two nations aiming to assure their own survival and to a total annihilation, as if the words of Napoleon stating that “a war between Europeans is a civil war” had been forgotten. The ideas of Von Clausewitz had imbued almost every military men in Europe, to the point that in 1914 most of the strategies used on the battlefields were clearly influenced by the postulates of the Prussian officer. After the First World War, Clausewitz was accused of having prompted, through his influence on European officers, such unprecedented madness. Not without sarcasm, Liddell Hart referred to him as the Mahdi of mass and mutual slaughter (see Larson, 1980: 70). Be that as it may, war made it possible to further develop the theory of absolute war.

Ludendorff, who came out defeated from the Great War, popularized the theory of total war, a key development which led to the American concept of generalized war. Indeed, rather than creating the theory, Ludendorff disseminated and glorified it. He knew

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his conception opposed that of Clausewitz and that was the way he wanted it to be, because he criticized Von Clausewitz for underestimating the idea of unlimited violence. Von Clausewitz did not make any conceptual distinction between politics, war management and strategy⁸. However, Ludendorff infringed an essential principle in Germany when he said that *On War* belonged to an out-of-date period and proclaimed that politics had to serve the interest of war. In order to do so, Ludendorff preached a sort of dictatorship of the commander in chief. He believed the whole nation was object and subject of fight, in material and moral terms. War was the best way of expressing “the will to live” and the moment of truth for peoples. And that was why the nation, when at war, should serve the interest of war, and, when in peace, should prepare for the next war⁹. Ludendorff’s totalitarian views stressed the importance of bringing people into a state of mental unity, because the spirit of sacrifice of the nation gave their soldiers a victorious halo. He even called for an eradication of any dissident or anyone questioning the ideas of the top officers.

Ludendorff said that peoples are not necessarily willing to support wars of aggression, but they are indeed willing to fight for their lives or respond if an enemy declares war on them

⁸ Actually, Aron (1983: 12) considers that the postulates of Von Clausewitz lead to think as follows: “The soldier never separated thought and action and, similarly, he (Von Clausewitz) did not separate war from politics”.

⁹ That, in fact, was not an original idea by Ludendorff. Sparta tried it once and succumbed precisely because of the damages they suffered as a result of those same principles.

(Ludendorff, 1936: 177-178). Modern war required the participation of all people, so they needed to be systematically trained. Ludendorff understood this necessity in metaphysical terms, as he considered that war emphasized the vitality of race in an incomparable manner. Victory had to be radical and had to be achieved by violently striking the enemy’s weakest points either just once or many times. In order to do so, it was vital to use all the means at the nation’s disposal (military, diplomatic, economic, psychological), either within its borders or beyond. That was total war, which reached its height during the First World War. And that was why politics –therefore, the whole State– had to serve the interest of war. Of course, this needed a national economic system ruled by autarchy and able to adapt their production to the needs of total war. War needed to be absolute and that was the way it had to be. Actually, Ludendorff blamed the German people for the defeat in the Great War, because he thought they ultimately lacked of cohesion and energy. In the end, the will to fight for the nation had broken into pieces. In other words, it was not the army, but the rearguard which cracked. In fact, Ludendorff proved his courage when leading his army, as we can see through the results of the campaigns he led, where, by accepting calculated risks, he succeeded many times (Liddell Hart, 1991: 167-173; 187-206). He learnt from the defeats suffered by the allies that tactics should be put before strategic goals, even though his tactical victories provoked his fall.

Those postulates led Hitler to start a similar war in 1939. He had read Ludendorff and had even got to know him personally. He also understood the revolutionary techniques of Lenin and

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used his agitation methods to try and achieve his insane interpretation of race supremacy. At the same time, he used the military instruments inherited from the past to achieve a more ambitious goal than Napoleon's. Hitler had the intuition, but he often miscalculated the risks and he also committed monumental mistakes on the battleground. The Great War meant for him the biggest experience a man could have ever lived and he had found on the battlefield an inspiring danger. His *hubris*, his sacrilegious arrogance, was unlimited. As Kershaw (1999: 592) puts it, "Hitler swallowed the boundless adulation. He became the foremost believer in his own Führer cult. Hubris –that overweening arrogance which courts disaster– was inevitable". Hitler did not reach the modern world, as he kept on thinking that the top commander was a sort of high priest to whom soldiers must always blindly obey because he thought this postulate would inevitably lead to victory (Liddell Hart, 1991: 211). This uncritical mindset was also highlighted by other authors, such as Fagan (2006: 161), who, paraphrasing Ackermann, wrote that "Hitler is reported as having said in a conversation with Rauschnigh about his pedagogical principles: 'I don't want an intellectual education. Scholarship spoils the young... But they must learn control. I want a violent, dominant, fearless, brutal youth, one that will shock the world'".

Hitler wanted to make war excessive, to turn it into a struggle for the survival of the German people, but the death of politics led ultimately to a catastrophe he did not foresee. It was not for nothing that he was a loud and proud Clausewitzian who saw war as a continuation of politics and did not understand that there are several relevant differences between both of

them. Kershaw (2008: 203) believed that National Socialism was, for Hitler, not a conventional political program, but a political crusade, which proves that the dictator deliberately mixed both fields: politics and military action. During the Second World War he felt obliged to maintain the war to prevent National Socialism from becoming ideologically obsolete. He suspected that conventional treaties would not permit the achievement of a new society built on racial purity and supremacy. However he, unlike Ludendorff, believed that the aspiration of war leaders "should be to produce the capitulation of the hostile armies without a battle" (Liddell Hart, 1991: 210). Keegan (1993: 374) explains this same idea in a very revealing way: "Hitler's infatuation with the idea of *Blitzkrieg* had forced it to abandon earlier plans to build large, long-range bombers".

"Revolutionary weapons, the warrior ethos and the Clausewitzian philosophy of integrating military with political ends were to ensure that, under Hitler's hand, warmaking in Europe between 1939 and 1945 achieved a level of totality of which no previous leader – not Alexander, not Muhammad, not Genghis, not Napoleon– had ever dreamed" (Keegan, 1993: 374). Moreover, only Hitler and Ludendorff explained the concept of absolute hostility developed by Carl Schmitt (2007). Both of them consider racial community as a key topic in History, and see the enemies of this community as the transhistorical enemies of the German people. What is more, as highlighted by Aron (1983: 378), this is precisely what absolute hostility is about, "as it alone deserves the term 'absolute', since it ends logically in massacre and genocide". Ludendorff

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and Hitler views on race, State and the right of German people to world domination were similar. There were, however, several relevant differences between them, because while Ludendorff wanted strategy to lead politics, Hitler himself played both roles, making the most of the same privileged position held in the ancient world by Alexander and Julius Caesar, and by Frederick the Great and Napoleon in more recent times (Liddell Hart, 1991: 211).

During postwar times, the winners also embraced the idea of a war without political ends, a war aiming at survival, on the one hand, and absolute victory, on the other. The notion of total war spread rapidly throughout the United States, and that was a new form of absolute war (Comblin, 1979: 36). As Aron (1983: 203) recalled, “the total character of war derives both from concept and from experience. The nearer war is to its absolute state the nearer it is to its original nature”. The strategy of the atomic war finds its roots in these postulates. According to the Clausewitzian logics, nuclear weapons could achieve political ends even without been used, but just through the potential threat they pose. At the beginning of the 1960s this idea was clearly reflected in the aforementioned Mutual Assured Destruction, where the aim was to dissuade the enemy from striking precisely in view of the huge damage that can be caused to both contenders, no matter who hit first (Freedman, 2003: 150).

Generalized war in Latin America and the National Security Doctrine.

All this confusing thinking –which mixes absolute and atomic war in order

to define generalized war, a concept complex and vague by definition– made its way to Latin America. There, theorists of the National Security Doctrine constantly quoted Ludendorff and based some of their thesis on his postulates¹⁰. They stated that the whole nation should get involved in the fight against Communism, that every means could be used in order to weaken the enemy, that everything should serve the interest of war, that dissidence was dangerous for the survival of the nation and therefore should be killed off, and that a sound economy was needed to make the most of all war efforts. The supporters of the National Security Doctrine insisted on the idea of total war, which was a fight for survival.

Brazilian general Couto e Silva (1967: 190-200; 225-257) could not understand war against Communism in any other way, because that conflict was the true war for the survival of the Western World –that is, it was total war–. In like manner, general Pinochet fought an absolute war against Communism, as he recalled in his speech on 11 September 1973, just after his attack to the presidential palace, La Moneda: “As many other countries in the world, especially in Latin America, Chile has suffered the attack of marxism-leninism and has decided to fight and destroy it”¹¹ (Pinochet, 1973). This political

¹⁰ Brazilian general Golbery de Couto e Silva mentions that in one of his most significant works, *Geopolítica de Brasil*. Besides, Ludendorff’s main book, *Der totale krieg*, was translated into Spanish and published for the first time in that language in 1964 by Pleamar, an Argentinian publishing house located in Buenos Aires.

¹¹ This is part of the speech General Pinochet said following the coup d’etat against the



doctrine could only led to a war aiming to utterly destroy the enemy, who was seen as intrinsically treacherous and potentially very dangerous. The logics went on as follows: if we commit the mistake of not destroying them, that would lead to a generalized war, that is, the clash of two blocks in a war in which both contenders would perish for sure. Pinochet also said in that speech that Marxism “is an intrinsically evil doctrine, and whatever it may bring, no matter how nice it seems, is poisoned to the bones. That is why it is essentially flawed and, at the same time, global, as it is impossible to debate anything with its advocates”.

In order to successfully fight the enemy it was necessary to blur the civil and military areas of the society. If the 19th century drew a clear line separating them, the National Security Doctrine did not distinguish between civil and military societies. That assimilation was foreseen by theorists of total war¹², such as Ludendorff; but this new idea was brought in, partly, by the United States after the Second World War¹³. Armed

democratic government of Salvador Allende in 1973.

¹² As a matter of fact, authors like Luttwak & Koehl defined total war as a “theoretical concept, implying the use of all available resources and weapons in war, and the elimination of all distinctions between military and civilian targets”. See Luttwak, Edward & Koehl, Stuart (1991). *The Dictionary of Modern War*. New York: Harper Collins, p. 625.

¹³ The gradual blurring of the borders between the civil and military areas of the society first started in the United States. The first stage of this melting process was the creation of the National Security Council (NSC) and of a new bureaucracy which unified diplomacy and war – the activities performed by the Department of State and the Department of Defense-. This was followed by the integration of the biggest

forces were no longer that army of citizens that emerged after the French Revolution, because by then they were an autonomous body, which had their own laws, as well as their own way to enforce them. However, the theorists of the National Security Doctrine believed the armed forces were the only legitimate representative of the nation. If from the 19th century the Army, as pointed out by De Vigny in a famous quote, was a nation within the nation, the armed forces of the National Security regimes became the nation itself, or at least their only representative (De Vigny, 1962). The following words, wrote by the rebel officers in their *Mensaje al Pueblo Argentino* (Message to the Argentinian people) in 1966, could be applied to the rest of the continent, since their logics are also valid for the new regimes that were emerging at that time throughout Latin America. “Today, as in all the decisive stages of our History, the Army, interpreting what the highest common good is, takes on the responsibility of assuring national unity and public welfare, incorporating modern elements from culture, science and technology which, by their influence, will place (the nation) where it deserves considering the intelligence and human value of its peoples and the richness put on its territory by the Providence (...) in order to restore a true representative democracy in which order prevails within law, justice and

sectors of the economy to the point of creating a military-industrial structure which even Eisenhower considered a huge danger for the American society. University and trade unions went next. However, the United States always remained a democracy, even in the worst years of the Cold War. That was the biggest difference with many Latin American countries. See Comblin, J. (1979), op. cit.

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the common good. All of that will channel the country again to the path of its *grandeur* and will show this to the rest of the world” (AA.VV., 1966: 4). Their intention –they said– was to build a true democracy at the service of the national *grandeur*.

In the Latin American regimes ruled by the National Security Doctrine, the goal was precisely to blur the separation between civil and military areas of the society, because, if achieved, the whole nation would be committed to a single strategy – required by the circumstances of the Cold War, which was total, generalized and absolute–. National strategy directed national power in order to fulfill the necessities of national security, and that achieved a perfect, essential synthesis. This simplicity came as a consequence of the common basis from which everything arised: the aforementioned concept of war. Thus national security meant not only military protection for the nation, but also for all the different expressions of the national life: either in politics, economics, society or culture. Military defense of the nation moved to the field of social and political relations. General Lyra Tavares said in 1962 that national security was not solely related to the defense of the national territory, but also to the preservation of the national entity against the attacks of all the elements that could potentially damage the nation (Lyra, 1962). That included all domestic enemies as well. Militarism, therefore, was rationally justified since the ground was laid for the Army to act beyond their influential sphere. If young revolutionary Nasserists officers had justified their intervention in Egypt in order to fight feudalism and corruption, in Latin America the struggle was against Communism (Riera, 2010). And the

Army –where discipline, hierarchy, centralized power and team spirit were the norm– was the right tool to fight it. Oddly enough, the aforementioned characteristics had caused the isolation and self-sufficiency of armies¹⁴ in precedent years.

In case all the previous logics were somehow unclear, theorists of the National Security Doctrine stated bluntly that every war against Communism was inescapably a war for survival (Cortés, 1976: 121-122). They applied Ludendorff’s concept of total war, and the concept of generalized war we owed to the Major State of the United States. They changed the means, but the concept of war remained the same. That is, it was an absolute war, even though this was not the ideal – though historically unfeasible– type described by Von Clausewitz, but the expression in real life of the worst conceivable type of war: the one aiming to utterly destroy the enemy. This was precisely why war finally prevailed over politics –as anticipated by Ludendorff–. Somehow, war absorbed politics, and ultimately made it disappear –as it was actually the case in the National Security regimes–. The strictness of the political systems applied in the countries that suffered the National Security Doctrine was very likely due to the way they conceived war. Von Clausewitz believed a good soldier should not be guided by fixed rules, but rather know what absolute war was and, following that ideal, be able to adapt to the circumstances of real war. That was

¹⁴ In this respect, it becomes particularly interesting the reflections made in *The Man on Horseback* by Samuel Edward Finer. The book was published in London by Pall Mall Press in 1962.



precisely what the officers who applied the National Security Doctrine did. And that alone rendered irrelevant the fact that the doctrine was scarcely defined or even confusing: the only thing that mattered was its ability to guide officers in action and to let them know how to act in the war against the enemy. In like manner, Von Clausewitz thought that absolute wars, as unfeasible as they might be, were very similar to the Napoleonic campaigns, i.e., the revolutionary wars of his time. For that reason, theorists of the National Security were so afraid of revolutionary wars or what they thought revolutionary wars were, and that is why they fought them so hard.

Conclusion.

This review has aimed to clarify the ideal from which National Security regimes started their activity in Latin America. If war was to be utterly destructive, it should be avoided at all costs, no matter how. It was better to go too far in repression than falling short in fighting the enemy, since the main goal was to avoid the war that would lead to total destruction. If it was a survival war, the whole population had to be involved, had to assume the nation values. If war absorbed every effort, politics had to give way to those leading the war. If dangers were everywhere, control had to be constant too. If the violence of war threatened public life, the violence that kept peoples alert was indispensable. In other words, the whole mindset of the National Security Doctrine represented the main ideas of the authoritarian and despotic State.

Part of the conventional military doctrine started to emphasize the relevance of the psychological factors

already in the 1960s, and the officers of the National Security regimes, who truly believed that the psychological issues played a vital role in the outcome of the war, made it become an even more decisive factor. That is why they gave priority to the control of all factors that could damage the morale of the population or their will to fight Communism. Since a common will was necessary to achieve victory, dissidence had to be prosecuted in order to avoid any crack on the system. Likewise, sowing deceit of discord amongst the enemy was a strategic subversion mechanism aimed to break the balance between both contenders. Chilean colonel Cortés (1976: 136) stated that war potential became military potential “according to the will of those men who wanted to work more, consume less, save more, assume troubles and dangers and accept their lives being more guided by the Government, either freely or under compulsion”.

Armed forces exerted unlimited power. There were no essential differences between military power and all the other ways in which the State acted, because, in fact, everything was militarized. In the National Security regimes, armies were fully integrated in politics and military power was nothing but a part of the generalized military power assumed by a specialized body: the Army. This spread a wave of fear, political threats, and repression throughout all social relations, to the point that social conflicts were so severe that societies were on the brink of war. In fact, the National Security regimes transformed the collective representation of political violence, where all classes or social groups had the same weight. Repression in Latin America had been traditionally exerted on specific groups –indigenous people, peasants, miners...–, but here

Generalized war and the National Security Doctrine. German Military Thought in Latin America during the last third of the 20th century.



political and ideological repression went much farther. Its apparently arbitrary character created a permanent threat that spread chronic fear, and the supporters of total war incorporated these tools to the theoretic corpus of the generalized war.

However, the war that Latin American armies were fighting was not an atomic war. And it was the latter the one being studied and defining the National Security issues in the United States. This “small” problem was sorted out with a very popular and, at the same time, frequently misinterpreted concept in those days: the Cold War. Theorists of the National Security believed the only difference between the atomic war and the Cold War was just the degree of violence, their essence being basically the same. Thus the concept of total or generalized war could be applied to the Cold War as well, and that was another key aspect of the National Security theory.

It might be pointed out that what Gaston Bouthoul (1962: 190) said about the atomic war can be applied to the societies where the National Security Doctrine was established. Indeed, that system violently expelled democracy and gave way to a mix of aggressiveness and terror that clearly evoked Panic Days. Ultimately, apocalyptic terrors have become more frequent in our century (Bouthoul, 1967: 212-213), to the point that peace, as it was understood by the National Security regimes, was “the peace of Damocles, full of threats and terror” (Bouthoul, 1967: 247).

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