

277
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MILITARY MULTIFUNCTIONALITY AND DEMOCRACY: a dangerous coexistence

Rafa Martínez, Associate Senior Researcher, CIDOB; Professor of Political Science and Administration; and Director of GRAPA (Group of Research and Analysis on Public Administration), University of Barcelona.

Present changes in the world political system are obliging reconsideration of the functionality of armies, failing which they could take on roles that will end up in their obsolescence or uselessness. This critical point leads to a debate in which three arguments converge: the *abolitionist*, which could be regarded as ingenuous; the *adaptive*, which adopts the logic of the three Rs (redefine, resize, and reconvert); and the *pragmatic*, which ends up justifying multifunctionality of the armed forces.

Multifunctionality of armies implies militarisation or, in other words, normalisation of the use of the military—or extension of the use of force—in the provision of services outside their traditional roles. In the worst case, this can lead to militarism. However, multifunctionality can also be achieved without having the use of force as a goal but, rather, an attempt to benefit society by means of the military's status as a catch-all administration. This approach aims at tempering the military mindset, when its members are not expected to use force in the various tasks they are entrusted with.

Two of the greatest fears that any bureaucracy faces—if it avoids the constant requirement of updating or, the more ambitious one of modernisation—are falling into obsolescence or sterility. This is a situation to which, in recent works (Martínez, 2020a and 2020b) I have applied the metaphors of the *lamplighter* and the *lift operator*. In the former case, it is for the following reason: after the mid-eighteenth century, many of the big European cities had a corps of *lamplighters* who, every evening, set out with a wick to light all the lanterns—initially oil and, after the nineteenth century, gas—and thus to illuminate the public thoroughfares. At dawn, they extinguished and cleaned them. The advent of electric light and the replacement of the old lanterns with electric ones made the lamplighters' task totally redundant, so the corps was disbanded and the trade became obsolete. Hence, when I refer to the military in the lamplighter role, I am thinking of functional immobilism, of being unable to anticipate or at least not being able to adjust to new realities and, as a result, being swallowed up by the changes that have overtaken them, and those they have not been able to keep with. In this sense, to keep preparing for a war against a frontier rival, when such a threat is almost inconceivable, is rather anachronistic and pointless.

As for the *lift operator*, this is a job that supposedly enhances the prestige of a building, provides a service, and gives security to the lift's occupants, even if the functions are limited to announcing the next stop, asking which floor one wishes to go to, and managing

the button panel. But if the lift breaks down, if it stops between two floors, lift operators can do nothing since they do not operate an escape system or any other way out. At best, they can activate the interphone and call for help from outside. In brief, it is a profession that conveys a sense of security but, at the moment of truth, this is illusory, which means that the lift operator is a perfectly dispensable figure. Any civil servant would protest if he or she was carrying out unreal or useless tasks. Nevertheless, the disciplinary components of armies—their hallmarks—mean that they must stoically bear the duties of the lift operator. From the standpoint of political power, the justification—mistaken, of course, as well as short-sighted—would be that it is better to do something that creates a sense of security, even if illusory, than to do nothing. In short, any administration faces the Damoclean threat of being rendered irrelevant or pointless for the simple reason that, since times change, its activity has been superseded either because of being outdated (in the absence of the *aggioramento* that all processes require), or because of the appearance of some new device that surpasses it or

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improves on what it was able to do. When this happens, the agency's role becomes antiquated (lamplighter) or, in the worst of cases, decorative (lift operator).

Although it may seem that the war in Ukraine might be taking us back in time, in general it is undeniable that the global political system has been undergoing radical transformation since the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and that this unquestionably calls for a serious rethink about what to do with armies. What do we want them to be like? How many troops do we need? What characteristics should they have? What should they do? Indeed, if *security* can be broken down into three constitutive elements, namely hostile agent, asset to be protected, and cover, in terms of national security none of them means today what they have represented for centuries. Hence, "hostile agents" are no longer states, and their threats are very different from war or invasion of territory; the "assets we want to protect" are no longer territories and collective identity so, logically, when talking about "cover", armies are no longer the main instrument for combatting the new threats. In fact, today's threats are more about terrorism,

cyber-attacks, fake news, disinformation, organised crime, epidemics and pandemics, climate change, and energy dependence, to name a few. Strategies of national security no longer speak of nuclear, armed, and military power but, instead, one finds words like multilateralism, interoperability, resilience, proactiveness, comprehensive approach, coordination between administrations, risk drivers, development, and diplomacy, etcetera. Even the concept of war, understood as a confrontation between state armies, is also moot because nowadays we speak of asymmetric, hybrid, technological, grey zone, fourth generation, and spectator sports wars.¹ For all these reasons, it would not occur to anyone to claim that the armed forces are the only instrument responsible for security. Moreover, sometimes they may no longer be the most appropriate tool for ensuring it.

Are armies still useful? Three arguments

With this new reality, there is still heated debate as to whether armies are necessary—Machiavelli saw them as the ruler's strength—or expendable. Three types of arguments are put forward: the abolitionist, the adaptive, and the pragmatic.

The *abolitionist* argument understands that, given the futility of war, and the obsolescence of war and armies, it is best to dispense with them. This is an option which, in addition to the utopian notion that no one will ever attack anyone, means that states would renounce their monopoly of violence in their conflicts with third parties (Martínez, 2020a). Without wishing to offend, I would say that this argument is totally naïve.

The *adaptive* argument expresses what I have called elsewhere the 3Rs logic: redefine, resize, and reconvert (Martínez, 2020b). In this scheme, the military administration focuses its efforts on modernising or reforming in accordance with the defence needs of the day. In other words, there is, on the one hand, an attitude of resilience when confronting the recurrent

1. If armed forces are to operate internationally, one of the essential factors is having the support of the population. This frequently means that there are conflicts in which international forces act as "sports spectators" in the conflict because of intolerance in their home societies of so-called "collateral" or "unintended" casualties. If these losses occur because of their intervention, they can have a negative impact on the social legitimacy they need to carry out their mandate. Hence, in many conflicts, international troops are like spectators at a sports event, "suffering it but unable to intervene".

questioning about the need for armies and thus keeping alive the need for defensive tools but, on the other hand, an awareness that this is not a question of empty polemics since there is a growing need to adapt armies to new threats and defensive needs. In brief, this is an adaptive resilience which, faced with the radical transformation of the reality of the moment, entails *redefining* the military's functions, *resizing* its volume and, fruit of that, probably dispensing with part of its troops and *reconverting* them into another type of agency that would cover the state's non-defensive needs. Thinking about armed forces adapted to the demands of their time leads to the establishment of small, very flexible armies that are interoperable with their allies, easily deployable, highly technologised, and composed solely of professionals (Dandeker, 2004).

With ever-increasing intensity, troops have become a tool of the foreign policy of states rather than being a mere instrument for defending the territory. As the result of international commitments, new missions have been added to the traditional one of territorial protection, these including the responsibility of protecting the state and its allies from external threats, contributing to the achievement of international stability, participation in peace missions, and assisting in cases of catastrophes and calamities. This accommodation to the new international scenario normally entails reorganising the army's internal domestic distribution, modifying its education and training dynamics, acquiring equipment in keeping with the logic of refinement rather than quantitative criteria, and reducing the number of troops. This latter measure always ends up being traumatic, but it could be made more bearable if part of the military is transformed into assets to deal with other related problems, for example internal security and emergencies. Such a reconversion, which is already underway—albeit not without drama—in the heavy industry and mining sectors, could be a way of downsizing armies, of avoiding leaving their forces in the lurch, and of focusing on the necessary updating of an administration which, if not constantly modernised runs a serious risk of being overwhelmed by an always changing reality.

Finally, the *pragmatic* argument favours solving military inoperability with multifunctionality. This consolidates the *status quo* and avoids adjustment processes. In other words, it does not change the number of troops, or the public spending allocated to the military (Martínez, 2022: 18). The pragmatist believes that, in the absence of conflict, the military tools at the state's disposal must be used, even if not in the traditional tasks and especially

in countries with meagre resources (Pion-Berlin, 2016). Several reasons are given for this requirement of the armed forces: 1) their size is not inconsiderable; 2) their administration is hierarchical and disciplined, which is very convenient for the political decision maker; 3) they represent an administration with a high degree of territorial capillarity, which means that they are, or can be quickly available throughout the territory; 4) their requirements of autonomy give them considerable functional versatility/adaptability; and, finally 5) the military administration is accustomed to acting fast, so the troops can be mobilised and moved without delay. Nevertheless, even though this multifunctionality can be successful in the short term, it causes endless, and much more serious problems in the long term (Saint-Pierre and Donadelli, 2014; Diamint, 2018 and 2020; Kuehn and Levy, 2020; Jenne and Martínez, 2022).

In any case, according to Goodman (1996), if military personnel engage in functions outside their traditional missions, they must not go beyond certain bounds. They must not 1) replace other social groups that

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are capable of performing these tasks; 2) be granted privileges for doing so; or 3) neglect their main defence function. Even from the pragmatic standpoint, limits are set (Pion-Berlin, 2016). They must never 1) act in densely populated areas; 2) work in social programmes; 3) engage in missions that require training and material that is outside their scope; or 4) function as a police force. In a nutshell, the expansion of the military into non-defensive roles is a course that is not exempt of risks. In my view, the conditions under which the military can intervene outside its traditional role in the domain of defence must be very stringent: exceptionality, emergency, overstretching of traditional instruments, non-existence of alternatives, temporary in nature, guided by those in power, and only until the state can muster the tools it needs (Pion-Berlin and Martínez, 2017).

Accordingly, as a general principle, the expansion of military functions into areas that are not natural to them is a risky venture. If securitising development or social agendas usually makes no sense, militarising them is totally illogical. Moreover, although domestic

security may seem to be a more compatible area, militarising this is not a recommendable path either. Indeed, resorting to the armed forces is currently becoming commonplace and, as a result, any issue can be militarised. Some pressing need and the guarantee of efficiency supposedly offered by the military are evoked but this overlooks the fact that such dynamics sow the seed of militarism. And this is something that usually does not arrive with any plan to go away (Saint-Pierre and Donadelli, 2014; Diamint, 2018, 2020).

The risks of multifunctionality

Military multifunctionality not only disregards the primary task of armies —defence— but it also normally means flouting the normative framework, circumventing the necessary military reforms, obstructing the development of civilian skills for the specific activities the military undertakes, and implanting undemocratic trends of political culture (Jenne and Martínez, 2022). Furthermore, the military

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may be enjoying privileges for undertaking these tasks, which then creates major problems for democratic governance.

When it is decided not to apply the three Rs process but, instead, to maintain the status quo, multifunctionality is entirely embraced and this is when perverse roles (as I have elsewhere called them) appear (Martínez, 2020a; 2020b). In its eagerness to be useful and thereby to justify its budgetary and personnel resources, the military ends up taking on missions for which it is not properly equipped, or outdated, or out of place, however well-intentioned the project might be. I call this the *scarecrow* or *veterinarian* role. Imagine that we are on a plane, on a transoceanic flight, and a passenger has what seems to be a heart attack. On the PA system a crew member asks if there are any doctors among the passengers. The minutes go by, and the crew member then asks if there is anyone on board who works in the health sector. After almost ten minutes, the crew member repeats that there is a passenger whose life is in danger and they

are asking for the help of a doctor, a nurse, or someone working in the health sector. Then a passenger stands up and tells the hostess, “I’m a *veterinarian*”. Everyone breathes a sigh of relief. However, imagine what would happen if the president of a government announced that, given the shortage of doctors in the country, it had been decided to cover the vacancies with veterinary surgeons on a permanent basis. It would not be a good idea to fall ill in that country. As for the *scarecrow*, it is placed in a field after the sowing, in the hope that its presence, immobile except for its clothes flapping in the wind, will frighten away the birds so that they do not eat the seeds and ruin the crop. But, alas, if some intrepid or unheeding bird lands next to it and has a nice little snack, the scarecrow will not do anything, and the crop will probably be destroyed in a very short time.

A military man who is metaphorically a veterinarian will be performing, presumably with great dignity— but probably with little expertise—functions that are apparently in his area, for example internal security or

emergencies, at the request of his government. We might speculate that the role of the veterinarian is a low-cost modernisation of those who have been lamplighters. Instead of redefining themselves and modernising so that they can deal with the new electric streetlights, they agree to continue being called military personnel in exchange for employment as police, teachers, street sweepers, health workers, etcetera, or whatever they

are asked to do. In this situation, if they are required at any point to perform their main function as a defensive instrument, we will probably find that we have scarecrows.

In this sense, thinking about the armed forces as scarecrows would therefore mean assigning them to missions that are necessary and consistent with the needs of national defence, but for which they are badly prepared and/or ill-equipped. In this case, it would surely be necessary to reduce the number of troops to save on personnel costs and, with a small army downsized to the level of threats that are envisaged, to redirect the acquisition of materials and training of personnel to fit these new challenges. Yet, the military administration is resistant to change, and rulers are averse to complications, so even if they are aware that they will be replicating *Hunk*, their aim is to reassure society that the state is able to deal with threats with the means at its disposal. In the long run, however, this brings the military into

disrepute since it no longer serves its function and it is therefore accused of being useless, for example because of planes that do not fly for lack of fuel, pilots who only fly in the flight simulator, maritime zones that cannot be protected from the systematic incursions of foreign fishing boats, submarines that sink because broken welding is repaired with wire, and rusting boats stacking up in harbours, etcetera. In countries where such scenarios have become more common, the soldier loses his or her vocation, becomes indoctrinated, and is mostly concerned about salary, privileges, and retirement pension. The defence mission is relegated to an anecdotal level and the only tasks for which the military is equipped are *veterinary* missions, which require considerable human deployment and little or no technical support. It is sufficient to have the basic means of transport to reach every corner of the country, vaccinate, distribute school desks, bring drinking water, and fumigate against dengue fever.

From militarism to the joker administration: different conceptualisations of the military

One problem that has always been present in studies of civilian-military relations is determining whether the military are concerned with defending their autonomous decision-making power or whether, on the other hand, they accept civilian supremacy (Agüero, 1995). Directly linked with this discussion is a radicalisation of autonomy which would lead to *militarism* (Lleixà, 1986a, 1986b), a perverse situation in which the military not only feels independent of political power but also that the entirety of political life must be subject to its control. As Diamint (2022: 36) puts it, this is “military empowerment associated with a deficit of civilian control” and, accordingly, a version of military power that undermines the very viability of democracy. Periods of militarism involve a dominating or determinant presence of the military in the processes of political decision-making. Not only is there a profuse military intervention in public life but the military also normalises its direct participation in affairs of state. In this situation, militarism engulfs the administration and military decision-making spheres while also establishing the use of violence as an effective method for dealing with problems that should be political. Hence, it is an “imposition of a military ethos, of the military values of its organisational culture, its language, and its discipline in different areas of civilian life” (ibid: 40).

Much less damaging, but still bordering on damage, is the idea of *corporativism* which Abrahamsson (1972) links to secondary socialisation —that of military training centres— and which, in the Spanish case, is found to be more embedded in primary socialisation, namely that of the family (Martínez, 2007). Wherever it comes from, excessive corporative zeal can lead to social isolation and—this would be dramatic—pave the way for rejection of political control over the military administration. As Feaver (1996: 149) notes, the civil-military challenge is to “reconcile a military strong enough to do anything the citizens ask them to with a military subordinate enough to do only what citizens authorize them to do”.

However, when I refer to *militarisation*, I do not mean the existence of a political-military power, but normalisation of the use of the military —and thus, even if only potentially, of force— in the provision of services that are alien to military roles and, on many occasions, basic. In this regard, Kuehn and Levy (2020) distinguish between “material militarisation” and “discursive militarisation”. With the former, which they measure on the basis of coups d’état, they refer to military influence in the formation and dissolution of governments, and the relative weight of military resources in the society, which would seem to be referring to militarism as described above. However, *discursive militarisation* comes with the shaping of a narrative that would legitimise and justify the use of force

Militarisation ends up turning the armed forces into the favoured tool for dealing with all kinds of security threats. If, in addition to this, securitisation of social and development agendas occurs in the political system, militarisation, which already prevails in the domain of security, can eventually invade economic and social areas as well.

for spheres of security that do not pertain to the military. This type of militarisation ends up turning the armed forces into the favoured tool for dealing with all kinds of security threats. If, in addition to this, securitisation of the social and development agendas occurs in the political system, problems that are unrelated to security — for example poverty, squalor, and illiteracy, etcetera— get turned into problems of a securitarian nature and, moreover, militarisation, which already prevails in the domain of security, can eventually invade economic and social areas as well.

Militarisation is also an escalating process of legitimating and justifying the use of force. In other words, this is not just a matter of armies taking on an increasingly greater number of roles and, thus, missions, but also of considering that this security instrument —as well as its

procedures— is the most appropriate, among all those available to the state, for dealing with problems. There is no coyness among the political authorities about its use—at times indiscriminate—and not a peep of protest from citizens. Both the political authorities and society believe that use of the military is both proper and helpful. This is a call for *order* which finds the most expeditious path in the use of military force.

Finally, there is another dynamic—this time ending up with a scenario similar to that of military multifunctionality in the political system—which is based on a *decremental* logic regarding the use of force.² This is a furtive way of taking advantage of the armed institution—its size, adaptability, versatility, hierarchy, discipline, availability, rapid response, and territorial spread—while avoiding its modernisation in keeping with a defensive role in order to reconvert it, without having to do so formally, by means of the missions entrusted to it. I refer to sugar-coating of the military, by which I mean a tendency towards establishing military forces that are less trained and prepared for combat and avoiding any special emphasis on modernisation and renovation of its arms arsenal since it is believed that this is unnecessary and could represent a superfluous expense. These are armies that are not expected to resort to use of force in the various tasks they are entrusted with because these are not missions that require shortcuts to achieve *order* but large-scale activities in terms of volume, space, and problems of accessibility. Governments treat them not so much as members of an armed institution but as a “joker administration” (Jenne and Martínez, 2022), which is what happens with the role of veterinarian when it ceases to be an anecdote and becomes a creed.

Conclusions

There are three ideas that structure this text. First, that thoroughgoing changes in the global political system have created new relational dynamics in which it seems that the classical wars—Putin permitting—are not going to be the usual way of solving conflicts. This gives rise to doubts about the need for armies or, at least, calls for a rethink. If these risks are not dealt with in a timely fashion, the whole administration could be affected and might end up as a *lamplighter* or *lift operator*.

2. I cannot refer to *demilitarisation* because I am not speaking of dynamics that imply the withdrawal of the armed forces from certain areas that they previously controlled. Neither can I refer to *desecuritisation* because this would mean converting into non-securitised concerns issues and problems that could and should have been dealt with differently, but which were securitised at the time.

The second is the conclusion that, at this point, which is so decisive for the military, two solutions are being offered. First, is the option of adapting to the new scenario its activity, preparation, material, procedures, and troops. This would probably result in a military contingent that is surplus to the country's defensive needs. The solution to this situation would be to retrain these members of the military in other, not necessarily military agencies, for which such assets are necessary but not available. The police, civil protection, and emergencies sectors would seem to offer congenial fields for this reconversion which, from the outset, will never be agreeable for those who are affected. Second, some observers have understood that, if the army is no longer useful for war, it should be of service in other situations. This is precisely what I have called multifunctionality, a solution that brings together both military personnel who do not want to lose manpower or budgetary presence and those in power who do not want to deal with problems that could give rise to the logic of the three Rs (redefine, resize, and reconvert) when applied to military administration.

The pragmatism that pervades multifunctionality leads to the third point: although using the armed forces as a joker administration—which to say, as an urgent means with which to solve multiple problems—may, in the short term, seem to be the cure-all balm of Fierabras, in the medium and long term it entails militarisation of many non-defence areas. There might be a number of motives for this, none of them encouraging, as it could be a strategy for stepping up the use of force, which is understood as intrinsic to the armed forces and, therefore, there will be no arguments about it. This is a route that moves along the razor's edge of militarism. It could also be a strategy that surreptitiously seeks to move the armed forces away from their defensive role and establish them, without further ado or political debate, in other roles.

Whatever the strategy is, militarisation pushes the military into two perverse roles, those of the *veterinarian* and of the *scarecrow*. In the former case, they end up engaging in missions for which they are neither equipped nor prepared but the political decision-maker understands that these tasks are close to their level of capability and that, in such deployment, they will be more effective and speedier too, if necessary. As *scarecrows*, they would find that increasing activity in non-defensive roles and even acquisition of equipment in keeping with these new roles would leave them ill-prepared when they must confront truly defensive challenges.

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