

## Original Paper

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# The Role of the Ecuadorian Armed Forces: Historical Structure and Changing Security Environments

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## Abstract

This work addresses the central points of the construction process of the Ecuadorian Armed Forces to the new challenges, perceptions and responses related to the present environment of security and defense, from a structural and long-term historical perspective, which allows the understanding of this institution as key component of the complex Ecuadorian State-society, and its relations with different moments in the world and regional order. As an introductory point, a historical reading is presented, addressing the period between the conformation of the Republic to the culmination of the delimitation of its land border; in a second moment, the Pre and Pos scenario of the Peace Treaty with Peru from 1998 to 2007 will be analyzed; later it reviews the scenarios,

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perceptions and responses of Ecuador in the face of changes in the security environment in the decade 2008-2019.

**Keywords:** Ecuadorian Armed Forces, State-Society, Security, Defense, World Order.



## Introduction: From the Conformation of The Republic to The Culmination of Its Land Border Delimitation

This article works from the perspective of the Armed Forces (FFAA), and takes a historical tour around the way the institution has related the changing challenges in the construction of the State and images of the Ecuadorian nation, and the challenges perceived within the field of national security and defense. The text, besides presenting data obtained by different bibliographical sources, also brings interpretations based on information obtained via methods related to the so-called *customary practice* and *everyday life*.

By 1830, when Ecuador became an independent Republic, after the dissolution of the Great Colombia, it faced three main challenges: the defense of the national territory, the continuity of the State, and the overcoming of the threat of fragmentation generated by centripetal forces and interests of the departments of Guayaquil, Quito and Cuenca. It is observed, then, that from the institutionality of the State, and from the military centrality<sup>1</sup>, senses are generated oriented to build the imagined Ecuadorian community (cf. Anderson, 1993), identity and the nation.

During the rest of the nineteenth century, the political instability in Ecuador that accompanies the structural weakness of the State (cf. Centeno, 2002), is expressed even in the discontinuity of the institutions of a modern State, including the spaces of formation of military commands. Thus, for example, Vicente Rocafuerte created the Military College in 1838, and in 1861 the Regimental Artillery School was founded (Ejército Ecuatoriano, s.d.); whereas from 1869 there would be at least three moments of closure that meant new foundations or reopening: a) the one that took place under the modernizing Catholic nationalist project of Gabriel García Moreno, who perceived as a threat to neighboring Peru, and to the Colombian liberals and their influence in Ecuador (Maignashca, 2005) where the Cadet Practical School was founded; b) in 1888 when the Military College was reopened, during the period of Antonio Flores Jijón (Ejército Ecuatoriano, s.d.); and c) when the Military College was finally created on December 11, 1899, in the government of Eloy Alfaro (COMIL, 2015) and the armed forces were institutionalized in the liberal revolution in early 20th century (Ejército Ecuatoriano, s.d).

From here, we can point out the projection to form a modern and professional army, which projects, from its symbolic heritage, the need to maintain the cohesion of the nation as one of the priority tasks of national security. At the same time, as a component of the formal spaces where the attributions of the State as an institution are processed (Maignashca, 1996), it is projected as a body that guarantees the continuity of the State's duties related to forging "la identidad nacional de la Sociedad por

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<sup>1</sup> The Army was created by mandate in the first Constitution of the Republic, but also, as Loveman (1999) notes, the Latin American States have their genesis in the militias that carry forward the independence effort.



intermedio de leyes, constituciones, símbolos y utopías" (ibid.: 372),<sup>2</sup> the republican utopia being just one of the components of such projection.

However, republicanism as utopia had transited, after the defeat of the first president and ex-military, Juan José Flores (1845), from the idea of "the republic as a legal-political mechanism, to one of an economic-social type" (Aguirre, 1972: 351-361, 426-427 apud Maiguashca, 1996: 378), promoted by "the democrats", and its leader General José María Urvina (Ibid.: 378). In spite of the above, it can not be minimally guaranteed that the Ecuadorian republican utopia definitively and monopolistically landed in one of these, or others, constructs. Recognizing its development, on the other hand, allows us to locate ideas, images and representations that will continue to inform the armed forces in the 20th century; and even until, at least the 90s, "los militares ecuatorianos se han caracterizado por su actitud abiertamente reformista"<sup>3</sup> (Páez, 1994: 3).

Proof of the previous thing would be the total irruption in the exercise of the national policy in 1925, in the "Juliana Revolution",<sup>4</sup> as a response to the crisis of the oligarchic liberal project, which articulated in its direction military sectors of middle managers, "modernizing" intellectual sectors – representatives of an expanding middle class in the cities –, and a traditional oligarchic mountain influence (Del Campo, 1978).

Such participation could have multiple readings, of which two can be rescued: the first where an intermediation role oriented to arbitration is seen; while for the second, the armed forces could be observed "levantando un proyecto de modernización del Estado que reconociese el emerger de los sectores populares organizados y pudiese cooptar a los nacientes sectores medios dentro de una institucionalidad más abierta que la propuesta por el régimen liberal- oligárquico"<sup>5</sup> (Páez, 1989: 14-67 apud Páez 1994: 3). Probably under this last interpretation, the Armed Forces, in the following years, would build a series of mechanisms of consolidation or strengthening of statehood through the formation of institutions that allow contributing, mainly, to the development of the country. Under a predominantly civilian vision, this revolution focused on reducing social gaps through the restructuring of the country's monetary system and the provision of state protection to workers, while at the same time conceiving the Armed Forces as actors in politics and internal conflict, before they are concerned with external threats (Breilh Paz y Miño; Herrera, 2011, Paz y Miño Cepeda, 2002).

From there on, the "national trauma" produced by the enormous territorial loss (approximately half of the total) in the war with Peru in 1941, marked in the following

<sup>2</sup> "the national identity of society intermediate of laws, constitutions, symbols and utopias".

<sup>3</sup> "The Ecuadorian military has been characterized by its openly reformist attitude".

<sup>4</sup> As background is the general strike of Guayaquil in 1922, which mobilized structurally marginalized sectors and was severely repressed, generating a critical juncture in which all the social forces of Guayaquil participated, and whose repercussion spread throughout the Republic (González, 1997).

<sup>5</sup> "raising a project of modernization of the State that recognizes the emergence of organized popular sectors and could co-opt the nascent middle sectors within a more open institutional framework than that proposed by the oligarchic-liberal regime".



decades reflections on security, defense and geopolitics of the armed forces. The State project, clearly led by this institution, would turn, until 1998, around the realist classic dynamic of the expansion of national power.

In this context it was verified that the liberal oligarchic project of the government of Arroyo del Río (1940-1944) had been exhausted, as it went on to consolidate its position on the basis of social repression and control over the military by the police, then called Carabineros (Páez, 1994: 3). Thus, the second moment in the XX century "de la participación FFAA en la política nacional (se da en) Mayo de 1944, apoyando la insurrección popular contra dicho gobierno<sup>6</sup> y posibilitando la ampliación de la participación popular, que fue consagrada en la Constitución de 1945"<sup>7</sup> (Cf. Páez, 1994); all inscribed within a modernizing perspective, although it could be considered historically and structurally as "spasmodic".<sup>8</sup>

After "La Gloriosa" of 1944, and a succession of civil governments with severe difficulties for governance, the Military Board (1963-1966) assumed power, breaking with the modernizing trend and with predominant social focus that military governments had had until then. The central preoccupation of this government was to deactivate the possible articulations between sectors that could raise reformist processes<sup>9</sup> or revolutionary proposals driven by the "foquismo" of the Cuban Revolution. For national defense, this government granted a priority equivalent to that of precedents, focusing on this from the perspective of the defense of territorial sovereignty, but also strengthening an orientation to avoid domestic elements triggering against social cohesion.

The image of "the Peru threat", and the possibility of recovering the lost access to the Amazon in the war of 1941, became the pillars of foreign policy and defense policy of the country, and served as axes of articulation for subsequent decisions in most areas of national policy. The Armed Forces would go on to an exercise of trying to reconcile the republican utopia and its reformist attitude of the State, with its role within the "cold war" scenario; in other words, linking national security and development.

The formation of the "revolutionary nationalist government" of General Rodríguez Lara in 1972 (Maiguashca; North, 1991) constitutes the next moment of active linkage of the Armed Forces in the administration of the State. Intervention and control, which also meant that for the first time in history, the Ecuadorian state was the owner

<sup>6</sup> "The influence of the left, particularly the Socialist Party, within the middle management can also be signaled as an element of this reformist attitude of the Institution" (Páez, 1994: 3).

<sup>7</sup> "of the participation of the Armed Forces in the national policy (it occurs in) May of 1944, supporting the popular insurrection against said government and enabling the extension of popular participation, which was enshrined in the 1945 Constitution".

<sup>8</sup> In "another work (Cf. Páez, 1989) 'spasmodic modernization' (in as much) impulses frustrated in its degree of amplitude and depth, but that generated relative enlargements of the participation, functional differentiation of the State among other results" (Páez, 1994: 3).

<sup>9</sup> And this, despite the promotion of the Agrarian Reform undertaken by the Military Board itself (Gándara Enríquez, 1980: 179; Maldonado Donoso, 1980: 393; Loveman, 1999: 189).



of the direct rent of its main export product (oil), and intended to implement a development project (with strong influences of the replacement project of imports from ECLAC structuralism),<sup>10</sup> to "modernize" the state, industrial productive capacities, expand the participation of the middle sectors, and incorporate new sectors of the population into the market; all this within a planning vision, proposed and developed by civilian and military actors (García, 2003; Bocco, 1987) that generated a greater role of intermediation of the state, both in front of the national social forces, and in front of the world order.

On the other hand, it is necessary to point out that the military project of that government did not deploy repressive actions such as those developed in the Southern Cone, because unlike those countries where the image of the "internal enemy" was configured, functional to extra-regional interests related to war or cold peace (Hobsbawn, 2003). In the Ecuadorian case, the possibility was conceived that the materialization of "development" could contain threats to the security of the State, both internally: domestic policy, and projectively externally; perspective that would last and that would be articulated to the notion of territorial management that occupies and prevents threats to sovereignty.<sup>11</sup>

The Government of Rodríguez Lara is succeeded by a Supreme Government Council (military triumvirate, 1976-1979) that deposed the first, and that prepares the transitional scenario towards the democratic governments after 1979, the year of the return to democracy. However, and given the beginning of the implementation of the so-called structural adjustment mainly associated with the crisis generated by the external debt that hits all of Latin America, since early 1980s, and deepened by the damage of several natural events (phenomenon el niño in 1981, earthquake in 1987), programs of cuts begin.

Despite these particularities, the institutional weight of the Armed Forces would seem to protect them from the effects on the budget, nor did it generate a transformation in its strategic objectives, its geopolitical vision oriented mainly to Peru and the recovery of the Amazon (Child, 1981), nor its institutional projection in relation to its intermediation role already described in front of the complex Ecuadorian state-society. At this level it should be noted that the process of democratic transition, initiated in 1976, developed a series of political mechanisms that would safeguard the military oversight capacity on democracy when it was presumed to be in crisis (Bustamante 1988, Loveman 1994), the protection of its own interests and capabilities in the military sphere itself – in the dynamics of all agreed transitions – (Mainwaring,

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<sup>10</sup> For Páez (1994), "the Philosophy and Plan of Action of the Revolutionary Nationalist Government" was very much in tune with the demands of the pro-Papal planners, in contradiction with the preferences of the traditional economic elites (Bocco, 1987: 22-39).

<sup>11</sup> This would be deployed with greater force after the armed conflict between Ecuador and Peru, in the so-called "War of Paquisha" in 1981, especially with the proposal to generate living borders (territorial and human development oriented to contain threats and penetrations of interests and populations as had happened in the territories lost during the 1941 war.



1989; Rouquié, 2011; Stepan, 1988), and, the preservation of a specific development model that sought to keep the State as the central actor of the link with the economy and society (Bustamante; Varas, 1977; Echeverría, 2010, Fitch, 1977; Verdesoto; Ardaya, 2010).

Already in the nineties, the State enters a neoliberal phase (Andrade, 2009) in which budget cuts are deepened especially in the Sixto-Dahik government (1992-1996), with a clear technocratic perspective. In parallel, the maintenance and relative increase of investment in the budget of the armed forces take place, even more so in a context of a new armed conflict with Peru in 1995.

After the signing of peace with Peru in October 1998, political party actors begin with a position on the defense issue, perhaps for the first time in history, mainly under the following arguments:

- The need to maintain the budget in the defense sector is questioned, and even among liberal sectors – radical idealists, the very existence of the Armed Forces in Ecuador.
- There is a deepening of the logic of public disinvestment on the part of the following governments, under orthodox economic arguments (liberal economism), and that impacts on the material capabilities of the Armed Forces.

From the external level – world order – the attempt for the involvement of Ecuador in the Colombian armed conflict continues, in a logic that had been present since the war against drugs (declared by Ronald Reagan in February 1982). With the launch of the Colombia Plan (1999-2000) for that country, the insertion – implicit – of Ecuador in such a strategy was to turn the country into an "*yunque*", while exerting pressure on Colombia's armed irregular groups. Meanwhile, the rhetoric of "new security agendas and new threats" built around economic, environmental, societal, political and military concerns (Buzan; Waever; De Wilde, 1998), continues and is revitalized. They incorporate proposals for human security, multidimensional security, and comprehensive security (existing in the argumentative matrices on security in international regimes).<sup>12</sup>

These conditions led the role of the Armed Forces in a post-signing scenario of the peace treaty with Peru to be revised and required a new delimitation, since the military institutions of countries like Ecuador went on to operate within a world order marked by pressures of the logic of a liberal globalization that not only impacted the

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<sup>12</sup> In Ecuador, and in South America, there would be a hegemonic debate between projects that pose a greater or lesser role of intermediation of the State between its social forces and the world order (Reyes, 2009; cf. Cox, 1993), materialized at least in the last 60 years, in the competition between: a) political economic projects with developmentalist matrices (including those influenced by ECLAC structuralism, those of national and neo-national popular, and neo-developmentalists); and b) liberal economicist ones (which include variants such as the oligarchic, authoritarian bureaucratic and "neoliberal" projects). (O'Donnell, 1972; Bonilla & Páez, 2003; Reyes, 2010).



entire complex state-society, but also impacted on their material capabilities, and even on the very conception of their nature. These conditions cause, however, a practical difficulty, tied to the national scenario that since 1996 imposed old-standard demands, but that the Armed Forces had to deal in a relatively new perspective.

### **Armed Forces Scene and Political System Pre And Post Signature of the 1998 Treaty with Peru**

It is not possible to understand the nature of the Armed Forces in the region, and particularly in Ecuador, without reviewing the action they have in the political system daily life. This requires a brief look at the way it operates since the democratic transition. As it was indicated above, after the revolutionary nationalist government of Rodriguez Lara, came a military triumvirate that would organize the return to democracy. This is the turning point in the political history of Ecuador because it would confront two visions of the State that had to coexist through the capacity to synthesize the social conflicts that the political parties achieved, and the unifying capacity demonstrated by the Armed Forces.

Thus, the tension over the State model is evident in the succession within the dictatorship (1972-1976) where the group of officials with visions of a market economy and an aggressive insertion of the country in the neoliberal logics assumed power, in detriment of the one that considered necessary a greater participation of the State in the administration of the economy to guarantee a social and redistributive purpose, reducing, in addition, the participation of the oligarchies, as a means to ensure the security-development dyad. Both, however, coexist in the process that would trigger the return to democracy, led under the figure of General Richelieu Levoyer, who became the facilitator of an institutionalization that should facilitate the resolution of the conflict of visions presented.

In the transition that began in 1976 it is possible to find three phenomena that would be recurrent in the moments of systemic crisis observed in the period indicated in this section. On the one hand, 1) the demands of a transition agreed upon (Mainwaring, 1989; O'Donnell & Schmitter, 1986) suppose a partisan-military coordination as a means to allow the transition; then, 2) with the advent of democracy comes into play the need to reconcile economic and political interests considering that the State would reformulate its participation (North, 2006; Verdesoto, 2014); and, 3) in this configuration, society has a legitimating and procedural role, but not substantial (Argones Puglia, 1983; Bustamante, 1988). The political system that is configured under these tensions happens to have as a central element the political parties that are presumed to be modern, representative and institutionalized (Freidenberg, 2016; Pachano, 2010) but that, inscribed in the multiple cleavages of the country,<sup>13</sup> fail to achieve some kind of representation that makes them efficient means of transmission

<sup>13</sup> The cleavages of the traditional party systems go in the left-right axes, and, liberal-conservative. However, in the Ecuadorian case, it is argued that there are also – and probably more importantly, the coastal-sierra, urban-rural, indigenous-mestizo, and capital-periphery axes (Pérez Enríquez, 2018).





and resolution of social demands (Pérez Enríquez, 2018). In the tense framework that this implies, the Armed Forces become a sort of counterbalance, which, as analyzed in the following lines, allows the return of the operation of the system, at least in the period 1997-2007.

Between 1979 and 1996, the Ecuadorian political system operated within a relative normality, since the tensions it faced tended to be resolved by the operation of the mechanisms predisposed by the transitional agreements. However, by 1996, the tension between the Executive and the political parties operating in the legislature had increased irresolvably to provoke a political trial of the vice president of that time. Although this moment did not provoke his dismissal, it did reveal a new dynamic in the functioning of the relationship between Executive and political parties. In 1997, President Abdalá Bucaram, who had taken office six months earlier, was dismissed in a process involving the actions of parties and armed forces. For the processes that took place in 2000 and 2005, with the dismissal of Presidents Mahuad and Gutiérrez, the general dynamic was similar: systematic blockade of the parties to the decision-making capacities of the Executive, exhaustion of alliance capacities, social crisis, and resolution provided by a group of political actors, which will be endorsed by the Armed Forces.

Concerning this last element, a reflection is necessary to analyze its role in late 20th century and early 21st. Aside from the conjunctural characteristics that make up each case, it should be noted that, on the three occasions mentioned, the Armed Forces intervened in a timely manner, issuing two messages: the withdrawal of support to the acting president, and the acceptance of the formula of succession proposed by the political actors involved. Hence, it is no accident that, in 1997, after Bucaram left the government palace, and amid uncertainty about who should assume the presidency of the Republic,<sup>14</sup> the two potential successors went – by separate ways – to the Ministry of Defense<sup>15</sup> to negotiate and define how the succession would occur. In 2000, the then vice president, “fue posesionado ante las Fuerzas Armadas como nuevo mandatario del país, decisión que fue ratificada más tarde por el Congreso Nacional”<sup>16</sup> (El Universo, 2000); in 2005, the vice president would take power after waiting for news in a military

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<sup>14</sup> This was due to the troubled way in which the session for the dismissal of the President by the National Congress took place, because it was interpreted that 1) the president was mentally incapable of exercising such functions, and that 2) the succession should favor the President of the Congress over the vice president of the Republic. The reasons for this were strictly political, since some type of medical analysis would mean prolonging the time and losing the opportunity provided by the protests at its zenith, while in the second case, the constitutional interpretation made by the legislature left out who could formally replace the president, probably because it was an operator alien to those who provoked and negotiated the exit of Bucaram.

<sup>15</sup> This could be a euphemism. The Ministry of Defense operates within the same complex in which the Joint Command of the Armed Forces do, and the General Command of each of the forces. The Chief of the Joint Command of the Armed Forces became a very public operator of the succession and return to some kind of normality of the political system (El País, 1997).

<sup>16</sup> “was placed before the Armed Forces as the new president of the country, a decision that was later ratified by the National Congress”.



base, and after his troubled inauguration in the National Congress would have to go, first, to the Joint Command of the Armed Forces (The Universe, 2005).

Thus, under these conditions, it is evident that the Armed Forces played a central role in establishing the mechanisms of political succession after the above described crises: by publicly communicating the "withdrawal of support" to the presidents, they questioned their legitimacy and made evident their position of power within the Ecuadorian political system, which was ratified by endorsing the succession decided and presented by civilian political actors. The existence of a constitutional provision that made them "guarantors of the legal system" (Asamblea Nacional Constituyente, 1998; Constitución Política de la República del Ecuador, 1979) provided the Armed Forces with a legal tool that ratified their decision-making capacity.

This period of crisis in the Ecuadorian political system tended to diminish after 2005, and the Armed Forces would return to their professional missions in order to contain the risk of institutional weakening, a cost implicit in any political intervention by the military (O'Donnell & Schmitter, 2010; Przeworski, 1988), while the relationship between the Executive and the political parties took place along the typical lines of a system that foresaw the extortion of the former and the lack of representativeness of the latter. In this context, military professional concerns took a back seat during the period described; likewise, the tensions on the northern border were sporadically present, although except for rather mundane actions to control sovereignty, there were no relevant events until the beginning of the Rafael Correa period in 2007.

Next, new scenarios for security are analyzed, the current role of the Ecuadorian Armed Forces, to finally propose elements that allow us to rethink the role of the Armed Forces and their strengthening in face of the challenges that are presented to the complex Ecuadorian State-society within the current configuration of forces within the world and regional order.

### **On Human Security, Comprehensive Security, and Return to National Security? 2008-2019**

In 2007 the new period of government started with a convocation to a Constituent Assembly that would give rise to a Constitution which would try to reconfigure widely the institutional system in all its orders, including the Armed Forces. In their respective articles, the mission of guaranteeing the legal order of the country (which was part of the Constitutions of the country since 1835) was withdrawn, and an attempt was made to exercise a narrower civilian political control over the military institution.

The limits granted for the functioning of the Armed Forces were intended to articulate a constitutional innovation that was mentioned but not developed: comprehensive security. Under this denomination, the new regime sought to break with the tradition of classical defense of sovereignty that had prevailed throughout the



republican period, even after the signing of peace with Peru in 1998. The problem, however, was that the claim of conceptual replacement was insufficient once it was put into practical terms, since the potential extension of its interpretation meant expanding the scope of action of the Armed Forces, while the official discourse sought to reduce its size (El Telegrafo, 2014; El Universo, 2016).

The current scenario of the Armed Forces in Ecuador in 2019 has been the product of a long transition that started in the 2008 Constitution, which tried to reconfigure the concept of security, eliminating the scope of defense, and trying to replace it with a particular vision oriented to generate a social and regional gear that came together in clear political ideological alliances with the so-called "progressivism". This, in the Ecuadorian case, curiously tied with the liberal security agendas that promoted a division of labor in security and defense based on the Armed Forces, focusing on confronting the issues of the liberal security agenda – even "policing" the work of the Armed Forces –,<sup>17</sup> while unconsciously the premise of this agenda was accepted: that the defense would be delegated to the work of the great powers. All this took place within a scenario that conceived that the hypothesis of interstate conflict with Peru was already overcome, but without generating projection of possible intra- or extra-regional interstate threats, nor with a harsh conception of national defense against new actors that violated territorial sovereignty.

However, the threats and visibility of vulnerabilities that appeared in the scene of the North border of Ecuador and the territories of the south of Colombia, the Venezuelan exodus, and the constant operations of drug trafficking in the Ecuadorian Pacific, have generated that the response since 2017, already under the mandate of President Lenin Moreno, was: a) the dimension of defense and national security resumed their importance as areas of the State, and b) the Armed Forces were their exclusive protagonists.

In that transition, we can point out in the first place that The Constitution of 2008 was one of the first results of the popularity of former President Rafael Correa, who less than a year after his election in 2007, managed to position the need for a refoundation oriented to move from a classic conception of the Nation-State to a State of "rights".<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> The Ecuadorian Armed Forces showed a disjunction, despite the discomfort. On the one hand, they did not see clearly the orientation of security and defense, nor the clear existence of the construction of a new doctrine pertinent to its historical mission. At the same time, certain elements related to the developmental modernization generated in the decade 2008-2017 were tied to the reformist objectives historically accepted in an important part of the institution. In spite of the above, it must also be remembered that the relative economic and political stability of the country did not bother the Armed Forces' discourse of no intervention in the arbitration that was outside its jurisdiction.

<sup>18</sup> The use of the denomination of "State of rights", referred to a change in the understanding of a political administrative structure, of checks and balances accompanied by the division of powers by an institutional structure whose main objective was to guarantee the citizens' rights, the pre-eminence of public policies on institutions and discretionary judicial interpretation on the right of state powers (Corral, 2011).



The 444 articles presented novel institutional proposals such as: the legal subject "nature", free universal mobility, planning as an axis of the actions of the State, the incorporation of two more powers to the checks and balances of the State: Electoral Council and the Council of Citizen Participation, and universal citizenship. But perhaps the most diffuse area presented by the new Constitution of Ecuador was an ambiguous line between security and foreign policy.

This supreme legislation, for the first time, eliminated the articles that constituted sovereignty, defense, national security and international relations; here, sovereignty became an ambiguous concept that prioritized domestic issues such as food (Art. 15), or the return to the political concept of the popular will (Art. 96), while Art. 158 maintained the classic mission of the Armed Forces related to the defense of the national territory. In the same way, it was included:

- The constitutional prohibition of making any type of bilateral or multilateral agreement that would allow the authorization of a foreign military base in national territory (Art. 5). This prohibition occurred under the context of rejection of the Manta Base (which in 1999 had been the result of an agreement between President Mahuad and the United States);
- It was added that, to the orientation to which foreign policy would prioritize, as strategic, the Latin American scenario.

In this context, Ecuador incorporated the concepts of "human security"<sup>19</sup> and "comprehensive" as fundamental criteria for the generation and application of public policies. One of the most important considerations to try to apply these possible new paradigms, as already mentioned, was the understanding that security linked to defense had lapsed since the signing of Peace with Peru in 1998 and, that it was a new moment to orient the efforts of security towards peaceful coexistence, the criminal, the culture of peace, the administration of justice as well as the prevention of risks and natural disasters (Art. 393).

But in spite of having delineated a border more of public order than of State security, the "comprehensiveness" could not be defined, being rather a recurrent technocratic rhetorical horizon of the Correa administration that referred to the refoundation of the State and the citizens' needs that would be summarized in four areas: access to education – mainly elementary –, social security as an inalienable and obligatory right within job security, health, and investment in public infrastructure and

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<sup>19</sup> "Human security" is a category that was introduced by the United Nations in its 1994 report in the Human Development report called "New Dimensions of Human Security" This content was established as a debate, once the Cold War ended, between the classical conception of security and defense where the prioritization is the State and its territorial integrity and the human being as the center to which the efforts of the States and the world must be oriented to provide comprehensive living conditions: access to health, housing, work, environment, information, prevention of natural disasters, development, among others (Alcázar, 2011).



road development as the axis to achieve better productive results (Plan Nacional de Desarrollo, 2008).

In this scenario, it should be noted that on March 1, 2008, in Angostura, within the Ecuadorian territory, the Colombian Armed Forces attacked a clandestine camp of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), and discharged one of its main leaders, Raúl Reyes. This meant a diplomatic impasse, and treatment by the Organization of American States (OAS), which finally established precepts such as: the condemnation of the violation of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ecuador and the prohibition of preventive attacks on territory of America (El País, 2008).

But although, in the international field, the "preventive" Colombian attack in Operation Fénix had been condemned, where Reyes died, the greatest impact – with a large balance against Ecuador – was to show the weakness of the infrastructure of its armed forces towards a territorial military threat (Reuters, 2008), threat from two foreign armies: one state and another parastatal.

Thus, the internal vulnerability of intelligence services, both police and military, and the lack of infrastructure of the Armed Forces were not only evidence of absence of investment in the state sector, but also the clear evidence of the need to rethink the architecture of the State security and defense sector. The response was the Law on Public Safety and the State, in 2009.

This law, built around the word "comprehensiveness", turned out to be a normative body that overlapped and confused the area of defense, public order, citizen security and intelligence institutions. The strategic as a tool of the projection of the State disappeared to give way to citizen security as an axis articulator in the face of violence and criminal activities such as organized crime – whose answers should be understood from the control and punitive areas, Art. 23 (Ley de Seguridad Pública y del Estado, 2009). The establishment of an Intelligence Secretariat that could coordinate the police and military agencies was also prioritized; also, operations for citizen security were encouraged over those of defense, and even the possibility that actions in the field of citizen security were carried out by military forces (Art. 45) was made explicit (Ibid.).

While the institutional architecture outlined a new orientation towards the strengthening of police, judicial and criminal instances, the government of Rafael Correa was also concerned with the implementation of its "comprehensive security" accompanied by cutting-edge technology, which was finally captured thanks to an active relationship with Chinese cooperation. This new global actor and emerging power was generating a greater approach to regional integration mechanisms such as UNASUR and CELAC, which at that time were driven by progressive and developmentalists. They found parallel acceptance agreed by the projects that conjugated liberal positions in the economic and realistic projections in the field of security and defense.

In this context, by 2011, China had become Ecuador's second trading partner, and according to Samanmud (2014), the first financier, and largest technology provider.



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This association brought with it, for example, the ECU911 platform, through a Chinese loan of around 240 million dollars. Its function was to establish an integrated surveillance system in the main cities of Ecuador (Quito, Guayaquil, Cuenca, and also in the Galapagos Islands) based on the idea of prevention, control and mitigation of crime; as well as the identification and support of the problems associated with natural risks and disasters (La República, 2012), all prioritized as the main threats to security in this period. Thus, this constant equation "emergencies = security" was far from the vision of defense of the State and was more oriented to the vision of the daily needs of citizens.

For the second period of Correa (2013-2017), a series of normative reforms were promoted to *securitize* the image of the President, as a good to be guarded by the norm. This converged in greater areas of punitive judicialization – as a demonstration of efficiency in the control of citizen security – and *desecuritization* of mechanisms for rendering accounts about the administration of the public. In parallel, there was a disarticulation between the institutional and operational field of security and defense and that of Ecuador's international policy, prioritizing domestic security and internal control.

As of 2014, citizen security became the focal point of government efficiency, through the phrase "the transformation of justice" – already outlined the previous year (Presidencia de la República del Ecuador, 2013). A process that ranged from comprehensive reforms to procedural and substantive regulations; to administrative processes that have shaped a new form of operation of justice, and that were complemented by changes in the prison system and discourse in relation to certain crimes.

This disjunctive between the social and the punitive instances generated a normative framework that was not linked to the objectives of the State and its relation to integral human development; this led to a divorce between speech and reality; for example, one result: as the increase in the prison population in the period 2012-2017 was considered a synonym of quantitative efficiency and improvement of the perception of security, this increased the abandonment of the prioritization of the topic and defense capabilities of the Ecuadorian State.

On May 24, 2017, President Lenin Moreno took office, triumphing under the auspices of the same political party of his predecessor, Alianza País, who had been vice president of Rafael Correa in his first term. At first, the policy around security and defense in Ecuador seemed to reproduce the same orientation as the previous administration; however, the breaking point occurred from the events of March 2018, when three Ecuadorian journalists were kidnapped and killed by one of the demobilized groups of the Colombian border, the so-called " Frente Oliver Sinisterra " (Semana, 2018). This episode repositioned the concern about what was the strategic vision of the defense for Ecuador and the mission of its Armed Forces.



In addition to this scenario, there was a sort of inventory of the resources used and usable in the security sector, which in the first instance generated questions on: the National Intelligence Secretariat (Universo, 2018); the construction of front-line roads in the border area with Colombia, an extensive strip of open sea without military control (Fajardo, 2018); and a lack of vision and clear doctrine that clarify the strategic limits of the defense, in relation to the "human security" and "comprehensiveness" of the Constitution and the Law of Public Security and of the State.

Thus, because the generalized perception was that the previous administration had prioritized the operations of political intelligence over those of the strategic defense of the State, it led to the closure of the Intelligence Secretariat and the preparation of a new norm: the Organic Code of State Security (Comercio, 2018b). In addition, when taking into account that the first order highway that led to the Colombian Mataje (even being part of a bilateral agreement, not executed by the Colombian counterpart) agreed spatially with one of the preferred scenarios for drug trafficking routes, it could be deduced the lack of basic geopolitical understanding in the 2008-2017 security proposals, while for the public opinion a lack of understanding of the threats to the sovereignty and security of the State became evident (Expreso, 2018).

It is in this scenario, where a radical questioning was generated both to what was built around "comprehensive security", as well as to the interstate associations that Ecuador had prioritized in the previous decade, it was urgently established a defense agenda that looked at the classic precepts of national security, which resulted in a new version of the White Paper.<sup>20</sup> To this was added a scenario where, once again, the Ecuadorian northern border became an obligatory passage of migratory exodus, now with the Venezuelan case, whose number of migrants established in Ecuador is estimated to be around 300,000 (Comercio, 2019c.). Such problematic brought additional challenges to the assumptions of traditional security, human security, and even the defense sector.

On the other hand, perceptions have increased of more threats to sovereignty mediated by news reports that accounted for the presence in 2019 of "a Chinese fleet of 245 vessels between fishing boats, factories and supply vessels in the vicinity of Ecuadorians waters (around the Galapagos) and who had the Ecuadorian Navy on alert for the third consecutive year" (Comercio, 2019b) or "the constant seizure of cocaine shipments in the high seas off the Ecuadorian coast" (El Universo, 2019).

It is in this context based on a scenario mediated by the above mentioned perceptions that the reactivation of a strong relationship with the United States is

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<sup>20</sup> The preparation of recent version of The White Paper (January 9, 2018) was led by Minister Oswaldo Jarrin, a former military officer who had been, in the first decade of the 21st century, Minister of Defense. This new work involved delineating a defense policy with the following fundamental areas: promoting the reinforcement of strategic capacities, the sovereignty of the State through the protection of its territory and population, the use of force in case of aggression, and the prevention of threats (ElComercio.com, 2019a).



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considered, seen as the greatest potential ally to face security threats; both for its capabilities, but also for the need perceived as urgent for the country to recover initiative and operability. Thus, on June 29, 2018, Mike Pence, vice president of that country visited Ecuador, resulting in an agenda that included: cooperation in security (northern border and fight against drug trafficking), the fight against corruption, and Venezuelan migration (Comercio, 2018a). After that, and once this bilateral agenda was established, Ecuador has continued to receive visits from several high-level representatives of the United States, reinforcing the reactivation of the close relations between these countries.

In these two years of government (2017-2019), it resulted in: a) that the leadership of Ecuador look back to its historical allies, as the United States is perceived; and b) that the weakening and abandonment of the notion of the defense of the State by the policies of the previous government was made visible.

Another point to be considered is that Ecuador, at least temporarily, has distanced itself from China; and is that by April 2019, several investigations were spread around the Ecu911 platform, which argued that the Chinese technological system could have been used as a surveillance program for political dissidents and opponents of the previous government (Mozur, 2019). In addition, according to the investigations' and the media's perceptions, that what in Correa's administration was presented as an advance in terms of efficiency for the integral security, it would have become a threat, a system that reported to the local political intelligence system, and whose technology could only be maintained by China, which would imply little compatibility with Western technological systems. This subject, still under discussion and in spite of not having been verified, allows to visualize the perceptions of the distance of the key defense issues and the contracting in internal security matters.

Even more, after almost 12 years of a Constitution that considered that the threats related to the problems of the defense of the Ecuadorian state had been overcome, we find ourselves with an emphatic return to a classic vision of the conflict and the threat, to confront new scenarios such as:

- The custody of the territory and its borders in the face of the existence of a Colombian territorial extension marked as an uncontrollable scenario, given the presence of the remains of the paramilitary forces and the ex-guerrilla dissident groups, post-peace agreements of Colombia, and whose economic sources of survival are drug trafficking, and other criminal activities;
- The problems of a Venezuela that has become an uncontrollable issuer of migratory flows that seek survival;
- An extensive maritime border that is part of the illegal activities of organized crime



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To these, are added problems related to intelligence systems linked to technologies not compatible with the need for information exchange with the Western Hemisphere.

## Conclusions

National security apparently continues to be the safe port of configuration of the defense and the work of the Ecuadorian Armed Forces. This concept involves various areas of operation, including actions to "stabilize" the policy, operating as an actor that necessarily seeks to align its interests with those of the State.

This dividing line is one of the fundamental difficulties in understanding the role of this institution in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Its traditional mode of operation seeks to reconcile the demands related to the classic territoriality – which has been questioned by illegal armed groups on the border with Colombia at least until 2018 –, intervention in politics (sometimes in subtle ways) to preserve a State vision built from the country's own independence, and the urgent need to assume new ways of acting to face threats that demand reactions of a different nature.

In this tension, the Armed Forces in Ecuador have to solve the problem of adapting to the new times in an environment in which the demands of security are different from what more institutionalized systems could suppose or face. On the other hand, the global dynamic imposes tensions that are, for the Armed Forces of any country, of urgent attention but that imply the recognition of the need for high levels of coordination among several countries, intensive use of intelligence and technology, and a detailed understanding of the mechanisms of political decision-making, with the limitations that these imply.

Finally, we can point out that, at present, despite the fact that national security and defense are taken up again as a horizon of the strategic interests of the State and the necessary defense of territorial sovereignty, it would seem that these precepts have been intertwined and mutually superimposed with the precepts and division of international defense work proposed by the so-called "new security agendas". It is a framework that the developmentalist attempt of the previous decade could not understand nor could overcome, and in front of which it is necessary to present answers that guide to resume the construction of a long-term national political projection.



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