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ARTICLE



# Evolution of the Argentina Ministry of Defense since 1983: Organizations, norms, and personnel

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## ABSTRACT

Through a progressive strengthening of organizational, legal, and personnel attributes, Argentina's Ministry of Defense has become civilianized. The MOD has been strengthened by the addition of new bureaucratic units headed by civilians with the authority to shape and conduct defense policy while also encouraging interactions with military personnel, resulting in better informed policy choices. This article will account for these changes through a detailed analysis of foreign affairs, strategic planning and promotions, production and research, and education. Procedural rules, divisions of labor and civil-military interactions are delineated. Military modernization deficiencies and the need for a permanent civilian staff are noted.

**KEYWORDS** Argentina; ministry of defense; civilian control; national defense; civil-military integration

## Introduction

Since the return to democracy in 1983, the Argentina Ministry of Defense (MOD) has undergone a progressive strengthening in three key dimensions of civilian control: in its internal organization, regulations, and personnel.<sup>1</sup> These changes have enabled the MOD to fulfill its principal purpose: to act as the organizational link between the democratic government and the military, translating policy preferences of elected politicians into military commands.<sup>2</sup> It has also created institutional routines and standard procedures that favor the regular interaction of civil and military officials on issues of importance for each area of defense.

The MOD can be seen as a microcosm for civilian control writ large in Argentina. As general civil-military relations have been transformed in ways that have strengthened the hand of government officials, so too have they been transformed inside the defense ministry. Unlike some of its South

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<sup>1</sup>David Pion-Berlin and Rafael Martínez, *Soldiers, Politicians, and Civilians: Reforming Civil-Military Relations in Democratic Latin America* (New York: Cambridge University Press 2017), 167–211.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

American neighbors, civilian control in Argentina is not only strong, but institutionalized. The nation has pursued a more difficult but more stable version of control by embedding civilian direction within organizational settings. Institutions have a tendency to persist, and if they can be designed to maximize civilian authority, input and oversight, then control can be achieved for the longer term, and not subject to the whims of each new administration. With some unfinished institution-building still to attend to, that is what has largely occurred in Argentina, and the MOD reflects and reinforces that pattern.

What follows is an analysis of how the defense ministry has evolved during the democratic period (1983-current) paying attention to bureaucratic, legal and personnel changes that have strengthened its ability to function as a civilian control agency. It then takes a deeper dive into four critical functional areas within the ministry: foreign affairs, strategic planning and promotions, production and research, and education. In each the procedural rules governing decision-making are delineated, underscoring what the division of labor and interaction is between military and civilian personnel, and who has final say so. Then the article concludes by indicating some areas where improvements are needed within defense and the ministry itself.

## Ministerial evolution

A Ministry of Defense is the key link in the chain of civil-military command that that allows government policy to be translated into military action. It structures power relations between the president and his military commanders, as well as serving as a buffer between them. In this manner, the democratic authorities can, by introducing MOD organizational reforms, reduce the decision-making autonomy enjoyed by the armed forces by erecting an institutional structure of secretariats, undersecretariats, and directorates.<sup>3</sup> Adding these bureaucratic layers means more opportunities for civilians to take charge over a broader array of key functions, permitting 'a more unified, comprehensive and coordinated design and execution of defense plans which in the past had been relegated to the separate service branches or not performed at all'.<sup>4</sup>

In Argentina these bureaucratic agencies have been headed by civilians who were empowered by the enactment of legal norms that gave them the authority over a broad array of functions including strategic defense

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<sup>3</sup>Thomas C. Bruneau and Richard B. Goetze Jr., 'Ministries of Defense and Democratic Control', in Thomas Bruneau and Scott Tollefson, (eds), *Who Guards the Guardians and How: Modern Civil-Military Relations*. (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press 2006), 71–98; David Pion-Berlin, 'Defense Organization and Civil-Military Relations in Latin America', *Armed Forces & Society* 35/3 (April 2009), 562–586.

<sup>4</sup>Pion-Berlin and Martínez, *Soldiers, Politicians, and Civilians*, 177.

planning, international policy, weapon acquisitions, justice, human rights, research, education – all previously under the authority of the armed forces.

The civilians who assume duties in the MOD are recruited from outside the system, not from the civil service. Since the return of democracy (1983) and up to the present, several of the key officials in the area have come from the defense epistemic community. During the term of Minister Nilda Garré (2005–2010), this trend deepened with the appointment of specialists from the ruling party and academics in key areas of the Ministry, including Ernesto López as Chief of Staff and German Montenegro as Secretary of Military Affairs.<sup>5</sup>

Recently, those civilians in positions of authority also come equipped with on the job experience. Minister Agustín Rossi (2020–2021), who served during the first two years of the Fernandez Administration, held the same post between 2013 and 2015, and his team of civilian defense experts returned to occupy the same functions. The current minister, Jorge Taiana, has kept the entire team from the previous administration.<sup>6</sup> These practices not only deepen defense understandings, but enhance institutional memory and continuity.

Although a large number of the officials who have held relevant positions in the MOD have come from the epistemic defense community, what is missing is a civil servant career track like that in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. That leaves appointments to depend on the willingness of each new minister to surround herself with personnel who have expertise in defense matters. Building that career track is one means by which institutionalized civilian control can be fortified.

The evolution of the organigram of the Argentine MOD since the return of democracy in 1983 and until 2020 (Table 1) reflects the organizational expansion. Between 1988 and 2020, 14 new organizational units at secretariat, undersecretariat, and directorates levels were created. Moreover, 36 departments and 20 coordinating teams depend on the 33 major agencies that composed the MOD today, all staffed by civilians. What is more important, the

**Table 1.** MOD: The evolution of the institutional structure of civilian control, 1988–2020.

	1988	1996	2008	2020
Secretariats	3	2	3	4
Undersecretariats and Directorates	16	9	20	29
Total	19	11	23	33

Sources: Government of Argentina, Decree 1277/1996; Ministry of Defense, *Libro Blanco de la Defensa* 2010.

<sup>5</sup>Argentine Government, Ministry of Defense, *Libro Blanco de la Defensa, 2010 and 2014*.

<sup>6</sup>Jorge Battaglino, 'Threat Construction and Military Intervention in Internal Security: The Political Use of Terrorism and Drug Trafficking in Contemporary Argentina', *Latin American Perspectives* 46/6 (November 2019), 10–24.

MOD was strengthened both by the enactment of regulations that gave civilians the authority to limit military preferences and by the growing number of civil servants occupying the main leadership and advisory roles.

The institutional density reached by the MOD at present safeguards the policy-making process from the direct interference of the armed forces, limiting veto options and imposing bureaucratic distance between the military and centers of political decision authority.<sup>7</sup> This level of institutionalization contributes to structuring power relations between the military and civilians and limiting the military's influence to advising on technical or operational matters.

The institutional strengthening began during the presidency of Raúl Alfonsín (1983–1989) who created many intra-ministerial agencies, most of which were under the direction of civilians. This was the transitional stage of democratic renewal, characterized by the lack of regulations for the effective exercise of control and by the scarce number of civil servants with expertise in defense matters. The MOD suffered a remilitarization and change during the presidency of Carlos Menem (1989–1999) by implementing the so-called strategy of subordination by delegation, which granted the military significant presence in different agencies, *and* by reforming the state by shrinking its size and reducing public expenditures, which negatively impacted the ministerial structure.<sup>8</sup>

In the presidencies of Nestor and Cristina Fernández de Kirchner (2003–2015), there was an expansion and institutional strengthening of the MOD because of the political decision to regain ministerial civilian control. This broadened its capacity to plan policies and monitor their implementation. Why this turnabout in policy direction from the Menem administration? The Kirchners were committed to assuring that the military would no longer be a politically powerful actor. Part of the strategy involved a resumption of trials against military officials accused of human rights abuses during the dictatorship. But these presidents also understood that civilian control would not endure solely through retribution, if it yielded nothing more than an admonished, politically diminished military. It would have to be part of a more comprehensive effort to embed civilian direction within an institutional setting; to make civilian control a permanent component of a revamped defense sector. Because the defense ministry is key to managing the armed forces, special emphasis was placed on fortifying the civilian presence there.

Since 2005, the creation of new secretariats, undersecretariats and directorates has increased, including one secretariat (International Issues) and new undersecretaries (Science, Technology and Defense Production; Strategic

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<sup>7</sup>Pion-Berlin, 'Defense Organization'.

<sup>8</sup>Marcelo Sain, *Los votos y las botas* (Buenos Aires: Prometeo 2010); David Pion-Berlin, *Through Corridors of Power: Institutions and Civil-Military Relations in Argentina* (Penn State University Press 1997), 122–127.

Planning; Logistic Planning; and Education). Below (see figure 1) these in the bureaucratic ladder are new directorates, including Research Human Rights and Humanitarian International Law, Social Communication, Logistics, and Intelligence and Military Strategy, all of which further strengthened the MOD.<sup>9</sup> For example, the Directorate of Defense Logistics, composed of specialized military and civilian personnel, has the mission to manage the procurement of goods and services used by the armed forces. They reformed the military intelligence system through the creation of the National Intelligence and Military Strategy Directorate, under the command of a civilian which heads the three intelligence services of the Armed Forces. One of the crucial measures taken by this directorate was to adapt the military's intelligence agency operational procedures to suit the requirements of laws passed during the democratic period. The designation of civilians complemented the creation of new ministerial agencies in several technical organizations which had operated under military command. Thus, the MOD now commands the National Weather Service (formerly part of the Air Force), the Naval Hydrographic Service (Navy) and the Military Geographic Institute (Army). The regulatory monitoring and control role of air traffic historically exerted by the Air Force was transferred to the National Civil Aviation Administration.<sup>10</sup>

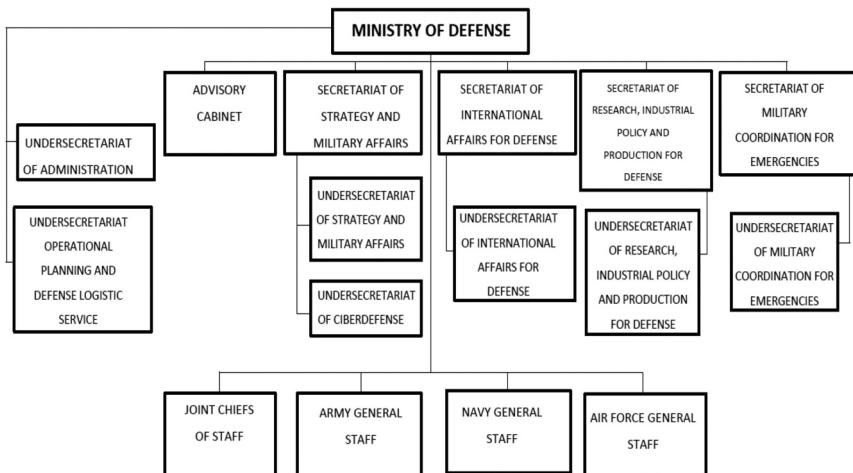


Figure 1. Ministry of Defense, simplified organizational chart, 2021.

<sup>9</sup>Jorge Battaglino, 'La Argentina desde 1983: un caso de desmilitarización del sistema político,' *Revista SAAP* 7/1 (2013), 275–273.

<sup>10</sup>Argentine Government, Ministry of Defense, *Libro Blanco de la Defensa*, 2010.

This organizational strengthening was further reinforced with the enactment of legislation that assigned the MOD exclusive authority for the conduction of national defense and that empowered civilian servants to exercise civilian control daily. As many of those interviewed said, 'rules allow control'. In particular, the decrees 727/2006, 1691/2006, and 1729/2007 awarded the MOD the prerogative of leading the armed forces and carrying out the national strategic planning, the military strategic planning, and the administration of the armed services.<sup>11</sup>

Decree 727 regulated the National Defense Law sanctioned in 1988 and gave the MOD the responsibility of: a) assisting and advising the president in the military conduct of the war (article 12), b) establishing the conditions required to perform the command of the four branches of the armed forces, for example, by evaluating the background of the candidates (arts. 13, 15 and 26), c) approving the selection mechanism and the appointment of Joint Chiefs of Staff (*Estado Mayor Conjunto-EMCO*) personnel and developing missions and functions of the EMCO (arts. 13 and 16), d) *approving* military strategic planning (arts. 13 and 17) and e) *ordering* the creation of units and approving organizational charts of the Armed Forces (art. 13).<sup>12</sup>

Likewise, Decree 727 established that the principal mission of the armed forces is to confront armed aggressions by other states. This limit not only refers to their direct actions but also to personnel education and training, doctrinal elaboration, and the purchase of materials and equipment (art. 3). This article is essential since it allows MOD officials to control aspects of defense that could, if not attended to, conceivably reorient military doctrine away from external defense missions, as enumerated in the Law of Defense and Decree 727. For example, if the Army requests authorization for one of its officers to carry out a training course in a foreign battalion specialized in counterinsurgency, MOD figures responsible for international affairs and strategy will reject the request because it would permit military preparation to fight internally, and thus contradict the national defense law.

Decree 1691 authorizes civil officials to 'evaluate and decide on the equipment requirements of the armed forces that best contribute to achieving the objectives of national defense.'<sup>13</sup> Decree 1729 authorizes the MOD to propose the National Defense Planning Directive to the president (art. 1); supervises the Defense Planning Cycle, controlling its development, making corrections, and approving the documents that comprise it (art. 6, 8, and 10); and evaluates the correspondence of military strategic planning with the

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<sup>11</sup>Germán Montenegro, 'El marco normativo y doctrinario de la Defensa Nacional', *Revista de la Defensa* 1(2007) 15–27. Argentine Government, Ministry of Defense, Decreto Reglamentario 727, Reglamentación de la Ley Nº 23.554, 12 June 2006; Decreto 1691, Directiva sobre Organización y Funcionamiento de las Fuerzas Armadas, 22 November 2006; Decreto 1729, Ciclo de Planeamiento de la Defensa Nacional, 20 November 2007.

<sup>12</sup>Argentine Government, Decreto Reglamentario 727.

<sup>13</sup>Argentine Government, Decreto 1691.



guidelines determined in the National Defense Policy Directive (*Directiva de Política de Defensa Nacional* - DPDN).<sup>14</sup>

The aforementioned norms are key to exercising civil control because they allow officials to take the initiative in different policies or to veto proposals from the armed forces by appealing to sanctioned norms, reducing the tendency to make arbitrary decisions, and making the policy-making process more predictable. That in turn is part of the overall effort to institutionalize government control over the armed forces.

### Ministerial staff, expertise, and the epistemic defense community

Regarding the staff that is serving at the MOD in 2021, 100% of the secretaries, undersecretaries, and directors are civilians supported by a bureaucracy that is composed of civilians.<sup>15</sup> As mentioned, a large proportion of the current officials have a high level of on-the-job experience since they served once before under former Defense Minister Agustin Rossi. Officials who have specialized in defense matters cover the areas of strategic planning, international affairs, education, and arms procurement. In the remaining agencies, officials who carry out administrative and legal functions have university degrees related to their specialties but without deep knowledge on defense issues.

Although the political officials change with the different administrations, there is an indeterminate number of stable, specialized advisors. However, in some areas, such as strategic planning, they are not permanent and they come and go as governments change. Precise data about the ebb and flow of personnel, in all areas of the MOD, is not available.

Argentina does have an extensive network of institutions that produces a steady supply of well-educated well trained civilians who can be tapped for positions within the MOD. To begin with, the National Defense University (also see below) offers over 40 postgraduate courses on defense, geopolitics, military history, and strategy. The public and private universities offer an important number of undergraduate and graduate courses on international relations, some of them oriented to the study of strategy and conflict.

Likewise, the defense epistemic community is numerous. As an example, the defense commission of the Justicialist Party has around 60 members with expertise in defense issues. In this commission, there are weekly talks and different training activities targeting young and senior politicians with an interest in defense matters. Although there is no cadre of civil servants, the size of the epistemic community is a constant source of human resources that

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<sup>14</sup>Argentine Government, Decreto 1729.

<sup>15</sup>Argentine Government, Ministry of Defense, 'Estructura Orgánico Funcional', 2021.

can potentially fulfill the goal of enhanced civilian control and expertise within the MOD.

The epistemic community of defense specialists in Argentina is the largest in South America together with that of Brazil. Unlike the latter, specialists from Argentina have had a leading role in defining policies both in the congress and in the Ministry of Defense.

This community dates back to the early stages of re-democratization (1980s), when the military *problematique* was the most important issue on the Argentine political agenda.<sup>16</sup> The military dictatorship's massive human rights violations, a lost war and a deep economic crisis stimulated political interest in military issues. Above all, there was a consensus about the need to reform civil-military relations to break with the pattern of militarization that had prevailed in Argentina in the past decades. In this context, a large group of defense and security experts was organized, made up of civilians and some retired officers. They worked in the defense commissions of congress, within political parties, universities, study centers and the Ministry of Defense.<sup>17</sup> They conducted debates, research and importantly, took the lead in formulating new national defense regulations within the defense commissions of both chambers of congress. Legislative advisors from different parties, such as Luis Tibiletti and José Manuel Ugarte, helped forge a 'basic bi-partisan consensus on defense' that enshrined into law, three fundamental principles: a) the elimination of the hypotheses of conflict with neighboring countries, b) the establishment of civilian control of the armed forces and c) the organic and functional separation of National Defense and internal security.<sup>18</sup>

These defense specialists also helped link academic activities with the creation of partisan spaces for reflection on national defense issues. Foundations and research institutes tied to the political parties were set up, such as the *Arturo Illia Foundation for Democracy and Peace* (FAI) of the Radical Civic Union party and the *Centro de Estudios para el Proyecto Nacional* (CEPNA) linked to Justicialism Party. The *Military Center for Argentine Democracy* (CEMIDA) was also an important actor during the growth stages of the epistemic community. Members of this community also established programs in the universities.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>David Pion-Berlin, *Through Corridors of Power*.

<sup>17</sup>Marina Vitelli, 'Ideas y política exterior: la comunidad epistémica de defensa argentina y su rol en la cooperación regional', *Relaciones Internacionales* 24/4 (Junio 2015), 33–57.

<sup>18</sup>Marcelo Sain, *Los votos y las botas*; Sergio Eissa, 'La política de defensa como política pública: el caso argentino (2005–2010)', *Revista Brasileira Estudos Defesa* 1/1 (Julio-Diciembre 2014), 162–184.

<sup>19</sup>The School of Sociology of the University of Buenos Aires, directed by José Miguens, was important in this regard. The *Armed Forces and Society* area of the Latin American Faculty of Social Sciences (FLACSO), was coordinated by Ernesto López, who would later direct the *Research Program on Armed Forces and Society* (PIFAS) of the National University of Quilmes.

Beginning in 1990, the President of the Senate's National Defense Commission in coordination with the epistemic community, initiated forums to discuss and reflect upon different axes of defense policy. The Permanent Seminar *Towards the Armed Forces of the Year 2000* held more than 60 meetings between 1990 and 1997. Launched in 1992, the magazine *Seguridad Estratégica Regional en 2000* published the seminar's contributions, and would, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, become the *Security and Defense Network of Latin America* (RESDAL) that brought together dozens of specialists from Argentina and the region.<sup>20</sup>

Finally, by 2003, the epistemic community spread from academia and the halls of congress to the defense ministry itself. Some of its most relevant members were summoned to hold different ministerial positions – a trend that continues to the present day.<sup>21</sup>

### Current functioning of the MOD

The political management of the Armed Forces requires that the institutional structure of the MOD be capable of supervising the different activities carried out by the military institution. When the MOD lacks supervisory powers in some areas (e.g., education), the political authorities' control capacity is weakened and the military ability to autonomously decide increases. In order to examine the functioning of the MOD, we analyzed four of its most important areas. For this purpose, we interviewed eight key officials (four secretaries, two undersecretaries, a national director, and a general secretary).<sup>22</sup> We also interviewed six senior commanders of the armed forces with responsibility in the areas of the MOD that are analyzed below.<sup>23</sup> There are common elements that emerge from the responses of those civilians interviewed.

First, all the officials agreed on the importance of the rules to supervise the activities of the forces. Expressions such as 'the power of the rules' or 'without rules, control would not be possible' were frequently mentioned,

<sup>20</sup>Marina Vitelli, 'Ideas y política exterior'.

<sup>21</sup>For example, Rut Diamint, Jaime Garreta, and Ernesto López, among others.

<sup>22</sup>These high level civilian officials must remain anonymous, and are identified by C1, C2, etc. All interviews were conducted by Jorge Battaglino. C1, personal interview, Buenos Aires, 12 January 2021; C2, personal interview, Buenos Aires, 16 January 2021; C3, personal interview, Buenos Aires, January 25 2021; C4, personal interview, Buenos Aires, 7 January 2021; C5, personal interview, Buenos Aires, 28 January 2021; C6, personal interview, Buenos Aires, 22 January 2021; C7, personal interview, Buenos Aires, 11 March 2021; C8, personal interview, Buenos Aires, Argentina, 14 April 2022.

<sup>23</sup>The six interviews were conducted with active military personnel and, for this reason, cited as anonymous. Interviews were conducted with three Generals, two Rear Admirals and one Brigadier: interview JCS1 (General on active duty in the Joint Chief of Staff, personal interview, Buenos Aires, 12 July 2021); interview A1 (General on active duty in the Army Command, Buenos Aires, 14 July 2021); interview A2 (General on active duty in the Army Command, Buenos Aires, 15 July 2021); interview N1 (Rear Admiral on active duty in the Navy Command, Buenos Aires, 18 July 2021); interview N2 (Rear Admiral on active duty in the Navy Command, Buenos Aires, 4 August 2021); interview AF1 (Brigadier on active duty in the Air Force Command, Buenos Aires, 11 August 2021).

emphasizing the fact that they used different norms to set limits on military preferences in bureaucratic routines. This is consistent with studies that emphasize the importance of formal rules and procedures as sources of civilian strength within the MOD.<sup>24</sup>

Second, there is a high level of formal and informal civil-military interaction. Institutional routines and standard procedures foster the regular interaction of civil and military officials on issues of importance for each area. Besides, there is a planning cycle (in the Secretariat of Military Affairs) and institutions such as councils made up of civilians and the military (e.g., in education). A high level of informal communication complements these practices. The different agencies maintain daily personal and telephone contacts with the military. These are the mechanisms through which civilians orient activities like doctrine formulation, defense plans, and military education. For example, standard procedures dictate that candidates for the post of military attachés are vetted by civil authorities. This regular practice tests the viability of candidates before triggering appointments to avoid future rejections or delays.<sup>25</sup>

In addition, physical proximity between civilian leadership and the military command encourages a logic of daily informal interaction between the two sides.

The defense ministry headquarters building houses a large number of civilian led defense agencies, but also the General Staff of the Army and the Joint Chiefs of Staff. The headquarters of the Navy and the Air Force are within a radius of half a kilometer.

Third, within the framework of these formal and informal exchanges, civil officials consult and listen to the advice of the military on technical and operational issues and the military vision in these dimensions prevails when there is no contradiction with the existing normative framework, the orientation of the government's foreign policy or specific criteria established by each area. If the military view contradicts the above factors, civilians prevail.

Although institutional procedures and routines are clearly established and recognized by the military as reducing arbitrariness and uncertainty throughout the policy design process, the military warns that its 'operational and technical opinion is subject sometimes to the predominance of political criteria'.<sup>26</sup> This view is more frequent in weapons acquisition processes when the political evaluation of equipment differs from the military preference. According to this account, 'the effectiveness of the military organization is affected when a weapon system does not meet operational and technical demands'.<sup>27</sup> Ministry officials point out that the distinction between

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<sup>24</sup>Pion-Berlin, 'Defense Organization'.

<sup>25</sup>Interviews A1, N2 and AF1.

<sup>26</sup>Interview JCS1.

<sup>27</sup>Interview A1.

a technical/operational sphere and a political one is vague, since any major acquisition of weapons has obvious geopolitical implications.<sup>28</sup>

What follows is a description of the functioning of four key MOD agencies. These reveal the extent to which MOD organization, regulations and personnel ensure that defense planning policies, research and education are guided by civilians while at the same time maintaining fluid, ongoing interactions with military personnel. Procedures will be detailed to reveal what the division of labor is between military and civilian personnel as policies get crafted, and who has ultimate decision-making authority.

## Ministry of Defense agencies and their functions

### *Foreign relations*

The *Secretariat of International Affairs for Defense* (*Secretaría de Asuntos Internacionales para la Defensa* – SAID) is responsible for relations with the ministries of defense and the armed forces of other countries. It has the rank of secretariat since 2020, and prior it had the rank of undersecretary and national direction.<sup>29</sup> Three issues are central to daily work of this area: a) the appointment of military attachés, b) the selection of military exercises to be carried out during the year with other countries, and c) the so-called ‘external commissions’, the sending of military personnel abroad to take courses or training.<sup>30</sup>

Argentina has around 25 military personnel who serve as attachés in different embassies around the world. These are countries with which Argentina has ties in defense issues because they are regular suppliers of equipment or spare parts. A high level of institutionalization and civil-military interaction characterized the procedure for selecting the military to be sent as attachés. It begins when each force sends a shortlist of candidates for each foreign embassy to the SAID. In this first stage, the military preference is expressed. After that, the ministry examines the nominees’ backgrounds, paying particular attention to human rights records and to gender. Once the candidates pass this screening process, the Minister chooses who will be the attachés.<sup>31</sup>

The Argentine armed forces conduct joint exercises with foreign militaries. This personnel procedure is somewhat different since it requires congressional approval via an annual law on joint exercises. As in the earlier case, the process begins when the forces send to the SAID a proposed set of exercises for the year, based on two criteria: are the exercises lawful and is there

<sup>28</sup>C4, personal interview, Buenos Aires, Argentina, 7 January 2021.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid.

<sup>30</sup>The functions of this Secretariat are described in: Argentine Government, Decree 50/2019, Estructura Organizativa, Anexo II, 19 December 2019.

<sup>31</sup>C4, personal interview, Buenos Aires, Argentina, 7 January 2021.

a balance between the countries with which it will conduct exercises and Argentina's foreign policy orientation? While under President Macri, a majority of the exercises were carried out with the United States, the Fernandez administration has a preference for multilateralism, and has diversified its exercises with numerous South American countries.<sup>32</sup>

The military point out that sometimes, the choice of which military exercises to carry out is based on political criteria rather than on operational needs. They argued that during the current ministerial administration; some exercises with the US were cancelled in favor of others with countries in Latin America or other regions. Although the military interviewed understand the political dimension of the exercises, they also said that these changes can affect professionalism because many times the countries with which they exercise do not have the technology or combat experience that the United States does.<sup>33</sup>

Regarding external commissions, the procedure begins when the Joint Chiefs of Staff prepares an Annual Program of External Commissions (*Programa Anual de Comisiones Externas* – PACE). The SAID then analyzes the PACE based on criteria similar to that of joint exercises – although in this case they will reject a commission if Argentina has a similar course offering.<sup>34</sup> In the three cases – attachés, exercises, and commissions-, the armed forces initiate the process deciding who should be attachés and what exercises and commissions are important based on technical/operational knowledge and perception of organizational needs. But the different agencies of the MOD and, in particular, the SAID, make the final choices, based on the limits imposed by norms and political criteria.

A high command of the army pointed out that civilians do not understand the importance of 'officers studying the new forms of threats and conflicts, something that other countries in the region do'.<sup>35</sup> It is worth mentioning that the legal framework prevents the military from training, organizing or equipping themselves to carry out missions of an internal nature, which are those associated with the so-called doctrine of new threats.

### ***Strategic planning and promotions***

The *Secretary of Strategy and Military Affairs* (*Secretaría de Estrategia y Asuntos Militares* – SEAM) handles the main definitions at the level of strategic planning and military policy. It is responsible, among other aspects, for determining promotions and preparing the Directive for National Defense Policy

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<sup>32</sup>Ibid.

<sup>33</sup>Interviews JCS1 and A2.

<sup>34</sup>C2, personal interview, Buenos Aires, 16 January 2021.

<sup>35</sup>Interviews A1 and A2.

(DPDN).<sup>36</sup> There exist two kinds of promotions: those that need congressional approval, above the rank of Colonel/Captain/Commodore, and those below that do not. There is a common institutional procedure for all officers' promotions. After the forces present the slate of officers to be promoted to the SEAM, their service record is sent to the Directorate of Military Politics, which requests an opinion from the following agencies: the Directorate of Institutional Transparency which analyzes if any of the proposed officers have causes or antecedents for corruption cases; to the Human Rights Directorate to check for their participation in human rights violations, and to the Gender Directorate, which analyzes gender behavior inside and outside the barracks.<sup>37</sup> The Military Politics Directorate receives these reports and then carries out an analysis of the officer's career and verifies whether the officer issued political opinions. Within the higher ranks, the Congress added its own control. The promotion is rejected if the officer has a negative report from one of these agencies.

One of the principal functions carried out by the SEAM is the drafting of the DPDN (Directive for National Defense Policy). Between 1990 and 2005 there was just one DPDN produced that the Joint Chiefs of Staff wrote with no civilian, ministerial involvement. That would change under the direction of Defense Minister Nilda Garré, beginning in 2006.

Decree 1729/07 launched a planning cycle that outlined the sequential steps in writing the DPDN. For this purpose, Minister Garré created several agencies within the ministry, directed and integrated by civilian personnel, who designed and implemented the cycle. In this way, the relaunch of the so-called 'Defense Planning Cycle' in 2007 allowed civil control to be strengthened by favoring civilian supervision and leadership over the entire process of strategic planning.<sup>38</sup> That process has been institutionalized and continues to this day.

The first stage of the cycle comprises drafting the DPDN, a task that is carried out by one of the departments within SEAM called the Directorate of Planning and Strategy (*Dirección Nacional de Planeamiento y Estrategia - DNPE*), which is headed by a civilian. The DPDN is further approved by the executive through a decree.<sup>39</sup> From that instance and under the supervision of the MOD, the EMCO proposes a Military Strategic Planning Directive (*Directiva de Planeamiento Estratégico Militar - DEPEM*) which the minister approves after its evaluation by the DNPE. In other words, military strategic planning is aligned with and follows from the civilian defense plan which

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<sup>36</sup>The functions of this Secretariat are described in: Argentine Government, Decree 50/2019.

<sup>37</sup>C1 personal interview, Buenos Aires, Argentina, 12 January 2021.

<sup>38</sup>Luciano Anzelini and Iván Poczynok, 'El planeamiento estratégico militar en la Argentina (2003–2013): reflexiones en torno al gobierno político de la defensa', Austral: *Brazilian Journal of Strategy & International Relations* 3/6 (2014), 143–167.

<sup>39</sup>While decree 1729/07 launched the planning cycle, decree 1714/09 approved the DPDN which is the first step of the planning cycle established in decree 1729.

precedes it. This directive is an instruction that guides the sequence of documents that make up military strategic planning. Then from the DEPEM are derived the following: a) the Military Strategic Assessment and Resolution, b) the Military Strategic Directive, c) the short, medium, and long-term military plans, d) the military capabilities project and e) the military capabilities plan. According to the director of planning and strategy, in all the plans 'there is a *permanent* interaction with the MOD that evaluates the correspondence of the military strategic planning with the guidelines determined in the DPDN', [emphasis ours] *as established* in articles 6, 8 and 10 of decree 1729.<sup>40</sup>

In parallel, *the DPDN* developed resource planning, which comprises preparing plans, programs, and budgets to get the human and material resources necessary to generate the military capabilities determined by military strategic planning. The Military Capabilities Project (*Proyecto de Capacidades Militares* – PROCAMIL) and the Military Capabilities Plan (*Plan de Capacidades Militares* – PLANCAMIL) are the documents that express the link between strategic military planning and resource planning.<sup>41</sup>

The last phase of the cycle comprises preparing a draft of that Military Capabilities Project written by the Joint Chiefs of Staff, but which is reviewed and discussed by the DPS – the civilian director of Planning and Strategy, in weekly meetings with EMCO representatives.<sup>42</sup> Once approved, it becomes the PLANCAMIL. *The entire sequence of defense planning is civilian initiated and controlled*, and also features military interaction with and seeking approval from the civilian authorities within MOD.

The military perspective on this issue is that in the DPDN sanctioned in 2018, there was little civil-military interaction and that, in fact, officials from outside the Ministry of Defense wrote the document. This dynamic was reversed in the current edition, published in June 2021, since it was not only written by officials of the Ministry of Defense and reviewed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, but also commented upon by the military during the drafting of the document.<sup>43</sup>

### **Production and research**

The production and procurement of arms, along with defense research are directed by the Secretariats of Research, Industrial Policy and Production for Defense (Secretaría de Investigación, Política Industrial y Producción para la Defensa – SIPIYPD) and the Undersecretariat of Operational Planning and Defense Logistics Service (Subsecretaría de Planeamiento Operativo

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<sup>40</sup>C6, personal interview, Buenos Aires, Argentina, January 22 2021.

<sup>41</sup>Government of Argentina, Ministry of Defense, *Libro Blanco de la Defensa*, 2010, 242–249.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid.

<sup>43</sup>Interview JCS1.



y Servicio Logístico para la Defensa – SSPOYSLD). Both agencies are headed by civilians.

The *SIPYPD*'s remit is production and defense research. Regarding production, within the orbit of the Secretariat, there are different decentralized companies for the production of weapons such as *Fabricaciones Militares, Fabrica de Aviones and Tandonor*. Meanwhile, research is conducted by the Institute for Scientific and Technical Research for Defense- Instituto de Investigaciones Científicas y Técnicas para la Defensa (CITEDEF), the National Geographic Institute, and the National Meteorological Service, all of them led by civilians.<sup>44</sup>

The Scientific Technological Council for Defense (*Consejo Científico Tecnológico de la Defensa - COCITDEF*) is the dominant institution for defense research, created in April 2011 to coordinate scientific and technological policies with the research areas of the Armed Forces and the Ministry of Defense. COCITDEF brings together all the research areas of the forces, the Ministry, and the National Defense University (*Universidad de la Defensa Nacional – UNDEF*). The Council meets every month to decide priorities for lines of research and funding for various defense programs. The work dynamics of this council begin with meetings at the beginning of each year where representatives of those institutions propose lines of research that will later be the basis for financing projects presented by the agencies that are part of the Council. A considerable part of the funded proposals is technological, while they allocate the smallest proportion of resources to defense-related human or social sciences projects.

The guiding criterion for determining priorities is the orientation of civilian-led defense policy. For example, in the last call, projects related to the development of technological capabilities for the control of maritime, air and land space received more funding.<sup>45</sup> The priorities established for 2021 were communication systems and earth observation for monitoring and surveillance of threats generated in cyberspace; electronic warfare; navigation and guidance system, vectors systems for vehicles and platforms; Antarctic logistics and health emergencies and natural disasters; health and environment for the control, prevention and treatment of pests, and epidemics.

SSPOYSLD directs and coordinates purchasing equipment for the forces.<sup>46</sup> The Joint Chiefs of Staff centralize the weapons acquisition process involving the purchase of different weapons systems that are justified on technical and operational grounds. The EMCO prepares a purchase order that describes the weapon system required and a weighted score comparing various models on the market.<sup>47</sup> This document, which reflects the preference of the forces, is

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<sup>44</sup>The functions of this Secretariat are described in: Argentine Government, Decree 50/2019.

<sup>45</sup>C3, personal interview, Buenos Aires, Argentina, 25 January 2021.

<sup>46</sup>The functions of this Secretariat are described in: Argentine Government, Decree 50/2019.

<sup>47</sup>C5, personal interview, Buenos Aires, Argentina, 28 January 2021.

submitted to the SSPOYSLD, whose civilian advisers analyze different aspects of the request, including operational effectiveness (if it meets the declared needs), logistics (if it includes an after-sales service), financing (Given the economic difficulties that the country is going through, the probability of acquisition increases as the percentage of financing approaches 100% and payment terms are lengthened), technology transfer and, geopolitical assessment.

Sometimes, military, and civilian preferences for a weapon system diverge because of the different weighting schemes attached to each criterion. For example, in EMCO procurement proposals, 'operational' criterion receives a higher score than the 'geopolitical' one. The reverse is the case in the evaluation carried out by the SSPOYSLD.<sup>48</sup> Ultimately, the prevailing criterion is the political one, unless the technical and operational dimension is scored by the military as being too low for the equipment chosen by ministerial authorities. In this case, the process begins again with the military proposing new equipment that meets geopolitical considerations and operational suitability.

All the military personnel interviewed agreed that the fundamental problem is not the procedure for purchasing weapons, which was defined as 'ordering and necessary' but the lack of budget for the acquisition of equipment.<sup>49</sup> For this reason, the criterion of 'financing' has a disproportionate weight in the acquisition's evaluation of weapons.

### **Military education**

The National Defense University (*Universidad Nacional de Defensa, UNDEF*), in coordination with the Directorate of Education of the MOD, has the major responsibility for the training and the continuing education of armed forces personnel. The UNDEF is under the leadership of a rector's office comprised of civilians and results from a convergence of military education with the standards of the National Universities. This process began with the enactment of the Higher Education Law in 1994 and the Military Restructuring Law of 1998, which established the need to make military education compatible with the national educational structure to treat soldiers both as full citizens and as specialized public servants.

These laws promoted the convergence between the defense education system and the national university. Decrees N ° 545 and N ° 1336 of 2003 established that the MOD is responsible for military education. From then on, a reform of military and civil education for defense began under the supervision of civilian authorities. In 2005, a Special Commission for the Evaluation

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<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> Interviews JCS1, A1, A2, N1, N2 and AF1.

of the Education and Training System of the Armed Forces was created, made up of civilians and military personnel.<sup>50</sup> This Commission concluded that the educational institutions of the armed forces had diversified without an ordering criterion, which led to autonomous developments disconnected from the national educational standards. With the creation of the Undersecretariat for Formation, tied to the SEAM, military educational institute study plans were updated, and complementarity between the military university institutes and national civilian universities was promoted.

The aforementioned commission prepared a project for the Reform of Higher Education of the Armed Forces in 2006, the principal aim of which was to promote the articulation of military education with the national educational system. This led to the creation of the National Defense University in 2014, which is in charge of training the military and civilians through undergraduate, graduate, and postgraduate courses.<sup>51</sup> UNDEF's creation signifies that the initial education and advance formation of the noncommissioned and commissioned officers – which until 2014 depended on the Chiefs of Staff of each of the Forces – now comes to depend on a rector appointed by the Ministry of Defense. This is a significant advance in bringing military education into conformance with civilian educational priorities and standards.

The UNDEF comprises 8 departments: Army, Navy, Air Force, Joint Training, Army Engineering, National Defense, Administration Sciences and Engineering, which offer over 130 undergraduate, graduate, and postgraduate courses. The UNDEF has two institutional bodies which allow the forces to have a regular and institutionalized opinion on matters related to the education of their personnel. The first is the Board of Directors, the highest governing body of the UNDEF, whose president is the Minister of Defense and which comprises the Heads of the Armed Forces, the Rector and the secretaries of the MOD. This Board, has the prerogative of advising the Minister on the approval of the University statute and its modifications, appoints the Rector and Vice-Rector, designates the Deans and Vice-deans, and can create, dissolve or merge Faculties or Institutes, create careers in the military profession and consider the Annual Academic Plan presented by the Rector (article 14 statute).

The second is the Council of Consultative Governance, a collegiate body that advises the Rector of the UNDEF in the production and modification of the University's internal regulations and on matters about teaching and research activities, discipline, and issues that are submitted by the Rector for his consideration. The Rector chairs the Council which is comprised of the

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<sup>50</sup>Sabina Frederic, *Las trampas del pasado: las Fuerzas Armadas y su integración al Estado democrático en Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2013).

<sup>51</sup>Ibid.

National Director of Education of the MOD, the Vice-Rectors, and the Deans and the Secretaries of the Rectorate. For example, the Council may prepare proposals or issue an opinion on the general policy for teaching, administrative and service personnel; the general regime for undergraduate, graduate, and postgraduate careers; career curriculum that, at all levels, comprises the University's academic offer; the general program for researchers, their programs and projects, and educational policy, among other aspects.<sup>52</sup>

These two institutions meet regularly and allow high-quality interactions between political office holders, civilian staffers, and the military to maximize informational exchanges and points of view. Permanent communications complement the formal functioning of these two councils between officials of the rector's office and the military, given that the administration of the UNDEF involves dozens of daily decisions that encourage a high level of civil-military interaction. Although the final decisions rests with the civil officials of the university, it is important to highlight the civil-military interaction and the fact the rectorate supports many military initiatives, such as the creation of new careers or lines of research.<sup>53</sup>

The eight UNDEF departments have around 3,000 professors. Although there are no official numbers, it is estimated that between 35% and 40% of professors are civilians, while the rest are active or retired military.<sup>54</sup> Civilians teach courses in the social sciences and humanities, law and economics, while the military is in charge of technical matters related to the education of non-commissioned and commissioned officers. The interaction between civilian and military instructors within the UNDEF helps to close the inherent gap in values and understandings that exist between their two worlds. Towards that same goal, the university continues to promote the incorporation of female professors into the military training system.<sup>55</sup> In these respects, the Argentine professional military educational system differs substantially from the French system, which (as discussed in a separate article in this special issue) has no permanent civilian teaching staff and which unlike Argentina narrowly focuses on operational training that allows the military to control the curriculum.

## Conclusion

The analysis presented here largely confirms that the Argentine MOD has become an institutionalized fulcrum for civilian control over the armed forces. New laws, regulations and practices have elevated the role of political leaders and their civilian appointees in the conceiving and guiding of defense plans

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<sup>52</sup>C7, personal interview, Buenos Aires, Argentina, 11 March 2021.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid.

<sup>54</sup>C8, personal interview, Buenos Aires, Argentina, 14 April 2022.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid.

as well as the overseeing of military implementation of those plans. New bureaucratic organizational units structured in vertical layers of authority have been added to the ministry over time that limit the armed forces from interfering with policy at the highest levels by imposing bureaucratic distance between the military and centers of political decision, thereby limiting its veto options. Procedures are put in place that determine the decision-making sequence, allowing for military input while ensuring that civilians within MOD make the final call. Hence, while organizational and procedural changes have fortified civilian control mechanisms, they have not discouraged important fluid, sometimes informal, civil-military interactions drawing on military expertise to better inform policy choices. This is suggestive of what Eliot A. Cohen referred to as the unequal dialogue- a mix of civilian-led hierarchy and civil-military communication.<sup>56</sup>

Argentina is a kind of success story when it comes to building a strong, civilian led defense ministry, in contrast to so many other countries in the region. That raises the question why? In brief, it is Argentina's past that accounts for so much of what has transpired. The catastrophic failures and demise of the last military dictatorship (1976–83) resulted in a decisive shift in the balance of civil-military power, granting an opportunity for the new democratic governments to reform. The country had suffered the most extensive repression in the subregion,<sup>57</sup> and its military regime suffered the steepest, most stunning fall from grace of all the dictatorships. These two conditions helped to define what could be achieved, because with a politically weakened military, it opened up wider avenues of opportunity for elected politicians to reform than that afforded to many of their regional neighbors. And with the haunting memories of state terror still fresh on their minds, it strengthened the motivations of political leaders to seize those opportunities.

And reform they did, as military commanders were downgraded in status, and as the ministry of defense was inserted into the chain of command between the president and the armed forces, its powers and jurisdiction clarified and enlarged, and its staff expanded.<sup>58</sup> Moreover, the presidents' political parties by and large enjoyed ample pluralities if not outright majorities in the congress, giving them the margin needed to enact laws that would institutionalize civilian control, and redefine defense and security policies for a modern democratic nation.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>56</sup>Eliot A. Cohen, *Supreme Command: Soldiers, Statesmen, and Leadership in Wartime*. New York: The Free Press, 2002.

<sup>57</sup>Argentina had, by far, the largest number deaths and disappearances, in absolute and per capita terms. See Figure 9.2 in Chapter 9. Also see Anthony W. Pereira, *Political Injustice: Authoritarianism and the Rule of Law in Brazil, Chile, and Argentina*, (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press 2005), 21.

<sup>58</sup>David Pion-Berlin and Rafael Martínez, *Soldiers, Politicians, and Civilians: Reforming Civil-Military Relations in Democratic Latin America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2017).

<sup>59</sup>*Ibid.*, 372–376.

Argentina had once been a country ravaged by militarism for much of the twentieth century. As a result, successive democratic governments from 1983 on have chosen to strengthen civil control while paying less attention to the material dimensions of defense. In real terms, defense spending has steadily declined for decades, even during times of economic expansion, and when spending on internal security has increased. Ninety percent of the defense budget is spent on salaries and pensions leaving only ten percent for operations, training and equipment.<sup>60</sup> All of this has meant that the armed forces have failed to properly modernize and is thus ill-prepared to defend the territory. This imbalance between control and defense preparedness if understandable politically is still a deficiency that should be corrected. The recent enactment of the National Defense Fund (*Fondo Nacional de la Defensa - FONDEF*) for the acquisition of weapons, is hopefully a first step in that direction.

The ministry itself needs additional strengthening by developing a more permanent civilian staff. The size of the Ministry of Defense, with almost 90 agencies, requires a significant number of specialists both to fill the main posts and to give specialized support to them. The latter have been filled through advisors hired in many cases on a temporary basis. Although this has not seriously impaired civilian control, the absence of a steady stock of civil servants is an important institutional weakness. For the consolidation and deepening of civil control, as well as to assure greater defense preparedness, it is necessary to set up institutional routines for the incorporation of specialists as permanent cadres of the MOD bureaucracy. When staffers remain on the job for longer periods of time, they gain greater familiarity with defense issues, and also provide continuity from one administration to the next. That in turn guarantees that the ministry will remain strong and relevant even as political preferences and ideologies change. One means of rejuvenating a high-quality civilian staff is to draw on Argentina's important epistemic defense community. There are universities, think tanks, political parties and NGOs, which develop human resources in defense from which the Ministry of Defense can recruit new, well trained personnel.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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<sup>60</sup>Sergio Gabriel Eissa, 'Presupuesto y equipamiento en la política de defensa Argentina (1983–2019)', in *Cuadernos del INAP* (Institución Nacional de la Administración Pública, Año 1 2020).

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