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Intelligence Report

DCI Environmental Center

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Latin American Militaries: Environmental Activities Gaining Ground Slowly [Redacted]

With a few exceptions, militaries throughout South America, Central America, and the Caribbean lack statutory mandates to engage in broad environmental-related missions. In addition, several militaries, facing budget and personnel cuts, are reluctant to assume a large environmental protection role. Nonetheless, those militaries seeking new post-Cold War era missions are slowly expanding their efforts in non-traditional areas that assist civilian government environmental protection measures such as enforcement of anti-logging laws, oilspill clean-up, and reforestation. [Redacted]

A survey of countries in Latin America indicates that only a few, notably the **Dominican Republic, Guatemala, and Uruguay**, have environmental protection mandates spelled out by the national constitution or military regulations.¹ Moreover, several militaries are reluctant to assume a larger role in environmental protection.

- In **Argentina**, senior commanders argue that scarce budget resources should be devoted to more traditional national security and personnel concerns—salaries have declined by 50 percent in real terms since 1990—and the high command appears wary of devoting funds to issues that it does not view as a top priority [Redacted]
- In **Brazil, Chile, Guatemala**, and elsewhere, many senior army officers remain uneasy about ecological issues because they tend to associate environmentalism with leftist political causes. Environmental activists are sometimes referred to by military personnel as “watermelons,” green on the outside and red on the inside.
- Many senior commanders often complain about what they perceive as foreign government and NGO attempts to control domestic

¹ In the **Dominican Republic**, for example, the military is charged with conservation and management of forest resources under a 1967 law [Redacted]

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exploitation of natural resources and dictate policies through international environmental treaties or diplomacy; **Brazilian** army officials publicly have accused the US, other governments, and international environmental groups of trying to "internationalize" the Amazon region. [redacted]

For their part, most civilian leaders also have not fully embraced the idea of deploying their armed forces for environmental purposes. Although militaries in the **Caribbean** play a major role in road building and other civic actions, most civilian leaders — especially in recently pacified and democratized countries in **Central America**—are reluctant to give their militaries expanded environmental protection or law enforcement duties. After decades of struggling to exert civilian control over restless militaries in the region, many civilians argue that such a shift would risk unnecessarily involving the military in political affairs [redacted]

- Civilian governments likely will resist giving their militaries a broader environmental mandate that would give them direct, independent control over large projects and programs. [redacted]

That said, several militaries have made important contributions to environmental issues in the region mostly on an ad hoc basis. In addition to participating in disaster relief efforts, experience gained by providing assistance to civilian agencies in oilspill clean-up, firefighting, and other areas appears to be sensitizing militaries to environmental problems and may spur willingness to play a greater role in conservation, especially if funding, training, and other rewards are forthcoming. This trend could gain momentum if civilian leaders continue to articulate the need to protect natural resources—waterways, fisheries, and forests—as a security issue.²

- In some countries —**Chile** and **Peru**, for example—the navy or coast guard is charged with protecting marine environments and enforcing fishing restrictions; the **Venezuelan** Coast Guard in September arrested more than 20 fisherman from **Trinidad and Tobago** who were illegally fishing off the coast. The **Uruguayan** military helps enforce laws protecting national parks, assists in oilspill

²The Miami Summit of the Americas (SOA) in 1994 and the Sustainable Development Conference in Bolivia in 1996 served as catalysts for regional dialogue and collaboration on a wide range of issues, including the environment. Article IV of the SOA Plan of Action calls on countries to guarantee sustainable development and conservation of the natural environment for future generations, and to work toward sustainable energy use, biodiversity and pollution prevention. [redacted]

[Redacted]

clean-up—most recently in the San Jorge spill last February—

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

- Firefighting, anti-logging patrols, monitoring poaching of endangered species and illegal mining are common forms of military support to civilian governments in **Central American** countries, as well as **Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Peru and Venezuela.**

[Redacted]

- [Redacted]

Military Activities and the Environment

In many of the lesser developed countries, where environmental laws are often ambiguous and spread across multiple ministries, domestic enforcement is weak and oversight of military activities that could harm the environment is nearly non-existent.

- Some militaries have appointed forestry or marine resource experts to coordinate with civilian agencies, but there is a significant lack of resources, equipment, expertise, and training in environmental protection among the region's militaries. These deficiencies often preclude regional armed forces from taking effective measures to limit the environmental impact of their own activities.
- [Redacted] although most militaries in the region are obliged to comply with national environmental laws and standards during routine duties, there is scant enforcement of even minimum requirements to remove and safely store hazardous substances, restore natural areas, or clean-up firing ranges and training grounds.

[Redacted]



Outlook. Over the long term, the trend toward political and economic cooperation and integration in the region probably will provide a catalyst for the upward harmonization of environmental standards. In turn, these trends may eventually increase the pressure on regional militaries—often the most organized, disciplined, and cohesive institutions in some Latin American countries—to take on a greater role in enforcing the growing number of domestic environmental laws and international treaty obligations, including those addressing environmental crimes such as the black market in ozone depleting chlorofluorocarbons and illegal marine dumping of hazardous and radioactive wastes. Conversely, in countries where civil conflict is ongoing or still a fresh memory—such as **Colombia, Guatemala, El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Peru**—civilians will likely remain reluctant to encourage their militaries to take on environmental missions given the lingering sensitivity to military involvement in traditionally civilian responsibilities.

