

Political Intelligence and National Security in Ecuador: A Retrospective Reading

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Abstract

The political debate that has developed around the doctrine of national security in Latin America has been extensive. Nevertheless, we note with curiosity that there are few academic studies that analyze the existing linkage between institutional logic power frameworks and the strategies for the application of political intelligence that prioritized this military doctrine over civil intelligence. This article focuses on the figure of the “Pesquisa” in Ecuador during the Cold War. This term refers to that civil agent or police officer linked to the National Public Security Office whose mission was to infiltrate social movements, opposition political parties, labor unions, trade unions, universities, etc. His intelligence objectives or targets included people or individuals who were assumed to represent a threat to the internal security of the State, but also those government officials that often mixed their private life with the public sphere or maintained links with foreigners within a context of limited internationalization, in a country with parochial characteristics. With little instrumental and professional analysis capacity, the “pesquisas” and their networks built personal relationships with the authorities of the Presidency of the Republic or functionaries of the ex-Government Ministry – now the Interior Ministry – reproducing the political patterns of patronage, personal favors and clientelism.

Keywords: Political Intelligence, National Security, Civil Intelligence Agents, Ecuador And Cold War, Human Rights

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1. Introduction: "Inquiry-Ready"

The political debate that has developed around the doctrine of national security in Latin America has been extensive. Nevertheless, we note with curiosity that there are few academic studies that analyze the existing linkage between institutional logic power frameworks and the strategies for the application of political intelligence that prioritized this military doctrine over civil intelligence and that, paradoxically, was what provided better "effective results" in spite of the social impact caused due to human rights violations during the Cold War. On the other hand, certain ambiguity, silence and even confusion have remained amongst the studies that highlight the limits that badly employed security represents for the State and their justifications for having violated citizens' rights in the name of the "public good"³.

A bipolar arena that set two ideologically contrary powers against each other and turned Latin America into the stage for their confrontations and hegemonic interests characterized the Cold War. By means of the promotion, construction or destruction of democracies, by encouraging or limiting non-resolved territorial conflicts, of halting or encouraging revolutionary activism of the political left and legitimizing or restraining the armed forces as exclusive actors in the areas of security, intelligence and espionage, they became an indispensable mechanism for obtaining information and executing the objectives of the national security doctrine.

Intelligence continues to be the object of theoretical controversies and paradigmatic debates in distinct scientific fields that include law, economics, and public policy, amongst various disciplines (Rivera and Barreiro, 2011a, p35). Traditionally tied to the State's security apparatus, it was the object of arbitrary, violent, and unpunished uses that violated human rights and infringed upon people's lives, cultural goods and economic resources. As time passed, intelligence has escalated in its professional status and, currently, it is a subject of academic concern and scientific disciplines that include security and strategic studies as axes of government programs.

³ According to Ecuadorian legislation, public goods are those that are considered to be of public domain or for the use and pleasure of all of the citizens. According to Art. 604 of the Civil Code, they are those "that belong to the entire nation," whose interpretation has been considered in an economic dimension of use and pleasure of one or more people simultaneously without this establishing an exclusivity in terms of access to the good with a fundamental characteristic of State tutelage. A category described in this manner is ambiguous and leaves room for unlimited interpretations. The problem becomes complex and serious when this public good – security – monopolized by the State, infringes upon another public good: people's security and their lives.

Without having abandoned their classic methods, based on the exhaustive gathering of information and an intense analysis and fact-checking process that is then passed to the legitimate and legally elected political decision-makers, intelligence is fundamentally aimed at the prevention and mitigation of risks, systemic vulnerabilities and challenges that represent threats of different types for the State and its inhabitants. The vulgar and cinematographic image of the secret agent who battles "evil" is a distant cry from the preventive logic based on predictive models and simulations that guide and suggest actions for confronting natural disasters and mortal health epidemics or detecting the infiltration of criminal groups that could destabilize a country's economy (Rivera y Barreiro 2011a, p.28).

This declaratory field or the expectation of what intelligence "should be" is the desirable form that should reign in distinct styles of democracies, independent of the regime to which they are attached; however, in countries with an authoritarian past and present, not without gaps and clientelism, and with an informal political culture full of institutional weaknesses, corruption and impunities, that "should be" remains stuck in the waiting room in spite of legal and institutional changes that have occurred in recent years in the intelligence sector.

"... It is frequent for the republican and democratic government that arises after decades of authoritarianism to inherit an intelligence system whose institutional structure, powers, practices and customs and habits were aimed at the perpetuation of the ruling government, with the suppression of dissent, espionage, disarticulation and battles against the opposition." (Ugarte, 2012, p. 19)

The Ecuadorian case is not that distinct from the above description. On the one hand, academic studies on intelligence are scarce, requiring specialized access and aimed at training those who perform information analysis and the preparation of intelligence products. Their reserved, select and secret nature has prevented access to reliable information to back studies related to the use of intelligence for decision-makers at critical internal times or times of international tension. The relationship existing between the dynamics and interests of the intelligence agencies of the international "cooperation and development" agencies and the influence exercised by national institutions have also not been analyzed much.

The world of intelligence is characterized by secrecy, scarce access to information, and to an even greater extent, the concealment of its logic frameworks and internal structures. During the Cold War and the bipolar international arena, security was defined as an issue of national sovereignty and survival of the State, subordinating any other agenda or interest and clearly drawing a dividing line between the external security under the responsibility of the Armed Forces and diplomacy; and, on the other hand, conceptualizing public order as an issue of police management or internal control. The intelligence services responded to this logic and their fields of action included the political intelligence that operated under the doctrinal concept of internal defense in which a threat or an internal enemy necessarily existed.

This practice manifested not only in Ecuador but also in the great majority of countries of the region because the political arenas showed significant democratic instabilities and the governments used intelligence to stop the threats to their political stability. This gave weight to discretionary practices and logical frameworks on the part of those in power and, at the same time, legitimized political intelligence, which in Ecuador was known as “pesquisa”^{T.N.}, protected by the argument of internal defense, the securing of sovereignty and the application of national security.

This article focuses on the figure of the “Pesquisa” in Ecuador during the Cold War. This term refers to that civil agent or police officer linked to the National Public Security Office whose mission was to infiltrate social movements, opposition political parties, labor unions, trade unions, universities, etc. His intelligence objectives or targets included people or individuals who were assumed to represent a threat to the internal security of the State, but also those government officials that often mixed their private life with the public sphere or maintained links with foreigners within a context of limited internationalization, in a country with parochial characteristics. With little instrumental and professional analysis capacity, the “pesquisas” and their networks built personal relationships with the authorities of the Presidency of the Republic or functionaries of the ex-Government Ministry – now the Interior Ministry – reproducing the political patterns of patronage, personal favors and clientelism.

T.N. “Pesquisa” is a disparaging term that refers to an intelligence operative whose job was to spy on targets, generally opposition political figures. The “pesquisa” generally came from a lower socio-economic class and had little education, but who had the advantage of being able to blend in with the people around him and thus, could gather information by infiltrating social and professional groups.

Being of lower class or, at most, middle class origin, the “pesquisas” could blend in with Ecuador’s cultural diversity, without much instruction in ethnographic codes, managing their cultural codes simultaneously and creating privileged information channels and social networks.

2. National Security: the “Star” Intelligence Concept of the Cold War

In Latin America, the national security doctrine operated by means of imposing economic and political alliance on governments in exchange for complicit and opaque assistance with combatting Soviet communism. Strategies and mechanisms that homogenized regional defense agendas were established in order to achieve these objectives. These included the Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance (Rio Treaty or TIAR as per its name in Spanish)⁴ and the training of military personnel and police in the School of the Americas.

Intelligence was a strategic tool for the prevention and disarticulation of threats, subordinating the function of the police services to national security. (Scott y Hughes, 2008, p. 12). Utilizing the example of the Soviet military invasion of Eastern Europe, the state-centric concepts reaffirmed the defense of national interests. The concept of development mimicked that of security and vice versa. In this way, the hegemonic interests of the United States managed to join and synthesize, within the concept of National Security, two clearly determined spheres: the military-led strategy, and in the operational area, political intelligence.

The State must protect itself in the sphere of its classical characteristics such as territoriality, sovereignty and independence as directly related to its military capacity. In addition, National Security cannot be conceived without the social development strategy that provided the justification in the region for US programs such as the Point Four program and the Alliance for Progress used to combat communism⁵ (Fitch, 1998, p. 108).

⁴ TIAR was created as a regional mechanism for reciprocal defense of America in order to counter external military interference (Kissinger, 1995, p. 613). It is a continental defense system designed to face the possibility of extra-continental invasions or aggressions. Its principals considered a threat any type of occupation or military aggression attempt towards one of the signatory countries to the agreement. (Barreiro, 2002, p. 231).

⁵ For the United States, security was an objective guaranteed by cooperation in the area of development since greater development meant greater prosperity, lower potential levels of conflict such as

External security was the subject of analysis and protection, converting internal security into a functional body that was expected to destroy or neutralize situations that could have been risky or could have undermined national objectives. Internal security, then, became a dimension of national defense (Lituma, 1974, p. 103-104).

Within this context, the political intelligence and police communities in Latin America were formed under the principles of national security and the tutelage of the United States. For that, national security maintained the military vision of combatting the enemy and its intelligence was aimed at strategies of eliminating war adversaries; while domestic intelligence maintained its orientation towards public order and government stability, ranking all groups aligned with communist ideology as the largest internal threat. (Scott y Hughes, 2008, p. 4).

During the Cold War period, US intelligence in Ecuador had the paradoxical result of strengthening the discretionary practices of political intelligence irrespective of the institutional construction of the services and the controls regarding the management of its job. Under this logic, political intelligence was not professionally regulated. Rather, it was simply executed in accordance with the secret missions established by the decision-makers and they constituted espionage practices that violated all privacy and sovereignty regulations (Bozeman, Adda, 1992, p.190-193)

2.1. Ecuador: Cold War, Communism and other Demons

In 1942, after a war and the loss of one third of its Amazon territory, Ecuador signed with Peru the Protocol of Peace, Friendship, and Boundaries between Peru and Ecuador, or Rio Protocol, in the middle of the Second World War. This historic act marked the agenda of Ecuadorian security during the Cold War, since it established the defense of the national territory and sovereignty as the country's priority for fifty years.

communist revolutions, and greater stability or peace. President Truman, after creating the OAS in 1949, proposed as a security strategy for the region the Fourth Point, or technical cooperation program, to guarantee peace and to promote democratic values in the region's countries. After more than a decade, in 1961, President Kennedy proposed the Alliance for Progress, which was signed by all of the countries of America, including Cuba, whose text specified its main objective as "improving the lives of the continent's inhabitants" through plans in education, health and economy" (Hobsbawn, 2003, p. 612-614).

The territorial conflict with Peru centered on the discussion regarding the border delimitation that the Protocol envisaged, its exactitude or injustice and of the Ecuadorian Amazon dream accompanied by the internal enemy: communist subversion.

In the 1970s, the success of the Cuban Revolution and symbolic figures such as Che Guevara and Mao Tse Tung had inspired followers and militants throughout Latin America. This decade represented, for Ecuador, a period of revolutionary struggle with strong activity from the Communist Party until the conformation of the Revolutionary Union of Ecuadorian Youths (URJE according to its name in Spanish), which advocated armed battle and “Fidelism” (Cedema, 2003). The alliance between left-wing organizations, including the Communist Party, URJE and the Revolutionary Socialist Party of Ecuador (PSRE as per its name in Spanish), proposed a revolutionary guerrilla project known as the “Pinol War” which developed its operations on the banks of the Toachi River. This failed attempt led to the breakup of the URJE (Pareja Diez Canseco, 1979, 110).

In 1963, a military dictatorship was established that deposed President Carlos Julio Arosemena Monroy for having maintained diplomatic relations with Cuba. This fact led to Washington to distrust the government and produced the CIA intervention that achieved the installation of the Military Junta that held power from 1963 to 1966. The CIA made itself seen as a fundamental actor of Political Intelligence (Agee, 1975, 75). Said dictatorship ratified the discourse of combatting the “internal enemy” and went down in history as the initiator of informal practices and turning a blind eye to the CIA. By 1965, the “Conquer or Die” movement (VM as per its Spanish name) was formed, but it was easily disbanded by the end of the 1970s. This same year saw the creation of the Detachment of the Secret Organization (DOS as per its name in Spanish) which would later give rise to the Revolutionary Left Movement (MIR). By the end of the decade the AU Shyris “War People” movement, responsible for the hijacking of two airplanes destined for Cuba, appeared (Villamizar, 1990).

With the implementation of the National Security Act in the 70s⁶, the CIA managed to encourage some preventive and combative intelligence operations against communism. Amongst these, one of the best known was the establishment of the anti-Castro OMEGA 7⁷ group, which participated in the invasion of the Bay of Pigs in 1961, with the objective of forming a provisional government that would be recognized internationally and would depose Fidel Castro. In the case of Ecuador, these years saw encouragement of the formation of anti-communist university groups, such as Ecuadorian Anti-Communist Action (AAE as per its name in Spanish); the Conservative Party was strengthened; and support was provided for the establishment of the Christian Social Movement and the Nationalist Revolutionary Action party of Ecuador (ARNE) with roots in the conservative/liberal battles (Reyes, 2011). These groups maintained an alliance with the CIA by means of infiltration operations in communist groups as well as through informants (Quintero and Silva, 1995, p. 223).

From 1972 until 1976, General Guillermo Rodríguez led a military dictatorship under a prosperous oil-based economic scenario that permitted the consolidation of the country's development through the Armed Forces. In 1976, Operation or Plan Condor, issued from Washington to favor the dictatorial governments, entered operations. The Supreme Government Council of 1976-1979 succeeded Rodríguez Lara and maintained its development focus, but was more flexible in terms of opening itself up to markets and favoring external debt as the price of oil fell.

During this last dictatorial period, there were important episodes regarding tactical internal security operations.

⁶ "...Intelligence intervened intensely with the goal of achieving a breakdown in relations with Cuba. In order to do this, it penetrated multiple institutions, apparatus and power centers of the Ecuadorian State, so as to, from there, influence the entire civil society, in which it also operated. The US political pressures were effective at numerous and decisive levels in the army and amongst political groups of all orientations". (Agee, 1975, p. 227).

⁷ OMEGA 7 was a group comprised of exiled Cubans living in the United States who were trained, directed and financed by the CIA with the objective of breaking up the Cuban Revolution and deposing Fidel Castro. This group participated in the invasion of the Bay of Pigs, without the expected results, and in spite of this it continued to operate throughout the decade of the 1970s and in the beginning of the 1980s, murdering Cuban politicians and Latin American communists. One of its best-known acts was the murder of Chilean Ambassador Orlando Leteleir in 1976. By the decade of the 1980s the FBI considered it a terrorist group and it was broken up: some of its leaders are serving prison terms in the United States (Rebelión, 2011)

The first was the repression of the workers at the AZTRA sugar mill⁸ in 1977, which ended with the death of approximately one hundred people. The second consisted of the murder of politician Abdón Calderón Muñoz that same year, and the kidnapping and murder of businessman Antonio Briz Sánchez in 1978. All of this coincided with industrialization and agrarian reform in Ecuador, themselves parallel processes to the consolidation and rapid decline of Ecuadorian trade unions of the time: CTE (Central Workers of Ecuador), CEDOD (Ecuadorian Confederation of Christian Workers, with its Christian democratic principles and its antagonistic socialist axis), and the CEOSL (Ecuadorian Confederation of Free Union Organizations). All of these groups, years ago, fought for recognition and labor rights in the country. (Fausto Dután, 2011).

During the 1970s, communist subversion was no longer the topic of analysis. Rather, the focus was on left-wing political groups such as: National Liberation Revolutionaries (RLN), the Christian Left, The Leftist University Revolutionary Front (FRIU), the Leftist Revolutionary Movement (MIR) (*Diario Hoy*, 2009); or movements such as the Ecuadorian Communist Marxist Leninist Party (PCMLE) the Ecuadorian Revolutionary Socialist Party (PSRE) and the Broad Leftist Front (FADI). These groups were legitimate political actors in the democratic transition.

The end of the 70s saw the beginning of a democratic period in Ecuador under its first President, Jaime Roldós Aguilera. An important aspect was the promulgation of a new constitution and with it, the National Security Law. This Law was the instrument that configured the security and intelligence system of democratic institutionalism through the creation of the National Security Council (COSENA).

3. National Security and Democracy

“National security,” “internal security,” “public security”: all are practically synonyms used to refer to Ecuador in the 1970s. Guidelines for both the internal (public) fields and the external (defense) areas were determined by the National Security doctrine.

⁸ The AZTRA case occurred in the final framework of the dictatorship and the “plan to return to democracy,” demanding as a prior requirement a “climate of peace and order,” which in practice, meant the implementation and validity of anti-workers decrees, the illegalization of the National Educators’ Union, of the CEDOC and the FESE, the imprisonment of workers’ and teachers’ leaders, the repression of progressive clerics and the murder of rural leaders ...”. (Alainet, 1988)

This gave rise to a series of institutional actions aimed at responding the danger of these threats, a strategy that was maintained in spite of the transition to democracy in 1979 and in the face of the recurrent political instability until 1998.

This tautology, at the same time an ambiguous boundary between external and internal security, led to a mixture and overlap of tasks, roles, missions and structures that remained in place with the promulgation of the National Security Law on September 28, 1979. This law, which maintained the same logic as the one promulgated in 1964, established a system of national security in which the Armed Forces continued to be the main actor of security and all of the other entities became support elements, legitimized by the creation of an organ dedicated to formulating national security policies and the strategic vision of national security: the National Security Council or COSENA (Art. 11).

The normative and institutional levels of political security were:

- The National Security Law 1979
- COSENA's functions in terms of internal security
- The National Intelligence Office (DNI)
- The Office of the Under Secretary of Police of the Ministry of Government⁹
- The National Public Security Office (DNSP)¹⁰, as an entity dedicated to strategic analysis.

COSENA, presided by the President of the Republic, included various levels of institutional operations known as the external, internal, economic and military fronts, comprised of representatives of all of the State ministries. (Art. 18). These fronts were designed to prevent, alert, supervise and combat the following: external threats; war threats (international policies and the border problem with Peru); threats of foreign political interference (subversion); and, natural disasters (earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, etc).

⁹ The Office of the Under Secretary for Police was the nexus between COSENA and the National Police's Chiefs of Staff according to the organic statute of the Ministry of Government of 1987 and 1994.

¹⁰ Office of the Ministry of Government responsible for managing public order of the State.

A National Secretariat presided over the COSENA structure, which comprehended three national offices and an academic training unit: Civil Defense, Mobilization and Intelligence¹¹ and the Institute for Advanced National Studies. In parallel, there were national security action fronts working in four main areas¹² (Section 3): Internal, external, economic and military. At the same time, coordination with each ministry of the Ecuadorian State had to be performed through units called Offices of Security Planning for National Development (DIPLASEDES: Section 4)¹³ except in the case of the Military Front¹⁴. The hypothetical function of these offices was to maintain a link with the National Secretariat of COSENA, that is, with Mobilization, Intelligence and Civil Defense. Although the legal mandate determined that all of the ministries had to establish the DIPLASEDES, only a few managed to do it and their level of functionality determined their ability to collaborate in scenarios of natural disasters with Civil Defense.

Within this context, the field of action of the internal front, the Third Title of the National Security Law, led by the Ministry of Government, is clearly defined: its ultimate purpose was established as the cohesion of the population threatened by the internal enemy of the insurgency, and support of the Military Front in the preservation of national interests for National Security and the subordination of the Police to the Armed Forces for purposes of national defense and internal security operations. An interesting aspect worth highlighting is that the COSENA structure does not contemplate the incorporation of the Police, or of any other unit of the Ministry of Government. In spite of this, the information gathering function of the distinct services of the Ministry of Government and the Police was always a fundamental input for the preparation of Political Intelligence products.

¹¹ The National Intelligence Office (DNI) was established as a strategic policy analysis department that never performed the role for which it had been created, that is, the coordination of both military and police strategic and political intelligence.

¹² National Security Law, 1979.

¹³ National Security Law, 1979.

¹⁴ According to Chapter Three of Articles 35-40, the Military Front was comprised of the Ministry of Defense and the Joint Chiefs of Staff of the Armed Forces. By its own nature, Art. 35 was the maximum security planning and management office and did not need a DIPLASEDE.

The operational entity of COSENA was the National Intelligence Office (Art. 17), which was conceived, as in the case of the National Security Law of 1964, as the most highly specialized national security office, to be understood as the entity with the highest level of analysis and preparation of intelligence products for the President's political and strategic decision making. For this reason, its main function was the coordination of the State's different Intelligence services and the information processed. This implied that its structure was composed of the four fronts of national security: external, internal, economic and military.

Under this logic and with the repeal of the Functional Organic Regulation issued by the last dictatorial military government (1976-1979), a new regulation was approved in 1982 that establishes two Under-Secretary Offices for the Government and the Police.

The National Security Unit and the National Mobilization Unit, both reporting to the DIPLASEDE, are noteworthy within this new organization. The first unit was supposed to formulate the internal political strategic concept, strategic appreciation and the preparation and execution of sectorial plans for National Security. The National Mobilization Unit, on the hand, served as liaison to the National Mobilization Office of the Armed Forces.

In spite of the first democratic, post-dictatorial government's modernizing attempt to institutionally strengthen the Ministry of Government, in the 1980s the regional scene showed internal conflicts in both Colombia and Peru that exceeded the classic conception of the communist threat and showed, beyond the guerrillas, the new actors that in spite being non-political had great influence in the state setting thanks to their relationship with drug trafficking.

This phenomenon would signal a new strategy for US security and the construction of a new discourse based on the narco-guerrilla threat and concept. This latest scenario fit within the concept of low intensity conflicts. Its domestic nature constituted a limit to the strategy of exclusively military confrontation and required internal security actions that boosted intelligence and communication mechanisms.¹⁵

¹⁵ Mario Ramos (2008) State security policy, apparatus and counterinsurgency strategies: 1984 -2006, Centro Andino de Estudios Estratégicos [Andean Strategic Studies Center]: Quito: 5.

In the Ecuadorian case, and during the presidency of León Febres Cordero, strategies were implemented to combat Alfaro Vive Carajo (AVC), designated as a guerrilla organization. Its consequences led to the need to create specialized internal security operational elements, such as the Intervention and Rescue Group (GIR) and the Special Operations Group (GOE) of the National Police, that exist to this day. The army had its own GEO (Special Operations Group).

At the same time, and again, under the presidency of Febres Cordero in 1987, the Ministry of Government promulgated a new functional organic regulation¹⁶ that maintained the same sub-branches related to national security, but that incorporated an ingredient that had been absent until that moment and that was imposed by the United States: the combatting of drug trafficking as one of the priority responsibilities of the National Police¹⁷, a function that would get stronger and remain, until today, as a regional agenda.

In 1994, the new functional organic structure basically maintains the same institutional logic, although it reformulates it in terms of security. The National Security and Mobilization Units are eliminated and the Public Security Unit is created as a sub-office of the Office of the Under Secretary of Police. The new functions focus on establishing basic intelligence mechanisms for political research and will maintain their role, according to the National Security Law, as well as including the performance of coordination tasks related to national internal security policies, projects and programs.

According to this new regulation, the Office of the Under-Secretary of Police would be the entity responsible for administration and planning as well as coordination with the Ministry of Government and the National Police in order to execute the control, guidance, follow-up and evaluation of public security within the national territory.¹⁸

¹⁶ Official Registry No. 833 of 1987, Approved. December 16, 1987.

¹⁷ "El control del tráfico ilícito de drogas y estupefacentes en el País y la coordinación con la Interpol, y demás organismos similares" [Controlling illicit drug trafficking and psychotropic substances in the country and coordination with Interpol and similar organisms], Chapter V, Art.45, No. 45, Reglamento Orgánico Funcional del Ministerio de Gobierno [Functional Organic Regulation of the Ministry of Government] December 16, 1987.

¹⁸ Official Registry No. 645.

What is curious about these new regulations is that although it is true that the intelligence operations that worked with civilian informants did not belong to the Police, they were always executed, and they served as a powerful weapon during the dictatorial governments. At the moment this regulation was issued, elite Police groups had to a great extent replaced their functions¹⁹.

In spite of this, the Office of the Under-Secretary of Police is still granted a certain lead role in terms of the political intelligence tasks in terms of its information gathering and processing function with regards to the four internal security fronts: political organizations, indigenous groups, labor and student organizations. Although the regulation was issued in a scenario very distinct from that of the Cold War, which inspired the National Security doctrine and law, the logic of security and the internal enemy were still maintained as categories used to define political threats.

These reforms, instituted under the Presidency of Sixto Durán Ballén, at the end of 1995, [were tested by] allegations of possible misuse of “reserved expenses” by means of checks that had been deposited in personal accounts on behalf of Vice President Alberto Dahik (Aguirre, 2010). This event led not only to the resignation and “self-exile” of Dahik, but also to reforms to the 1967 regulation, which was still in effect after forty years and to that day had not included any accountability procedures.

This reform that took effect on December 1, 1995 defines “reserved expenses” as:

(...)Funds for reserved or secret expenses are deemed as such when they are those whose nature has been assigned as such in the General State Budget and are defined in the classification system of income and expenses of the public sector, and whose investment is necessary for the maintenance of internal and external security of the State and the conservation of peace and public order.

It is strictly forbidden to incur in expenditures, to be charged to the reserved or secret accounts, for concepts that are not related to the maintenance of internal and external security of the State and the conservation of peace and public order.

¹⁹ Interview of XXXXX, former agent of the Office of Public Security of the Ministry of Government, December 2011.

With this, the two dimensional sense in which security is understood is maintained: defense and the classic internal enemy. During the Presidency of Durán Ballén, internal security due to the territorial conflict with Peru was essential, since in 1995, [the country] had to face a military confrontation against its southern neighbor. This fact generated a sense of national union that eclipsed any other possible manifestation of internal instability.

With the end of the Cold War and a unipolar political scene, the doctrine of National Security lost validity in the international scene. The traditional realist agenda of power, subversion and national interest declined in importance. Similarly, the threat to internal security, to be prevented and defeated – represented by communism –, is no longer of concern and interests have been reoriented toward issues linked to drug trafficking and social movements.

The decade of the 90s was a period of political instability and high levels of social fragmentation for Ecuador: Overturned fleeting governments; corruption scandals; the possibility of long-sought peace with Peru; and economic instability. All of these, added to the scandal that occurred during the interim government of Fabián Alarcón that led his Minister of Government, César Verduga, to flee the country, accused of improper use of reserved expense funds. The idea of creating controls on Intelligence occupied many media and political spaces. Once again, allegations were made which turned into still-unfinished trials for graft and illegal enrichment. All of this led to budgetary expense control mechanisms through budget items assigned by the Ministry of Finance exclusively for the Ministry of Defense and the Ministry of Government for external and internal security operations.²⁰

The institutional structure generated around the issues of internal security and concentrated especially on political intelligence has always been broad and ambiguous due to the very nature of its operations. However, this has permitted a wide-open field for impunity, corruption and discretion in line with the current power interests.

²⁰ Regulation for the management of public funds destined to reserved or secret expenses. Official Registry No. 68, of Tuesday, May 20, 1997.

4. Conclusions

During the Cold War, homogenization between the discourse and practices of National Security was achieved in the countries of Latin America by means of the indoctrination of the Armed Forces and Police of the region. This led to the establishment of an agenda of common threats and vulnerabilities under the umbrella of the internal and external enemy known as communism. This was considered a war that had to be fought using the tools of defense and that produced laws, structures and procedures so entrenched that they have not been able to be disbanded even today, in spite of some constitutional changes and strategic reorientations that now exist in various countries.

Leadership of the military analysis and the subordination of police entities characterized the intelligence systems at that time. For this reason, institutional structures were carefully established that were designed to promote defense mechanisms more than domestic systems linked to professional, scientific and modern knowledge. As a result, the “pesquisa” espionage system, more than “specialized knowledge,” became a craft based on the personal skills of those who performed it. In the Ecuadorian case, ever since the National Security Law of 1979, the State has installed a planning methodology in the security and defense sector, rather than an intelligence system.

Political Intelligence traditionally has been used as a tool for government stability. For this reason, it has been the closest tool for decision-makers, but at the same time, the least controlled and regulated in practice. In Ecuador, as in the majority of countries of Latin America, during the Cold War, political intelligence became the most efficient weapon for battling communism, but it also responded to personal, patrimonial and discretionary-power interests.

The Ecuadorian institutional apparatus developed through legal regulation responded to the predominant vision of National Security that established military control mechanisms and defense of intelligence. These structures were not included, delineated nor established as organs of security. This permitted a breach to open between the ways in which political intelligence gathering was practiced, the consequences, and the lack of performance oversight parameters.

This vacuum of democratic controls did not become evident until the end of the Cold War and the beginning of the XXI century thanks to the creation of the Truth Commission²¹ which, although it did demonstrate the constant violation of human rights, did not have the greatest support in terms of the material evidence demanded, which was hidden or had vanished over time because one of the recurrent practices of Ecuadorian political intelligence was the disappearance of said materials.

Although political intelligence was delineated by military entities and had distinct levels of responsibility – both military, police and civil – in the majority of cases, it was exercised on an operational level by groups directly attached to the Ministry of Government or the National Police. This historic absence of institutionalization has been the cause of abuse, corruption and social scars that have been present for over fifty years. The questions remain. Have these practices been eradicated? Is their logic still current?

The presence of infiltrated agents and other forms of persecution of all people who opposed the regime, guaranteed sure success in the elimination of political threats or objective, but also conspired against institutionalization and a structural advance of the intelligence services themselves.

Governed and utilized by the military for patronage purposes, the political intelligence processes were assumed to be a necessary evil and were even viewed with contempt because of their low-class and scarce educational origins. This is a paradox, considering that the results were highly desired by the governing powers and ruling politicians who, at the same time, delayed or limited the institutionalization of accountability and the creation of specialized oversight organisms that could have controlled the intelligence activity: an institutional paradox and concomitant doctrinal schizophrenia.

²¹ The government of Rafael Correa organized the Truth Commission on May 3, 2007 and the Commission delivered its report in 2010. The objective of the Commission, at the beginning, was to examine in an ad-hoc manner the violation of human rights in the anti-subversive battles waged by the organs of intelligence, the Police and Defense, during the presidential period of León Febres Cordero.

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