

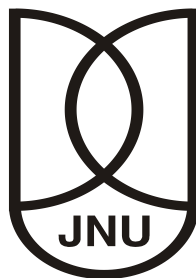
# **"Civil-Military Relations in Venezuela under Hugo Chavez"**

*Dissertation Submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement for the Award of the Degree of*

*Master of Philosophy*

*Submitted by  
Sanghamitra Kalita*

*Submitted to  
Prof. Abdul Nafey*



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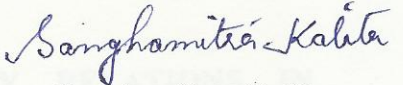


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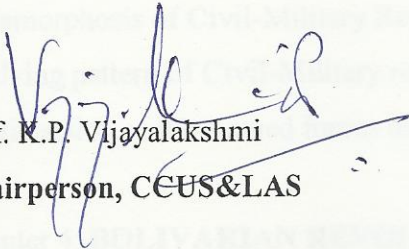
**DECLARATION**


I declare that the dissertation entitled "**Civil-Military Relations in Venezuela under Hugo Chávez**" submitted by me in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the degree of **MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY** of Jawaharlal Nehru University is my own work. The dissertation has not been submitted for any other degree of this University or any other university.

  
**Sanghamitra Kalita**

**CERTIFICATE**

We recommend that this dissertation may be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

  
Prof. K.P. Vijayalakshmi  
Chairperson, CCUS&LAS

  
Prof. Abdul Nafey  
Supervisor

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**Sanghamitra Kalita**

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## **List of Abbreviations**

AD	Acción Democrática
COPEI	Comité de Organización Política Electoral
MAS	Movimiento Al Socialismo
MBR-200	Movimiento Bolivariano Revolucionario 200
MEP	Movimiento del Pueblo
PDVSA	Petróleos de Venezuela, S.A.,
PPT	Patria para Todos
PROFAN	Pro Fuerzas Armadas Nacionales
PSUV	Partido Socialista Unido de Venezuela
URD	Unión Republicana Democrática
LCR	La Causa Radical

## **Chapter 1**

# **THEORETICAL APPROACHES AND ISSUES IN THE STUDY OF CIVIL-MILITARY RELATIONS**

Civil-Military relations refer broadly to the interactions between the armed forces as institutions and the sectors of the society in which they are embedded. Civil-Military relations focus primarily on the relative distribution of power between the government, any government for that matter, and the armed forces of a country. It involves a process in which the civilian control is measured and evaluated by weighing the relative influence of the military officers and the civilian officials in decisions of state concerning war, internal security, external defense and military policy that is the shape, size and the operating procedure of the military establishment (USAID 1998:7). The subject of civil-military relations is interdisciplinary in nature as historians, sociologists, political scientists and policy analysts, all have made their respective contribution to the field. The Political Scientists tend to observe the patterned generalisations of cause and effect and focuses primarily on the institutions of political control in the study of civil-military relations (Feaver 1999:212). The core issues of civil-military relations lie central to the process of democratisation and to the development of state's legitimacy.

The subject of civil-military relations holds prominence in the context of Latin America. The armed forces have played an important role as a power factor in the historical development of the nations of Latin America. They have been the precursor of industrialisation and have contributed to the transition from traditional to modern societies overcoming tendencies of regionalism and localism. But in the political sphere they have overthrown governments that have created them; the generals have used the armed forces as a tool to make themselves as the head of the states; and military faction has often intervened in the political process (McAlister 1966). The restoration of democracy in Latin America was not a smooth ride. With years of dictatorships, the process of institution-building and reordering of democracy was an uphill task. Coups which were the traditional response to political crises have almost vanished in Latin America in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The military may have subsequently lost a certain degree of authority but their historical alliances with the dominant sectors of society yield significant power even today. The relation between the civilian and the military have become quite normal but not yet settled down to clear communication and understanding through institutional channels. The defense ministry in many countries are still headed by active duty or retired military men. The functions of the civilians that hold defense ministries are restricted to mediating between the military and the authorities and do not cover areas related to defense

policy making, defining missions of the armed forces etc. The lack of democratic control over defense is also compounded by the lack of congressional oversight of intelligence service activities (Diamint 2002). In most countries, intelligence and the security of the state are interconnected and are coordinated from the ministry of war or defense. The military intelligence is responsible for the domestic political affairs and national development policies (Kruijt 1996). The changes that the military institutions have undergone in Latin America were indeed the response to reform the state than to give new dimension of defense within the framework of democracy.

A diversity of pattern or systems of civil-military relations exists in Latin America. At the schematic level, the types of civil-military relations can be categorised into four types: the Praetorian state that is marked by the frequent overthrow by coups to meet non-military ends. Venezuela, before and after the dictatorship of Juan Vicente Gómez can be regarded as a praetorian. The second type is the Gendarmist state when a single individual who is generally a military man imposes social and political order with the help of a mercenary army. The dictatorships in Venezuela are a good example. The third type is the Garrison state where the military not only dominates or influences the political system but also attempts to militarise the state and society at large. Paraguay under Francisco Solano López was a garrison state. And the fourth type is the civilist state which is marked by the supremacy of the civilian government over the military forcers. Eg. Venezuela from the period 1958 to 1992. <sup>1</sup> (McAlister 1966: 344).

The literature based on civil-military relations view armed forces as an institution geared for defending the state against external threats and so is the case in most developed nations. The view that role of the military is purely external in nature is not applicable in the developing nations in general and Latin America in particular. The military is often brought in to perform the internal domestic functioning of the state like in civic action programs i.e. building roads and infrastructural facilities to providing rural health care to the marginalised section of society to performing police duties in and outside the capital city (Forman and Welch 1998).

The high cost of the maintenance of modern militaries is related to the economic development of a particular country.

1. The elaboration of the patterns of civil-military relations in the context of Venezuela is explored in Chapter 3.

The drastic cuts in military budgets may infringe on what has been regarded as the institutional prerogative of the armed forces can lead to serious repercussions. One of the prime causes of coups invariably has been reductions in military budgets which are often resented by the armed forces (Forman and Welch 1998).

The 'civil-military problematique', a term used by Peter Feaver rests on the paradox that the very institution that is created to protect the polity is sometimes endowed with sufficient power to become a threat to the polity (Feaver 1999: 214). It therefore involves the balancing of two important and potentially conflicting aspects. On the one hand, the military as an institution must be adequate in size to prevail in war. It should be strong enough to attack other groups or ward off attacks by other groups. On the other hand it must conduct its own affairs so that it does not prey on the society it is intended to protect. The seizure of political power by the military has been a pertinent worry of the civil-military relations theory (Feaver 1999).

In his study of civil-military relations, Peter Feaver has underlined three forms of analyses of civil-military relations: normative, empirical/descriptive and theoretical (Feaver 1999: 216). Each of these components makes a significant contribution to the study of civil-military relations.

- i. Normative analysis prescribes what ought to be done, how much of a civilian control is necessary for military subordination and the steps necessary for the improvement of civil-military relations.
- ii. Empirical/descriptive analysis is applied to the problems of civil-military relations and involves developing typologies of various forms of civilian control or lack thereof. This kind of analysis helps in distinguishing between reality and rhetoric, between what appears to be the case and what is the case. Area studies literature has been preoccupied with the centrality of the civil-military relations to the political life of particular region.
- iii. The theoretical approach also involves the typology development but then it moves to advance propositional statement of cause and effect. The theoretical approach distinguishes between dependent variables i.e. the things to be explained and predicted eg coups and independent or explanatory variables which do the explaining and predicting like the degree of military professionalism or the type of civilian governmental structure. The approach specifically analyses the ways in which the changes in the independent variables are reflected in the changes in the dependent variables.



Military coups as a dependent variable has remained the traditional focus of civil-military relations as they reflect the central problem of the military in which they use their coercive strength to replace the civilian government. The frequency of coups and the probability of the success of the coup are two related and distinct questions that are always taken under consideration. A coup generally symbolises military strength vis-à-vis other groups but it also indicates the weakness of the armed forces in the sense that the military is unable to meet its demands through the normal political process. The recent works on civil-military relations by Pion-Berlin (1992), Stepan (1971, 1988) and Welch (1978) have dealt with issues like military influence; civil-military conflict; military compliance; and delegation and monitoring.

- I. **Military Influence:** The primary focus on military influence encapsulates the idea that military institutions may be politically powerful even when they do not resort to forcible seizure of power. Military influence as a dependent variable is much harder to measure than coups thereby limiting its theoretical usefulness. The oldest debate on civil-military relations concerns fusionism, the argument that the line between the military and the political has become so blurred that the distinction has lost its meaning.
- II. **Civil-military friction:** A focus on civil-military friction/conflict has compensated for difficulties that came across in coups and military influence dependent variables. Civil-military conflicts can occur even in coup friendly societies. Friction results as a consequence of a different pattern of civilian control than due to civilian control itself. Alfred Stepan (1988) in his study of Brazilian civil-military relations has made conflict an integral part of his study terming it 'military contestation'. Too much friction between military and civilian actors can trigger a military coup.
- III. **Military Compliance:** This dependent variable reflects the essence of a normative democratic principle that states that the will of the civilians should prevail. There are instances and situations when the civilian governments defer to or heed to military demands. But when a dispute has gone into the public domain or seeks public attention, it becomes difficult to determine whose preferences prevail in the decision making process. It therefore becomes necessary to ascertain the degree of unconditional and unquestionable compliance with the civilian government.

IV. The degree of delegation and the types of monitoring mechanism used by the civilian governments has become the recent focus of study in the field of civil-military relations. Monitoring mechanism include activities such as audits, investigation. Rules of engagement; civilian staffs with expertise and oversight responsibilities; and extra governmental agencies such as the media and the think-tanks. The effectiveness of monitoring mechanisms can be established when there is a willingness on the part of the civilian governments to punish noncompliant behaviour (Feaver 1999).

Independent or explanatory variables are differentiated according to whether they are external or internal to a country. External factors that require a large sized army or pressure exerted in the form of targeted aid and advice from the influential powers greatly influence the shape of a country's civil-military relations. Internal factors include determinants such as the nature of dominant cleavages in society, the nature of domestic political system, distribution of wealth and the threat of a civil war. Explanatory variables which are internal to the state can be further differentiated according to the civilian/military distinction itself bringing forth issues like whether the causal factors relate to feature of civilian society or to the feature of the military. Huntington's two classic works on civil-military relations deals elaborately with the issues of degree of military professionalisation in the officer corps and his latter study emphasizes a civilian factor, namely the degree of institutionalisation within civilian society.<sup>2</sup>

He has also emphasised on the ways in which the three competing ideologies, Liberalism, Conservatism and Marxism conceives military affairs and how these conceptions lead to different pattern of civil-military relations in liberal, conservative and communist societies. There is an inherent contrast and contradiction between military ethic and liberalism and Marxism but similarity and compatibility can be found between military ethic and conservatism. Individualism which lie at the heart of liberalism the reasoning and moral dignity of the individual and opposes political, social and economic restraints upon the individual whereas on the other hand the military ethics holds that man is evil, weak and irrational and must be subordinated to the group.

2. *The Soldier and The State: The Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations* (1957) and *Political Order in Changing Societies* (1968).

Both Marxism and military ethics emphasises the importance of power and groups in human affairs. The former stresses the importance of economic power while the latter glorifies the superiority of sword. (Huntington 1957).

The factors that arise from the transition from authoritarianism to democracy as independent variable deserve special mentioning. The nature of transition to democracy can also be a causal factor in shaping civil-military relations (Feaver 1999). Where there is a peaceful transition of power the civilians were not able to develop necessary institutional counterweights to prevent future coups whereas state resulting from an armed struggle will have the necessary experience and the expertise to create strong armed counterweights to the traditional military and thus keep them in check. Countries with histories of authoritarian regimes face particularly onerous challenges in making the military establishments politically neutral and subjected to control and subordination of the civilian government. Thus the need for effective, competent and courageous civilian leadership becomes imperative.

The institutional mechanisms like approval of defense budgets in the Congress, restricted the military to its own sphere of influence developed during the transition process in the form of contested policy goals can be advantageous for the civilian authority in the long run (Trinkunas 1999).

The present introductory chapter examines the theoretical formulations and issues of civil-military relations and these formulations basically pertain to liberal democracies. In the context of Latin American countries in general and Venezuela in particular, issues and theoretical formulations relating to civil-military relations are on a different plane altogether although there may be some similarities.

The introductory chapter is divided into four sections. The first section covers the various issues of civil-military relations common to all countries. The second section analyses the institutional approach to the study of civil-military relations giving a general outline of its various aspects and its applicability in the Venezuelan context. The third section examines the subjective and objective control of the armed forces in understanding Venezuelan civil-military relations after 1958. The final section has tried to provide an insight on the Chavista model of civil-military relations and its ramification.

## Major Issues in Civil-Military Relations

Some of the important issues that often come across in all programmes/analyses of civil-military relations are as follows:

### I. Variables that affect the nature and scope of military participation in politics

The concept of a totally 'apolitical military' is difficult to comprehend in modern times. Even in democratic polities that pride themselves on the subordination of the armed forces to civilian oversight, considerable scope of military political action is always present. The armed forces always try to convert the rules and policies to their own point of view in all countries with civilian governments. The challenge herein lies to compel the armed forces to use regular channels of decision making rather than resorting to blackmailing tactics or threats of vetoing policies.

### II. The balance between 'legitimacy' and 'coercion' found in individual political regime.

A legitimate government is seen to be less dependent on security forces to maintain its control. The civilian government also attempts to make insubordination and coups more costly as it raises the expectations of the civilian leaders that the masses will support them against the military (Feaver 1999). But in the developing or recently democratised countries, the ruling government may seek military support when they are unsure of popular support.

### III. Effectiveness of major means of governmental control

Legislative oversight of defense policies is one of the important elements of democratic control over the armed forces. In representative democracies, parliament provides legitimacy to a state's civil-military coalition (Forster 2002). The effectiveness can be brought through legislative budget appropriation, formal control over appointments/promotions of the military officers to the highest ranks, adequate defense expertise and designation of the elected civilians as the elected head of the state.

### IV. The balance between externally and internally oriented security measures.

In most of the developing countries and in many developed nations the armed forces, the armed forces are deployed to not only to defend national boundaries from external threats but also to take up policing jobs to deal with domestic

disturbances. The armed forces overrule the national and local police forces in most Latin American countries. Thus the political responsibility for the national police becomes a matter of civil-military power distribution (Kruijt 1996). One of the major steps in ensuring the civilian control of the armed forces is the professionalisation of the police function. There should be a clear delineation of military defense duties from the law and order tasks of the police.

V. Military ‘professionalism’ of different types and levels

If professionalism include a strong sense that the officers should limit themselves to offering expert advice on government policy matters the likelihood of forcible intervention declines and the possibility of a successful democratization increase.

VI. Depoliticisation of the officers who have played leading roles in juntas

Democratisation and effective civilian control could be achieved by the political neutralization of the high- ranking officers keeping in mind of any potential threats (Forman and Welch 1998). The historical role of the armed forces especially in Latin American countries is highly significant. Militarism in Latin America is considered as the cultural residue of the war of independence’ (Johnson 1966). Therefore it becomes imperative that the constitutional roles of the armed forces are defined formally.

The nature and the level of military’s utilisation in internal security operations is also an important aspect in the study of civil-military relations

### **Institutional Approach to the Study Civil-Military Relations and its Critique**

With the change in institutional design, the civil–military balance of power also changes (Pion-Berlin 1997).

To institutionalise civil- military relation is to normalize the relations between the two principal actors; and to makes it adhere to the legitimate conventions of political process. Stability, conformity, regularity and moderations; which are the basic

requirements of any institutionalized relations are related to one another to a certain degree. There are two dimensions to institutional relations, one formal and the other is behavioural. The Latin American countries have adopted the path of democracy leaving behind the past of military dictatorships. Though the road to democracy was erratic, but the nations have stuck to democratic means by adopting the constitutional documents, statutes, codes, regulations and other legal instruments needed to establish order, rules and norms for the functioning of the political process. The states have erected the foundation of democracy through these laws (Pion-Berlin 1997). .

For the institutionalisation of the political relation between any principal actors in society, it is essential that the adherence to democratic conventions become a behavioural adaptation, and not just a legal fact. The military, which is regarded as an important power factor in Latin America, abide by the democratic rules of the game as long as their interests and prerogatives are not infringed. Contacts between the military and the political rulers occur within the ambit of governmental agencies where policies are debated, formulated, implemented and often defeated. The political behaviour of different actors are shaped and defined by these institutions (Pion-Berlin 1997: 20).

Policies constitute an important aspect of civil-military relation over which the civilian rulers and armed forces may agree or differ. The institutional mechanisms/ designs established in democracies may either facilitate or obstruct military's intentions to influence policy processes. In the same way, they may enhance or retain the ability of the political rulers to accomplish their programmes. The institutional arrangements in a given system shape the capacity of a particular group to realise their interests and agenda. The institutional norms and procedures can serve as a foundation for procedural interactions between both the actors, but it is not certain that it will yield any substantive results for either side.

The chief executive that is the president executes policies to further his political agenda and that of his party; maintains a firm grip on his party and in the process contributing to the consolidation of democratic process. The military as an institution and a fighting force seek the interest of its organisation and its objective is to have total control over the means of coercion; maintain their professional ethics, pride, and conduct and ensure that discipline, cohesion and esprit de corps is thoroughly observed within the ranks. The military issues pertaining to matters related to upgradation of living standards, equipment, and training, education, maintaining

and protecting budgetary shares, fulfilling the assigned missions and often becomes an area of contested policy goals between civilian governments and the armed forces. In order to push their vested interests, the politicians and soldiers had devised strategies within the democratic framework. The institutional approach thus helps in analysing the causes of success or failure of policy programmes.

The institutionalists primarily focus on the political, economic and social conditions that exist in the system and between the principal political actors. The institutional factors define the objectives of these actors and the distribution of power among them in a given policy matter. Wendy Hunter has analysed that the institutionalists approach the issues of civil-military relations on the basis of economic and social variables. An example that can be cited in this regard is the concept of bureaucratic-authoritarianism introduced by Guillerme O' Donnell. These kind of regimes are characterised by a technocratic, bureaucratic and a non-personalistic approach to policy making and the presence of an institutionalised military in the political arena. The concept of bureaucratic authoritarianism remained valid from mid 1970s to early 1990s in countries like Argentina, Brazil, Chile and Uruguay. But with the new wave of democratization that swept many countries in 1980s and 1990s and the fall of authoritarian regimes had raised many serious issues. Therefore the study on the new issues of transition and effects of military power and autonomy addressed through institutional approach became more prominent.

Venezuela after 1958 have built an effective, competitive and democratic political order that continued till 1992. The civilian government was able to contain the military institution politically and a highly organised, mass based political parties were created and maintained. The political order and continuity was maintained through regular transfer of power since 1968, mass mobilisation with very high level of electoral participation. The Venezuelan democratic experience was premised on the tools of compromise and conciliation between the political parties limiting the arena of conflict and disputes. The political leaders emphasised on the institutionalisation of common legitimate norms and structures of action than to the achievement of specific programmes. The obstacles to participation which was predominant before 1958 was reduced and active political involvement was encouraged during Punto Fijo. The role played by the political leaders were visibly pronounced as they were successful in overcoming fragmentation, building common ground of activity and institutionalizing new patterns of political action and legitimacy (Levine 1985: 49). With time

democratic behaviour and beliefs have become an integral part of the popular culture and the electoral competition was confined to two leading parties, Acción Democrática (AD) and Comité de Organización Política Electoral (COPEI).

Thus the central institutional mechanisms during the transition to democracy since 1958 and its consolidation and maturity were political parties, periodic elections, strong leadership, consistent stress on compromise and conciliation and restricting the armed forces to its sphere of influence. These factors have facilitated the creation of a strong, institutionalised and legitimate political order.

Terry Karl in the context of Venezuela has analysed that the dependence on petroleum revenues produced a distinctive type of institutional settings, the petro-state, which encouraged the political distribution of rents by accommodating the diverse interests in society. This in turn resulted in further weakening of state capacity as the state officials became habituated to relying on the progressive substitution of public spending for statecraft. The centralisation of power in the hands of the president and the bolstering of the institution of presidency became a paramount feature in Venezuelan political system.

The civilian government after 1958 adopted the strategy of ‘divide and conquer’ into concrete military institutions. The set of institutional reforms were broadly accepted by the armed forces as they perceived them to be the scope to enhance their service autonomy, promotions and professional development. The Venezuelan political rulers were not only able to secure the civilian control but also narrow down the jurisdictional boundaries between the civilian and military spheres (Trinkunas 2001).

The 1992 coup attempts by Lieutenant Colonel Hugo Chávez revealed the flaws and weaknesses of the institutional design set up during Punto Fijo. The coups were not successful owing to the institutionalisation of the policies of divide and conquer that prevented cooperation between plotters in different services and the informal links set up between military high command and the politicians.

Critique:

The institutional mechanisms that are developed to normalise civil-military relations are often at the mercy of the principal actors (politicians and the soldiers) and it can be overhauled if their interests are at stake. The institutions persist over a period of time and sudden overhaul by altering the established mechanisms can be risky, costly and time consuming. But if the principal actors like the armed forces began to feel



disenchanted with the existing institutional mechanisms and the opposition to change the existing institutions is strong and sizeable enough, the institutional change becomes a possibility (Pion-Berlin 1997: 25).

### **Subjective and Objective Control of the Armed Forces: Period of Punto Fijo in Venezuela**

Samuel J. Huntington is regarded as one of the greatest exponents of civil-military relations since 1950s. His analyses on the subject of civil-military relations have been a mainstay for all other contending theories of civil-military relations. In his book, *The Soldier and the State: The Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations* (1957), Huntington suggested that the civilian control of the armed forces can be achieved by adopting two major strategies i.e. 'subjective control' and 'objective control' and the principal focus of any civil-military relations is the relation of the officer corps to the state.

The civilian control of the armed forces is premised on the relative power of the civilian and military groups (Huntington 1957). Subjective civilian control basically relies on convergence between the armed forces and the civilian groups whereas the objective civilian control is based on differentiating the armed forces from the civilians.

Subjective civilian control is achieved by maximising the civilian power in relation to the military. Due to the presence of varied characters and conflictual interests between the civilian groups, subjective control becomes a matter of power relation between the civilian groups. Thus civilian groups attempt to maximise their control over the military vis-à-vis other civilian groups. Subjective control achieves its end by civilianising the military, making them the mirror of the state (Huntington 1957). It essentially denies an independent military sphere.

Objective civilian control of the military on the other hand is premised on maximising the military professionalism and it pertains to modern militaries. With a more professionalized armed forces imbued with advanced training, organisation and equipments, the institutional concerns that separate them from those of the political, social and other actors becomes more profound among the armed forces. Objective control of the armed forces achieves its end by militarising the military, making them

the tool of the state. The essence here lies in the recognizing an autonomous military professionalism (Huntington 1957).

The primary requisite of any system of civilian control is minimising of military power. Objective control minimises the military power by professionalizing the military and rendering them politically neutral and inactive. This will lead to a lowest possible level of military political power with respect to all other civilian groups (Huntington 1957).

Professionalisation and objective control necessitate maximising military expertise and therefore some degree of autonomy is a prerequisite to allow the military to practice its expertise. Excessive civilian interference with the internal affairs of the armed forces may lead to a triggering effect from the armed forces and also diminish the military's ability to utilize its own expertise effectively. But an active and informed civilian leadership and oversight are necessary to guide the armed forces and to ensure that their actions conform to the civilian agenda (Norden 1998).

Huntington has also made an argument in his aforementioned book that the military organisations are also defined and shaped by functional and social imperatives. Functional imperatives denote special characteristics of the military organisation which deals with their capability of defending the state against external aggression and threats and on the other hand social imperatives emerge from social forces, ideologies and socio-political institutions. These two imperatives can be helpful in understanding the characteristics of military institution in a particular state.

The military policies in Venezuela during Punto Fijo drew on mixture of objective and subjective control and it worked well within the ambit of a viable political and economic scenario. It is observed that the two major coups that Venezuela witnessed during 1945 and 1958 had largely to do with the issues of military professionalisation and autonomy. The junior and mid-level officers were infuriated after seeing that their professional careers were blocked by less trained colleagues who did not have the benefit of a foreign training and education. The young officers were disgruntled with the rampant corruption among the senior officers and politicization of armed forces regarding promotions, allotment of assignments and missions. There was a strong feeling among the junior officers that military as an institution should be kept out of politics. The civilian government in Venezuela after 1958 crafted institutional mechanisms and oversight to keep the military under their subordination. The central military goals of professionalism and autonomy that were the two prime requisites of

'objective civilian control' were supported by the civilian government after 1958. The different services of the armed forces were given the mandate and the resources to upgrade their level of professionalism and military skills without any obstacle from the civilian sphere. The military pact signed during Punto Fijo promised technical upgradation and modernization of the armed forces and designated the institution as an "apolitical, obedient and non-deliberative body". The Acción Democrática government under Rómulo Betancourt in 1958 took the opportunity to mend ties with the armed forces by taking on the job of modernization and technically upgrading the armed forces and improving the economic needs of the armed forces in the form of high salaries and pensions and assigning obligatory military services. Venezuela's souring economy propelled through petrodollars allowed the civilian government to increase their salaries and other privileges (Karl 1987: Norden 1998). The historic dominance of the army over the institution of the armed forces was countered to a certain extent as the Estado Mayor (General Staff) was replaced by a weak Jefes de Estado Mayor Conjunto (Joint Chief of Staff), thus providing greater independence and autonomy to each services (Norden 1998).

The subjective control of the armed forces was also put into use by the civilian leaders in the Venezuelan context. It was founded on a broadly shared developmentalist ethos and extended practice of party penetration, influence and patronage within the military. The civilian leaders like Rómulo Betancourt had made efforts for an active outreach of the armed forces and personal contacts between the military leaders and party elites began to develop eventually (Bigler 1977). The objective of 'civilianising' the military which is one of the major propositions of subjective control was brought through military education and assigning socially sensitive tasks to the armed forces to encourage military's acceptance of democracy and compliance with the civilian authority (Norden 1998).

Rómulo Betancourt who was known for his staunch anti-military attitude before 1958 realised the essence of military cooperation to fulfill his dream of democratisation into reality and therefore readily turned the armed forces from enemies into professional allies during his presidential years. His successors continued to wield influence over the armed forces by adopting policies of appeasement in the form of promotions, salary hikes and assigning the desired assignments. This kind of an arrangement helped the civilian authorities to maintain strong personalistic ties with the armed forces thus discouraging the latter from any kind of political adventurism. Petroleum

wealth together with the general civilian trust of the armed forces further helped in enhancing the cooperative relationship between the Venezuelan armed forces and the Congress during the Punto Fijo years.

The rise of military politics in Venezuela since 1970s is attributed to the infringement of the areas of military prerogatives by the civilian government like reducing military budgets or promotions which are politically motivated sidelining merit and seniority. The officers were not too pleased with the shortened period of service which was reduced to thirty years and rapid rotation of command. The approaches adopted by the civilian government may purely fall within the ambit of subjective control but it is incompatible with an objective form of control. Strategies that were adopted to achieve subjective control succeeded in establishing a firm belief in democracy and identification with the civilians. But the nature of rigid pacted regime began to be viewed to be less democratic. No doubt the Venezuelan model of subjective control was able to attain a high degree of allegiance of high ranking officers of the armed forces to political elites but drifted the young officers from the hold of the civilian government and drove many in the military towards the masses (Norden 1998). The exposure of the junior officers to a kind of education which was different from that of the seniors created a kind of breach and generational break between the ranks. The institutional autonomy, an important aspect of objective control had developed in such a manner which had minimised the institutionalised political oversight of the armed forces to a great extent.

The objective and subjective civilian control have their own weaknesses and shortcomings that could hamper effective control. Excess autonomy, which is one of the major flaws of objective control, can reduce the effect of civilian control of the armed forces. The convergence of goals and ideas between the civilian and the military is essential for maintaining stability in civil-military relationships/coalition or otherwise the divergence may increase military's propensity and tendency to confront the ruling government. The excessive autonomy granted to the military by the civilian government in Venezuela and the diverging goals between the junior officers and the ruling elite brought the Venezuelan democracy at the verge of collapse in 1992 (Norden 1998). The 1992 coup attempts were a turning point in Venezuelan polity as it again questioned the highly flawed and fragile nature of pacted democracy practiced since 1958. It also revealed that some section of the armed forces began to identify

themselves with different groups and ideologies that significantly lowered the degree of control of the civilian rule over the armed forces. Huntington has overemphasised the aspect of military professionalism which maintains the political neutrality of the armed forces thus allowing the civilian governments to carry forward their agenda and secure legitimacy within the state. But this is not the case in most of the Third World countries where professionalised armed forces can be less cooperative and can pose a challenge to the civilian government (Pion-Berlin 1997). The higher level of military professionalism has historically resulted in high degree of military intervention in politics and high level of autonomy which is detrimental to the functioning of the civilian governments.

### **Chavista Model of Civil-Military Relations**

Hugo Chávez came into the limelight of politics as Lieutenant Colonel leading an unsuccessful coup in 1992 against the civilian government of Carlos Andrés Pérez. The primary motive behind the coup attempts was to remove the existing civilian government and to establish civil-military juntas. The Venezuelan insurgents who claimed to be the believer of democracy viewed that sometimes democracy needs to be interrupted for its smooth functioning. The coup attempts of 1992 highlighted one important problem pertaining to the model of Venezuelan civil-military relations i.e. diminishing capacity of the civilian government to control and subordinate the lower ranking officers through subjective control. The intra-military and civil-military crises had further deepened and were threatening the legitimacy of the civilian government in power. The collapse of the subordination of the armed forces by 1992 raises serious question regarding the failure of Venezuelan model of subjective and objective control (Norden 1998). For an effective subjective control two conditions are highly essential i.e. ideological convergence between the civilian government and the armed

forces and maintaining ideas and consistency of identifications within the armed forces.

Hugo Chávez became the President of Venezuela in 1998 with an overwhelming majority and continued his Bolivarian agenda with the help of the armed forces. The presidential tenure was not a smooth ride for Chávez as he had to face constant criticism for his policies, the foremost being the politicisation of the armed forces and the extensive use of armed forces in social missions. Against the backdrop of an unsuccessful coup in 2002, President Chávez began to consolidate his position by eliminating the disloyal officers and instituting subjective control of the armed forces (Coletta 2010).

With each succeeding electoral victory after 2002 coup, President Chávez was able to galvanize his reign over the state by eventually sidelining his opponents. After his victory in 2009, Chávez has used the law making and law enforcement agencies to put forth his agenda of 'state socialism' (Colleta 2010).

There is a greater tendency of politicisation of the armed forces when the military as an institution is controlled by one section of the army. This is evident in the case of Venezuela under Chávez.

The Venezuelan armed forces are known for its professionalism. Some scholars like Harold Trinkunas have noted that those junior officers who were trained in military training institutes in United States and other European countries were instrumental in bringing down the dictatorship of Pérez Jimenez in 1945. A decade later, many like-minded junior officers rebelled against their Generals to usher an era of 'pacted' democracy in Venezuela. The high level of military autonomy that is synonymous with Venezuela's model of professionalism prompted the junior and mid-level officers to act independently of their military superiors and the political leaders during the political and economic crisis of 1980s and 1990s (Norden 1998).

The civil- military relations of any country are also a matter of who has the final say on a particular matter and on what become a national priority (Forman and Welch 1998). In the context of Venezuela, President Hugo Chávez is able to control and subordinate the armed forces through a faction of the military which is loyal to his Bolivarian agenda. The military officers who had been brought into the arena of politics are either democratically elected or directly appointed by the President.

The Chavista model of civil-military relations has to a great extent deviated from the tenets as prescribed by liberal democracies. The civil-military relations have undergone some major transformation during the tenure of President Hugo Chávez. The military is subject to intense politicisation or to say there is a militarisation of politics under Chávez. Second, military roles and missions were reoriented to internal functioning of the state. And finally, the expansion of armed forces in the political arena has been further reinforced by the Constitution of 1999 dismantling the traditional control of armed forces established during the period of Punto Fijo. The high degree of military participation in non-defence policy making and implementation has undermined the civilian control of the armed forces and increased the potential for civil-military conflict (Trinkunas 2002: Norden 1998). The civil-military relations after 1998 has tilted in favour of the armed forces as President Chávez has established a direct and unmediated personal control of the military to implement his objective of achieving a revolutionary transformation of Venezuela (Trinkunas 2010).

## **Chapter 2**

# **DEMOCRACY AND CIVIL-MILITARY RELATIONS IN VENEZUELA, 1958-1998**



Venezuela became a mature colonial society in the last quarter of the eighteenth century and organisationally it was highly fragmented. The creation of the Captaincy General, a bureaucratic and military construct was an important aspect of this period that helped in bringing together the semi-independent provinces of the region under a unified administrative control. The Captaincy General brought together the peripheries of Cumaná, of Maracaibo, and of San-Cristobal-Mérida into the control mechanism located at Caracas. This pattern of consolidation both in socio-economic and administrative fronts was of historical significance (Lombardi 1977: 9).

The history of Venezuela since the time of its independence from Spain in 1820 until 1958 except for those three years from 1946 to 1948 known as *trienio* was marked largely by the period of dictatorships. The long and the ruthless struggle for independence had profoundly influenced the Venezuelan socio-political structure. The ‘militarisation of the political authority’ was an important outcome of the Independence Movement.<sup>1</sup> The wars of independence which was marked by instability and destruction replaced the old methods of determining legitimacy and right that prevailed during the centralised bureaucratic political system with a new system based on force (Lombardi 1977: 11). Political power in Venezuela soon after independence was centered on the struggle between the regional caudillos to seize the capital, Caracas and it continued till the 1945 military revolt. All through since independence, the ruling military clique was firmly allied with the landed oligarchy with the sole purpose of maintaining order and preserving the status quo (Lieuwen 1960:347).

The Venezuelan socio-economic structure however underwent a fundamental transformation with the development of oil industry in the 1920s. The petroleum economy was instrumental in the decline of the stagnant agricultural sector thereby diminishing the role of the landed class. The weakening of the rural base had serious underpinnings as agrarian interests were gradually driven to a backseat and its place was replaced by oil.

1. John J. Johnson has reiterated the fact that militarism in Latin America is a ‘cultural residue’ of the War of Independence and military mentality evolved as a result of the long period of independence struggle in one of his book *The Role of Military in Underdeveloped Countries*.

The oil based economy propelled the growth of urban centers as there was an upsurge of a new professional and commercial middle class along with a mass of illiterate rural peons. The growth of an urbanised Venezuela provided the much needed impetus for a democratic regime (Karl 1987:70).

Until 1945, the so called traditional forces were able to resist the mounting popular pressure on the military dictatorship owing to sweeping socio-economic changes and the growth of a strong opposition parties. The Second World War further intensified the pressure upon the military clique with civilian opposition joining hands with the young military officers threatening the regime of Isaias Medina. The War had greatly influenced the ideology of the young military officers which later proved beneficial for Acción Democrática (AD). The alliance between the army officers and Acción Democrática (AD) led to the revolution of October of 1945, an event that symbolised the attainment of power for the first time by the Venezuelan people (Lieuwen1960:348).

The chapter is divided into three major sections. The first section deals with the political traditions and patterns of power sharing arrangement between the two leading parties, AD and COPEI and the institutional mechanisms developed to maintain and sustain democracy since 1958. The second section analyses the crises and tensions that civil-military relations experienced during the period of Punto Fijo. The third and the final section looks into the nature and causes of the 1992 coup attempts and its impact and fallouts on the changing pattern of politics thereafter.

### **Power-Sharing Arrangements After 1958**

The election for the Venezuelan National Constituent Assembly in 1946 paved the path of democratic electoral process and the evolution of modern party system. The Venezuelan political tradition and culture developed after 1958 imitated all the prerequisites of a liberal democracy and was considered as a successful model in a highly fragile region (Buxton 2000).

Acción Democrática, one of the prominent political parties was formed under the aegis of the 'Generation of 1928'.<sup>2</sup>

With labour as its principle support base, the somewhat leftist oriented and reform minded AD championed the cause of universal suffrage, end of military dictatorship, representative government, rapid industrialisation and agrarian reforms, adequate public health services and universal education. AD was primarily a multiclass party with a broad base of support among the lower and middle income groups.

Under the leadership of Rómulo Betancourt, AD was successful in consolidating its position by winning all the three elections held during *trienio* i.e. the three years from the fall of the dictatorship of Medina Angarita in October 1945 to the overthrow of President Rómulo Gallegos by a military coup in 1948.

During the *trienio* period, participatory reforms like universal suffrage and direct Presidential elections were introduced for the first time in country's history; a thorough reorganization of the educational system with a view to increase the literacy rate: land reform measures were being adopted with public lands distributed to the landless; formation of democratic trade unions were encouraged and the welfare schemes were revamped (Kantor 1959: 243).

The alliance between AD and the military officers known as Patriotic Military Union was however short-lived and turbulent. The young officers who were party to the alliance were apprehensive of the radical programme initiated by AD. The rise of militarism in Argentina and Peru and President Gallegos's refusal to include more military officers in the cabinet further strained the relationship between the army and the government. (Kantor 1959: 244). Thus, AD's reform programmes had antagonised most of the sections of the society, be it the landlords who felt threatened by the agrarian reforms; the petroleum companies were suspicious of the nationalisation issue; and the military feared that the mobilisation of the urban and the ruling class would lead to social unrest (Martz

2. Generation of 1928 was a group of Venezuelan students like Rómulo Betancourt, Raul Leoni, Rómulo Gallegos who led the protest march against the dictatorship of Juan Vicente Gomez. This group of university students later founded the basis of modern political parties in Venezuela.

1977; Lombardi 1982). In nutshell, the national politics during these three years was dominated by intense conflict amidst expanded participation and deep penetration of party system.

The alliance was highly criticised as its split in 1948 unfolded a decade of military dictatorship. The Acción Democrática was ousted from power in 1948 by the same group of army officers who had allied with it in 1945 through a coup d'état and took over the government. The decade that followed after the ouster of President Rómulo Gallegos from power was marked by political repression and persecution and many political leaders of AD went into exile. Political parties had matured ideologically and politically as they tried to reestablish democracy and create broad based cooperative connections among the leaders. During the period from 1945 to 1948 many political parties emerged and came into limelight prominent among them being COPEI and URD. COPEI or Comité de Organización Política de Electoral Independiente was influenced by the social doctrines of the Catholic Church and found its base among the conservative sectors of the society.<sup>3</sup> The URD or Unión Republicana Democrática on the other hand emerged out of the personal differences within the leadership of AD. It was led by Jóvito Vilalba, one of the prominent student leaders of the 1929 movement (Molina and Pérez 1998).

The fall of the dictatorship of Pérez Jiménez in 1958 brought severe economic and political crises for the country. Street demonstrations demanding for jobs, better living conditions became a common sight. The road to democracy was not a smooth ride as there was continuous opposition from right wing army officials belonging to a group called Pro Fuerzas Armadas Nacionales (PROFAN) who refused the establishment of party democracy in Venezuela. The year also witnessed several coup attempts which were subsequently crushed by the combined efforts of Caldera, Vilalba and Mendoza (Karl 1987: 81).

3. It had its genesis in the catholic student movement in 1936 and was officially founded under the leadership Rafael Caldera in January 1946.

Initially both COPEI and URD were apprehensive of the hegemonic role played by AD although they had played a significant role in the establishment of party system in Venezuela. They therefore intended to restrain future powers of AD and became defacto supporters of the entrepreneurs, oil companies, the US, the church and the military (Karl 1987).

The three leading parties: AD, COPEI and URD formed the basic structure of the party system in 1958; and it was in the context of party-based and overall political contention that they formulated a scheme of 'shared governmental power'. These non-communist parties signed two decisive acts. I. The first one known as the Pact of Punto Fijo embodied the political component of pact making and coalitions. The consensus evolved through pacts and coalitions was both substantial and procedural in nature. It was basically premised on a limited programme; and radical transformations in the field of agriculture, education and industry were all kept aside. The parties agreed to act together in a cooperative manner to resist challenges to the legitimacy and survival of the democratic institutions. Social mobilisation and active participation of the masses after 1958 was another key factor for the realisation of democratic transition.

Importantly, it was that of a controlled and channeled one through party organisation and electoral competition (Levine 1985: 51). The parties ensured that they would maintain a 'prolonged political truce' and respect the electoral verdict. And it was agreed that the parties in the coalition would get equitable distribution of the benefits from the state. II. The second document, Programa Mínimo de Gobierno (Minimum Programme of Government) outlined the country's economic program based on local and private capital accumulation, providing subsidies to the private sector through the Corporación Venezolana de Formento and securing protection to the local industry. The document also guaranteed compensation for any changes in their land reform acts. The government also backtracked from the earlier stand of nationalising the foreign owned oil and steel companies. Rather, the new civilian regime ensured the presence foreign oil companies in extractive industries and in return demanded greater share in revenues from oil. The ruling coalition tended to provide subsidies in food, housing and securing welfare measures to the poor. The government made consistent effort to form consensus between the business and the labour and consulted them regularly, as represented by the Federation of Chambers of Commerce and Association of Commerce and Production and the Confederation of Venezuelan

Workers (CTU) so that their support to the regime remained steadfast (Karl 1987). The cost of political carelessness that AD had to bear during the *trienio* period was immense and was taken into account at every step of decision making.

The AD- COPEI collaboration continued to maintain its solidarity even after URD withdrew its support from the ruling coalition in 1960. The parties pledged to support each other which enabled Rómulo Betancourt to survive full term in office. Both Betancourt and Raul Leoni attempted to build a broad coalition of support to stabilise and legitimise the ruling government. The basic strategy was simplified in the sense that those ministries which were valuable to maintain the regime were reserved for the AD and the loyalists were granted patronage positions which provided them the necessary thrust and confidence to affect policies of national importance (Kelly 1977: 329).

COPEI played a significant role in building up a strong coalition with AD till 1969. The party was able to provide a disciplined, programmatic and democratic alternative to AD. Although the party did not join the Leoni administration in 1963 it remained a formidable opposition till 1969; the year that marked the transfer of power from AD to COPEI. Many independent sympathisers were given significant positions in the local, state and national legislative bodies during the AD period of Betancourt and Leoni. The highly sensitive ministries of defence and finance went to the independents. The ministry of defense was under the command of an active military man whom the president fully trusted (Kelly 1977: 33).

The Constitution of 1961 was a hallmark of constitutional government in Venezuela with regularized transfer of power by means of universal adult suffrage. The three branches of the government played a major role in legitimising the constitutional phase of political development in Venezuela since 1958. A strong executive has been a pertinent feature of Latin American politics and Venezuela is no exception. The 1961 constitution authorised the president to take charge of the nation's defence, financial system which included tax and tariff policies and the management of foreign affairs. He was given the authority to appoint all the cabinet ministers, state governors and state enterprise officials and to declare a state of emergency. As per as the constitution, the presidential election was to be held every five years by secret ballot and no incumbent was eligible for re-election during the years following the completion of his term. The role of the legislature was undermined under the clout of all powerful executive. The concept of the separation of powers between the

executive and the legislature was blurred under the overwhelming influence of the executive upon the law making bodies. The absence of strong, well staffed standing committees further diminished its role as an effective policy making body. But the 1961 Constitution made an attempt to contain the executive excesses and maintain democratic pluralism by streamlining the congressional structure and powers. Since then the legislature acted as a forum for debate and discussion but its effectiveness solely depended on the opposition holding congressional majority (Kelly 1977).

The political exigencies of the transitional era were met with consistent response and the political parties were quick enough to learn the rules of the game. The stable nature of the ruling coalition had its direct impact on the implementation and execution of the policy reforms. The political class was able to build an effective, competitive and a broad based democratic order. The successful transfer of power (1958, 1963, 1968, 1973, 1978, 1983, 1988, and 1993) between the two prominent parties, AD and COPEI remained peaceful thus manifesting consistency and continuity in the political order (Levine 1985). The coalition was intended to be small to preserve the centralised decision making process with the President as the supreme national arbiter (Kelly 1977; Karl 1987). The so called left was intentionally excluded in the transition process by the major parties to reassure their own hold over business, the Church and the military and to reconcile them in the new democracy.<sup>4</sup> ( Levine 1985).

According to Juan J. Linz, there are three basic factors that are necessary for political stability in democratic regime: legitimacy, efficacy and effectiveness. Legitimacy can be achieved when there is a general acceptance of the existing political institutions and the ruling authority. The ruler(s) need not resort to force to secure compliance (Crisp 1996).

Efficacy necessitates the regime to find solutions to the pertinent problems faced by the political system and effectiveness results from policy implementation. The civilian rulers were successful in attaining legitimacy, efficacy and effectiveness for regime survival during the period from 1959 to 1992.

4.The long standing rift and ideological differences between Rómulo Betancourt and the Marxist Left was also another reason for its non- inclusion in the in the process of government formation.

However, the two-party based pacted democracy did not remain without strains and crisis in the period between 1968 and 1988. Growing factionalism and fragmentation were the biggest concerns of AD administration of Raúl Leoni during 1963. The decade that followed was marked by infighting among the members of the party striving for personal ambitions and doctrinal divergences. Members of the AD youth movement splintered; it was the first major fallout when the young guns tried to establish a socialist pattern against the party lines through a rural revolt. The formation of Movimiento del Pueblo (MEP) by two of its prominent leaders Luis B. Preito and Jesús Angel Paz Galarraga further damaged party's hegemonic image and reputation in public. At the other end, small parties that were formed as a result of the disintegration from the major parties began to loose sheen and by 1968 the electoral contest was firmly confined to AD and COPEI (Martz 1977: 96). The small parties tried to make a mark on the political map of Venezuela but they were out rightly rejected by the common man.

COPEI who has remained in opposition since 1958 was able to defeat the ruling AD in 1968. The Venezuelan political structure was therefore boosted with successful transfer of power from the government to the opposition party which further strengthened the party system. The period from 1968 to 1988 was largely marked by a healthy competitive struggle between two dominant parties and the Venezuelan citizens began to value and defend the democratic procedures. Both AD and COPEI were able to pass the test of time and were able to provide a durable and functional government to the citizens.

The organisational machinery of both the parties was deeply rooted and had a firm grip over the national and regional levels. The monopolisation of the two leading parties continued and ADs' founding leaders later renounced further political ambitions to open its path for the second generation under Carlos Andrés Pérez. The 1974 presidential elections gave an unparalleled mandate to AD's candidate Carlos Andrés Pérez. The party had secured absolute majority in both the Houses of the Congress and in the municipal councils. COPEI had suffered a major defeat with steep decline of voter's percentage and losing all the three states which were its traditional bastion. Not only the two- party system was firmly established, the voters were also committed to a healthy democratic party competition as the foundation of government (Martz 1977: 100). The voter turnout in the national elections between 1958 and 1973 was in excess of 90 percent and above 80 percent between 1978 and



1988 which firmly indicate the degree of legitimacy granted to the electoral mechanism by the electorate. The trust that the Venezuelans had entrusted on the democratic institutions/mechanisms, periodic elections, party system, smooth transition of power from one party to another, presidential form of government with the centre having supreme authority had provided the much needed legitimacy to the ruling government and the political system.(Crisp 1996). Political pacts and petroleum wealth were both able to fulfill the aforesaid objectives for the survival and sustainability of the democratic regime.

### **Crisis and Tension in Civil-Military Relations**

The political system during Punto Fijo period began to experience acute credibility problem facilitated by the process of deligitimisation. The following section has highlighted how the crises and tensions have unfolded since 1970s and how it has impacted the civil-military relations.

Punto Fijo had designated the institution of armed forces as an “apolitical, obedient and non-deliberative body”. It was an opportunity for the state to mend the ties with the military and thus the AD administration took on the job of modernising and technically upgrading the armed forces, improving the economic conditions of the officers in the form of salaries and pension and assign obligatory military service. The military personnel were guaranteed amnesty for the misdeeds committed during Pérez Jimenez era and the parties made sure that the military as an institution acted as a repository of democratic values (Karl 1987: 83). Upholding the democratic ethos and assuring the stability of the democratic institution became the primary objective of the armed forces. Its commitment towards the establishment of the political system was demonstrated when the armed forces confronted the guerilla attacks of early 1960s in a bid to sustain the democratically elected government. The civilian leaders during the transition era consolidated their supremacy over the armed forces by crafting institutions that shifted power from the military towards the bureaucracies the leader’s control. The political neutrality of the armed forces was further reinforced by the fact

that the active duty military personnel were prohibited from holding any public office and from exercising their franchise (Norden 1998: 149).

The 1961 Constitution was a great leap forward in this direction. It has to a large extent curtailed the powers of the armed forces. The Senate was in charge of approving all promotions to the rank of Colonel and General and also for approving of the foreign military missions into its territory and Venezuelan missions abroad. Both the Houses of the Congress were required to give their approval on the government budgets and other appointments including those of the armed forces. Thus the military compliance with the government authority was gradually brought in areas concerning the missions, organisation and engagement of military activities. The civilian government limited the period of active services of the armed forces to thirty years which enabled the young officers to climb the ladder of military ranks more quickly. The rotation process of the military command was done at a faster pace giving most of the officers an opportunity to secure the top ranked position at some junction of their professional career. The other branches of the defense machinery, which was historically dominated by an all encompassing military, became more independent (Norden 1998: 149). President Rómulo Betancourt made a sincere attempt to build a cordial relationship with the armed forces by turning them into professional allies during his administrative period.

During the period from 1958 onwards, the political leaders formulated a strategy of 'divide and conquer' that empowered the elected officials, eliminated the centralised military command structure particularly the Estado Mayor General and granted limited autonomy to each branch of the military service. The Venezuelan 'exceptionalism' from 1958 to 1992 was thus credited to a stable civil-military coalition created through institutions of appeasement, increased military budgets and by establishing a strong social safety net. The civilian control of the military was based on a depoliticised and professional military restricted to a narrow sphere of activities (Trinkunas 2002). The political neutrality of the armed forces was maintained as long as their professional needs were maintained by the civilian elites (Norden 2002). The armed forces maintained a high degree of autonomy which was relatively restricted to a narrow sphere of state policy like the national defence. The civilian regime however let loose its strings of vigilance and oversight once they were confident that the threat of military intervention was fully contained.

The seventies saw the rise of educated and highly trained elite junior officers who were inspired by the ideals of Simon Bolivar with a nationalistic fervor and outlook. This new generation of armed forces felt detached from the old traditional military hierarchy and underwent generational break. The plan Andrés Bello helped in reviving the nationalistic ideals and patriotism among the young officers.<sup>5</sup> The Venezuelan armed forces wanted to expand and legitimise their participation in the national economic affairs but they were vehemently sidelined by the ruling class ensuring that it was merely ritualistic.

The frustration was building up among the young officers who felt that the path of their career building was deliberately blocked by the lesser trained senior officers. The disgruntled young officers became demotivated as the military operations were confined only to counter insurgency activities. In an effort to redefine their military missions, the armed forces lost their professional objective and began involving themselves in the internal power struggle for resources, position, promotions and military assignments.

The oil crisis of 1960s and 1970s had increased government revenues to an all new high which helped in increasing defense budgets to almost double during the period from 1967 to 1977. The Venezuelan armed forces were one of the best paid compared to most of the Latin American countries. The period also saw massive procurements of armaments to secure its territorial boundary and upgrade defense capabilities. Many new missions were sent to countries like United States and in Europe to seek advanced training (Trinkunas 2002: 46).

Massive procurement of weaponry benefited the high level government officials, military superiors and the intermediaries who were hand-in-gloves, and who generally bought them in an overpriced amount with a hefty commission.

In the absence of a civilian supervision, the military autonomy had also increased which shielded the growing corruption from public scrutiny. The members of the defense committees in the Senate or the Chamber of Deputies were not experienced in military dealings which were indeed a boon to those corrupt officials as defense deals did not undergo detailed scrutiny. Political affiliations to any of the mainstream parties facilitated career opportunities of the higher officials.

5. Plan Andrés Bello pertained to the new educational programmes implemented within the armed forces which eventually turned Venezuela's Academia Militar into a university-equivalent institution.

Luis Herrera Campins who was the president from 1979 to 1983 emphasised the need that appointments of military personnel should be made on the basis of trust rather on merit. This in turn created fierce competition among the officers and the ultimate benefactors were those who had party lineage ( Trinkunas 2002).

Personalistic and political ties undermined the merit based professionalism of the armed forces. The intense politicisation of the armed forces pertaining to promotions and assignments disgruntled the junior officers who had set high standards of military ethos during their professional career. To a certain extent the politicisation of the armed forces helped in countering the institutional autonomy on important issues but created a major divide between the junior officers and the higher ranked military men and their civilian counterparts. The military discontent was managed through policies of appeasement and fragmentation within the military hierarchy. But the growing distance between the admirals and the general and their subordinate officers and the subsequent alienation of the young officers was given a blind eye by the civilian government. Many junior officers could truly feel the real sense of democracy when they were inducted in civic action missions giving them an opportunity to relate themselves with the populace.

The decline of international oil prices in 1982 had an overbearing impact on the politico-economic structure of Venezuela. The series of events that followed is regarded as one of the worst period in Venezuelan history. The first was Black Friday (18 February 1989) when the currency collapsed initiating depreciation, inflation and stagnation of the economy. In such a panic situation, the government of Luis Herrera Campins lowered the bolívar/dollar exchange rate which had historically been overvalued. The absence of any coherent policies by the successive governments during that decade further deepened the economic crises (Lander 1996: 50).

With foreign debts mounting to 33 billion dollars, the Venezuelan economy was on the threshold of collapsing. The widening gap between the rich and the poor can be estimated from the fact that the number of Venezuelans living in critical poverty expanded from 32.6 percent in the early 1980s to 53.7 percent in 1989. The rate of inflation which was in single digits reached to 28.0 percent in 1987 and 29.48 percent in 1998. In addition to it, a huge proportion of the budget was absorbed by the deficit and external debt of the state enterprises. The legitimacy crises faced by the government was further deepened by growing corruption in public life and deterioration of wages and other services (Lander 1996 and Trinkunas 2002). The

figures and indicators show that the lives of the common man had become miserable and the growing resentment against the civilian regime was inevitable.

President Carlos Andrés Pérez adopted the structural adjustment plan called the 'El Gran Viraje' (The Great Turnabout) in an attempt to save the economy from severe balance of payment of crises and the state institutions. The structural adjustment program was premised on three conceptually three distinct aspects: i. adjustment as the mechanism for establishing short term equilibria and repayment of external debt; ii. Structural reform of the economy- the shift from a state directed and oil dependent economy based on private non-traditional exports; and iii. transformation of the state-centered strategy to that of a free market economy that would conform to the demands of the economic globalisation. The economic policies of Pérez administration were mainly recommended by a 1987 International Monetary Fund mission. The recommendations made by the IMF became a commitment by the Venezuelan government in a bid to renegotiate its external debt (Lander 1996). The programme was intended to eliminate price and currency controls, raising interest rates, reducing tariffs, privatizing state owned industries and deregulating the economy. Pérez's economic policies led to a widespread unrest among the working class, manufacturers, labour unions, government employees. It had come as a shock to the common man who had immensely benefited from the populist measures of the post civilian government. The government was also not able to control the unabated corruption that had defaced the party in power in public eye. The legitimacy crises had further deepened as the approval ratings of President Pérez had declined to a all time low of 12.3 percent which was taken at the end of 1991. This had serious underpinnings on Venezuelan democracy as it was gradually losing its legitimacy and effectiveness (Trinkunas 2002: 50). Mass protests with growing lawlessness became the order of the day which was threatening to destabilize the political system. There were urban riots on the streets of Caracas and other cities in February 1989, with many innocent lives lost. The armed forces stood by the civilian government in controlling the unrest. The decline in the social services resulted from the incapacity of the state institutions to deliver owing to resource mismanagement, corruption and politically bloated bureaucracies (Levine and Crisp 1999).

The economic crisis aggravated political crisis. High voter turnout was a key feature of the Venezuelan elections during the first three decade of the democratic rule. The voter abstention in 1988 election was over 18 percent and it jumped to 49 percent in

1993 presidential elections. The parties were gradually becoming incapable to channel conflict, control organization and mobilize the voters. The Caracazo episode of February 1989 was the manifestation of the shock treatment of the structural adjustment program of President Carlos Andrés Pérez (Levine and Crisp: 1999).<sup>6</sup>

These developments transformed anti-incumbent anger into anti-establishment anger (Coppedge 1994).

The structural adjustment policies were not only impacting the lives of the common man but also those of the armed forces. There was a steady decline in the living standards of the military officials who were earlier rejoicing the privileges and benefits deriving from oil revenues. The wages too declined as the amount that was spend per soldier got reduced from more than thirty thousand dollars in 1982 to less than fifteen thousand in 1991. The officers who were leading a life of comfort were suddenly reduced to such a position where they were not able to afford their bare minimum requirements. Above all, there was immense corruption among the upper echelons of the armed forces in regard to arms procurement, promotions, assignments which infuriated many young officers.

President Pérez was facing strong criticism for his handling of the external defense issues by the young officers. The privatisation policies of his administration that led to the sale of state industries and the national telecommunication company to the foreign investors was perceived by many young officers as damaging to the state sovereignty as these assets were considered as the strategic assets of Venezuela ( Trinkunas 2002: 53).

The crises of the Venezuelan political system deepened substantially between 1988 and 1993. The period was marked by unstable limited multipartyism characterized by decrease in voter's participation and the development of negative attitude towards the political system. The party system after 1993 did not represent any consolidated form of partisan loyalties which was the characteristic feature of the democratic era.

The instability in the political system was also the result of the presence of significant anti-system political forces like the Movimiento Bolivariano Revolucionario 200(MBR-200) and Patria para Todos (PPT).

6. Caracazo is referred to the wave of protests, strikes, looting and mass killing that was witnessed in the streets of Caracas and its neighbouring cities on 27<sup>th</sup> February 1989.

The institutional reforms also led to the shift of the party system towards unstable multipartism. Direct elections for mayors and governors were held for the first time in 1989 in the Venezuelan states. These changes played a significant role in the transformation of the party system as small parties like Movimiento Al Socialismo(MAS) and La Causa Radical(LCR) came into prominence. The personalistic leadership with a broad based electoral support weakened the parties as major channels of political representation and mobilisation and created a political environment that allowed presidential candidates to garner support from non-traditional parties like Rafael Caldera (Molina and Pérez 1998). There was a strong anti-party tendency amongst the population by the mid 1990s that extended beyond AD and COPEI to all political organisations.

### **The Aborted Coup of 1992 and Changing Pattern of Politics in Venezuela**

During the period between 1970s and 1980s, many small groups of middle ranking and young officers had begun to form factions or self help groups with common interests and sharing common platform during assignments and missions. Movimiento Bolivariano Revolucionario 200(MBR-200) was one such faction that was formed in 1983.<sup>7</sup> Ideologically influenced by the ideas of Simón Bolívar and many other war heroes, MBR-200 was formed mainly of the junior army officers who were among the first graduates of the Academia Militar. This faction voiced their protest against the growing corruption in political life, neo-liberal economic policies and external influences on the domestic policy making and advocated a strong Bolivarian democracy. Lieutenant Colonel Hugo Chávez who was spearheading the MBR-200 along with his fellow officers like Francisco Arias Cardenas staged the 1992 coup to transform Venezuela into a ‘true democracy’(Trinkunas 2002).

The coup attempt was intended to overthrow the civilian government and replace it with civil-military juntas.

7. MBR-200 was founded on the occasion of the 200<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary of Simon Bolívar, so the number 200 was added with MBR.

The coup attempt of 1992 was the reflection of the civilian government's inability to rein over and subordinate the lower ranking officials through subjective control and exposed the dysfunctional civil-military relations (Norden 1998).

The activities of MBR-200 were well known to the military and the civilian government since 1984. Its anti-regime ideas and propaganda were not taken seriously by the Pérez administration. Also the senior ranked officers of the army had lost its cohesiveness over the issue of the appointment of General Fernando Ochoa Antich as the Defence Minister surpassing General Santiago Ramírez who was the topper in his class (Trinkunas 2002).

The participation of junior and middle rank officers is one of the prominent characteristic features of the military coups in Venezuela. The first coup attempt on 4<sup>th</sup> February 1992 was the outcome of the anger and disaffection of the junior officers against the military superiors. The coup attempt may have failed owing to poor organisation and planning but it provided the rebel leaders with a launch pad to project their revolutionary ideas and agenda. The decline in the economic standards of the common man and the social upheaval after the urban riots of 1989 and the growing nexus of corruption between the political elites and the senior officers had disgruntled the junior rebel officers and they decided to oust Pérez government of power and establish a new 'democratic era'.

The generational split within the armed forces and the distrust between the upper and the middle rank officers had further prompted them to guard the secrecy of planning a coup attempt (Norden 1998). The open support from the masses that the rebels were able to garner had further vindicated their position and agenda. They were hailed as the saviours of the Venezuelan democracy which had over the years stagnated and was on the verge of collapse. The polls conducted immediately after the coup indicated that nearly half of the population was sympathetic towards the rebels and believed that the coup attempts were for the sake of the betterment of things<sup>8</sup> (Agüero 1995: Norden 1998).

8. There is an apparent difference between the coups of the Southern Cone countries and that of Venezuela. Whereas the former sought to protect the 'nation' as a whole and the governing elites from the threatened mobilisation, the Venezuelan coups were directed towards asserting the rights of the poor and the marginalised.



The failure of the first coup attempt on 4<sup>th</sup> February 1992 was due to lack of cohesion between the different units of the armed forces as it was participated only by the rebel forces within the military.

The administrative independence and autonomy of each services granted by the civilian government prohibited the young officers to form any inter-service links. Thus the fragmentation and lack of support from other services besides the army undermined the possibility of a successful coup. Hugo Chávez was imprisoned for his coup bid and in his absence the MBR-200 could not mobilise any concrete anti-government movement. Confusion over goals, ideology and methods created a frenzied atmosphere among the rebel officers and they had to face the wrath for their failure.

The Pérez administration however faced severe opposition from another military faction headed by senior officers like Admiral Hermán Grüber Odreman and General Visconti Osoria who were from other services besides the military. The coup leaders who belonged to air force and navy found that it was becoming difficult to coordinate with the fellow co-conspirators of the armed forces. The political inclination and ideologies of the two factions, one led by Hugo Chávez and the other by Admiral Grüber could not find a common ground of convergence of the desired political programme. Lack of mutual trust and coordination led to the failure of both the coup attempts of 1992.

The upper echelon of the armed forces that was firmly allied with the civilian government showed its solidarity at times of distress to suppress the military rebellion (Norden 1998).

Meanwhile, the Pérez government failed to contain the anti- government protests and the pacts and coalitions that were the norms of the democratic era were no longer sustainable. The lack of party discipline and the inability of the parties to keep the clientele intact further worsened the situation. The President declared a state of emergency and suspended the constitutional guarantees including right to free assembly and demonstrations after the failed coup attempt of 1992 (Levine and Crisp 1999). President Pérez tried to rebuild the civil- military relations to reestablish military order and provide security to his administration.

The military as a unified institution and an integral part of the civilian government showed solidarity fearing its disintegration and the threat posed by the

rebel officers. Many members Of MBR-200 were arrested and detained in military prisons. The civilian strategies of oversight in the form of monitoring and vigilance were intensified by the Pérez administration. In this regard, the Dirección de Inteligencia Militar ( DIM) played a significant role in monitoring the clandestine and conspiratorial activities in both the armed forces and civil society. Officers who were suspected of dubious behaviour were either suspended from the armed forces or sent to overseas for a long haul as student or military attachés. The rotation process of officers through new command was quick and it barely lasted for three to six months. The social safety net of the armed forces, reduced during to the oil crises of 1983, was revived and huge investments were made in this regard. The policy of appeasement which was one of the important strategies of the civilian government was brought into prominence with increased pay hikes, rewards and paying off debts. The government made an attempt to redress the grievances of the military rebels by spending more on the social welfare measures of the armed forces (Trinkunas 2002). In 1992, the military spending in Venezuela amounted total to 1.55 billion dollars which was 50 percent more than the average expenditure spend from 1988 to 1990, as reported by the US Arms Control And Disarmament Agency.

On 21 May 1993, President Pérez was removed from office on charges of corruption by an act of impeachment by the Venezuelan Senate. He was accused of misusing public funds, profiting from illegal exchange transactions which involved classified accounts in the Ministry of Interior related to national security. The Supreme Court started the proceedings against Pérez and concluded in 1996 that he was found guilty of minor misuse of public funds for sending National Guard Troops to Nicaragua to provide security services to Violeta Chamorro during her presidential campaign. He became the first President in the modern democratic era of Venezuela who failed to complete his constitutional term (Levine and Crisp 1999). Ramón J. Velásquez, a noted historian ,was chosen by the Senate to complete the remainder of Pérez' term in office. Thus the crises of governability persisted throughout the Pérez administration and had exploded with the military coups of 1992 (Molina and Pérez 1998).

Rafael Caldera, who had separated from COPEI, the party he founded and headed won the presidential elections in 1993 on a platform of autonomy and in electoral alliance with MAS and other minor parties that captured the plurality of votes for the president. Elected for the second time, earlier as COPEI candidate, Caldera's presidential election of 1993 mark a new trend in the Venezuelan politics where the

candidate that was chosen was neither from AD nor COPEI. President Caldera took office with the political agenda of returning Venezuela to the good old days of pacted, populist regime with the state playing the central role in the form of an interventionist state. His political agenda was based on social equity, justice and an end to neo-liberal economic reforms. He suspended constitutional guarantees of the citizens through an executive decree to tackle the menace of corruption in political life and the corporate sector which were responsible for the present crises. The Caldera administration introduced new exchange and price control measures to overcome the rising inflation, recession and capital flight. With the exit of privatisation and neo-liberal policies, foreign investment dropped and the banking sector soon was on the verge of collapsing (Trinkunas 2002).

Caldera's economic programme was mainly formulated by those economists who were very critical of the structural adjustment programmes of the earlier government. In addition to the political crises that his government inherited, there was a serious financial crisis that escalated soon after he took office. The crisis began with the bankruptcy of Banco Latino, the second largest bank in the country. The government had the option of either closing the bank even though it had 10 percent of the total deposits in the commercial banks or providing with the financial assistance. The bailout took a heavy toll on the already broke government which was suffering from enormous foreign debts and budget deficits (Lander 1996).

President Caldera sought to revive the old glory of Punto Fijo by crafting civilian control and subordination of the armed forces in a desperate attempt to save the Venezuelan democracy. He reestablished himself as the commander-in-chief of the armed forces and dismissed Admiral Muñoz Leon as the Defense Minister several months before the completion of his term. The decision to appoint a junior army general as the new defense minister infuriated many senior officers who were forced to resign out of sheer humiliation. The appeasement policies of President Caldera were also extended to those young officers who had participated in the coup of 1992. They were pardoned and made to retire immediately from the armed forces (Trinkunas 2002).

The economic and the social policies and the anti-corruption crusade of President Caldera were welcomed by the armed forces. His ideas of state led development to bring forth national security was approved and supported by the officials. To a certain

extent President Caldera was able to minimize the level of public anger with his less conflicting economic policies but it was short lived.

In order to bring back the sense of professionalism within the armed forces, the President ordered the deployment of armed forces to suppress the activities of Colombian insurgents in the border areas. There were numerous attacks on the military outposts in Venezuela's frontier region by the guerillas of the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Columbia (FARC) causing many casualties between the period from 1994 and 1998. President Caldera recalled and deployed the military personnel from all services for external and internal security duties. The stern position adopted by the President contrasted with the foreign policies of former President Perez. Besides security related issues, the soldiers were also deployed to maintain emergency services during general strikes by public sector employees. Another strike by the doctors was also handled in the same fashion deploying armed forces doctors in the government hospitals. The air traffic controllers at major airports were also replaced by air force counterparts. Army was also deployed at the Caracas public transportation when there was a general strike by the metro employees. Thus the national security doctrine of 'democracy and development' was applied though military participation in public services (Trinkunas 2002). Caldera tried to rebuilt the institution through the policies of appeasement which pacified the officer corps to a certain extent and reasserted his image as a concerned commander-in-chief. His less conflicting economic policies and popular support kept the conspirators away from hatching any new plots against the regime. However the honeymoon period of president Caldera was short lived and after 1995, anti government protests and strikes became more frequent (Trinkunas 2002). President Caldera was also criticised for promoting his son-in-law as the Chief of the Military Office in the Presidency and appointing his son as the minister in charge of the Presidential Secretariat (Saavedra 2001).

### **Summary and Conclusions**

The Venezuelan political experience with the emphasis on central leadership, norms of coalition and compromises, elite consensus and institution building had an enduring significance Venezuelan democratic life after 1958. The political class made a conscious and successful effort to maintain, sustain and control democracy. The lessons from the experiences of *trienio* (1945-1948) were put into practice by the

civilian government and they can be broadly summarized as: pacts and coalitions; inter-elite consensus and compromise; controlled and channeled participation; and exclusion of the revolutionary Left (Levine 1985).

A noted feature of Venezuelan democracy during the transition era was that it was structurally based on oil which helped in accommodating diverse interests necessary for its survival. Oil as a commodity had a major impact on the socio-economic structure of the Venezuelan society. The transformation from agricultural to an oil based economy weakened and eventually displaced the traditional oligarchy. With it the caste-based like politics was sidelined and it paved the way for party politics with its base in the large middle class and labour fostered by the petroleum industry.

The petrodollars helped in building up a strong coalition and during 1930s its mismanagement was the precursor of regime change. The feasibility and sustainability of the pacted democracy was largely possible due to oil revenues which helped in appeasing different sections of society.

Betancourt and the other leaders were able to expand the horizon of the political spectrum and apply the experiences of the *trienio* in the transition era in the form of Pact of Punto Fijo and Programa Mínimo de Gobierno. The leaders were able to build an atmosphere of trust among them which was one of the chief indicators of Betancourt's statecraft. Granting concessions to the weaker parties further enabled AD to create a major stake in the system. The AD administration fuelled by oil was able to avoid extreme nationalistic tendencies which some of the Latin American countries experienced during 1960s and 1970s (Karl 1987).

The rentier state theory in the Venezuelan context could be applied to a certain extent. Oil rents created favorable conditions for the ruling elite by forming stable patronage networks, widespread clientelistic relations and distribution policies that weakened the democratic pressure from the general populace. The formation of a highly centralised administration with the president as the supreme authority helped in stabilising the political system by reducing the possibility of power struggle between local or regional forces and the central government and that of a separatist conflict often associated with oil (Mähler 2009)

Like all pacted democracies, Venezuela also had its own short comings. It sometimes became too rigid to allow future socio-economic transformation of society. The productivity and the efficiency of the state was also hindered in the long run since the agreements and pacts were based on the spoils system (Karl 1987).The *Partidocracia*

system (party system) was based on institutionalisation and consensus building behavioural pattern of the elites but with time it was more inclined towards clientelistic and patronage networks. These networks in the beginning had a stabilising and conflict reducing effect but in the long run they gradually reduced the efficiency of the political institutions and public administration with waste and unabated corruption. The decline in legitimacy and effectiveness of the Pérez administration provided the necessary preconditions for a coup'd etat. The coup attempts of 1992 were a turning point in the Venezuelan political history as it questioned the sustainability of the democratic era and the Punto Fijo political system as there was a complete overhaul of the previous political system to form a new system where the armed forces has taken central stage.

## **Chapter 3**

### **CIVIL-MILITARY RELATIONS IN VENEZUELA UNDER HUGO CHÁVEZ**

In analysing contemporary Latin American democracies, one of the core issues is the nature of civil-military relations. The wider and complex subject of civil-military relations is conditioned by the realities of time and context. Admittedly, the pattern of civil-military relations in Latin America is diverse in nature and each pattern represents a complex interaction involving the structure, status, position and power of different groups pertaining to a specific socio-economic environment. The distribution of power between the civilian and military actors within the state is an important aspect of any civil-military relations. The range of civil-military relations pertains to situations where civil authority is supreme and is at the helm of affairs to conditions where there is direct and forcible usurpation of power through coups by the military to meet non-military ends (McAlister 1966).

In between the two stated positions, there is a wide and varied gamut of civil-military relations in democracies as well as non-democracies.

The importance of the military as a power factor in Latin American politics is well established fact and its relation with the civilian actors of the state can be regarded as a discrete historical and sociological problem (McAlister 1966). A peculiar behaviour that is often observed in Latin American politics is that the democratic governments are often made the scapegoat during periods of instability and turbulence. The military would eventually try to weaken the ruling elite through threats, intimidation and coercion and create a political vacuum which is ultimately filled by the antidemocratic forces.

The traditional dominance of Venezuelan politics by the armed forces has been its paramount feature. In the words of its founder *Símon Bolívar*, Venezuela is a barrack and it continued to be so for more than a century after gaining independence. The Venezuelan history could be narrated in the lives of its military dictators. Considering the civilian rule as incompetent and irresponsible, the armed forces has crowned themselves as the supreme authority (Lieuwen 1960). Following the War of Independence, militarism and militarisation of the political authority became the distinct feature of the Venezuelan political pattern (Johnson 1971, Lombardi 1977). The post independence period saw the emergence of charismatic military chieftain who maintained a sizeable group of armed supporters amidst the domestic turmoil of that period where there was a constant struggle for power among the regional



caudillos. This was typical of Lyle McAlister's 'Gendarmist State' that Venezuela experienced during the nineteenth century.<sup>1</sup>

The third chapter has broadly three sections. The first section analyses the different patterns and types of civil-military relations and how it transforms from one pattern to another owing to socio-economic and political conditions in the context of Venezuela since the time of her independence. The second section dwells with the evolving pattern of civil-military relations since Hugo Chávez became the president in 1998. The third and the final section examines the nature of the Chavez regime and how he has brought the military in the political domain with the help of the Constitution of 1999 and assigning the armed forces with civic-action plans and social missions.

### **Metamorphosis of Civil-Military Relations**

The pattern or types of civil-military relations do not exist in pure form and have a tendency to metamorphose from one to another. Owing to changes in the socio-economic structure within the praetorian and gendarmist state, they may transform into a civilist state and sometimes political and economic strain in the civilist state could lead to the formation of a praetorian or gendarmist pattern of civil-military relations (McAlister 1966).

The Venezuelan politics by the middle of the nineteenth century was reduced to a struggle of power between the competing factions of the armed forces as with the passage of time the patriotic characteristics of the early military rulers such as Simon Bolívar and José Antonio Páez instilled in the army began to fade. It had become a struggle to siege and control of the nation's resources (Lieuwen 1960). Warlordism and caudillo politics which was based on personal ties and patron-client relationship became the order of the day.

1. Gendarmist State emerges where a single individual generally but not always a military man imposes a new social and political order with the help of a mercenary army and uses it as a gendarmery to maintain and consolidate his position and power.

After the end of the First World War, the rise of modern armies with technical skills and weapons eventually gave a final blow to the provincial caudillo (Johnson 1974: 111).

The Revolution of Liberal Restoration of Cipriano Castro in 1899 was an important turning point in the history of the Venezuelan military. After becoming the president in 1899, Castro began to modernise his regional army with newly acquired weapons and entrusted General Juan Vicente Gómez to recruit more regional loyalists from Táchira. Castro improvised his regional army by establishing a general staff, a regularised chain of command and an implicit organisational structure with the sole motive of defeating rival caudillos. The period (1899-1945) thus saw a number of dictatorial successions from the Andean region particularly from Táchira. Popularly known as 'Andean Hegemony', the period marked a gradual institutionalisation of the military based on regional cohesiveness. The institutionalised army was firmly behind the Andean leaders and the presidency and key military command were restricted to Tachirences (Bigler 1977).

The pattern of civil-military relations that Venezuela witnessed during the period from 1945 to 1958 broadly falls under the category of a 'Praetorian State'. It is characterized by frequent overthrow of governments by military coups (*golpe de estado*) to meet non-military ends. Such a state was associated with a high degree of social and political disorganisation and low level of military professionalism within the armed forces (McAlister 1966). Isías Medina Angarita, a Tachirese General succeeded Eleazar López Contreras in 1941. During his tenure political parties were provided with a platform to organise and participate openly in public activities and Acción Democrática (AD) was one of the first political parties to do so legally. President Angarita believed that military and civilian spheres of activity should be treated as a separate domain from each other. Unlike his predecessors, Medina government was more tolerant towards all kinds civilian political activity which eventually led him to neglect the pertinent issues faces by the armed forces during his tenure (Bigler 1977).

The administration of General Medina Angarita was overthrown in Oct 18, 1945 by a *golpe* which was led a joint collaboration between the young army officers and members of Acción Democrática (AD). The primary motive behind the coup undertaken by the junior officials known as Unión Patriótica Militar (UPM) was the failure of Medina government to take concrete steps towards military

professionalisation, modernisation of the armed forces which was blocked by the Andean dominance in the upper ranks of the military institution. The ambitious, well trained young officers felt that their career opportunities were blocked by the cronyism of the non-professional Andean soldiers who were very much inferior in training and skills (Bigler 1977).

The short lived administration of AD (1945-1948) known as the *trienio* was turbulent and was subsequently overthrown by the same group of officers who had brought it to power (Bigler 1977:117). There was scramble for power after President Rómulo Gallegos was overthrown from power and Delgado Chalbaud was assassinated in 1950. Colonel Pérez Jiménez became the unrivaled head of the military and a prominent presidential candidate. Jovita Vilalba won the election but unfortunately his government was overthrown by coup by Pérez Jiménez with the armed forces firmly behind his support. Pérez Jiménez remained the President till 1958. Under his regime all political activities were suppressed and many leaders were prosecuted or went into exile. Pérez Jiménez brought the social and political machinery under its grip through repressive measures.

After 1957, there was an outright rejection of the military government which was evident through massive national strikes by the labour, business and other sections of the society. Civilian unrest soon took over the streets of Venezuela. The economy began to crumble owing to the fall in oil prices in 1957 which had serious repercussions on the regime of Pérez Jiménez. The failure on the political and economic fronts of the dictatorial regime of Pérez Jiménez gave the much needed impetus to establish a broad consensus among the civilian elites for regime transformation. The legitimacy crises faced by the dictator was further aggravated when young army and navy officers, disgruntled by the omnipotent presence of clientelism and favouritism among the upper ranks of the armed forces tried to overthrow the regime of the dictator. Pérez Jiménez fled the country on 23 January 1958 in the wake an insurrection led by the navy and with the support of the masses (Trinkunas 2001).

After the fall of the dictatorship of Pérez Jiménez, the armed forces were split into three competing factions, each having its own agenda. The air force and the junior officers of the army were led by Lieutenant Colonel Hugo Trejo who was involved in the early rebellion against the dictator. The navy was led by former Commander Admiral Wolfgang who quickly joined hands with the democratisers for a regime

change. The split within the armed forces into three hostile camps facilitated the process of democratisation as there was no effective opposition from upper echelon of the armed forces. During the transition from dictatorship to democracy in 1958, two of the three factions were eventually eliminated through fierce competition and divide and conquer strategies of the civilian elites. Thus any cohesive opposition to democratisation was an enormous and impossible task for the armed forces (Trinkunas 2001).

The AD under Rómulo Betancourt came to power in 1959 after getting an overwhelming majority in the democratically held elections, ushering a period of democratic experimentation in Venezuela. The period of democratic transition created an opportunity of civilian control of the armed forces which was marked by high level of mass mobilization, unity among the political strata and fragmentation in the hierarchy of the military institution. The period from 1958 to 1992 can be termed as a 'civilist state' which provided one of the patterns of civil-military relations in Venezuela.<sup>2</sup>

The emergence of new pattern of civil-military relations after 1958 in Venezuela can be attributed to the following factors. First, the military began to lose the support of the common population as regular strikes and protests demonstrated the unacceptability of the military rule and its credibility to provide governance. Second, the armed forces no longer had supremacy over other services like the navy and the air force post internal changes brought forth within the military establishment by the civilian government. Third, the political parties showed their solidarity during the transition process and crafted a broad based consensus on common programme of governance known as the Pact of Punto Fijo. The opposition to military regime was thus not confined to political parties and the Junta Patriótica but had extended to groups like private business houses, the Church, medical and engineering societies and the intelligencia.

2. According to Lyle McAlister, a civilist state is characterized by the civilian supremacy and authority over the armed forces with a professionalized and an autonomous military and a stable civil-military coalition

The civilian governments in Latin America in general and Venezuela in particular during Punto Fijo understood the fact that for the military to faithfully execute policies, the armed establishment should be subjected to institutionalised civilian control. The endurance of the civilian control was built on a structured relation that formalised stable and supportive encounters between political elites and the military personnel (Pion-Berlin 2009).

David Pion- Berlin has articulated four guidelines that solidify the civilian control of the armed forces: enhancing the civilian presence; empowering the defense ministries; lowering military vertical authority and dividing the military power. Civilianised institutions and the leaders must ensure that policy issues get translated to defense actions and keep vigilance against evasion of the duties by the armed forces. The defense institutions should prepare the armed forces to serve the policy goals of the civilian government.

The ministry of defence (MOD) is an indispensable mechanism for establishing and asserting the civilian control of the armed forces. It acts as an organisational link between the civilian government and the military that allows the governing elites to translate policy preferences into military commands.

The ministry is responsible for organising the defense forces and preparing defense objectives, plans, strategies and even doctrines. But this is not so in the case of Latin America where defense ministry is relegated to administrative jobs, leaving strategic and defense related issues in the hands of the president and the top military brass and Venezuela being no exception (Pion-Berlin 2009).

Samuel J. Huntington has also formulated some key aspects of organizational design pertaining to civil-military relations: lowering the level and reducing the scope of military authority; keeping vital strategic policy matters in the hands of the top civilian officials and keeping the secretary of defense well informed of the civilian and military advice.<sup>3</sup>

In the backdrop of analysis along the lines of Pion-Berlin and Huntington, some key aspects of civil-military relations from the period from 1958 to 1992 can be put forth in the following manner.

3. Samuel Huntington, *The Soldier and the State: The Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations*

After assuming power, Betancourt tried to craft institutional mechanisms that would shift centers of power away from the military and treated the institution as another part of public bureaucracy. The ruling elite were not keen to take the support of the military for the redressal of grievances. To prevent any political adventurism by the armed forces, Betancourt had also removed the active duty officers who had close ties with the former dictator. To make his image as the commander-in-chief more prominent and pronounced, Betancourt made frequent visits to the military bases. The 'objective control' of the armed forces was firmly established and the ministry of defense became the central focus of civil-military coalition (Bigler 1977:122). Betancourt shifted the focus of the armed forces towards the handling of the guerilla conflict, thereby minimizing the possibility of any threat against the democratic regime.

During the administration of Rómulo Betancourt and Raul Leoni, the ministry of defense went to active military personnel in whom the president has full confidence and faith. The institutional framework devised by the civilian leaders made sure that they had full control and authority over the armed forces and the role of the president as the commander-in-chief was fully asserted.

The General Staff which was authorised to maintain centralised control of all military services was replaced by a Joint Staff having no operational authority over the individual services. In a bid to avoid any military adventurism, the civilian government eliminated joint military education thus reducing the possibility of any inter-service collaboration with the potential conspirators.

The military reforms introduced by the regime created many independent centers of power within the armed forces which made them fully dependent on the civilian government for distribution of resources and resolving issues of coordination (Trinkunas 2001).

The 1961 Constitution continued the furtherance of the civilian control of the armed forces. The institution of civilian oversight was devised through the legal provisions in the constitution and one of the clauses declared the armed forces as an "apolitical, obedient and non-deliberative" body. As described elaborately in the previous chapter, the Senate was in charge of approving all promotions to the rank of Colonel and General and also for passing of the foreign military missions into its territory and Venezuelan missions abroad. Both the Houses of the Congress were required to give their approval on the Government budgets and other appointments including those of

the armed forces. Thus the military compliance with the government authority was gradually brought in areas concerning the missions, organisation and engagement of military activities. The civilian government limited the period of active of services and the rotation process of the military command was done at a faster pace giving most of the officers an opportunity to secure the top ranked position at some junction of their professional career. The other branches of the defense machinery which was historically dominated by an all encompassing military became more independent (Norden 1998: 149). The active military men were debarred from holding electoral positions and exercising their franchise. The political influence over the armed forces was enhanced through political loyalties and family ties. The trust and confidence between the armed forces and the civilian government was gradually building up but military was still an isolated elite in the 1960s.

Another feature of military politicisation that was witnessed during the democratic period was that the doctrine of developmentalism was infused within the conceptual framework of national defence and security. The developmentalist ethos was reinvigorated in the internal role expansive functioning of the state. Thus it was seen as a contributing act of the armed forces towards the society (Bigler 1977).

The civilian control towards or away from the armed forces can be measured using two variables: i. *regime leverage* over the armed forces; and ii. *regime capacity* to supervise national defense and security.

*Regime leverage* became a reality when the civilian authority devised strategies like ‘divide and conquer’ giving more empowerment to the elected officials. The strategy tends to exploit the internal military weaknesses, encouraging competition among the forces thereby minimising the tendencies of military intervention. Once so divided, each service is motivated to accrue a better deal for itself through better cooperation with the civilian government (Pion-Berlin 2010). The strategies applied by the civilian government became written rules as they were legally sanctified which further helped in stabilising the civil-military relations in Venezuela.<sup>4</sup>

4. The civilian government removed the centralised military command structure particularly the Estado Mayor General and endowed more autonomy to each branch of the military services pertaining to their administrative and military needs. Each service created its own system of independent training centers, garrisons and commands that gave them little scope and time to interact or have contacts with other members of the armed forces. The civilian leaders in order to neutralise the armed forces created a new counterbalancing security forces such as the gendarmeries or the national police forces which acted as deterrent within the armed forces.

The 1961 Constitution thus helped in institutionalising the civilian rule. Executive decrees, legislative actions or court judgments were used as tools in taming the armed forces to maintain a state of equilibrium in the civil-military relations. The civilian authority in a bid to decentralise the military services granted more resources and professional autonomy and provided amnesty to those who committed crimes during the previous dictator.

*Regime capacity* is established when the civilian government tends to manage the defence affairs that creates permanent institutions to maintain and sustain the leverage over the military. It includes budgetary resource allotment to the armed forces and appointment of civilian experts committed to national defence in the state ministries, legislatures and the courts. The role of independent press and the civil society is also important in this regard. The civilian defense experts in the government deal with the military bureaucracies and allocation of military budgets, institutionalising the civilian oversight mechanism. In civil society groups and organizations like the military think-tanks and human rights groups provide the necessary expertise to the civilian government (Trinkunas 2001).

The oil crisis of 1960s and 1970s increased government revenues to a all new high which helped in increasing defence budgets to almost double during the period from 1967 to 1977. During this period, the center of focus of civil-military relations has shifted to budgetary matters.

The period also saw massive procurements of armaments to secure its territorial boundary and upgrade defense capabilities and many new missions were sent to countries like United States and in Europe to seek advanced training ( Trinkunas 2002: 46).

Personalistic and political ties undermined the merit based professionalism of the armed forces.

The intense politicisation of the armed forces pertaining to promotions and assignments disgruntled the junior officers who had set high standards of military ethos during their professional career. To a certain extent the politicisation of the armed forces helped in countering the institutional autonomy on important issues but created a major divide between the junior officers and the higher ranked military man and their civilian counterparts. The military discontent was managed through policies of appeasement and fragmentation within the military hierarchy. But the growing distance between the admirals and the general and their subordinate officers and the



subsequent alienation of the young officers was given a blind eye by the civilian government. Many junior officers could truly feel the real sense of democracy when they were inducted in civic action missions giving them an opportunity to relate themselves with the populace. All these factors culminated in the coup attempts of 1992. But the institutionalised mechanism of divide and conquer prohibited the conspirators from forming a cohesive structure between different services and the strong informal links between the military high command and the governing elite prevented from materialising the coup attempts of 1992 (Trinkunas 2010).

### **Evolving pattern of Civil-Military relations under Hugo Chávez**

Hugo Chávez took over the reign as the President of Venezuela on 6<sup>th</sup> December 1998 by securing 56 percent of the electoral votes. The two prominent parties, AD and COPEI who dominated the Venezuelan political scene for nearly four decades were reduced to single digits. The dramatic shift in the voter's preference and loyalties resonates from the deep legitimacy crises faced by the previous government and the Venezuelan masses calling for a radical change.

The stellar rise of Hugo Chávez since the military coup of 1992 till the presidential elections of 1998 has been phenomenal. The support base that he was able to build during the period from 1992 to 1998 led to his victory in 1998 with 56.2 percent of votes in his favour. His electoral victory was a cumulative effect of many factors which includes the deterioration of the living standards of the Venezuelans, a stagnant economy, the decay and decline in the traditional party system and the growing organisational strength of the Chávez party, the unabated political corruption that was deeply rooted and the dynamic electoral campaign of Hugo Chávez. He was able to make a serious dent into the prime bastions of the two leading parties thus shifting the voter's preference in his favour.

The 1998 Presidential elections ushered a new era in the Venezuelan polity as a former anti democratic leader was elected through democratic means. Chávez has become a key player in the contemporary Venezuelan politics. A charismatic leader with a mass following, he was able to mould the psychological and the sociological elements of the Venezuelan society to create a mass hysteria. His intense campaigning through mass mobilisation gave a sense of assurance to the common man that he no

longer represented a threat to the democratic form of government. The violent overthrow of democratic regime will not take place but will be replaced by a peaceful change (Canache 2002: 74).

The second argument that supported Chávez's rise to the helm of Venezuelan politics was the fact that many of his supporters did not value the cherished goals of democracy and were ready to take the risk if it was for the betterment of the common man. The democratic transgressions are often forgotten and forgiven if it was for an improved government. Also the support that President Chávez garnered during 1998 was from that section that valued democracy but was highly dissatisfied with the incumbent government and its practices and policies (Canache 2002). The consistent support of the electorate in the five elections or referenda towards Hugo Chávez and the overwhelming victory in the Presidential elections in 1998 vindicated his position to enact a new constitution in 1999. Therefore, the Constituent Assembly was convened to rewrite the Constitution of 1961 which attempted to institutionalise the civilian control of the armed forces. (Trinkunas 2002).

The new Constitution of 1999 has major implications on the civil-military relations in Venezuela. The civil-military relations have undergone a major transformation during the tenure of President Hugo Chávez. First, there is an intense politicisation of armed forces during his period. Second, military roles and missions were reoriented from national defense to internal security. And finally, the expansion of armed forces in the political arena has been further reinforced by the Constitution of 1999 dismantling the traditional control of armed forces established during the period of Punto Fijo. The expansion of the role of the armed forces during the tenure of Hugo Chávez has translated into greater political power of the armed forces. The radical shift in the roles of the armed forces is manifested in a manner where they are involved in developmental works: preparing for an asymmetric warfare and was deployed for political intervention during conflicts with PDVSA (Venezuelan State Oil Company) and the police. The high degree of military participation in non-defense making and implementation has undermined the civilian control of the armed forces and increased the potential for civil-military conflict (Trinkunas 2002: Norden 1998). The civil-military relations after 1998 has tilted in favour of the armed forces as President Chávez has established a direct and unmediated personal control of the military to materialise his objective of achieving a revolutionary transformation of Venezuela (Trinkunas 2010).

President Chávez has primarily focused on the importance of military participation in economic development and national security while at the same time, creating a counter-weight through his new civilian based militia (Norden 2009). The utilisation of the armed forces to materialise the government's broader agenda has strengthened some aspects of civil-military alliance to a certain extent. Deborah Norden has reiterated that military contestation during the period of President Chávez reflects a dangerous trait as it not only extends to the expansion or protection of institutional privileges of the armed forces but it often expresses the rejection of the regime itself.

### **Politicisation of the Armed forces under Hugo Chávez**

Hugo Chávez after winning the presidential elections in 1998 has remained true to his military lineage and background and his frequent public appearance in military uniforms has raised eyebrows over the civilian nature of the post of the commander-in-chief of a democratic regime. The increased participation of military in the political domain of Venezuela has raised serious questions regarding the intentions and motives of the President as it conflicts with the traditional apolitical and non-deliberative role of the armed forces.

- I. Soon after taking on the office of the President, Chávez formed a new parallel military structure that falls outside the traditional chain of military command (Trinkunas 2010). In the election campaign in the year 2000, Chávez sought re-election for an extended term of six years under the new constitution of 1999. The election saw bitter contest between two former military men i.e. between Hugo Chávez and Francisco Arias Cárdenas. The latter was a co-conspirator in the February 1992 coup attempt but eventually opted out of the Chávez camp due to personal disagreement over the direction of the Bolivarian Revolution. Cardenas later became active in politics after being elected as the governor of the state of Zulia. The division of the armed forces between the Aristas and the Chavistas resurfaced the differences and the possibility of an internal division within the armed forces (Trinkunas 2002).
- II. President Chávez inducted active-duty and retired military officers to staff political and bureaucratic positions. The loyal officers have been well positioned in Legislative Commissions, Judicial Police Corps (CTPJ), Internal Affairs Ministry, Sports National Institute (IND), National Budgetary Office(OCEPRE) and

Agriculture Ministry. By June 2001, as many as 176 active duty military officers had retained senior ministerial and administrative positions in the government. The key positions that were meant to be politically non-partisan such as the attorney general, national comptroller general and the majority of the members of the National Executive Council have been identified with Chavismo (Ellner 2010). Some close allies were also given prominent berth in the cabinet and the governorship of the federal district during the transition to Quinta Republica (Fifth Republic).<sup>5</sup>

- III. The position of the President and the Vice-President of Petróleos de Venezuela (PDVSA) which is a state owned oil company and the Chief Executive Officer of the US subsidiary, CITGO were handed over to military officials. Guaicaipuro Lameda who was a Brigadier General of the Venezuelan army became the President of Petróleos de Venezuela from October 2000 to February 2002 (Trinkunas 2002).
- IV. A Constitutional enactment of 2000 also allowed the re-incorporation of ex-military rebels into active ranks in the armed forces. The rebel leaders of 1992 coup were re-coroneted with their earlier ranks and many found suitable position in the government machinery.
- V. A general referendum known as the 2000 ‘Mega Elections’ were carried out to re-elect the President, governors and mayors of different states. President Chávez was re-elected again for a term of six years with an electoral support of 59.7 percent of votes.
- VI. The MVR candidates who contested for the 23 governorship posts secured 14 of them and out of which 7 went to military officers (Bastidas 2004). This was followed by the presidential recall election of 2004 and the referenda on the constitution of 1999, the 69-article constitutional reform in 2007 and the constitutional amendment in 2009. The system of referenda clearly indicates the elements of direct or participatory democracy in Venezuelan political system under Chávez.
- VII. The diplomatic appointments in the new Chávez administration is formulated in a quota system where 51 percent of the appointees are from professional diplomatic field and the rest 49 percent are reserved for ex-military men. Former Defense Minister Raúl Salazar who had retired from the army was appointed as the Ambassador to the United States.

5. The term Quinta Republica or Fifth Republic was coined by the supporters of Hugo Chávez to distinguish and differentiate their movement from other political parties.

- VIII. As many as eight more military officers were appointed to embassies in Asia, Latin America and Europe during that year (Bastidas 2004). President Chávez has effectively streamlined military and defense policies with the government's broader political and social agenda and has created an impression that there is a considerable cohesion in the regime's overall approach to military and politics (Norden 2009).
- IX. In order to retain his control and subordination of the armed forces and in return gain support and loyalty from them, Chávez has extensively used his presidential powers to promote and reward those officers who were sympathetic to the cause of Bolivarianism and expel those who were against it. Caldera's son-in-law General Rubén Rojas Pérez who had reached top position within a short period of time during his regime was retired soon after Chávez assumed presidency. The allies of the President Chávez were rewarded with important positions like General Lucas Rincón Romero became the Inspector General de la Fuerza Armada, a job which was reserved for the civilians during the Punto Fijo. General Manuel Rosendo was appointed as the commander of CUFAN which manages the operational control of all military assets in Venezuela (Trinkunas 2002).
- X. The Defence Ministry which holds a key position in defining civil-military relations has always been bestowed upon military man on whom the President had full confidence. This tradition was carried out since the time of Punto Fijo. President Chávez had tried to diverge from this pattern of selection when José Vicente Rangel – a close ally was appointed as the Defense Minister for a short period from February 2001-April 2002. The April 2002 coup attempt against Chávez brought back the practice of military Defense Ministers (Norden 2009). The Organic Law of the Armed Forces (LOFAN) which corresponds to July 2008 reform relegated the Defense Ministry to a purely administrative function. The law authorises the President to exercise supreme command over the armed forces, direct the general development of the operations, defines and activates the area of conflict, the theaters of operations and strategic regions of defense, the spaces for maneuvers and demonstrations, designating their respective commanders and assigning corresponding territorial jurisdiction. One of the prominent aspects inherent in the new Organic Law was the official creation of the National Bolivarian Militia, earlier known as the General Command for the Reserve and National Mobilization. The militia was initially created as a volunteer civilian reserve force in February 2006.

The 2006 Organic Law of the Armed Forces not only gave formal reorganization to the militia but also placed it on an equal footing with the traditional armed forces and was under the direct authority and supervision of the President (Norden 2009).

The military policies of President Chávez have been subjected to extreme criticism. A group of retired military officers formed a group called Frente Institucional Militar (FIM) by March 2000. The group which was a non-political organization demanded the immediate end of military politicization, the use of armed forces in Plan Bolívar to implement social programs and also for personal gain. Another group called Junta Patriótica Militar (Patriotic Military Junta) had demanded the immediate resignation of President Chávez and raised issues of corruption in Plan Bolívar and the undemocratic concentration of power in one hand and the deteriorating Church-State relationship (Bastidas 2004). Cracks and strains began to develop within the military as nearly 125 officers had revoked their support to the President. Many officers who had participated in 11<sup>th</sup> April 2002 coup declared 'legitimate disobedience' to show their anger and had asked for President's resignation.<sup>6</sup> The new Organic Law was seen to have threatened the traditional military prerogatives. It had taken away the powers of the Service Chief to a certain extent over the issues of control of its organisation and eliminated the traditional military's monopoly on the use of forces. The new structure that has been established owing to the new law has divided the military regionally with joint commands at each location and provided for a joint 'Strategic Operational Command' which is responsible for planning, coordinating and executing all military operations. The traditional military services i.e. army, navy and air force was placed organizationally parallel to both the regional and operational command but at the same time they were subordinated to the Strategic Operational Command (Norden 2009).

### **Constitution of 1999 and its implications on the Armed Forces**

The Constitution of 1999 is an embodiment of the social and political agenda of President Chávez and it evolved new equation in the civil-military relations in Venezuela.

6. Legitimate Disobedience' is one of the citizen's rights granted by the 1999 Constitution of Venezuela.

The expansion of the role of the armed forces in the Venezuelan politics has been legalised by this new document. It was particularly designed to discard and dismantle the institutional structures that were developed during the period of Punto Fijo. President Chávez has made considerable changes in the structure of the armed forces and its relationship to the state (Trinkunas 2010).

A national referendum was called on 2<sup>nd</sup> February 1999 to approve of a National Constituent Assembly. The Assembly was comprised of 131 seats, out of which 121 were the MVR members.<sup>7</sup> The new Constitution contains 350 articles and it intended to concentrate powers and authority solely in the hands of the President. The provisions for enforcement of laws are very weak and the President is endowed with immense powers and authority to run the government at his will (Trinkunas 2002: Saavedra 2001).

By virtue of Article 328, the military services will be subordinated to a supreme command and the General Staff was formed to take charge of planning, conduct and oversight of the entire military administration and its operational functions. The civilian control of the armed forces which was made possible through the Constitution of 1961 was gradually eliminated and was replaced by more politicised armed forces under the command of president Chávez who is the sole decision making authority. The macro-structure of the armed forces was transformed into Estado Mayor Centralizado (Centralized High Command).

There was a clear separation of jurisdiction between administrative and political activities of the Defence Ministry and the operational activities of the army. A civilian Defence Minister now appointed is independent of the Chief General and is responsible for the administrative and the political issues of the Ministry whereas the latter is in charge of the operational functions of the military institution (Bastidas 2004).

The internal security doctrine and its relation to the conceptual framework of developmentalism has been a prominent feature of Latin American politics (Pion-Berlin 1992). Article 328 reinvigorates this aspect of military politicisation by redefining the missions of armed forces with respect to national defense and maintenance internal order (Trinkunas 2002).

7. The new constitution of 1999 was adopted by the Constituent Assembly in the third referendum approved by 72 percent of the electorate.

The army was brought into the rubric of internal domestic functioning and has been the backbone of the Bolivarian Revolution. Under Article 328, the armed forces is charged with guaranteeing the independence, sovereignty and integrity of the nation by providing for defence and by helping to maintain internal order and achieve national development.<sup>8</sup> There is no distinction between the external and internal roles of the armed forces in the name of security. There can be a detrimental effect on civil-military relations if the duties assigned to the armed forces are not in tune to their professional calling as it gives the armed forces an opportunity to increase its sphere of influence (Pion-Berlin 1992).

Article 330 of the new constitution guarantees the member of the armed forces with the right to vote. The article acknowledges that the soldiers will not participate in acts of political advertising, militancy and or proselytizing. The right to vote provided the armed forces to act within a wider scope of political debate which was limited by the 1977 Suffrage Organic Law which clearly states that the member of the armed forces will not exercise suffrage while in military service. This act was further reinforced by the 1990 Organic law of the Armed Forces. Article 331 eliminates the control and oversight of the armed forces by the Legislature in the form of approving military promotions. The legislature is completely denied the participatory role which it used to play during the period of Punto Fijo regarding military policies, organization, acquisition, structure of the armed forces etc. Thus by virtue of article 236, the President is the sole arbiter regarding military promotions of colonels and generals. The propose Organic Law extended the period of the military services of armed force from thirty to forty years and included the new senior rank officer of Lieutenant General.

### **New Military Roles and Missions under Hugo Chávez**

Soon after becoming the President in 1998, Hugo Chávez has brought the armed forces under the rubric of his greater social and political agenda.

Plan Bolívar 2000 was one of the first ‘civic action plan’ that dramatically expanded the role of the armed forces in domestic policy implementation.

8. Constitución de la República Bolivariana de Venezuela



The Plan was inaugurated on February 27, 1999 to mark the tenth anniversary of the Cracazo riots that had shaken the Venezuelan polity to its core (Bastidas 2004). The military missions acted as a catalyst in further politicising the armed forces as there was a constant interaction between the armed forces and the underprivileged section.

The junior officers who were assigned the tasks of social reconstruction accepted with enthusiasm but the officers belonging from the privileged class was not that pleased as they perceived it to be against their professional calling (Pion-Berlin2004).

The Defence Ministry has proposed eighteen missions for the armed forces as compared to six which is present in the existing Organic Law. The Plan Bolívar 2000 was primarily intended to build infrastructure facilities, to provide health care facilities to the poor, to combat illiteracy and unemployment and distribution of food. The plan was initially targeted for a period of six months but later became an integral part of the President's administrative policies (Trinkunas 2002).

President Chávez wanted to change the image of the military in society and give them a new direction by inducting them in his social projects. He was able to convert the issues of poverty and hunger into a major topic of public debate. The Plan Bolívar 2000 has given the State Garrison commandants an opportunity to develop their own plan in accordance with the indigenous and local needs. General García Carneiro developed the Plan Avispa (Wasps Plan) to build small houses engaging civilian workers in the state of Aragua. The first year of the Plan Bolívar 2000 was devoted to repairing and building infrastructure (Bastidas 2004).

Each services of the armed force are deployed to formulate and execute the social agenda of President Chávez. The air force began to provide low cost rural transportation through the 'Social Routes' Plan (Rutas Sociales). The navy had its own plan called Pescar 2000 where the officers organise various cooperatives for fishermen and facilitate their transportation and equipment maintenance. The National Guard are made responsible for the National Plan for Citizen's Security (Trnkunas 2002; Bastidas 2004). The military was used extensively in the flood relief programs in December 1999 in the coastal state of Vargas where thousands of people were rendered homeless by the devastating floods. The military missions became a part of a daily educational and training experience of the armed forces. Another important observation to be made in this regard is that the missions are assigned by the constitutionally elected officials and not by the military organisation. Therefore the armies are decision takers, not makers carrying out their specific duties allotted by the

president and within the guidelines enumerated by the commander-in-chief. These missions undertaken by the armed forces do not pose a threat to the civilian supremacy and democratic rule as long as the leaders retain authority and credibility to restrain and contain the military (Pion-Berlin 2004).

### **Summary and Conclusions**

The Venezuelan military was involved with politics since the time of independence in 1830 and it functioned as an institution of state power till 1958. The pattern of civil-military relations does not exist in pure form and often show a tendency to metamorphose from one to another. Owing to changes in the socio-economic structure within the praetorian and gendarmist state, they may transform into a civilist state and sometimes political and economic strain in the civilist state could lead to the formation of a praetorian or gendarmist pattern of civil-military relations.

The Punto Fijo period which falls under the category of a 'civilist state' has designated the armed forces as an apolitical, obedient and non-deliberative body under the constitution of 1961. The armed forces were restricted to its own sphere of military autonomy and thus there was a higher degree of subordination of military by the civilian government. But the re-militarisation of politics began to take place under Chávez's administration which was led by the faction of the armed forces and the military institution as a whole. The re-militarisation of politics took place by reorienting the military roles and missions into internal defence and security and developmental works and through the constitution of 1999 which dismantled the traditional control of the armed forces developed during Punto Fijo. The Bolivarian agenda which defends military virtues of organic unity, obedience and discipline is applied by president Hugo Chávez in the political arena.

## **Chapter 4**

# **BOLIVARIAN REVOLUTIONARY ROLE OF THE ARMED FORCES UNDER HUGO CHÁVEZ**

After forty years of civilian control and subordination from 1958 to 1998, the armed forces once again came into limelight with the electoral victory of Hugo Chávez Frias, who was a former Lieutenant Colonel, in the presidential elections of 1998. The armed forces are indeed instrumental in the successful implementation of the Bolivarian Revolution and making it a reality since 1998. After becoming the president, Chávez has constantly tried to project a different Venezuela which is nationalistic in approach and committed to a radical change. His persistent emphasis on the 'people' and the 'nation' as a whole has again revived the pro-democratic sentiments of the electorate and their faith in the political system. Chávez is therefore working within the ambit of a meaningful participation, thus offering the reigns of sovereignty back to the people (Buxton 2000: 28).

The final chapter is divided into three sections. The first section entitled 'Bolivarian Revolution' analyses the significance of this movement in the context of socio-economic transformation of Venezuela which indeed has enhanced Chávez's popularity and consolidated his authority and position. The second section dwells with the developmentalist role of the armed forces in the form of social missions and programmes. The third and the final section focus on the political changes seen during the presidency of Hugo Chávez.

### **Bolivarian Revolution**

The Bolivarian Revolution as envisaged by Hugo Chavez has drawn its ideas and agenda from the writings of three famous people in the Venezuelan history : Simon Bolivar, the Liberator of northern Latin America from the Spanish colonial domination between 1811 and 1825; secondly Simon Rodriguez who was an intellectual and mentor to Bolivar; and thirdly Ezequiel Zamora, a peasant who fought against the landed oligarchy during the Federal Wars of Venezuela in the 1840s and 1850s (Pabian 2010). The present Bolivarian Revolution may have been inspired by the ideals of Bolivar but it is taking place at a completely different historical stage. The original Bolivarian Revolution led by Bolívar was primarily based on its fight against feudalism and eventually capitalism was replacing feudalism as a progressive

change in history. But Chávez's revolution is against capitalism and seeks to replace it by a new brand of 21<sup>st</sup> century socialism. Chávez has resurrected three of Bolívar's ideals in his agenda: a union between the people and the army; opposition to foreign domination; and a unified Latin America (Pabian 2010). The symbolism of change that Chávez had cherished after becoming the president was therefore encapsulated by renaming the country as the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. The political proposals and social programmes set by President Chávez have differentiated him from the mainstream and traditional discourse earlier embraced by his predecessors. The Revolution therefore attempts to reconnect politics and economics by building a participatory democratic processes from the community level and building up a redistributive mechanisms into policy making from the state level (Gibbs 2006: 270). The Bolivarian inspiration of President Chavez tries to build a new equation with the state and market and tried to divert the traditional dependence on oil towards areas like agriculture, tourism and small and medium industries. The economic model built by Chávez is protectionist in nature and its sole objective is to benefit the Venezuelans as a whole (Buxton 2000).

The Bolivarian Revolution began by revamping of the national constitution. It contains some elements that are unique pertaining to the areas of health and education. Access to healthcare and education are seen as fundamental rights and give equal footing with civil and political rights. The transformation of the healthcare scenario is an integral part of the Bolivarian Revolution and is seen as an arena of active citizenship. The Cuban supported Barrio Adentro Mission which was launched in April 2003 provided health care services to the marginalised section which accounted for nearly 70 percent of the population. Another key component of the Bolivarian Revolution is the idea of 'integral education' which means that education is not separate from other spheres of activities in life and is a prerequisite to create a direct, participatory democracy (Gibbs 2006: 274). Thus, it has attempted to provide a more inclusive form of social reforms which included the urban and rural poor, middle class civil society organisation, intellectuals, and junior ranked officers of the armed forces that felt alienated during the democratic period of Punto Fijo. This will help in realising the goals of enhancing citizen empowerment, autonomy sustainability and mobilisation of masses. It is experimenting with various forms of citizen organisations and community based political organisation like the Bolivarian Circles, the Electoral Battle units, the local water units (McCoy 2008).

Círculos Bolivarianos or the Bolivarian Circles form a significant part of the Bolivarian movement which calls for a democratic transformation of Venezuela. They are the basic unit of the Chavista organisations. Each circle consists of upto 11 members and is sworn to defend the constitution, follow the ideals of Simon Bolívar and serve the community. These circles are instrumental in spreading the ideas and programmes of the Bolivarian Revolution. They work in tandem with the government programmes and missions to promote education, health and economic self-sufficiency. They form neighbouring soup kitchens and organise agricultural cooperatives. The Bolivarian circles have always maintained strong political ties with the government and has openly campaigned for Chávez during elections. After the 2002 coup against the regime of Chávez, there was a change in the structure and objectives of the Bolivarian circles. They have taken up the mandate to organise civil society, raise political consciousness in order to safeguard and enlarge the political process and facilitate the fulfillment of social needs (Ramírez 2005: 86).

President Chávez has called for the unity between the masses and the armed forces to serve the cause of socialism. The idea behind this attempt is to make the army more citizen-friendly and to envisage that the military is loyal to the interests of the common man and not to the creole bourgeoisie. The unity between the common man and the large faction of the armed forces was instrumental in defeating the April 2002 coup against President Chávez. Thus with a strong support base, Chavez is able to create a socialist state (Pabian 2010).

Although the orientation and most of the tenets of the Bolivarian Revolution are directed towards domestic politics but it also has an important foreign policy facet. The Bolivarian foreign policy promotes a sovereign, autonomous leadership role for Venezuela in Latin America without external pressure and influence; oppose globalisation and neo-liberal economic policies and strives to achieve unity with other developing nations and work towards the emergence of a multipolar world in order to check US hegemony (Trinkunas 2004). The Bolivarian Revolution has tried to integrate with the ambitions of the Third World movement. The Bolivarian agenda has championed regional integration, internationalism and had challenged the neo-liberal capitalist ideology of the First World thus projecting Venezuela as the vanguard of the new world movement. The Venezuelan government under Chávez since 1998 has attempted to built international relations with regional countries in a bid to counter the challenges and threats of the First World. In this process, the

Bolivarian Alternative for the Peoples of Our Americas-Trade Agreement for the People (ALBA-TCP) was initiated to counter the neo-liberal Free Trade Agreement of the Americas (FTAA) which is primarily focused on Latin American and Caribbean integration.

The Bolivarian project envisaged by Chávez seeks a nationally rooted but a regionally integrated approach to development and poverty issue, where development is not measured solely on economic growth. The Bolivarian Revolution has retained many of basic traits of the 'Punto Fijo' political system (1958-98) : dependence on oil revenues for political and social sustenance ; reliance on distribution of oil rents; patronage and personalistic ties; highly centralised decision making structure with the President at the helm of all affairs; emergence of new set of privileged actors displacing the traditional actors and the failures to restore the regulative and restorative capacities of the state (McCoy 2008).

### **Political and Developmentalist Missions of the Armed Forces under Chávez**

The developmentalist missions undertaken by the armed forces are an integral part of the larger Bolivarian agenda. The military is considered at the only apparatus with a national structure besides the armed forces to carry forward these missions. The Venezuelan armed forces received an overwhelming support in the process of profound social transformation. The Venezuelan military can be distinguished from their Latin American counterparts in a number of ways. The military was deeply influenced by the philosophy of Simon Bolívar who believed in a unified Latin America and perceived that democracy could become a successful political system if it provides supreme happiness to the people. After 1970, the junior officers in the armed forces tried to revive the ideals of Bolívar and the spirit of patriotism began to rule their lives. Secondly, most of the military officers of the Chávez's generation were not trained in United States but in the Venezuelan military academy. After 1971, with the induction of Plan Andrés Bello, the Venezuelan military academy underwent

a radical transformation and was with a university standing. The junior officers were exposed to progressive ideas on democracy and studies Clausewitz, Mao Zedong and the Asian strategists in their strategy classes. Thirdly, most of the officers belong to the urban poor and peasant families and therefore could relate themselves to the difficulties of the deprived class. Another distinctive feature of the Venezuelan military is that they are devoid of any caste-based discrimination within the ranks of different services (Harncker 2003).

The armed forces in Venezuela are extensively deployed in the internal security and developmental missions, thereby interlinking the doctrine of internal security and developmentalism explicitly. The non-defence related projects and programmes became an integral part of their corporate identity. The concept of internal and external security makes little distinction in the Venezuelan context (Pion-Berlin 2004). The army therefore acts as an important representative of the central government in the rural areas. Unlike other Latin American countries, the military in Venezuela since 1970s never had to face any guerrilla threats or aggressions. They were more inclined towards domestic issues in the form of civic action plans and missions as assigned by the civilian government.<sup>1</sup>

The missions are primarily directed towards improving the socio-economic conditions of the poor and the marginalised sections of the society. The Venezuelan society is divided on the basis of racism, exclusion and inequality owing to the rising gap between the rich and the poor. With an objective of achieving social justice and an egalitarian society, the primary areas of concern are health, education, housing, sanitation, land reform programmes etc.

The connotation of the word 'mission' holds significance in the context of the Bolivarian Revolution. The word mission traditionally signifies a group of people sent by the Church or other missionary organisations to carry out religious works and other social services in the form of building schools, colleges and hospitals. In the same manner, the developmentalist missions are entrusted with the implementations of social programmes and spreading the ideals of Bolivarian Revolution across the country.

1. As Alfred Stepan has put it, the military was trained to acquire expertise in internal security in all aspects of social, economic and political life in many Latin American countries.



Chávez is successful in implementing his social programmes and has found support from the masses but some sections of the armed forces have decried his policy as against military professionalism and criticised President Chávez for using the armed forces as his personal instrument.

The Developmentalist missions have adopted a holistic approach towards redressing the problems of hunger and poverty. Venezuela in the past was reaping the benefits as a petro-state which was able to meet the demands of the diverse sections of the society. The overdependence of the Venezuelan economy on oil has made it highly fragile and vulnerable to the world market system. With the steep decline in oil prices by mid 1980s to mid 1990s, the Venezuelan economy was hard hit which took several years to become stable. These were the worst years as the rate of poverty increased sharply and Venezuela witnessed one of the largest proportion of people living under poverty. There was a sense of utter desperation among the majority of the population and thus disgruntled with their former leaders; they have turned their hopes on president Chávez to bring about a revolutionary transformation of society.

Chávez's presidential campaign was premised on the pressing issues of poverty, hunger, social justice and corruption. The endemic corruption among the political class and upper echelon of the armed forces prevented the earlier civilian governments from utilising the oil resources in social sectors (Herncker 2003). Soon after taking office in 1998, Chávez dismantled the existing social programmes designed by his predecessors and created a 'Unified Social Fund' directly under the management and control of the armed forces. The ministry for the family created during the Caldera presidency (1994-1999) was discredited. The ministry was in charge of managing social funds. These missions are mainly financed by the oil revenues generated by the Venezuelan state oil company, PDVSA.<sup>2</sup> The money is then transferred to a special fund set up by the presidency (Penfold-Becerra 2007: 70). The social missions were intended to portray Chávez as a demagogue who seeks a complete overhaul of the current political system and save Venezuela from the scourge of corruption and decadence. On an internal level, the social missions entail to establish a true democracy by bringing forth its participatory element and empowering the poor and the marginalised sections of society.

2. PDVSA has been a mainstay of the Venezuela economy since its inception and has mainly operated on as an autonomous state industry and on a management hierarchy based on competence.

On an external side, the social missions will restore the lost glory and independence of Venezuela.<sup>3</sup> Chávez has always tried to identify himself with the poor thus further adding to the populist aspect of leadership (Zúquete 2008).

Plan Bolívar 2000 was initiated in 1998 as a ‘quick fix’ strategy of social welfare programmes. The armed forces were firmly behind the implementation of this plan and played an instrumental role in its success. Nearly 40,000 troops were deployed to repair roads and schools, building infrastructure facilities thus enabling the armed to integrate in the process of Bolivarian Revolution. With an initial budget of \$21 million, the focus of the first year of the plan was housing and building infrastructure (Trinkunas 2002). Plan Bolívar 2000 was divided into a number of sub-plans and each branch of the services was allotted a specific plan to operate on. The Air Force had created the Social Routes Plan (Rutas Sociales) that provided low cost rural transportation. Plan Pescar 2000 was devised by the navy where officers help the fishermen with transportation and equipment maintenance.

Plan Consiquire 2000 developed by the National Guard helped in building houses of the indigenous people by the shore of the river Consiquire and transporting medicines and doctors to fur flung areas through boats (Harncker 2005: 73).<sup>4</sup> Charges of corruption were leveled against officers who were in charge of various plans and criticised for the lack of transparency in their implementation.

In Latin America, the social missions are often used as a political weapon to fulfill ones vested interests. With time, these missions become politicised and are subject to clientelistic and personalistic practices. In the context of Venezuela, the social missions helped Chávez in overcoming his lowest popularity ratings since taking over presidency and thus winning the crucial referendum of 2004. He was able to manipulate these missions to consolidate his popular support base which helped him in winning subsequent elections in the regional and local level in 2004 as well as getting re-elected to the presidential post in December 2006.

3. The social role of the armed forces is more reminiscent of Ecuador than the countries of the Southern cone

4. Mission Ribas, Mission Sucre, Mission, Mission Mercal, and Mission Barrio Adentro are other prominent social missions

Thus the social missions has served two purposes: they were able to buy votes for Chávez and the oil rents generated by big oil companies were percolated from top to bottom to benefit the poor and the low income population (Penfold-Becerra 2007:65).

### **Political changes under the regime of Hugo Chávez**

The political project of Chávez is a blend of populism, nationalism, militarism and socialism emphasizing the idea of a united South America as visioned by Simon Bolívar (shifter 2006:47). The electoral victory of Hugo Chávez in the presidential elections of 1998 highlighted the fact that the Venezuelan democracy and governance was heading towards a radical change. Mismanagement of the nation's resources in the face of the economic crisis of 1980's caused serious social dislocations and poverty.

A decade of suffering with insufficient redressal mechanisms led to the outright rejection of the traditional political elites which led to the collapse of one of the strongest political party systems in the region. The two prominent parties (AD and COPEI) were reduced to single digits in the presidential elections of 1998. After becoming the president, Chávez has initiated a transitional process and attempted to transform the inherited bureaucratic structure developed during Punto Fijo into a participatory democracy (Irazábal and Foley 2010: 97).

Chávez started his own party Movimiento Bolivariano Revolucionario-200 (MBR-200) as a clandestine organisation within the armed forces in 1983 which later transformed into an official political party known as Partido Socialista Unido de Venezuela (PSUV) in 2007. The PSUV has become the single most dominant party with the virtual disappearance of AD and COPEI from the political map of Venezuela (McCoy 2008: 4).

The radical democracy or participatory democracy established during Chavez's presidency is based on majoritarian rule and the direct participation of people in the decision making process. The democratic construct on which Chávez has built his 21<sup>st</sup>

century socialism seeks to establish a new form of socialism that avoids authoritarianism and the rigidity of the earlier communist autocratic regimes.<sup>5</sup>

The model of participatory democracy is established by the Constitution of 1999. The participatory element of democracy is conceived in the form of social cooperation, solidarity and co-responsibility (Art 4); and the sovereignty of the people is to be exercised directly (Art 5).

The prominent aspect of direct democracy is described more discretely in Article 62 which establishes a protagonist role of the community in planning and implementation. The constitution of 1999 also calls for the incorporation of all communities into organisations whose decisions are to be respected by the local authorities (Art 70). The populist element of Chávez's rule is embedded in Article 71 which provided that the elected officials who do not perform can be abolished by a popular referendum.

The tenure of president Chávez has seen intense mobilisation of masses which in turn has led to their empowerment, incorporation and political learning. Thus there is a paradigm shift with respect to the balance of social relations under Chávez. The key to the survival of his regime in 2002 was his mobilisation capacity that was able to withstand the onslaught of his adversaries. Hundreds of thousands of poor people had surrounded the presidential palace and military bases that enabled him to return to power. A significant number of military officers refused to support the coup and threatened an armed resistance against the dissidents. The massive electoral victory of Chávez beginning with the August 2004 recall election has asserted the position and activism of the Chavistas (Ellner 2010:81). Mobilisation and the empowerment of the masses have greatly influenced the general attitudes towards democracy.

The political system established under Chávez stands against the ethos of liberal democracy that stresses on checks and balances; the protection of the rights of the minorities and warns against the centralisation of power in the executive (Ellner 2010).

The Venezuelan democracy lacks the basic traits of liberal democracy on a number of counts. The key positions like that of Attorney General, members of the National Electoral Council which are intended to be non partisan are often identified with Chavismo.

5. It has been distinguished with the authoritarian regimes of countries such as erstwhile USSR, China and Cambodia from the current socialist-oriented nations of the Scandinavian countries.

The Electoral Council and the National Assembly has become a mere appendage in the hands of the executive. In a bid to centralise his authority, Chávez has increased the number of judges of the Supreme Court from 20 to 32 through a measure supported in the National Assembly.

The system of governance established by Chávez lacks three basic components essential for the sustenance and consolidation of any new democratic system: mechanism for internal critical discussion, organizational solidity and institutionalisation of the rules of the game (Ellner 2010: 86). The distrust shown to the political party leaders and the state sector professional employees popularly known as the technocrats obstruct the healthy development of organisational and institutional mechanisms. The frequent replacement of personnel in top ministerial posts, their inexperience in the context of structural changes in governance and lack of regularity in public administration often leads to low level of institutionalisation. The all-encompassing role of Chávez and his authority discourages critical internal debate and the creation of a well defined mechanism of decision making. Chávez has relied mainly on the armed forces to run his government which is evident from the fact one-third of the regional governments is in the hands of the armed forces directly linked to the president. The government has been busy organising private unarmed militia and planning to mobilise nearly two million reservists in the name of national defence. An independent National Police Force has been created that falls outside the traditional control of the armed forces and which is directly responsible to the president. There is also an institutional separation of various security organisations so that no one can encroach upon the authority of the other and the ultimate control is in the hands of the president (Manwaring 2005: 11). The opposition has tried to ouster Chávez through various tactics like coups, a national strike and a recall referendum. The failed coup of April 2002 not only raised serious questions on the democratic credentials of the opposition but also gave Chavez a perfect platform to take full control of the armed forces take control over the state oil company *Petróleos de Venezuela, S.A. (PDVSA)*.

## **Summary and Conclusions**

The armed forces have played a significant role in the socio-political transformation of Venezuela. Under the supreme command and guidance of president Hugo Chávez, the military playing a key role in domestic politics and in internal state functioning in the form of social missions and programmes. His presidency has also witnessed some radical changes its political system. The model of participatory democracy established by the Constitution of 1999 is based on majoritarian rule and the direct participation of people in the decision making process. The doctrine of internal security and developmentalism are explicitly linked in the Venezuelan context. The non-defence related projects and programmes has become an integral part of their corporate identity.

## Summary and Conclusions

The study of my dissertation is 'Civil-Military Relations in Venezuela under Hugo Chávez'. The core issue of civil–military relations and its nature is prominent in the study of Latin American politics and are central to the process of democratisation and to the development of state's legitimacy. The armed forces have played a key role in the historical development of the nations of Latin America and Venezuela is no exception. The militarisation of political authority is an important attribute of the war of independence in Venezuela. Since the time of independence in 1820, Venezuela has been ruled by dictators and there has been a constant struggle between the regional caudillos to seize Caracas, the capital city and therefore gain control of the nation's resources. The Venezuelan society underwent a fundamental transformation with the development of oil industry in 1920s. The young military officers after the Second World War were highly offended and disgruntled with the corrupt regime of Isías Medina Angarita and attempted a coup with the help of Acción Democrática (AD). The three years from 1946 to 1948, known as the trienio, marked a period of interregnum of democratic experience before the 1958 pacted transition.

The hypothesis that 'the change in socio-economic structure is linked to rise of militarism or militarisation of political authority' is well established in the Venezuelan context. The military as a dominant actor and power factor have always asserted their supremacy and authority in times of political crisis in Venezuela. The revolt by the army officers in alliance with AD to overthrow the regime of Isías Medina reiterated the fact that armed forces have taken up a leading role in overthrowing corrupt regimes when they are faced with legitimacy crisis facilitated by socio-political changes. The forty years of democracy known as the period of Punto Fijo was challenged and eventually overhauled with the presidency of Hugo Chávez in 1999 who has strong military lineage and the armed forces strongly standing behind his support.

In taking the debate forward the Second Chapter has analysed factors and conditions that have transformed Venezuela into a democratic polity and which led to the emergence of a stable civil-military coalition. It has also tried to examine the factors that have led to the degeneration of Punto Fijo. The period from 1958 to 1998 is regarded as a glorious period in history with Venezuela being elevated to a level of

a role model for other Latin American States. Venezuela began to be identified as one of the most stable democracies of Latin America. A wave of military take overs were taking place in countries like Argentina and Brazil to which Guillermo O' Donnell as described it as bureaucratic –authoritarianism. The populist leaders in these countries failed to institutionalise the mechanism of legitimate political succession and develop a coherent party base and their over-reliance on personality cult and patronage led to political underdevelopment. In contrast, Venezuela political system demonstrated all the pre-requisites of a liberal democracy and was viewed as a mature and consolidated polity.

The Punta Fijo political system (1958-1998) was premised on pacts and coalition; inter-party consensus; programme limitation; encouragement of participation through controlled and channeled manners and power sharing arrangement between two leading parties. These provisions were firmly documented into decisive acts i.e. Pact of Punto Fijo and Minimum Programme of Government. Venezuelan political system was based on a stable two party system comprised of the Social Democrat Acción Democrática (AD) and Christian Democrat Comité de Organización Política Electoral Independiente (COPEI). The experience of the trienio was put in to practice during the Punta Fijo period. The tendency towards penetration and control over the emerging social and political organisations that became highly pronounced in the Punta Fijo period were honed by the trienio experience. The failure of the trienio period was mainly linked with the hasty and destabilising incorporation of masses into the democratic political process. Therefore, the political class during Punta Fijo engineered a system that placed the political parties at the heart of the political process thus acting as monopolisers of socialisation, representation and interest articulation. Therefore the participation of the masses in the electoral process occurred in a controlled and channeled manner. The political class through Punta Fijo laid the basis for an interventionist state and was overtly populist in its orientation. The oil economy propelled the sustainability and durability and petro- dollars facilitated to pacify and satisfy the demands of various national groups. It limited the potential for class mobilisation by the distributive capacity of the state. The constitution of 1961 acted as a facilitator in institutionalising the constitutional government through the regularised transfer of power and by means of universal adult suffrage. It also led to the centralisation of power and authority with strong tendencies towards presidentialism. The government appointed the governors in the respective



provinces, thus there was no place for the development of regional politics. The armed forces had played a dominant role of a power factor in the historical and sociological evolution of Venezuela. But after 1958, the civilian control of the armed forces became the norm as the constitution of 1961 designated the military institution as an “apolitical, obedient and a non-deliberative body”. Thus, the Venezuelan exception ‘exceptionalism’ during the period of Punto Fijo (1958-1998) was credited to a stable civil-military coalition created through institution of appeasement, increased military budget, establishing a strong social safety net and restricting the armed forces to a narrow sphere of activities. The policy of divide and conquer applied to the armed forces worked well for the civilian leaders as it eliminated the centralised military command structure and granted limited autonomy to each branch of the military services. The endurance and sustainability was built on a structured relation that formalised stable and supportive relations between political elites and military personnel. The theoretical approaches that are applied to support the civilian domination of the armed forces and the stable nature of the civil-military relations during the period of Punto Fijo and its degeneration are the ‘Subjective and Objective control of the armed forces’ by Samuel Huntington and the Institutional Approach. These approaches have been dealt in the First Chapter.

The Venezuelan electorate valued democracy which was quite evident from the opinion polls taken in 1970s. But at the same time the educated, urban class felt alienated by the internal practices of the both the parties and the unrepresentative character of the political system. However the negative feelings towards the state were countered by the sustained distribution of material reward facilitated by petrodollars. By mid to late 1980’s the Punto Fijo system faced twin crisis of political and economic decline. The political decline was marked by rising rates of abstention from voting, ideological differences within AD and COPEI resulting to its delegitimation and ineffectiveness. The economic decline resulted from the fall in the international oil prices in 1982 has led to depreciation, inflation and stagnation of the economy. The structural adjustment programmes as structured by the Washington Consensus were adopted by President Carlos Andrés Pérez. These austerity measures were not able to meet the rising demands of the people leading to mass poverty and desperation. As the circle of oil rent beneficiaries began to shrink, there was a growing social opposition towards the civilian government in the context of declining public service provisions. The economic and politics mismanagement of the civilian

government led to the violent episode of Caracazo in February 1989 – a wave of protest, strikes, looting and mass killing witnessed in the streets of Caracas and its neighbouring cities.

The armed forces had also suffered due to the wrong economic policies of the government. Due to drastic budgetary cuts, there was a considerable decline in salaries, pensions and other privileges of the armed forces. The cracks and fissures in the civil-military relations were evident. A new breed of junior officers, educated in the lines of university equivalent education and infused with nationalistic fervor and outlook felt detached from the old traditional military hierarchy. They were also dissuaded by the personalistic and political ties between the political class and upper echelon of the armed forces that undermined merit based professionalism and rampant corruption that was eroding the social fabric. Many small groups of middle ranking and young officers began to form factions or self help groups with common interests and sharing common assignment and mission during the period from 1970 and 1980s. Movimiento Bolivariano Revolucionaria-200 (MBR-200) was one such prominent faction that was formed in 1983, on the eve of the 200<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary of Simon Bolivar, the ‘Liberator of Venezuela. Lieutenant Colonel Hugo Chavez along with fellow officers like Francisco Arias Cardenas spearheaded the MBR-200 to stage the famous 1992 coup. They had strongly voiced their protest against corruption in political life, neo-liberal economic policies, and external influences in domestic politics and therefore wanted to transform Venezuela to a ‘true democracy’. The coup attempts of 1992 which was the brain child of Hugo Chavez took everyone by surprise as it was never anticipated. History is being echoed as the prevailing situation reminds us of the period of 1948 when military has taken the political reign in times of economic and political crisis.

The coup attempts of 1992 may have failed but it marked a new era in Venezuelan history which dismantled the institution of party control of the military. The forty years of Punto Fijo dominated by AD and COPEI has left little room for political dissension and other organisational activities generating an anti-party tendency amongst the populace. The common man had bestowed all their hope on Hugo Chávez who was successful in mobilising the people on his side with his charismatic appeal and fiery rhetoric. Chávez’s ascendancy onto the political scene began during the period of presidency of Carlos Andrés Pérez. The parties and political class had suffered a form of perversion which dramatically weakened their

political and electoral base with the general class distancing themselves from all forms of political activity. The presidential campaign of Chávez in 1998 was deeply rooted in the popular hostility of masses towards elite corruption and neo-liberal economic reforms. 'A true democracy will be established' was the slogan with ideals of equality, social justice and in compliance with the Bolivarian ethos. The ideas of Chávez therefore received legitimacy as they had been tried by history and had yielded fruitful results. The overwhelming victory of Chavez in the presidential election vindicated his position and his Bolivarian agenda. He enacted the constitution of 1999 which brought the armed forces at the fore-front of the political realm.

The civil-military relations underwent a major transform during the presidency of Hugo Chávez was evident from a number of factors. Firstly, the armed forces were brought into all forms of political life leading to its politicisation. The process of militarisation of politics was further reinforced by the Constitution of 1999 which dismantled the traditional control of the armed forces enforced through institutional mechanisms established during the period of Punto Fijo. The military roles and missions were reoriented from national defense internal security. The civil-military relations under Chávez's regime are built on a constructed reality that is not typical to rest of Latin America in present times.

The period from 1980s to 1990s were one of the worst period in Venezuelan history as the civilian government was faced with the twin crisis of economic and political decline. There was a complete failure on the part of the government to tackle the economic crisis and it adopted neo-liberal reforms outlined by the Washington Consensus. The rise of Chávez in the political map of Venezuela amidst socio-economic changes and becoming the president in 1998 reiterated the fact that military still assumes prominence in its society and are ready to play a crucial role in politics and social transformation. Venezuela has undergone a large scale military modernisation under the guarded leadership of Hugo Chávez, which is an aspect of his civil-military relations. This aspect has not been dealt in the previous chapters but is significant in the context of regional security and integrity. Chavez's inherently controlling personality and coming-of-age during the cold-war has perhaps played a pivotal role in the flamboyant military upgrade that has been witnessed in Venezuela in recent years. Its military modernisation has also played out as a game of leverage and upmanship with the US.

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