

# Gender Policies and Armed Forces in Latin America's Southern Cone

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The present article first examines the contribution of international organizations to the formulation and implementation of gender integration policies in the armed forces of the Latin American Southern Cone's three main countries: Argentina, Brazil and Chile. It focuses on and accounts for the various policy contents and levels of implementation in those nations during the 2000-2014 time-bracket as a result of the dissemination of United Nations (UN) Resolution 1325. The said resolution, adopted in 2000, reaffirmed the crucial role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts, peace negotiations, peace-building, peacekeeping, humanitarian response and post-conflict reconstruction, and stresses the importance of their equal participation and full involvement in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security.<sup>1</sup>

The study analyzes the responses, influenced by their respective national contexts, of each of the three countries to that UN Resolution. It will additionally highlight the long-standing local initiatives of the three countries on this subject, and also the various points of contact at the transnational level: the latter clearly shows the distinct regional dimension of gender integration policies in the armed forces of Argentina, Chile, and – to a lesser extent – Brazil. It focuses on the factors that have contributed to such regional policy coherence, as well as those differentiating their gender agendas and policies. The particular concerns of each country, its government procedures, and the situation of its national defence institutions in the context of the democratization of the State and its armed forces are examined along the way.

It goes on to probe the relevance of the leadership exerted in the Defence ministries of Chile and Argentina by two women, Michelle Bachelet and Nilda Garré, who shared a long career in the fight for human rights. Finally, a broad, comparative picture of the current situation of military women in the three countries is succinctly offered.

The study's goal is thus not to offer an evaluation of the *gender integration policies*, or of the *participation of women in the military*, as indeed has been done by other researchers (Castrillón & von Chrismar, 2013). Rather, its purpose is to analyze how Latin America's Southern Cone region defined its priorities in terms of gender integration<sup>2</sup> and equality of opportunity between men and women in the military, including recommendations, strategies

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations, Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Special Advancement of Women: see <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/wps/>.

<sup>2</sup> On cross-national analysis of gender issues in the military, *cf.* Segal, 1995; Iskra *et al.*, 2002. On the policy process, this study informally draws on Jones, 1984 and Sabatier & Jenkins-Smith, 1993.

and implementation of country-specific policies. The intention behind it is, in sum, to examine the reasons that pushed the military to open its doors to women, a question already pinpointed by Marina Nuciari (2006, p.279) in the agenda for research on the integration of women.

## **Context**

While long periods of military dictatorships marked the region's recent past, there are differences among the three countries in terms of their duration and severity. It lasted from 1964 to 1985 in Brazil, from 1973 to 1990 in Chile, and from 1976 to 1983 in Argentina. In each case, the first years saw the most brutal political and social repression.<sup>3</sup> In each country, the same Latin American pattern – military dictatorships followed by restoration of democratic political institutions – was replicated. In some of these democratization processes, the ruling classes supported the investigation of the crimes committed during the dictatorships and the prosecution of those (in the military, police, or civilian) responsible for the crimes. Such investigations and prosecutions are part of the larger portfolio of efforts known as “human rights policies”.

The brutality of the military dictatorships, and the political stance adopted by these countries after their return to democracy (whether or not there were criminal prosecutions and convictions of persecutors), to a great extent account for the current situation of the military forces in each country. Furthermore, this study will analyze whether their gender policies are integrated within the larger framework of human rights, offering a broader perspective on the issue of the integration of women into the military defence.

The countries selected are particularly interesting as all three have gone through an extended period of participation in international peace support efforts – non-combat interventions in armed conflicts abroad – as well as of internal security concerns which, as will be seen, have loomed large in gender policy considerations.

## **United Nations Influence and National Variations in Gender Policy**

### **Implementation of Resolution 1325 in South America**

The first international event on gender in armed forces held in South America was organized by the United Nations in November 2007, and hosted by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) in Santiago, Chile. Officials, legislators and advisers on gender and armed forces from most of the countries in the region were convened to participate in the *High-Level Policy Dialogue on National Implementation of SC Resolution 1325 (2000) for Latin American and Caribbean Countries*. Participants presented the different local-level experiences on the subject, which were analyzed and evaluated to see if and to

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<sup>3</sup> Recent studies in social history seem to agree on viewing the aforementioned dictatorships as the result of a series of alliances among national and international economic, political and religious groups, rather than as the effect of military action. Further insight into the differences and similarities among the dictatorships of these countries can be found in Lida, Crespo & Yankelevich (2008), Bohoslavsky, Franco *et al.* (2010) and Cruz (2004).

what extent they complied with the recommendations of Resolution 1325<sup>4</sup> specifically urging governments to ensure the participation of women in the areas of defence, security and peace. The key objectives of the meeting were to encourage governments to prioritize a gender perspective in these areas. The meeting was chaired by the United Nations Special Adviser on Gender Issues (OSAGI), Rachel Mayanja, a Ugandan lawyer and diplomat. The list of participants included sixteen different officials from the Ministries of Women and Defence (among them female ministers and deputy ministers), as well as observers from other international and Chilean organizations. (At that time, the President of Chile was Michelle Bachelet, who had assumed office in 2006; in Argentina the Ministry of Defence was for the first time led by a woman, Nilda Garré, appointed in 2005). It is worthy of note that Brazil sent no representatives to the event, thus failing to inform its regional partners of its current policies, or learn about those of other countries.

Chile's representative described the policy developed and implemented by the country's MoD since 2004, which established the constitutional principle of "equality of rights between men and women", emphasizing the pioneering character of the initiative in the region. The idea of enhancing the participation of women in the armed forces defined a set of guiding principles: gender-blind equal opportunity, integrated participation of men and women in all professional activities with professional skills as the main criterion for selection, equal treatment, leadership support of the integration process, and permanent consideration of this process in institutional planning. The Chilean representative also mentioned that, soon after being launched in 2005, the policy was included the Book of National Defence to prevent it from becoming a mere short-term policy.

The Argentine Adviser on Gender, who at that time reported directly to the Human Rights Office of the Ministry of Defence, presented the experiences of the MoD's Observatory on Women in the Armed Forces and the Gender Policy Council. This Council was composed of academics, civil servants from different ministries, representatives of non-governmental organizations, and – mainly – military women. The Council contributed in offering an assessment of the current situation of military women in Argentina (which, up to that date, had never been undertaken by civilian officials) and also created a space for discussion and formulation of recommendations to the minister on specific policies.

The Argentine case received significant attention from the participants. Its leading role in the region was highlighted by Mayanja, the Special Adviser to the UN Secretary General on Gender Issues. Moreover, women officials from the MoDs of Chile, Ecuador and Peru asked for additional information on the policies developed in Argentina so that they could replicate Argentina's experience in their own countries.

Although in their presentations the countries noted their compliance with gender-related international agreements in general, none of them strictly observed the guidelines

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<sup>4</sup> See : <http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N00/720/18/PDF/N0072018.pdf?OpenElement>.

established by Resolution 1325, and each country followed its own specific political and sociocultural agenda. For instance, at the top of the agendas in Argentina and Chile was one of the first guidelines of the resolution that promoted increased female representation at all institutional decision-making levels in the national, regional and international mechanisms for the prevention, management and resolution of conflict.

At the meeting, participant governments were requested by the UN representatives to draw up national action plans to implement Resolution 1325 and, although the attending women officials agreed, they also stressed their wish to support national autonomy and prioritize local political and institutional agendas. Moreover, the Argentine adviser suggested that the international body should acknowledge the experiences presented, as well as any successful others in this field, as positive examples of implementation of the resolution.

### **The Action Plans of Argentina and Chile**

During 2008, after the High-Level Policy Dialogue (HLPD) in Chile, the Argentine Defence Ministry, in line with the guidelines established by Resolution 1325, extended the national policy on gender to include peacekeeping operations, thus legitimizing it before the United Nations. To this end, the MoD established an inter-ministerial work-group, including the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, to develop a national action plan. After an initial assessment, the ministry made ten recommendations for the development of actions. Chile's MoD acted similarly, although in their case the action plan only concerned peacekeeping operations, bringing down the level of gender integration achieved in the country until then. In the case of Brazil, the requirements laid down by Resolution 1325 were not met, and the country has not yet developed an action plan.<sup>5</sup>

In the formulation of their respective national plans, Argentina and Chile strongly emphasized the importance of promoting a cross-gender perspective to increase the proportion of military women in peacekeeping operations, especially of women serving in operational posts, and not only in medical care or support. Additionally, the plans also established policies designed to protect women from all forms of violence during armed conflicts. Nevertheless, for the purposes of this article, we shall only consider those matters contained in the action plans that specifically relate to servicewomen.

The Chilean National Action Plan included the following purposes : (1) identify all positions annually available to women candidates for peace support operations; (2) remove restrictions on the deployment of female staff in the mission area – in terms of accommodation or otherwise –, particularly as regards posts for which national female staff is available ; (3)

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<sup>5</sup> In September 2014, Minister of Defense Celso Amorim and the Special Secretariat for Women's Policies in the Office of the President of Brazil established a Gender Commission. This advisory commission was set up to enhance women's participation and promote gender equality in the forces. It is worth noting that when this agency was set up, the importance of including the Armed Forces in the National Plan for Women's Policies was specifically underlined ; however, reference to both Resolution 1325 and the UN recommendations was missing.

keep disaggregated statistics by sex of the staff deployed in peace operations ; (4) include statistical information on female staff serving in such operations and the availability of female troops ready to be deployed in the annual reports submitted by the Armed Forces ; (5) monitor female staff participation in the mission area, as well as the relation between the whole contingent and the local population, including men and women; (6) include analyses of female participation in operations in the reports submitted to military national authorities (ANAMIL) and agencies; (7) disseminate women's experiences in peace operations, using institutional and other means. Although in the introductory words the government authorities and President Bachelet herself emphasized the principle of inclusion and participation of women, it is fairly evident that the plan was aimed at gathering information and monitoring rather than at effectively implementing pro-active programmes to enhance female participation in the armed forces.

In contrast to Chile's, the action plan presented by Argentina first made an exhaustive estimation of the participation of women in peacekeeping operations and an evaluation of the main reasons given by the women to shun volunteering, which chiefly refer to the constraints imposed on deployed women regarding the families they leave behind. Secondly, it reaffirmed the concrete steps taken by Argentina since 2006 towards the implementation of UN Resolution 1325 in the country, and added other specific points. The lines of action thus defined and adopted were: (1) continuation of the cross-gender policy introduced by Argentina in 2006; (2) comprehensive revision of the criteria of eligibility for peacekeeping missions ; points (3), (4) and (5) concerned the revision of curricula, inclusion of a gender perspective, and incorporation of women as instructors at the Training Centre for Peacekeeping Operations (CAECOPAZ) ; point (6) was devoted to the monitoring and evaluation of this plan ; point (7) proposed the inclusion of a *gender focal point* in peacekeeping missions to address issues of education and gender; point (8) dealt with the dissemination of the plan, and point (9) with the adequacy of the necessary infrastructure for the deployment of women ; lastly, point (10) reasserted Argentina's commitment to having an active role in the promotion of programmes on gender at regional and continental levels.<sup>6</sup>

In this way, while Chile narrowly limited its implementation of Resolution 1325 to peacekeeping missions, Argentina, in its bid to comply with it, reasserted its commitment – now enjoying added legitimacy and extended to include peace support operations – to all its previous national programmes on gender, thus becoming the regional leader in this matter.

### **Outcomes of MoD Gender Policies**

In September 2009, two years after the event organized in Chile by the United Nations and the Ministry of Defence, the Friedrich Ebert Foundation and Argentina's MoD convened a regional seminar on the situation of women in the armed forces of South America. The

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. MoD Resolution 1226/2008: [http://www.mindef.gov.ar/institucional/marco\\_legal/resoluciones/r\\_1226\\_2008.pdf](http://www.mindef.gov.ar/institucional/marco_legal/resoluciones/r_1226_2008.pdf).

seminar focused on the various dimensions of gender policies in this sector, namely, peace-keeping operations, work environments, and the military profession, along with theoretical perspectives to address these issues. The presentations were then published in 2010 under the title *Género y Fuerzas Armadas: algunos análisis teóricos y prácticos* (Gender and the Armed Forces: Some Theoretical and Practical Analysis). Among the attendants were representatives of Chile, Brazil, Argentina, and other countries of the region. The variations across these countries in terms of policy orientation and approach to implementation were found to be quite large. With the exception of Chile, the results of the seminar reflected clearly that Resolution 1325 was not the guiding principle of the national policies of integration and participation of women in the armed forces of the region.

As regards Chile, the distinct shift in the national policy on gender integration was acknowledged in the presentation made at the seminar. Before the regional event hosted by ECLAC in Santiago in 2007, Chile had indeed made a priority of equal opportunity between men and women in the armed forces, and recruited more women into the military. As previously mentioned, however, the National Action Plan announced in 2009 before President Bachelet deemphasized this proactive stance and focused instead, in formal compliance with Resolution 1325, on developing a gender policy for peacekeeping operations only. The main change in Chile's gender policy between 2007 and 2009 thus was that its earlier priorities, which affected the military as a whole irrespective of the missions intended for it, were suddenly restricted.

In contrast, Argentina embarked on bolder, wider-ranging gender policy programmes. At the seminar, both Argentina's Defence Minister Nilda Garré and Human Rights Director Ileana Arduino underlined how – as stated by the latter – the Argentine policies on the inclusion of women in the armed forces followed “*an approach based on human rights as an essential part of the process of modernization of the democratic institutions fully promoted in the [military] sector, giving particular attention to the question of gender*” (Arduino, 2010, p.109). In addition, as her article points out, the Argentine policy is laid down in a number of laws that make the Argentine State responsible for “*the elimination of specific forms of violence and discrimination based on gender*”. Such is the case in Law n°26.845, passed in 2009, which instructs the State to take positive actions by all appropriate means to prevent, punish and eradicate all forms of violence against women. Furthermore, Article 11 of this law explicitly calls on the Defence Ministry to adopt regulations and positive measures to eradicate all patterns of discrimination in the recruitment, retention and promotion of women in the armed forces, raise staff awareness of the problem of violence against women, and include courses on the human rights of women in their training programmes.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Art.11 of Law 26.485 “on integral protection to prevent, punish and eradicate violence against women in all areas in which their interpersonal relationships take place” (approved on March 11, 2009 by the Senate and House of Deputies of Argentina).

It is clear then that a reorientation occurred in the actions of the government as regards the gender perspective sustained between the years 2006 and 2008, and there is now an increased emphasis on the detection of forms of violence rather than on equal treatment and career development. Undoubtedly, the appointment of law professionals specializing in human rights to review these policies is a significant contributing factor.

Moreover, the gender policy in the armed forces of Argentina relies on, and is affected by, the social, cultural, legal and political resources afforded by the larger national context. In order to produce change in the military institution, traditionally controlled by men, the MoD had to make a number of alliances and commitments with various civil society organizations and State agencies to bring legislation bearing on the armed forces in line with that governing other spheres of the State. Representatives of the national universities that had participated in the MoD's Council on Gender Policies, of the ministries of Justice, Security and Human Rights (including members of the Judiciary ) and of Public Health, were convened to draft and update the current legislation and establish standard operating procedures.

Concurrently, Gender Offices were created in the Navy and the Army under Resolution 1160/08. A few months earlier, the Gender Office of the Air Force had been established under the name "Oficina Centralizada de la Mujer" (Centralized Office for Women) on the initiative of this same force. The functions performed by these offices were:

[a]nalysis and evaluation of any situation arising from the incorporation of women into the military, the acknowledgment of all concerns regarding gender issues in the workplace, the obligation of providing preliminary legal and psychological assistance to military staff involved in conflict situations and lastly, to take the necessary actions to address the issues raised (Perdomo, Zicre & Sotelo, 2010, p.152).

Consistent with the unmistakable national accent of its gender policy, and although Argentina had designed and developed an action plan to implement UN Resolution 1325 in peacekeeping operations, this was not highlighted at the event.

With regard to Brazil, during the regional seminar members of the Air Force described the current situation of women in their country's armed forces, pointing out that females had been incorporated into the Brazilian Air Force just recently, and only in the command corps, while the other services had included women as assimilated professional staff. The presentations made by the Brazilian government were not published. In fact, the proceedings contain a lone article by a Brazilian academic, Maria Celina D'Araujo, whose research focuses on the issue of military dictatorship and democratization processes in Brazil and the region, but does not report the particular situation of military women in the country.

During this period, it is at these international and regional events, which serve as vehicles for the comparison and dissemination of gender policies in armed forces, that the differential impact of Resolution 1325 on the three countries can best be appreciated.

Argentina, for example, besides the national legislation that defined all forms of violence as “gender-based”, limited the implementation of the Resolution to peacekeeping operations, and grounded its integration policies in the relevant human rights policies in the country. Chile, once former Minister Bachelet left Defence to become the country’s President, disregarded the policy on professional equality in military careers and subsumed it completely under the implementation of UN resolution 1325, developing a national action plan to this end. In other words, whereas Argentina broadened the purview of its policies while initiating a selective application of the Resolution, Chile narrowed it down, and Brazil remained on the side-lines.

### **The Role of Female Leaders at the Top of MoDs**

As we have seen, Argentina and Chile were among the more firmly committed in the region to a gender perspective in the deployment of military forces on peace support missions. Despite differences in emphasis, similarities between them exist. One is that in both countries, civilian professional women personally involved in the processes of democratization were appointed Minister of Defence. And it is well worth looking at the career trajectories,<sup>8</sup> political skills, and personal influence over events of the two females in charge of the defence ministries in Santiago and Buenos Aires during a period marked by a great emphasis placed on gender policies.

Michelle Bachelet held office as Chile’s Minister of National Defence between 2002 and 2006, becoming the first woman in Latin America to hold such a post. During her term, she was actively engaged in the pursuit of equal conditions between men and women in the armed forces, the *carabineros* (internal security force) and the Investigation Police of Chile, in reforming the nation’s compulsory military service system, and in the deployment of peace-keeping contingents around the world. In 2006, after winning the runoff election, she became the first woman President of Chile, and served in that capacity until 2010.

Early in her presidency, she appointed another woman, Vivianne Blanlot Soza, as Minister of National Defence. Although she followed the approach developed by Michelle Bachelet regarding issues of gender and women’s integration, Blanlot Soza did not undertake

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<sup>8</sup> The political and family life of Michelle Bachelet was marked by her lifelong militancy in the Socialist Party. Her father, Alberto Bachelet, a loyalist Air Force Brigadier General, had been arrested under the brutal dictatorship that overthrew President Allende in 1973, prompting her to go into exile. Upon returning to Chile in 1979, she became involved in politics and actively engaged in helping the victims of the military dictatorship and their families. After Gen. Pinochet left power in 1990, she rose within the Socialist Party until, still almost unknown to the general public, she first held office as Minister of Health (2000-2002).

Nilda Garré was a lawyer actively engaged in the review process of gender integration into the armed forces. Her early political sympathies leaned towards the left-wing sectors of the Peronist party. Garré was first elected as national deputy in 1973, and remained in the Congress until the civil-military *coup* deposed the government in 1976. In 1983, following the initiation of a constitutional redress programme, Garré became a member of the Inquiry Commission of the Centre for Legal and Social Studies investigating the crimes (abductions, tortures and murders) committed by the military. During the 1990s, she was elected three times as a national representative. Garré was appointed Ambassador to Venezuela in June 2005, and a few months later she was recalled to join President Néstor Kirchner’s Cabinet as Defence Minister.

any further initiatives regarding these matters. It is at this time that gender policies in Chile become exclusively concerned with the specific implementation of Resolution 1325.

Shortly after leaving office, Michelle Bachelet dedicated herself exclusively to international policy, and in September 2010, she was appointed director of the newly established UN Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, known as “UN Women”, whose primary objectives are the enhancement of female political participation and economic empowerment, and a sustained effort to end violence against women. On December 15, 2013, she was re-elected as President of Chile for a second term (2014-2018).

Like Bachelet in Chile, Nilda Garré was the first woman in Argentina to serve as Defence Minister. Her appointment was disruptive of the status quo, not only because she was a woman, and restrictions on the incorporation of women in the armed forces were still in place, but also because she was believed to have close links with militants of armed organizations which had fought the regular armed forces under the 1976-1983 dictatorship.

Garré remained in charge at the MoD until 2010. In 2007, during her term, Cristina Fernández de Kirchner became the first woman President of Argentina. On December 15, 2010, Garré was sworn in at the head the newly created Ministry of Security, an even more sensitive post. She pursued a bold and active policy promoting gender equality in the police force, eliminating quotas for women (which brought about increased female accessions), lifting restrictions on pregnant women, respecting the self-perceived gender identity and, lastly, creating comprehensive gender centres in police institutions. In 2012, she left her post to become the Argentine representative to the Organization of American States in Washington.

The leading role of these two women in their respective MoDs does not mean that only women are capable of acting in the cause of gender equality, or of guaranteeing human rights for women. It is just that our focus is on tracing the evolution of gender policies within the wider framework of the post-dictatorship democratization process, to which those two eminent women were totally committed and in which they played a part. This process included the prosecution of those responsible for the criminal offenses perpetrated during the military dictatorships of the 1970's. Moreover, the political trajectories of Michelle Bachelet and Nilda Garré show a degree of leadership experience that goes far beyond defence issues: they both left their MoD posts to take up positions of equal or greater responsibility in their own governments, and later on the international scene.

Lastly, the fact that both were the first women to become defence minister in their countries is indicative of the climate that prevailed in each of them. Implementation of gender policies in the military is not a question of merely appointing female ministers. However, it may well be that the possibility for a female to become minister can be explained by the increase in women's participation in politics, which in turn derives from the realization that the purpose of integrating women into areas traditionally monopolized by men goes well beyond the military sphere, affecting also the world of work and politics.

## **Women in the Militaries of Argentina, Brazil and Chile Today**

### **Elimination of Restrictions on Women**

The lifting of restrictions on women's access to the armed forces was a gradual and lengthy process. The admission of military women in the Southern Cone countries started in the 1970's, but did not follow a stable and continuous policy path. On the contrary, each country and each service behaved quite autonomously in this respect. In 2000, with the strengthening of their gender policies, Argentina and Chile started admitting women to all the forces and service academies. In Brazil, however, the issue remains a pending challenge.

In 1975, Chile became the first country in the region to incorporate women into the Army. That same year, Ecuador also admitted the first group of women into its own Army, while Venezuela simultaneously allowed women to access all three services. Uruguay, with a female accession policy dating back to 1949, was the only country in Latin America that had female staff in the Army, the Navy and the Air Force prior to the 1970's.

After that first admission of women into the Army, it took Chile's MoD twenty-five more years to open new doors to women, this time allowing them into the Military Aviation Academy of the Air Force. The Chilean Navy, on the other hand, incorporated women only in 2006. The process of women's access to the different services was a discontinuous process, indicative of the degree of autonomy of each service when making decisions on this subject. Conversely, in the case of Venezuela, universal access to the Navy, the Army and the Air Force was guaranteed under a government provision.

In Chile's case, that autonomy reaches further down to branches and specialties, especially the Combat Arms. In the Army, female applicants were admitted to combat support units (Engineers and Signals) in 2003, but not to the combat arms proper, namely Armour and Infantry (Castrillón & von Chrismar, 2013). Likewise, in 2007 the Navy's academies trained women as line officers, but kept them out of Marine Infantry and its Submarine specialty. On the other hand, Chile's Air Force started a pioneering initiative in South America, allowing access of women to all positions, including that of Air Combat Pilot. In 2007, the armed forces of Chile further boosted the process of universal access of females to the Service Academies, by authorizing admission of women to the regular courses of the Naval Academy, later (2009) to the *Grumetes* School, and the Air Specialties School (Villalobos, 2010).

With regard to Argentina, women first entered the non-combat professional corps (as engineers, lawyers, medical doctors)<sup>9</sup> of the Navy and the Air Force in 1980; a year later, they were allowed to join the Army's. While the Navy and the Air Force concurrently authorized the admission of females to the NCO command corps in 1980, women had to wait until the 1990s and 2000s to access officer ranks in those two services.

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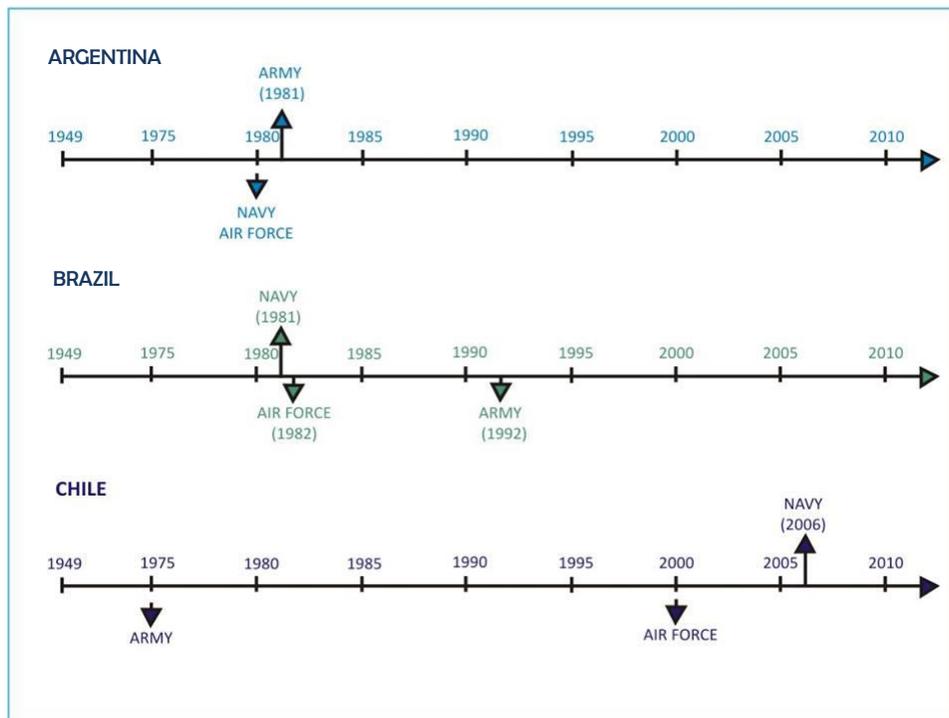
<sup>9</sup> In both Argentina and Chile, officers belong either to the professional (specialist) corps or to the command (line/ staff) corps.

As in Chile, women applicants were barred for a longer period from the Army’s Infantry and Armour units: it was not until 2013, two years after President Cristina Fernández voiced a public complaint, that both branches opened up under an Army Resolution. As Ileana Arduino (2010) points out, issues like women’s access to positions strongly related to the use of lethal force tend to spark off intense debate on gender. Situations of female subordination or confinement to auxiliary roles are hardly frowned upon in the parent society: the idea of women taking a direct and active part in combat duty raises questions as to the meanings of gender relations and roles that by far exceed the purely military sphere, as is the issue of women using violence.<sup>10</sup>

As regards Brazil, the Air Force and the Navy opened women’s access to NCO careers for some specialties during the 1980’s, and so eventually did the Army in the 1990’s. Like the other armies of the region, the Brazilian Army was the service that most strongly resisted the changes in female admission policy.

The chart presented below shows the years of admission of the very first women into the military, for a full or limited career, in each of the countries of the Southern Cone:

**Fig. 1:** Years of admission of women to military careers in Argentina, Brazil and Chile



Source : CEED data, “La mujer en el ambito de la defensa en Suramérica”. Informe Preliminar, February 2014.

<sup>10</sup> In this regard, the characterization of the use of violence by women is widely debated in the social sciences. Even though, from our own point of view, a thorough ethnographical research programme is required in order to make further progress on this question, the following references address the theoretical complexity of the subject: Cardi & Pruvost (2012), Héritier (2002), Rubin (2010).

According to a recent study by the Centre for Strategic Defence Studies (CEED),<sup>11</sup> until 2014 no military woman had achieved the highest available rank allowed by law in Brazil, Argentina and Chile. Its preliminary report, entitled “Gender Policies: Women in the Armed Forces of UNASUR”, notes in this respect that given their comparatively recent initial admission into the armed forces, servicewomen do not as yet enjoy enough seniority to have reached the highest ranks. Following this reasoning, and as a result of the policies on female admission, women can be expected to reach the military’s top over the coming years.<sup>12</sup>

### **Female Presence in the Military in 2014 : Basic Quantitative Data**

To illustrate the situation of military women in Chile, Argentina and Brazil by the end of the period under consideration, some statistical data on female participation in the armed forces in 2014 is provided below. The information offered can hardly pass for an in-depth statistical analysis of the situation, mainly because no accurate figures are available on the total number of women in each of the services. However, the general data presented in this section will suffice to supply a broad picture<sup>13</sup>: the number of women presently on active-duty in the command (generalist) and professional (specialist) corps; their participation rate in each category of personnel ; and the proportion of women present in each of the services.

In Argentina, there are a total of about nine thousand women in the professional and command corps of the Armed Forces, and overall female participation (including the rank and file) represents 12.9%. In the case of Chile, the percentage is higher, with females representing exactly 14.43% of total force levels, a proportion which amounts to 11,204 women. While Brazil, with 19,834 servicewomen overall, has the highest absolute numbers amongst the three countries, their share of total force levels only comes to a meagre 6.1% due to the fact that the Brazilian defence establishment is considerably larger.

When the gender composition of each of the services in all three countries is examined, a common denominator emerges: the Army is the force with the lowest female representation. On the other hand, since the beginning of the systematic implementation of gender policies, if compared to Brazil, Chile and Argentina show a consistently higher proportion of women admitted to the armed forces, including to military academies and units/positions earmarked for peacekeeping operations. The same observation applies when it comes to the percentage of women among enlisted volunteers.

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<sup>11</sup> CEED is a branch of the South American Defence Council (CDS) whose creation was approved in 2009 by the Defence ministers of UNASUR (Union of South American Nations).

<sup>12</sup> Significantly, if we take Argentina as an example, the highest ranks achieved to date by women are in the professional (specialist) corps.

<sup>13</sup> Whereas Argentina relies on an all-volunteer force, Brazil and Chile have so far refrained from suspending conscription. However, in those two countries, voluntary enlistments have been enough in the recent period to cover force level requirements, so that unless they wish to enlist young males are *de facto* exempted from military service.

**Table 1:** Breakdown of female participation by service

	Overall		Army		Navy		Air Force	
	Total number of women	% of force levels	Number of women	% of service strength	Number of women	% of service strength	Number of women	% of service strength
<b>Argentina</b>	9,601	12.9%	5,088	11.4%	2,610	13.9%	1,903	17.1%
<b>Brazil</b>	19,834	6.1%	5,698	2.9%	5,598	10.0%	8,538	1.3%
<b>Chile</b>	11,204	14.4%	5,280	12.8%	3,991	15.1%	1,933	16.6%

Source : CEED data, “La mujer en el ambito de la defensa en Suramérica”. Informe Preliminar, February 2014.

With regard to the rank structure, women represent 10% of the total number of officers in Argentina. Female NCOs represent 8.1% overall, though there is a clear disparity across services in this regard : while in the Air Force women represent 15% of the NCO corps, in the Army they constitute a mere 0.52% of total strength.

Furthermore, when the respective composition of the professional and command corps is examined, a distinct tendency to incorporate more women into the former can be noticed. In Argentina for instance, while women’s share of the command corps is 2%, it amounts to 10.8% in the professional corps.

## Conclusions

Among the three nations under consideration in this study, policies and programmes meant to increase female participation and integration in the military started decades ago – after the military dictatorships they lived through came to an end. This process has not only been dissimilar across the three countries, but also, and often more dramatically, across the services, branches or specialties of their armed forces. The influence of international organizations (UN agencies) and active interventions of national political actors within or from outside the ministries of defence encouraged such dissimilarity. Although each country, each service and each branch of the armed forces advanced at its own pace, progress, however unequal, has accumulated overall so that at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, women’s participation and career opportunities are distinctly greater. There are still a few branches, notably the combat arms, and some countries, like Brazil (though the latter has made commitments to remedy that situation), that lag behind, but recent trends are moving the matter forward even there. Meanwhile, the MoDs of Chile and Argentina are engaged in the elimination of the social handicaps and obstacles that hamper the professional development of women, and focused on the eradication of all forms of gender violence.

The influence exerted by international organizations, while it cannot ensure the consistency of the processes, has certainly stimulated and supported the trends identified. Although the appeal by UN representatives (Santiago, 2007) in favour of implementing recommended policies on gender integration in the military was made to Argentina, Chile and

Brazil simultaneously, each drew up its own local response. In the first period, the experiences of Chile and Argentina were similarly characterized by the development of national strategies and a proactive approach. However, later, Chile subsumed its entire policy on gender under the implementation of UN Resolution 1325 in peacekeeping operations. Principles such as equal opportunity between men and women, not considered in the Resolution, were all but abandoned. By contrast, although Argentina supported the UN resolution and implemented it in its peacekeeping operations, the country developed a local, human rights-based approach for its gender integration policy in the armed forces, as a reaction to the State terrorism of earlier days. Unlike its neighbours, Brazil, to date, has for the most part seemed to lack a strong commitment to proactive gender policies.

In spite of their different emphases, Argentina and Chile share a few similarities in the process of women's integration and the identification of gender issues. One is the sheer novelty of female ministers of defence who played leading roles during the key period that witnessed the surge of women's admissions to the different branches and specialties in the forces. Another resides in the relationship between the strengthening of democracy, embodied in the investigation of the crimes committed by the military dictatorships of both nations, and the implementation of human rights programmes that included gender policies.

In sum, going back to the question raised by Nuciari (2006) on the issue of deepening gender integration, while Argentinians, Brazilians and Chileans all agree in acknowledging that if progress is to be achieved on gender issues in the military, women need to be allowed growing access (though total force levels are not slated to increase) to specialties and senior ranks that hitherto were the preserve of men, there are differences among these nations in the way they conceive of gender policies in the realm of defence. One sees them as a quest for equality between men and women; another aims its programmes at the elimination of all forms of violence and of discrimination against women; the third has not yet dared take the plunge and initiate innovative policies in that regard. The salient fact is the apparent gap which distinguishes Argentina and Chile on the one hand, where democratization of the armed forces encouraged the implementation of gender policies in the defence sector, from Brazil on the other, which has yet to formulate and implement a gender policy for the armed forces.

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