



The U.S. Military and Human Rights Promotion: Lessons from Latin America (Praeger Security International)

By Jerry Laurienti

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Many years before the U.S. military had to deal with the repercussions of abuses at Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq, the U.S. armed forces were vigorously engaged in helping their Latin American counterparts to recognize the strategic imperatives of respecting human rights on the battlefield. Before Iraqi accusations of massacre at Haditha forced the U.S. military to again scramble to defend its honor and reputation, U.S. forces in Latin America were more than a decade into repairing their image after taking the blame for numerous human rights crises. Indeed, U.S. military relations with Latin America are at the center of numerous academic and policy debates, particularly regarding U.S. military assistance and its impact on human rights and broader democratic development. Until now, however, no book has focused on determining whether the U.S. military could serve as a primary source of human rights promotion. Meanwhile, U.S. military human rights promotion efforts in Latin America have become central to the Department of Defense Strategic Engagement Plan since the end of the Cold War.

The significant role of the U.S. military in promoting human rights around Latin America is unmatched by U.S. military efforts anywhere in the world. This book documents an approach to human rights that could become a model for Department of Defense strategy and behavior around the world. Perhaps the most important finding of this book is that the true heroes on the human rights front are not civilians, but U.S. military officials, a conclusion that is too often ignored by activists, missed by scholars, and would have been unthinkable only a decade ago.

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Editorial Review

Review

"This important book claims that the US military has played a significant, positive role in promoting human rights in Latin America through military assistance. While the thesis may seem counterintuitive in light of past US military involvement in human rights abuses in Latin America and similar, more recent abuses in Iraq, the book is tightly argued and well documented. Chapters 1 and 2 place the issue in historical and contemporary contexts. The next three chapters present three key case studies (Bolivia, Colombia, and Venezuela) of human rights promotion through US military assistance. The case studies are quite brief, but convincing. Chapter 6 relates the case studies and the book's thesis to the challenge of military human rights promotion in the counterterrorism age; a concluding chapter follows. The book is sufficiently compelling to require a rethinking of the role of the US military in human rights promotion in this hemisphere by all concerned, including practitioners in the government as well as private sector human rights groups. Clear organization and readability make the book accessible for undergraduates as well as graduate students and professionals. Highly recommended. All levels." - **Choice**

"Using case studies of Bolivia, Colombia, and Venezuela as a base for analysis, Laurienti shows that American consistency in promoting human rights through military connections has developed as a key to long-term counterterrorist policies, has facilitated democratic development generally, and has become central to the U.S. Strategic Engagement Plan." - **MultiCultural Review**

"Laurienti (a Latin America analyst for the US government) seeks to analyze whether human rights promotion in military assistance and training has had a positive effect in the cases of Bolivia, Colombia, and Venezuela. He finds that human rights promotion, which he argues remains a resilient commitment of US military officials in Latin America, does have a positive impact, but that the extent of such impact is contingent on each country's level of democratic civil-military development." - **Reference and Research Book News**

"Sceptical leftists will beg to differ but the author deserves credit for opening up far more avenues of debate than his opponents will be able to close down." - **Journal of American Studies**

Review

"This book offers a fresh, much needed perspective to the literature on civil-military relations. Stepping back from stereotypical and often emotionally driven charges of military misconduct, Laurienti analyzes and highlights the U.S. military's challenges and successes in seeking to improve human rights awareness among foreign armed forces. Laurienti's novel study presents surprising conclusions, the implications of which go well beyond Latin America." (Richard D. Downie, Ph.D., Director, Center for Hemispheric Defense Studies)

"As the United States takes on new military-assistance missions in the context of counterterrorism, it is important that we understand the lessons of the recent past. Jerry Laurienti brilliantly fills that need by walking the reader through the difficult history and present complexity of U.S. military engagement with a rapidly changing Latin America. *The U.S. Military and Human Rights Promotion* fills a big vacuum with a rigorous analysis of a controversial and little-understood topic: the human-rights impact--for good or ill--of U.S. military programs overseas." (Adam Isacson, Director of Programs, Center for International Policy)

"Laurienti sheds light on an issue that military and human rights scholars have left largely unexplored. He

provides a window into how the U.S. armed forces can foster security while playing a central role in human rights promotion. Policymakers and academics looking for practical options to advance a stronger military-human rights relationship will find this study enlightening." (General Barry R. McCaffrey, USA (Ret.))

About the Author

Jerry M. Laurienti works as a Latin America analyst for the U.S. government and writes frequently for top policymakers. He has traveled extensively in the region, where he conducted research for this book. He earned his Ph.D. from the University of Denver, Graduate School of International Studies.

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