5 The Distribution of Power and Military Conflict

Does the distribution of power affect the likelihood of militarized conflict? The bumper sticker debate between "If you want peace, prepare for war" and "Arms are made for hugging" resonates in the halls of government as well as in the towers of academia. Yet there is another major debate on the issue. If power matters, is parity or preponderance more likely to lead to peaceful competition among states?

The claim that military power is a fundamental contributor to interstate stability is contentious, especially in the Latin American context. By the early twentieth century U.S. and British diplomats in South America ridiculed the "vanity" which led governments there to seek modern weapons and training. Yet the U.S. and British governments competed with Germany, France, and Italy to provide the weapons and training.[1] After World War II U.S. military arms policy changed and sought to control the flow of armaments into Latin America, both in terms of quantity and quality.[2] Militaries were encouraged through training and arms policy to focus on internal rather than external "enemies."

Yet there have always been advocates of "power brings regional peace" formulas in Latin America. European training before World War I emphasized traditional definitions of security and deterrence missions. During the Cold War Latin American militaries took the money and political power which internal missions provided, but also worried about their neighbors. Many Latin American citizens, legislators, and civilian military analysts also believed in the importance of the balance of power.[3]

In the wake of redemocratization after a period of authoritarian rule there is renewed vigor against thinking about Latin American defense establishments functioning as modern militaries. Anti-militarists in the U.S. and Latin America do not believe military power is stabilizing. Still others see no external threats in Latin America to which military preparedness would be an appropriate response. Both types of critics seek to turn Latin American militaries into police forces or development corps, denying them any legitimate role in traditional external defense scenarios.[4]

This chapter examines the theoretical rationale for the argument that the distribution of power matters for understanding the use of force in foreign policy and evaluates the empirical record of Latin America. The chapter has four sections. The first two lay out the theoretical argument. I begin with a discussion of the importance of relative military power in an anarchic international system. Next, I examine the two major schools of thought concerning the impact of power distribution and war. Balance of power analysts argue that parity drives peaceful management of conflict, while power transition theorists claim that preponderance and intent constitute the keys to international conduct.

The last two sections explore the empirical record in Latin America. Qualitative analyses of important enduring rivalries among Latin American states are followed by statistical analysis on the issue of power balancing. In this last section I also examine whether the combination of military power and democratic institutions helps us explain the patterns of the use of force. The chapter demonstrates that neither overall military balance nor preponderance is a necessary or sufficient condition for militarization of conflict.

The Importance and Relational Nature of Military Power

Power analysts are Realists. All analysts working in the Realist paradigm share some basic starting points. Anarchy is the fundamental condition of international relations as long as political units that interact wish to remain independent. The implications of anarchy are twofold: the use of violence to resolve disagreements may occur because there is no legitimate and effective authority to prevent its use and the units are forced to rely on self-help to survive and prosper. Self-help in an anarchic system in turn privileges power relations, thereby forcing states to consider the importance of relative

over absolute gains. A Realist world is a world in which the use of military force cannot be eliminated, and at best is deterred by superior force.

Realists are divided, however, by the understanding of what drives state behavior under conditions of anarchy. Thucydides' focus on the innate drives for power in men, and therefore in the political institutions that they create, is echoed in Machiavelli, Morgenthau, and Mearsheimer.[5] Most modern analysts of the Realist school, however, reject the utility of the assumption that states are power seekers and maximizers, and instead focus upon the search for security.[6] The implications of this difference for understanding international behavior are fundamental.

If security concerns drive state behavior, under conditions of anarchy a security dilemma develops. In a self-help world, capabilities rather than intent matter; my attempt to safeguard myself worries you because you cannot be sure of my intentions. But the fact that you might sincerely be seeking security rather than power means that we may be foregoing cooperation that would be beneficial to both. The possibility of a cooperative security response that would not affect the relative distribution of power stimulates the search for ways to diminish the impact of the security dilemma.

If we substitute the assumption that states seek power rather than security, the relationship between states becomes stark. Make the drive for power innate and overriding and the security dilemma disappears: I *will* dominate you if I can; I know that and you know that. Cooperation is dramatically limited and short term in this Realist world. States do not even share a common interest in surviving, absent a situation of mutually assured destruction.

A focus on security rather than power is a more useful theoretical assumption to guide research in understanding foreign policy. Maximization of power does not follow logically from the assumption of anarchy, but a drive for security does.[7] Power maximization theorists are led, as were Thucydides and Morgenthau, to make assumptions about the nature of human behavior to sustain their argument. A security focus is more theoretically parsimonious and does a better job dealing with the issue of cooperation under anarchy.

The conditions under which the security dilemma may be mitigated and cooperation stimulated is answered in two different ways. The answers break down into two camps: those focusing on credibility and those on capability. While liberals devise many theoretical justifications for why credibility of pacific intent can be brought to levels which virtually eliminate the di-

lemma, Realists point to the cases where pacific intent did not carry the day to argue for the prudence of focusing on capabilities.[8] For these latter analysts the dilemma is diminished to the extent that the defense has the advantage over the offense, usually conceived of in terms of the technology of the weapons themselves or the strategies states implement to use them.[9] The basic point is that the cost of guessing wrong about intent will fall dramatically if the offensive capability of a potential offender is not sufficient to gain them advantage. Under these conditions it will be prudent to increase cooperation with states with which one has serious disagreements and perhaps even decrease one's defense budget.

Using either a technological or strategy-based offense-defense focus to explain militarized conflict in Latin America is problematic. With the exception of the 1941 war between Peru and Ecuador and any dyad in which a great power confronts a Latin American country, differences in the military arsenals of rival states are minimal. Military strategies (with the difference of the dyads just mentioned, as well as the El Salvador-Honduras war of 1969), also do not give one Latin American country an advantage over another.

Even when we consider that the offense-defense balance distinction is not usually an appropriate lens through which to think about the military balance of power in Latin America, the question of how much military power is enough remains relevant. Low absolute levels of military expenditures or arms arsenals are not in and of themselves sufficient to keep disputes from militarizing. Power is relative and what matters in a Realist paradigm is the distribution of military power between potential disputants. According to this line of reasoning, the absence of a MID is largely the result of a potential initiator being deterred by the existing distribution of power between herself and the potential target.

But what should we count to evaluate the distribution of power? Calculating the distribution is not a straightforward task, even if we limit ourselves to a Realist focus on which resources matter in the field of battle.[10] The debate largely breaks down into whether one should focus on overall or specific military capability. Advocates of the former assume that major skirmishes could escalate to a long drawn out war, thus resources that can be turned into military power in the medium term matter. In a major war a state is likely to have the time to mobilize and use all of its resources. Victory and defeat are expected to largely follow the distribution of resources. Consequently, when calculating whether to engage in military activity against

another state, it is the overall distribution of military capability that matters. Analysts who focus on specific military capability assume that the decision to escalate a crisis is based on very short term considerations. This chapter focuses on overall military power, leaving the question of specific military capabilities for chapters 6 and 7.

This discussion may seem too abstract to analysts who believe that Latin American governments use international disputes to divert attention from domestic failings. As noted in chapter 2, Latin America's security challenges arise from both external and internal factors (power distribution among states, political weaknesses of governments domestically). Realists do not deny the existence of domestic problems, but argue that whether or not those domestic problems affect foreign policy is largely determined by the distribution of capabilities among states. Thus a government may wish to employ diversionary tactics to distract domestic opponents, but it will only do so against states that are not expected to respond by inflicting such great pain on the country that the government is held to account. The attempt to distinguish between nonmilitary proximate causes and underlying military causes[11] breaks down in this formulation. Realists argue that the underlying cause is anarchy and the security dilemma and the proximate cause is the distribution of power.

If the distribution of power argument is a powerful explanation of interstate conflict, we need to develop and examine hypotheses about what distributions make the use of military force in foreign policy more likely.

Parity or Preponderance?

Power analysts disagree about whether parity or preponderance diminishes the likelihood of military conflict. The theoretical literature on the distribution of power and war examines the question from a systemic perspective.[12] Yet, as will be seen below, policymakers in the region often focus on the regional or bilateral distribution of power to explain military conflict.

If balance of power theorists are correct, parity should mean both fewer wars and less violent militarization of disputes. Parity brings peace because neither side can be reasonably sure of winning a war at acceptable costs.

Hypothesis 5.1 Power Parity and War: When power is roughly equally distributed, states will be more likely to refrain from war.

Hypothesis 5.2 Power Parity and MIDs: When power is roughly equally distributed, states will be more likely to refrain from engaging in MIDs, in particular major crises.

The power preponderance argument takes a different tack. Rather than see peace resulting from powers of relatively equal military strength balancing each other, preponderance analysts perceive peace to result from one power deterring challengers through its significantly greater power. Predominance is usually defined as having 80 percent more power than the rival, but some analysts make the distinction at 3 to 1 (moderate preponderance) and again at 10 to 1.[13]

At the systemic level, the preponderant power organizes the international system to reflect its own interests, hence a rising power will wish to reorganize the system to its own advantage. If the status quo defenders have a preponderance of power, the costs of challenging the status quo will likely be higher than the benefits, hence the revisionist state will behave peacefully. But when power shifts in favor of the revisionists, the likelihood of war increases.[14] In particular, the speed of the transition matters. Fast transitions make war all the more likely.[15] Speed, however, is measured ambiguously: sometimes Organski calls change "within a lifetime" "fast" and "very fast."[16]

We can extrapolate from this discussion of rivalry between a preponderant power and its rising rival to the question of relations among smaller powers. Organski and Kugler do not believe that power preponderance is relevant to "peripheral" states, i.e., those who are not disputing leadership of the international system. They note that small-state wars may occur independently of the distribution of power at the systemic level, hence changes there may not affect small-state war.[17] The logic of revisionist states being unhappy with the status quo, however, suggests that we can utilize the insights from this approach for our analysis. To test this hypothesis we have an easily identifiable population of revisionist states in Latin America consisting of the enduring rivalries discussed in chapters 1 and 2.

Hypothesis 5.3 Power Preponderance and War. When power predominance exists in a dyad, war is unlikely. The likelihood increases if a power transition occurs, with a rapid transition increasing the likelihood of war even more and just before parity.

While the two approaches to power distribution differ about the specifics, they both argue that power distribution is a necessary, though not sufficient, factor accounting for war. Most quantitative studies argue that it is power

preponderance, not parity which contributes to peace or war, though Organski and Kugler disagree.

If preponderance means less war because the challenger fears war with the defender more than vice versa, we should see more bullying with force by the defender to enforce the status quo. The revisionist state presumably will express its displeasure in some fashion short of those expected to provoke war. But the preponderant state can punish without fear of escalation to war. This may explain U.S. military intervention against weak Latin American states seen as anti-American.

Hypothesis 5.4 Power Preponderance and MIDs. Preponderant defenders of the status quo should bully by consistently using force in their disputes and the weaker revisionist state should not respond in kind.

Quantitative Analyses of Power Distribution

Historical analysis of relative military power in Latin America is difficult for anyone utilizing quantitative methodologies. Data on military budgets, arms expenditures, and imports are problematic until the 1970s[18] when they became merely debatable.[19] The combat readiness and skill of men and machines forms a basis for calculating strategic advantage yet is not quantifiable in any scientific way. Although this theoretically affects all nations, it is a particular problem in Latin America, where numerous armies have demonstrated their incompetence on the battlefield. Since not all the militaries are incompetent (the Chileans in particular are feared), and some evolve over time (e.g., the Peruvians in the late 1930s and the Ecuadorians in the late 1980s both became more efficient militaries), one cannot simply impose a general discount rate across all countries.[20]

These data limitations require that we proceed with caution in setting up and interpreting the analyses. The initial statistical analysis undertaken in this section relies on the widely used National Capabilities Database of the Correlates of War project.[21] I use measures of military expenditures in order to examine short-term shifts in the balance of overall military power and their potential effects on militarized conflict. The time period examined must also have some internal coherence, established by a major watershed which separates it from other time periods.

With these limitations in mind, for the statistical portion of the quantitative testing I begin with the Cold War and end in 1992.[22] In this time

period there were only three wars, which are too few to carry out meaningful statistical analyses.[23] Hence, we cannot evaluate Hypotheses 5.1 and 5.3 in this initial test. Probit analyses are used to evaluate Hypotheses 5.2 and 5.4

The military relationship in the dyads was operationalized in two different ways. The first, military, is the change (over the previous year) in military expenditures for side A, divided by the change (over the previous year) in military expenditures for side B. This variable assumes that military expenditures is a good proxy for measuring a change in the relative military capabilities in a dyad. In order to overcome distortions that resulted from ratios with extreme values over 1 (over a 100% change in the expenditure ratios) these extreme values were coded as 1. Likewise, those with ratios less than -1 were coded as -1. While the 1, -1 cutoffs for the ratios are somewhat arbitrary, coding a large change in the military ratio this way provides sufficient indication of a significant change in relative military capabilities

A second measure for relative military capability was created in the expectation that there could be a military buildup to the crisis beginning as early as a year before. The variable LGMILLD is identical to MILITARY except that it captures the change in relative military capabilities in the year prior to the year analyzed for the occurrence of a MID. This variable may more accurately capture the dynamics of military imbalances that produce a militarization of a dispute in the short term.

The first models specified MID behavior as a function of changes in the military balance in the year of the dispute, in the year prior to the dispute, and utilizing both measures. If the coefficient is statistically significant and positive, it means that an increase in power preponderance is an important determinant of MID behavior. If the coefficient is negative, it means that the power relationship has become more equal. The results were statistically meaningless. Hypotheses 5.2 and 5.4 would seem, therefore, to lack any statistical support.

Before deciding that the variables were either irrelevant or too poorly measured to be useful, I looked for another variable which might be confounding the impact of the military balance. Given the arguments in favor of the pacifying effects of democracy, and as a way of further testing the argument of the previous chapter, I incorporated democracy as another variable in the model. Democracy is measured as in chapter 4, using the *Polity* database.

New models were estimated, using changes in military expenditures both in the year of the MID and in the prior year as well as the democraticness (DEMDYAD) of the dyad. The results were again disappointing:

The statistical significance of the hypothesized causal variables in Model 1 were well above the standard cutoff (0.05): MILITARY (0.14), LGMILLD (0.37), and DEMDYAD (0.12). Thus the results could have happened by simple chance more often than is acceptable. Once again, neither power parity nor power preponderance seems to make a difference for the decision to use force in an interstate dispute.

Before abandoning the model, it is appropriate to consider whether we have measured the democracy variable adequately. The previous chapter argued that a 6 on the *Polity* database was an appropriate threshold for defining democracy in Latin American. Studies of other regions utilizing *Polity* find 6 to be a very low cutoff point. To evaluate whether too low a cutoff score was the problem in Model 1, Model 2 was developed, with the same military variables and a new democratic variable, consisting of countries with a *Polity* score of 7 or better. The results were more encouraging, though still inadequate.

The military variables improve marginally but remain statistically insignificant (same year from 0.14 to 0.13 and lagged from 0.37 to 0.36). The democracy variable (0.07) now approaches an acceptable level of statistical significance. Encouraged, another model was run with democracy levels raised to 8, but significance fell dramatically to 0.21. This outcome may be the result of having an inadequate number of democracies in Latin America that reached this level. Since the finding supported by Model 2 was sensitive to a change in level of democracy, the results might also be sensitive to the fact that the U.S. scored a 10 throughout the period and did not overtly use

TABLE 5.1 Model 1 of MID Behavior: U.S. and Latin America, 1948–1993

Variable	Coefficient	Standard Error	Significance
Constant	−2.282	0.037	—
MILITARY	0.069	0.047	0.14
LGMILLD	−0.040	0.045	0.37
DEMDYAD	−0.185	0.118	0.12

TABLE 5.2 Model 2 of MID Behavior: U.S. and Latin America, 1948–1993

Variable	Coefficient	Standard Error	Significance
Constant	−2.284	0.037	—
MILITARY	0.070	0.047	0.13
LGMILLD	−0.041	0.045	0.36
DEMDYAD7	−0.289	0.159	0.07

military force against a Latin American country scoring 7 or better. Models excluding the U.S. from the data were developed.

The variable for military expenditures in the year of the dispute experienced a slight deterioration in statistical significance, from 0.13 to 0.16. Democracy defined by level 6 became dramatically insignificant in intra–Latin American relations (0.77), falling below that for our military variable when lagged one year (0.64). As the insignificance corresponds to that found for U.S. and Latin American dyads at the 6 level, models were also run with democracy at 7 and then 8. In both cases the level of statistical significance remained abysmally low: Democracy 7 (coefficient -0.044; standard error 0.167; statistical significance 0.79) and Democracy 8 (coefficient 0.068; standard error 0.172; statistical significance 0.69).

The failure of these first models might reflect the problems already discussed with the data, rather than the actual impact of parity or preponderance. Unfortunately, I can't resolve that problem. But suggesting that the limited data we have do not support a simple power argument for MIDs, or

TABLE 5.3 Model 3 of MID Behavior: Intra-Latin America, 1948–1993

Variable	Coefficient	Standard Error	Significance
Constant	−2.406	0.044	—
MILITARY	0.078	0.055	0.16
LGMILLD	−0.025	0.053	0.64
DEMDYAD(6)	−0.038	0.134	0.77

even one that takes democraticness of the dyad into consideration, represents progress on the issue.

We can now take a more modest approach to test the hypotheses about power distribution and war. Ideally we should examine the relative distribution over time of parity and preponderance, develop a ratio of war and MIDs to each particular power distribution, and determine whether a statistically significant difference exists between the two power distributions for the likelihood of war and the militarization of crises.

Given the limitations of the data, it is more appropriate to test for whether a particular distribution of power is *necessary* or *sufficient* for the hypothesized explanations concerning the use of military force. I examine variations on the use of military force by whether its use led to severe crises or war. Table 5.4 presents the major crises in the last 30 years, and Table 5.5 examines the wars of the twentieth century.

There were fourteen major crises in this period, defined by whether both sides perceived a possibility of escalation to war or one side utilized major military force against the other. Three crises escalated to wars (El Salvador-Honduras, Argentina-Great Britain, and Ecuador-Peru 1995). One crisis developed into a mini-war (Ecuador-Peru 1981, with up to 200 deaths) and one resulted in a major invasion (the U.S. sent more than 20,000 troops to Panama and there were 557 deaths.[24] Another crisis escalated to an undeclared war (the U.S. armed and trained the "Contras" against the government of Nicaragua and the CIA mined Nicaraguan harbors). I don't consider the Haitian crisis to have escalated because U.S. troops landed only after the Haitian government agreed to accept them.

The parity theses (Hypotheses 5.1 and 5.2) find strong support in the case of major crises and war in the last 26 years (Table 5.4). Only three of the fourteen disputes involved parity and none escalated. This means that none of the three overt and one covert wars occurred in a context of military parity.

The preponderant argument concerning war (Hypothesis 5.3) is rejected for the last 26 years because all three wars in the period involved preponderance. What is especially damning to this argument is that in all three cases it was the weaker state (Honduras, Argentina, and Ecuador), that engaged in provocative behavior. The same pattern holds when we examine major crises. Ten of the fourteen major crises were initiated by weaker powers refusing to back down in confrontations with preponderant rivals. Of those major crises which escalated in this period, five of the seven (Ecuador-

TABLE 5.4 Power Distribution and Major Crises[a] in Latin America (1969–1998)

Crisis	Countries	Escalation	Power Distribution
1969	El Salvador-Honduras	War	Preponderant
1976/77	Peru-Chile	No	Parity
1977/78	Peru-Ecuador	No	Preponderant
1978/79	Argentina-Chile	No	Preponderant
1981	Peru-Ecuador	Mini-war	Preponderant
1982	Great Britain-Argentina	War	Preponderant
1980s	U.S.-Nicaragua	Covert War*	Preponderant
1986	Colombia-Venezuela	No	Parity
1989	U.S.-Panama	Invasion	Preponderant
1991	Peru-Ecuador	No	Preponderant
1993	Venezuela-Colombia	No	Parity
1993/94	U.S.-Haiti	No	Preponderant
1995	Peru-Ecuador	War	Preponderant
1998	Peru-Ecuador	No	Preponderant

*The U.S. recruited, financed, armed and trained the Contras to fight against the Sandinista government.

[a] MIDs in which either both sides perceived a possibility of escalation to war or one side utilized major military force against the other. E.g., the 1980 mobilization of troops on both sides of the border, including a visit by the Venezuelan President, seems not to have been perceived as anything more than a show of force. Alfredo Vazquez Carrizosa, *Colombia y Venezuela: Una historia atormentada*. Bogotá: Tercer Mundo Editores, S.A. 1987, 2nd edition, revised p. 441; Earle Herrera, *¿Por qué se ha reducido el territorio venezolano?* Caracas: Alfadil/Trópicos, 1978 pp. 52–53

Sources: Power distribution for 1969 to 1981 Max G. Manwaring, "Monitoring Latin American Arms Control Agreements," in Morris and Millan, *Controlling Latin American Conflicts*. His figures begin in 1970, but we can easily assume that El Salvador's 145 to 1 advantage over Honduras does not represent a dramatic change from the previous year; for 1986 to 1998 rough calculations from ACDA, *World Military Expenditures* pp. 59, 61, 78, 88; *Keesing's*.

TABLE 5.5 Power Distribution and War in Latin America (After the National Period)

War	Countries	Issue	Power Distribution
1932 Leticia	Peru attacks Colombia	territory	Parity
1928–35 Chaco	Bolivia attacks Paraguay	territory	Parity
1939–41 Zaarumilla	Peru attacks Ecuador	territory	Preponderant attack
1969 Soccer	El Salvador attacks Honduras	migration*	Preponderant attack Weaker
1982 Malvinas	Argentina seizes British territory	territory	Weaker attack Preponderant
1995 Cenapa	Ecuador provokes Peru	territory	Weaker provoke Preponderant

* Although there were underlying border issues, migration was the spark which ignited the crisis.

Peru thrice, Argentina-Great Britain, and Panama-U.S.), were initiated by the weaker state (only in El Salvador-Honduras and the U.S.-Nicaragua did the preponderant power initiate militarization). In addition, the only power transition occurred between the traditional rivals Argentina and Brazil, which went from a 4 to 1 Argentine advantage to a 3 to 1 Brazilian in a decade.[25] Despite the speed of the transition, no major crisis developed between them.

If we persist in letting data availability guide our analysis we would find some surprising results concerning the combination of military power and domestic institutions. Three of the fourteen crises occurred between states under military rule, but none escalated to even a mini-war (Peru-Chile, Ecuador-Peru 1977/78, and Argentina-Chile). Democratic regimes accounted for just under half the regime years in Latin America during this period, but were the first to use large-scale military force in five of the six which escalated (El Salvador v. Honduras; Peru v. Ecuador twice; the U.S. v. Nicaragua; and the U.S. v. Panama). Most escalated disputes were between democracies and authoritarian governments, but a war and a mini-

war occurred between two democracies (Ecuador and Peru in 1995 and 1981). And in two of the three cases in which a preponderant power escalated its dispute with a weaker power, it was the democracy that escalated (the U.S. against Nicaragua and Panama). We could conclude from this analysis, therefore, that in Latin America military governments never fight each other, that large-scale use of violence correlates with democracy, that preponderant powers only bully if they are democracies, and that democracies are more likely to fight each other than are non-democracies.

The results of Table 5.4 are so counterintuitive that they should be highly suspect. Although many quantitative analysts use very short time frames to analyze their questions we should not be seduced by statistical requirements. The 30-year period was determined by the availability of our quantitative data, not by any watershed that could theoretically justify such a selection. What we know about the characteristics of war and MIDs in the previous 70 years (see chapter 2), confirms that such results are artifacts of the time period studied.

Table 5.5 presents the six Latin American wars that occurred after the National Period[26] along with the nature of the dispute and an impressionistic distribution of power at the time.[27]

There were two cases of parity and war (Peru v. Colombia and Bolivia v. Paraguay, both in 1932). Four wars occurred under conditions of preponderance, but in two the preponderant power attacked the weaker (Peru v. Ecuador in 1941 and El Salvador v. Honduras in 1969), and in two the weaker attacked or provoked the preponderant (Argentina v. Great Britain in 1982 and Ecuador v. Peru in 1995). We can also note that power preponderance has always been on the U.S. side and that in the twentieth century no Latin American country engaged in war with the U.S., although the U.S. repeatedly invaded Latin American nations with great force. Table 5.5 and the U.S. experience confirm that war is not peculiar to one type of power distribution, hence, Hypotheses 5.1 and 5.3 are both rejected for the period covering the 20th century.

In short, sophisticated quantitative studies to evaluate claims about the impact of power distribution on militarized interstate conflict are of questionable value. Using less rigorous methods suggests that military power by itself is not an important determinant. This result could arise because our quantitative indicators are weak, because military power matters in ways different from the dimension studied by quantitative analysis, or because it has no impact. Before accepting the latter conclusion we should take a

historical and qualitative look at the distribution of power question in the specific context of a long-term rivalry.

Balance of Power Calculations in Latin America

For a number of reasons the measures of the distribution of power are even more ambiguous in Latin America than elsewhere. I have already mentioned the extreme variation in the region on the combat readiness of men. Equipment is also unevenly maintained and cannibalized. Even ammunition may be unusable, as the Argentines discovered when many of their bombs failed to detonate in the Malvinas War.[28] On the diplomatic front, formal alliances among one set of Latin American nations against another were rare in the twentieth century. Yet expectations of alliances developing in the event of an outbreak of war influence the calculations of statesmen and military planners throughout the region.

Despite the ambiguities of determining an appropriate balance of power, Latin American governments have long acted as if they understood its logic. The pattern of regional arms trading reflects these rivalries and possible alliances. Brazil exports arms to Chile, but not to Argentina. Argentina in turn exports arms to Peru and Bolivia, rivals of Chile, but not to Chile or Brazil. Meanwhile, Chile exports to Ecuador, a rival of Peru, but not to its neighbor Peru.[29] Indicative of the perception that unilateral arms reduction is potentially dangerous, when arms control and other confidence building measures have been pursued it is generally at the bilateral and multilateral levels.[30]

The analysis in this section does not seek to determine whether all weapons purchases are governed by power distribution considerations. Clearly they are not.[31] The relevant question for this analysis is whether militarization of conflict occurs repeatedly at any particular point in the evolution of the power relationship.

As the two most powerful Latin American countries, the relationship between Argentina and Brazil is an excellent case for evaluating the influence of power calculations upon dispute behavior. This dyad is particularly attractive because it represents the major power transition case in Latin America during the twentieth century. The Argentine-Brazilian relationship historically combined power projection issues with territorial disputes. Given the data limitations, I begin with a rough sense of the distribution of power

at the beginning of the century and examine its evolution over the course of the century.

Brazil occupies a unique position in Latin America. It is Portuguese rather than Spanish, and thus in a cultural sense different. Until late in the nineteenth century it was also a monarchy, in a hemisphere in which monarchy was suspect. Brazil was also able to overcome the political fragmentation that broke up the early Spanish American states and thus physically loomed as a giant in the area. In contrast to Argentina, which stressed its links to Europe, Brazil attempted to create for itself an American identity, much as the U.S. had. Argentine wealth and European culture led it to perceive itself as the natural leader among the republics created out of the Spanish American Empire. No other Western Hemisphere state was, however, willing to concede that mantle to the Argentines.

The Argentine-Brazilian rivalry began early, with war in 1825–28 and continuous tensions leading to a war scare in 1873. Uruguay was created as a buffer state between the two, guaranteed by the British. As with all buffer states, the rivals each attempted to control it. The Argentines in particular utilized military threats to pressure Uruguay on issues of maritime boundaries and foreign policy. Brazil also provided military and diplomatic support for the successful overthrow of the Argentine dictator Rojas in 1852.[32]

In classic balance of power behavior Argentina and Brazil did not let their rivalry prevent cooperation to ensure that other potential rivals did not develop. They joined forces in the virtual obliteration of the once powerful Paraguay during the War of the Triple Alliance (1864–70).[33] But such collaboration did not produce lasting friendship, especially as many Brazilians felt that Argentina benefited greatly from the alliance.[34]

Brazil and Argentina were wary of each other, but unsure of the possibility and costs of an outright military resolution of their conflict. Each state also had territorial disputes with other neighbors, raising the prospect of another multifront war. Leaders in both countries studiously avoided war by utilizing international law and bilateral diplomacy to keep the level of distrust at peacefully manageable levels. But periodic arms buildups also served a deterrent function as they helped to keep the specter of a disastrous war alive if diplomacy failed. Because each had large tracts of unsettled land and perceived the likelihood that a war would escalate to one of attrition, defense policies became oriented to both professionalizing the military and building up total national resources via development.[35]

At the turn of the twentieth century Brazil was busily settling her borders in the west and southwest, while Argentina was professionalizing and modernizing its military in response to a war scare with Chile. Through the use of bilateral negotiations and arbitration Brazil peacefully gained territory the size of France. But Brazilian diplomacy was not invincible. Outmaneuvered by Bolivian diplomacy Brazil militarized the Acre dispute in 1902–3 against first Bolivia, and then Peru. The need to depend upon military threats strengthened Foreign Minister Baron Rio Branco's perception that the declining military capability of Brazil over the past 20–30 years, from its prior naval preeminence in the region, hurt its international respect.[36] The Baron and many military officers also worried that Brazil was becoming weaker relative to Argentina, and that war was a possibility.[37]

Rio Branco set out to improve Brazil's standing by professionalizing the training of its military and increasing its armaments. From 1906 to 1914 Brazil acquired ships, armaments, and professional training from the major European suppliers. Among the ships were three Dreadnought battleships from Britain, including the largest built to that day. Some of the ships were constructed with unusual draught requirements, which Argentines interpreted as indicating an intent to use them on the Rio Plata, presumably against Argentina.[38] At the same time the Baron attempted to bring Brazil into close diplomatic relations with the U.S. and ride its coattails to predominance in South America.

Brazil's diplomatic and military policies worried Argentina despite its naval superiority (table 5.6). Given Brazilian advantages in manpower (estimated at 3 to 1 in 1906[39]) and geographic depth, as well as the potential for a Brazilian-Chilean alliance to encircle Argentina, naval superiority was perceived as a necessary part of Argentina's defense policy. Argentina's response to Brazil's naval program was twofold: Argentina accelerated military professionalization and undertook its own naval program, including the purchase of two Dreadnoughts. On the diplomatic front, Argentina sought to be the interlocutor between Latin America and the Great Powers. This response, if successful, would have allowed Argentina to benefit from its own strategic resources as well as to have access to more resources through the favor Argentina would gain with the Great Powers; the strategy would also keep Argentina from becoming overly dependent on one Great Power.[40]

The competition between the two South American leaders became tense enough in 1908–10 that British diplomats in South America reported that

TABLE 5.6 Naval Balance, Argentina-Brazil 1906

	Argentina	Brazil
Battleships	5	3
Armoured Cruisers	4	0
Protected Cruisers	3	6
Torpedo Gun Boats	5	2
Torpedo Boats	22	4
Gunboats	4	0
Destroyers	4	0

Source: D.R. O'Sullivan-Beare, Acting Counsel General, British Mission in Brazil, to Sir Earl Grey, London; November 10, 1906; Public Records Office, Foreign Office 371.13 folio 40648 p. 291ff

the Rio Plata region was experiencing a war scare. The crisis was defused by the conjunction of three factors. Brazil's navy revolted and used a Dreadnought against Rio de Janeiro itself. In addition, two of the chief protagonists, Foreign Ministers Estanislao Zeballos and Rio Branco faded from the scene.[41]

Despite improved relations armaments purchases continued on both sides. After World War I, Argentine and Brazilian military establishments traveled in different directions, largely because of differences in domestic political and economic contexts. The Argentine military was deeply impressed by the unexpected direction in which the European war developed, worried that they had trained for the wrong war and embarked on an important rebuilding effort in the 1920s. Despite good relations with Brazil, in 1923 the Argentine Congress approved an armament program which, had it been implemented, would have made its armed forces the most powerful in Latin America. Manpower also increased significantly. In 1925 a naval buildup was authorized, which would have turned the Argentine navy into the world's sixth most powerful (on paper). The Depression was a brief challenge to Argentina, which dealt with it by tying itself closely to the British economic orbit with the Roca-Runciman Treaty; subsequently the economy prospered.[42]

Brazil tried to respond, but given its domestic economic and political turmoil through the 1920s and 30s, it postponed military increases in the 1920s, ostensibly until 1932, but in actuality to 1937–38.[43] The military was keenly aware of the power disparity and expected an Argentine, Paraguayan, and Uruguayan alliance, possibly even including Chile, against Brazil. They utilized a French military mission to prepare for battle in the southern part of the country.[44]

In the late 1930s the rivalry between the two nations began to heat up once again, although the two governments, now dictatorships, had been collaborating in tracking down communists.[45] Argentina's ascendancy reached its zenith in 1939. It accounted for 33 percent of all of South America's trade, 80 percent of all of Latin America's foreign exchange and gold reserves and its national income was 25 percent greater than Brazil's. The Argentine Navy was the premier of Latin America, with two modern battleships, three new Italian cruisers, and sixteen destroyers; by comparison, Brazil had two old battleships, one cruiser, and one destroyer. The Army, one half the size of Brazil's, was the region's best trained, equipped, and prepared, as was the Air Force, rumored to have between 161 and 600 aircraft.[46]

Yet the Argentines did not feel secure. Their military buildup provoked a reaction by Brazil, which once again sought closer ties with the U.S. as a way to offset Argentine advantages. In 1937 they requested the loan of a few destroyers; the U.S. denied the request because Brazil's neighbors were "very vehemently" opposed.[47] As the European war threatened, Brazil's diplomatic and geographic advantages began to tell. Both Argentina and Brazil attempted to develop security relations with the U.S. that would increase their national capabilities. But the U.S. was wary of Argentina's nationalism (which would keep the country neutral until the last days of the war) and Brazil willingly followed the U.S. lead. In addition, the U.S. wanted to safeguard Brazil's geographic bulge in the northeast opposite Nazi occupied Africa. Brazil became the beneficiary of a massive arms buildup and infrastructure development. Brazil, however, perceived its threats differently from the U.S. and chose instead to utilize much of its new military resources to fortify its border with Argentina in the southwest.[48]

Argentine neutrality had negative consequences. The U.S. attempted to isolate Argentina militarily, economically, and politically.[49] The Argentines feared that power was shifting to an alliance between Brazil and the U.S. Argentina informally pursued arms supplies in Germany and Italy. On the same day Brazil declared war against the Axis, Argentina formalized its arms

request to Germany. But their own war needs prevented the Germans from meeting Argentine requests for "submarines, airplanes, anti-aircraft weapons and munitions of every sort."[50]

World War II turned the tide against Argentina and favored Brazil. It consolidated its position as the dominant U.S. ally in South America by actively participating in the European war.[51] Brazil's economy boomed after the war, as Argentina's fell into a stop-go pattern of growth, thereby dramatically increasing Brazil's national capabilities relative to Argentina's. Brazil's defense expenditures as a percentage of GNP grew significantly in the second half of the 1950s, just as Argentina's began a dramatic decline compared with that of the Peron years.[52]

By the 1960s the growth of Brazil's national capabilities relative to Argentina's gave it a sense of security even in the context of geopolitical doctrines which emphasized interstate competition.[53] Brazil was content to limit its military allocation to a small proportion of the national budget, while Argentina sought to balance the absolute level of expenditures in the much larger Brazilian economy. But Argentina had now lost the race with Brazil, which experienced a booming economy as well as internal peace even with a military government.[54] The Argentine economy virtually collapsed under the strains induced by domestic political battles, even under numerous authoritarian governments. Manwaring's relative military capability index shows Argentina turning a 4 to 1 advantage over Brazil in 1970 to a 3 to 1 disadvantage in 1981.[55]

The Argentine military government mobilized its forces against Brazil in 1977[56] but then made the fateful error of shifting its military focus from the long stalemated relationship with Brazil to the unstable situations with Great Britain and Chile. At the start of the Malvinas/Falklands war some Brazilian military analysts worried about the problems of having a successful and belligerent Argentina as a neighbor. The Beagle war scare, in which Argentina had to retreat after a great public fanfare, and the disastrous war with Britain in the Malvinas/Falklands Islands destroyed Argentine military resources and reputation. In addition, Argentine hopes for economic and political resources that could be used in the competition over strategic balances were dashed. Even with Argentine rearmament immediately after the war, Brazil remained unconcerned.[57]

Brazil and Argentina began, under military governments, broader cooperative relations. A multiparty agreement with Paraguay resolved issues around the Iguazo electrical project. Cooperation on nuclear issues defused

an incipient nuclear arms race, and led to both countries ultimately signing the 1967 Treaty of Tlatelolco, which bans nuclear weapons in Latin America. The capstone to the new relationship was the Treaty of Asunción of 1991 that created a free trade zone among Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay, and Paraguay (Mercosur).[58]

The "new Argentina" of today has transformed its traditional rivalries into partnerships, decimated its military establishment, and become the South American country most in favor of the cooperative strategy. Still, Argentine Defense Ministers Oscar Camilión and Jorge Domínguez (both civilians), have said that the local balance of power must be maintained.[59] It successfully pursued formal status as a "major non-NATO ally" of the U.S. in 1997, though it was rejected by NATO itself when it solicited entry in 1999.[60] Although this is largely a symbolic payoff, it does give Argentina preferential access to surplus U.S. weapons.

Argentine rearmament produced parity concerns in Chile, but not in Brazil.[61] Still, Brazil has not discarded its military capabilities. Brazilian defense concerns have turned northward. The Amazon attracts attention because of international concern about the increasing destruction of the rainforest and the country's own concerns with illicit transborder activities (mainly drug trafficking and gold mining).[62]

The historical preoccupation with strategic balances, including their military components, is not limited to the Argentine-Brazilian relationships, nor those between military governments. The long-standing Colombia-Venezuela democratic dyad is one of the most conflictual in contemporary Latin America. The two countries dispute 34 points along their border, with the most serious being in the Gulf of Venezuela, while illegal immigration, transborder guerrilla activity, and smuggling heighten Venezuelan concerns about Colombian intentions. In 1987, the appearance of a Colombian navy vessel in Venezuelan claimed waters provoked a major interstate dispute. The *Caldas* incident kept military forces on alert for two weeks.[63] After the crisis Colombia dramatically increased the size of its armed forces, partly due to increased guerrilla activity, but also stimulated by Congressional concerns that during the crisis Venezuela's superior military standing put Colombia at a disadvantage. This decision to redress the military balance was made even though both countries were democracies and in the process of increasing their economic relations. Tensions again erupted such that in March 1995 a leading Venezuelan historian felt it necessary to appeal in the press for calm, lest war break out.[64]

The Chilean-Peruvian relationship provides another example of democracies perceiving the prudence of military security. Although Chile does not currently perceive an immediate threat from Peru, it is upgrading its Air Force with purchases of Mirages and perhaps F-16s. The Chilean Air Force commander in chief justified these additions by noting that they would keep the country's fleet on a par with the Peruvian, which was also renovating its Air Force.[65]

Conclusion

The admittedly limited and impressionistic evidence of this chapter suggests that the distribution of overall military power is not a major factor in Latin America's violent peace. The decision to use military force in an international dispute is not systematically affected by whether the dyad is characterized by power parity or preponderance, measured in terms of total national capabilities. There is still no relationship even when we consider the potentially confounding effects of democratic institutional constraints.

Although I had expected the lagged military variable to capture the dynamics which produce militarization of a dispute, it was the least significant of the variables examined, with the exception of intra-Latin American democratic MIDs at a *Polity* level of 6. Consequently, a change in the overall military balance is unlikely to be a factor in the decision to militarize a dispute, assuming that changes in the level of military expenditures is an adequate way to measure this variable.

The democracy variable in the intra-Latin American models for the post Cold War period is highly insignificant. The analysis in this chapter thus contributes more suggestive evidence that democracies in Latin America are unaffected in their decision to utilize force in their foreign policy by whether or not the country with which they have a dispute is democratic. This holds true even after the effects of military balances are taken into consideration.

The lack of availability and unreliability of quantitative data limit the conclusions in this chapter. Available data in combination with qualitative analysis suggest that the military distribution of power is of very limited utility for explaining the use of force in interstate conflict in Latin America. However, the quality of military power, the issues of alliances, and the question of economic and political development were all perceived by policymakers

and publics to affect a state's relative power position, even though these factors did not determine whether force was used or not.

In the following two chapters we will explore the utility of the military bargaining model for explaining the decision to use force. First we will examine the case of two military governments, then turn to a democratic dyad. The democratic case is a contest of unequal powers, allowing us to further explore whether the perception that power matters is borne out in reality.