

DEVELOPING CIVIL- MILITARY COMPETENCIES AMONG SENIOR NATIONAL SECURITY PRACTITIONERS IN DEMOCRATIZING LATIN AMERICA

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OVERVIEW

This paper evaluates the process of normalizing civil-military relations in Chile and Argentina. “Normalized” civil-military relations confine the military to the national security arena and are characterized by collaborative interactions between the civilian and military spheres. Such “normal” or “routinized” civil-military relations would represent a significant increase in civil-military interaction over that which has occurred in the past.

The full or partial assumption of decision-making authority on the part of civilians in the defense bureaucracy would be one indicator of “normalizing” civil-military relations. Field research in Chile and Argentina indicates that as democratic institutions mature, interest in civilian oversight of national security matters is increasing. Civilian Ministries of Defense are increasingly interested in acquisition, budgetary, and deployment issues.

Effective civilian management and control, however, depends on the preparedness of the senior civilian and military leaders for their national security roles. New attitudes toward using the military to achieve national interests through the application of national power are evolving in these cases, however the expertise to conduct “normalized” civil-military relations is still lacking.

This paper examines the strategic education and professional development opportunities that senior military, civilian, and defense bureaucrats have to support their national security responsibilities. Additionally, it discusses the progress of “normalization” of civil-military relations in the two cases and proposes recommendations for U.S. policymakers interested in positively influencing this process.

INTRODUCTION

This study is an outgrowth of research conducted on the United States Professional Military Education (PME) system over the past several years and research on the development of post-communist PME systems in Central and Eastern Europe conducted since the early 1990s. Specifically, I seek to link the formation of national security professionals’ civil-military competencies with the degree to which civil-military relations follow “normal” patterns for democratic states. Of particular interest in the Latin American region is how civil-military relations are becoming normalized in terms of civilian oversight functions as democratic institutions mature in the wake of decades of authoritarian military rule.

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“Normalized” civil-military relations confine the military to the national security arena. Such “normal” or “routinized” civil-military relations would represent a significant increase in civil-military interaction over that which occurred in the past under either military rule or under recent patterns of civilian control. Increased interaction, however, may also lead to greater tension between civilian and military leaders than occurs when the military is granted large degrees of autonomy. The full or partial assumption of decision-making authority on the part of civilians in the defense bureaucracy would also be indicative of “normalizing” civil-military relations.

Field research in Chile and Argentina indicates that as democratic institutions mature, interest in civilian oversight of national security matters is increasing. At the same time, the military instrument of power is assuming more prominence in foreign policies in the region where peacekeeping missions project national power abroad. Furthermore, civilian Ministries of Defense are increasingly interested in acquisition, budgetary, and deployment issues. All of these trends call for increased interaction between civilian and military actors with national security responsibilities. Effective civilian management and control, however, depends upon the preparedness of the senior civilian and military leaders to carry out their evolving national security roles.

Among the topics explored in this paper is the strategic education and professional development opportunities that senior military, civilian, and defense bureaucrats have to support their national security responsibilities. New attitudes toward using the military to achieve national interests through the application of national power are evolving in these cases; however, the expertise to conduct “normalized” civil-military relations is still lacking. The paper discusses the process of the “normalization” of civil-military relations in the two cases and proposes recommendations for U.S. policymakers interested in positively influencing this process.

HISTORICAL LEGACIES

Civil-military relations in Chile and Argentina today are necessarily influenced by their unique national histories and previous patterns of political-military interaction. Herbert Huser noted “Argentina had as antecedent a negative or immature political culture inconsistent with a democratic republican life.”¹ The Hispanic political legacy, focused on controlling the state, trumped conceptions of democracy rooted in institution building and preservation of individual rights. Consequently, Argentine society has granted significant degrees of legitimacy to alternatives to democracy to include those forms that granted the military elevated stature in the social and political order.² Military governments ruled Argentina for varying tenures from the 1930s into the 1980s culminating in the ill-fated junta of 1976-1983 that prosecuted the Dirty

War and stumbled into the Falklands debacle. In this period of repressive military rule more than 30,000 people were tortured, murdered, or “disappeared.”³

Unlike Argentina, from 1932-1973 Chilean democracy stood out for its durability and multi-party character, which aggregated class and ideology into three distinct main parties.⁴ When Socialist Salvador Allende was elected with a plurality of the vote in 1970, a process was set into motion joining the centrist and rightist parties, backed by the United States, to his overthrow in a military coup. This coup was successful and General Augusto Pinochet led the military regime from 1973-1990. Sputtering economic performance in the late 1980s and disaffection resulting from the regime’s human rights abuses led to declining support for the military government and the opportunity for “redemocratization” to occur through a transfer of power back to civilian control.⁵

The historical legacy of each case, especially the circumstances of the transition from military to democratic rule, has bearing on the current states of civil-military relations. Chile experienced a pacted⁶, negotiated transition that followed a period of relatively competent governance. This contrasts sharply with the unplanned collapse of military rule in Argentina, stemming from the military government’s defeat in the Falklands War, its poor record of governance, and abhorrent human rights abuses.

Chile’s Pacted Transition

A coalition of political parties, the Concertación, opposed to the Pinochet regime united to defeat it in the 1988 presidential plebiscite under the rules of the game which Pinochet had established in the 1980 Constitution. Defeated under constitutional rules favoring the military regime, Pinochet was bound to honor the results, thus setting in motion the transition to civilian rule beginning with a competitive election among civilian candidates in December 1989.

The Concertación remained united behind Patricio Aylwin, leader of the Christian Democrats, and won a majority of votes against the candidate sympathetic to the military regime.⁷ Negotiations between the outgoing government and the Concertación had been ongoing as the election approached. The military regime put legislation in place to ensure the military’s continued influence under the incoming democratic government. This legislation included budgetary guarantees, and roles for the armed forces ensuring their continued political influence and near absolute professional autonomy.⁸

Overall, the terms of the pacted transition preserved much of the influence and privileges of the military institution. Pinochet stayed on as Commander in Chief of the armed forces until 1998 and benefited from the law granting former presidents life-long Senate seats upon retirement from the military.⁹ The military’s post-authoritarian status in society also benefited

from its support from pro-military right wing parties, which had backed Pinochet with 40 percent of the vote in 1988.¹⁰ The regime's narrow rejection reflected the perception among a broad portion of the electorate that despite its human rights failures, the regime's governance had been relatively effective.¹¹

The challenge for the normalization of civil-military relations was to “recover the culture of non-participation and absolute subordination of civilian control”¹² that had characterized the armed forces before the coup. This was difficult due to the military's belief that its actions in 1973 were aimed at recovering the democracy that it believed the Allende government threatened.¹³

Colonel Humberto Oveido, current Commandant of Escuela Militar, the Army's undergraduate military institution, recalled that at the time of the transition he was an instructor at the War Academy, the Army's post-graduate PME institution. His course at the time was entitled “Fundamentals of the Military Profession” and emphasized such themes as the need “to be obedient to the political class even though it didn't respect individual politicians”. Another course objective was to impress upon the young captains that the coup was “out of rule” and inconsistent with military professionalism. Many students, influenced by their loyal feelings to the military government and Pinochet himself, regarded Colonel Oveido as a traitor. Eighteen years later this officer, a graduate of the US Army War College, is Commandant of Escuela Militar and in a position to influence the professional development of the next generation of Chilean officers.

Further Evolution of the Strategic Environments

In the eighteen years since Major Oveido first attempted to influence young officers regarding their loyalty to the regime, democratic institutions have gradually matured in both cases and throughout the region. The period of democratic transition has coincided with the evolution of the international strategic environment. The Cold War configuration of East vs. West characterized by the collecting of proxies to contain the power of the opposing superpower has given way to an international system with many pockets in constant need of stabilization. These circumstances have caused many Latin American governments to rethink the roles and missions of their armed forces in terms of their ambitions for influence on the international stage and the perceived changes in the threat environment. Such a shift in attention on many fronts requires civil-military collaboration and dialogue. The paper will now turn to comparing the developments toward normalized civil-military relations in each case.

Civil-military relations in Chile take place against the general political back-drop. President Michelle Bachelet's ruling center left coalition of the Concertacion participates in a stable system of debate with the opposition Alianza por Chile alliance.¹⁴ Within this context of deepening democracy, civil-military relations are normalizing as power is steadily rebalanced in favor of the executive.¹⁵ As the executive asserts more power, the civilian political leadership has become increasingly interested in exerting more democratic political control over the military.

During the period of the military regime and at the onset of the transition, the military made national security policy decisions normally reserved for civilian authorities in democracies.¹⁶ Civilians were "comfortable not to run the armed forces".¹⁷ This division of labor was not due primarily to an aversion to democracy, but for a preference to rely on the military's expertise advantage in national security affairs while pursuing modernization.¹⁸ Budgets were set at 1/3 for each service and civilians were happy to let the military professionals decide the rest.¹⁹ However, as the national security community reassesses the strategic scenario there are calls to vary the equal distribution between the services in order to most effectively apply limited resources within the changed security environment.

A significant shift is also occurring in the political leadership's perception of the military as a tool of foreign policy. The political leadership is focused on how best to use Chilean resources to improve the Chilean government's power globally and to cope with threats in Latin America.²⁰ In this sense, one ANEPE²¹ faculty member noted, the military is one of several instruments of power available to move Chile up in line in Latin America.²² National security thinkers, admit however, that it is difficult for the civilian leadership to conceptually integrate military power within overall power in foreign relations. This observation points back to a key question of this study, "Who teaches the politicians about strategy?"

As both the political and military leadership increasingly recognize that the armed forces have an active peacetime role, the government has been introducing changes to give the armed forces an increasing role in decision making.²³ This changed security environment includes extensive involvement in peacekeeping operations and, encouraged by the US, a new counterterrorism role. Chile's global role has been playing out in its leading role in Haiti. The UN Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH) has approximately 8800 uniformed personnel composed of soldiers and police from 41 different countries.²⁴ MINUSTAH alternates between Chilean and Brazilian command.

Ironically, heightened political-military tension results as civil-military dialogue increases due to a more dynamic civil-military relationship. When autonomy was high, civil-

military tension was low due to the low level of civil-military interaction. Interviews in Santiago confirm that military and political leadership alike recognize this growing trend in civil-military relations occurring as their normalization proceeds.²⁵ Indeed high ranking Chilean military officers report that many of the efforts to further normalize civil-military relations are happening at the initiative of the military.²⁶

The nature of planning and conducting peacekeeping operations, in particular, calls for close political-military cooperation as the civilian leadership seeks to effectively manage the scarce funds, personnel, and equipment required for the task. Peacekeeping missions also forge and strengthen civil-military links due to the requirement for close operational coordination with civilians.²⁷ However, the custom of keeping the military and diplomatic instruments separate is strongly held and not easily overcome despite the increasing need to do so.²⁸ Close observers of the process say that all such decisions are still being made at the MOD and Presidential level with limited involvement from the military.²⁹

A draft bill for the Modernization of the Ministry of Defense is currently pending in the Congress. One objective of the bill is to redefine the relationship between the MOD and the armed forces by increasing the MOD's powers in areas of policy and strategy, investments, and technology.³⁰ A legacy of the military regime is that although the MOD was populated with many employees, it was not designed to lead the defense establishment. A key component of this redefinition of civil-military relations is the creation of a defense civil service with professional bureaucrats that could survive political changes across administrations.³¹ However, defense observers note that programs for developing the knowledgeable experts to fill such positions are insufficient and add that civil society and the political class is not conversant on the subject of defense policy.³²

Some Chilean defense experts contend that these developments collectively amount to embryonic civilian leadership, and, perhaps most importantly, some signs that the armed forces realize that they are better led with this change.³³ The conditions for normalization of civil-military relations, then, seem to exist. However, the missing factor is the national security expertise of the political leadership. One of Chile's most eminent national security experts observed that citizens are interested in playing a greater role, but there is no established path to prepare people to do this.³⁴ A military officer added that military autonomy is exaggerated because there is a vacuum in the realm of civilians playing their roles.³⁵ Improving national security education is clearly a key component in the continued democratization of Chilean civil-military relations.

National Security Education in Chile

The National Academy of Political and Strategic Studies (referred to previously by its Spanish acronym ANEPE) is a primary hub of national security expertise.³⁶ The military government created ANEPE to offer a political-strategic diploma focused on the link between the armed forces and the state's civilians.³⁷ Today its small faculty comprises a substantial portion of Chile's core group of national security experts.

But as one faculty member noted, "ANEPE is just a 'water drop in the desert'³⁸ of university level or postgraduate institutions that could potentially contribute to Chile's national security education requirements. Faculty agreed that university level civilian institutions are not suited to the task. As one retired general officer noted, "the political structures are filled with people without definite knowledge" of national security issues.³⁹

Military officers have two main opportunities to earn PME. Escuela Militar's 4-year undergraduate program has several courses where civil-military competencies are addressed. A military sociology course is offered as well as a political science core course. It is interesting to note that University of Chile faculty teach the political science core course. This course includes a requirement for cadets to participate in a panel where they describe the role of the military to an audience of invited civilians.⁴⁰

The next opportunity for PME is the War Academy whose students are primarily majors. There is no war college akin to the US senior service college model. In recent years the War Academy program has been shortened from 3 to 2 years. Faculty report that there is little time for strategy and policy topics, because the new curriculum is focused almost exclusively on military topics. Civil-military relations issues come up within the context of developing plans under civilian oversight. The de-emphasis of strategy and policy topics and consequently familiarity with the relevant civil-military competencies that relate to carrying out strategy means that the most officers will not have the opportunity to be exposed to a postgraduate education in these topic areas.

ANEPE will remain a place where a select number of high ranking officers will be selected to receive a political-strategic education. However a gap noted in the curricula of both Escuela Militar and the War Academy is that little or no attention is given to studying the period of military rule. The absence of this important topic in many respects is indicative of the current stage of Chile's democratic development. A War Academy instructor explained, "the problem is that there are 2 histories of this period: one favored by the military and one by the left wing. The War Academy doesn't want to take sides."⁴¹ As one ANEPE faculty member observed, in such a

context where “the teaching of national history and citizenship has been erased, what can we expect of civil-military relations?”⁴²

This inability to directly confront the past is also reflective of the generational differences that characterize the Chilean Army. The younger generation has no personal experience with the military regime and considers it irrelevant to today’s Army. Meanwhile some older officers, generally at the O-5 and above pay grades, still harbor loyalties to the military regime. Civil-military relations have normalized to the point where both sides are open to greater dialogue. Indeed, the evolving strategic environment and the civilian leadership’s consequent rethinking of the role of the military instrument of power in its overall foreign policy. However an obstacle to further progress is the lack of capacity on both civilian and military sides to develop national security professionals capable of achieving these national objectives.

I will now turn to the Argentine case highlighting similarities and differences with the Chilean case. In Argentina, as in Chile, the civilian political leadership is interested in exerting its responsibilities vis-à-vis the military. The Argentine political leadership has also rethought the armed forces’ roles and missions in light of the changed strategic and domestic environment. But there are some significant differences in the cases affecting the course of their civil-military relations today.

The legacy of military rule in Argentina is much worse. The military regime left office in disgrace following its disastrous prosecution of the Falklands/Malvinas War. In addition, Argentina benefited from neither the advantages of a pacted transition nor a reservoir of legitimacy built up from competent governance that Chile enjoyed.⁴³ At the time of the democratic transition, the two main parties, representing 90 percent of the vote, were critical of the military, human rights and economic policies of the military regime. In contrast, as stated earlier, there was still significant support for the military in the electorate at the time of Chile’s democratic transition.

ARGENTINA

Overview of civil-military relations today

The election of Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner in October 2007 to succeed her husband, Nestor Kirchner, as President ensured the sustained influence of Peronist political hegemony in Argentina.⁴⁴ Opposition is fragmented and unable to offer a credible alternative to challenge Peronist candidates. Another important aspect of Argentina’s political backdrop is its recent economic experience. The 2001 economic crisis threw the country into a depression for two years with hyperinflation leading to a poverty rate peaking at 57 percent in 2002.⁴⁵ Even before the economic crisis, however, the military was starved for resources since the Army returned to the

barracks in 1983. Consequently, the armed forces made few equipment purchases and lagged its neighbors Chile and Brazil on the acquisition front.⁴⁶

When the dictatorship ended in 1983, President Raul Alfonsin did not retaliate against the military. Nor did President Carlos Menem in the 1990s. There was no question in either of these civilian administrations that the civilians were back in control of Argentine politics overall, but the military was largely left to its own devices.⁴⁷ The legacy of military rule looms large and undermines Argentine civil-military relations. The political leadership views the military institution through the lens of military dictatorship.

According to observers of Argentine politics, the political leadership, drawn largely from those opposed to -- and victims of -- military rule, routinely seeks to score points by beating down the military.⁴⁸ In fact, a key component of President Nestor Kirchner's political power was the anti-military human rights groups.⁴⁹ The military, for its part, respects civilian rule and does not aspire to "come out of the barracks". However, with over 90 percent of the armed forces having entered service since democratic governance was re-established in 1983,⁵⁰ many servicemen feel as if they are paying for the sins of their fathers.⁵¹

Such an environment contributes to a poor climate for civil-military collaboration. Indeed, sources within the MOD reported little civil-military coordination is occurring. The military is playing a limited advisory role in some areas and retains much autonomy, but the overall civil-military dialogue over the management of defense policy and strategy is virtually non-existent.⁵² Argentine MOD civilians speak of the need for confidence building measures to normalize civil-military relations, while military officers carrying out their advisory roles assume that civilians disregard their recommendations.⁵³ A civilian participant in the Argentine process observed that the military had become too passive in representing its views. This observer characterized the environment as one where civilians do not ask for military advice and the military is not asking to be heard. Therefore many opportunities for cooperation are being missed within the mid-level policy ranks.⁵⁴ This state of affairs portends that the tensions that result from the increased interaction that occurs in normalized civil-military relations is still yet to come.

This is the civil-military context within which the Argentine MOD is trying to develop and implement a reform agenda focused on restructuring and modernizing the armed forces. As in the Chilean case, Argentina's strategic reassessment highlights a focus on peacekeeping. Argentina has participated in peacekeeping operations in Haiti and Kosovo and in the military observer mission in Cyprus. However, the primary mission remains defending Argentina against another state in the region. Other missions include humanitarian assistance and disaster relief as well as the Antarctic mission to support the Argentine science station there.

These missions have given the military concrete roles, notably not directed at internal security, and a chance for a rapprochement with society. However, many note that the current strategy does not represent a comprehensive vision.⁵⁵ As in the Chilean case, both civilian and military actors still need to grow into their roles and responsibilities. In this respect the process of normalizing civil-military relations is lagging in Argentina.

The inability to formulate and articulate a strategic vision is related to the poor national security acumen of the political class. As in Chile, a professional civil service does not exist, although there is some interest in creating one. The current Minister of Defense, Nilda Garre, advocates building a corps of civil servants in the MOD.⁵⁶ The hope is that besides improving the practical experience of civilian national security professionals, the increased civilian defense capacity will improve the mutual respect and cooperation between military actors in national defense policy and strategy formulation.

National Security Education in Argentina

Despite the poor state of civil-military relations in Argentina, the MOD is in the midst of a major attempt to reform the military education system. An Undersecretary of Education position was created in 2007 to oversee military education. Its first occupant is Enrique Bellagio, a Harvard educated reformer whose sister was among those who disappeared during the military dictatorship. The overall goal of this office is to shape the character of the military professional to be supportive of democracy and human rights.

The reforms have been ongoing since 2006 and are focused on educating and training the armed forces and professionalizing civilians in national security roles.

Education for defense and the education of military “citizens” are primary concepts in the new educational system, which is based on democratic values, guidelines and practices that reaffirm their role as citizens and specialized public servants. This creates a new institutional culture in the Services, which will be reflected in their day-to-day activities, habits, and skills.⁵⁷

The education department’s first priority for reform is the curriculum within the three services’ schools. The goal is to create a uniform education across the services overseen by the Joint Staff.⁵⁸ A key deficiency which has been identified is that these curriculums are deficient in the formation of legal, democratic, social and historic education. The goal is the holistic education of officers in their multiple citizen, civil service, and military roles. Rebalancing technical and non-technical subjects within curricula is key to achieving this objective. A top priority for reform is also the development of officers who can manage resources.⁵⁹ In the macro sense, reform must be supportive of the development of human capital at all levels of the military education system.

The Argentine approach identifies military education reform as a key aspect of military modernization overall, which includes a deliberate effort to sustain the process of democratization. *Anuario 2007*, an MOD publication describing the ongoing military reforms, devotes a whole chapter to reform of the military education system. The publication notes that proper formation of defense professionals should include basic democratic principles such as the role of the military in service to a democratic society, the apolitical nature of the military institution, and the principle of civilian control. The *Anuario* also calls for defense professionals to understand the global strategic environment and the role of the Argentine armed forces within it.

Ultimately, the goal is to achieve the effective integration of civilian and military actors in the national defense process.⁶⁰ The defense education reform effort has received assistance from the United Nations Development Program (UNDP).⁶¹ The United States has offered courses from the Naval Postgraduate School's Center for Civil Military Relations, the Center for Hemispheric Defense Studies in Washington, DC and the contribution of an English language lab to the MOD. In addition, Argentine participation in US-sponsored exercises positively shapes military professionalism.⁶²

MOD reformers understand the need to educate both the civilian and military sides of the national security equation. An MOD official, instrumental in the education reforms, explained that civilians need a basic national security education in order to understand the military sphere and to play their roles in the national security process. She added, "we have no technicians on defense" meaning the MOD lacked civil servants with knowledge of such topics as logistics and strategy.⁶³

Among the tools available to achieve these goals is the Joint War College (Escuela Superior de Guerra Conjunta) founded in 2007. This education is available to officers beginning at the company grade officer level. Additionally, Escuela Nacional (National Defense University) educates some civilians along with military students in courses equivalent to the American military's intermediate and senior service schools, such as Command and General Staff College and the war colleges. Civilian attendance at Escuela Nacional is just beginning. Observers note that while utilizing these post-graduate seminars is a step in the right direction, the civilian attendees would not have had the benefit of an undergraduate education in national security studies. At present, only post-graduate specialization is currently available.⁶⁴

Field research indicates much activity in the defense education reform arena in Argentina, but the initiative is exclusively from the civilian perspective without the benefit of cordial civil-military relations. While many of the concepts underlying the reforms are sound, the

military perceives that the civilian side is unilaterally imposing these initiatives without regard to the military's views.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

It is important to note that every observer and participant in both the Chilean and Argentine national security systems rejected the argument advanced by David Pion-Berlin and Harold Trinkunas that civilian national security expertise is unnecessary in Latin American armed forces because their capabilities are poor and their missions are insignificant.⁶⁵

On the contrary, the political leadership in both cases views the military as a key instrument of power increasingly important to the achievement of its foreign policy goals. Active management of the armed forces is also understood as being necessary to sustain the democratic character of each state. The trend in both cases is greater willingness to exert civilian control, but limited capacity to do so. A member of an Argentine think tank observed, "civilian managers aren't prepared to understand logistics matters, operational matters, arms acquisitions, regional imbalances, new threats, and technical knowledge of the arms industry."⁶⁶ While there is some emphasis on civilian control and especially human rights, little attention is being paid to the military's role in strategy and policy.

The potential for the achievement of defense education reform is great in Chile with its more cordial civil-military relations and the presence of a core group of national security professionals who understand the link between the formation of defense professionals and the quality of national security outputs. However, a formal defense education reform program akin to the Argentine model is not yet present in Chile. On the other hand, Argentine civilian overseers in the MOD are working hard to implement comprehensive defense education reforms within a climate of poor civil-military relations. This is likely to limit the effectiveness of the effort. There is great potential for outside actors to extend security cooperation initiatives to further the development of democratic civil-military relations in both Chile and Argentina. A window of opportunity for engagement is at hand that could yield significant results.

ENDNOTES

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- ⁶⁰ *Anuario 2007* (Buenos Aires: Argentine MOD, 2007), p. 37-38.
- ⁶¹ *Modernization of the Defense Sector: Principles and Characteristics of the Argentine Model*
- ⁶² Interview with senior American defense official and Military Group Commander; by author, Buenos Aires, July 2008.
- ⁶³ Chiappani interview.
- ⁶⁴ Ibid. .
- ⁶⁵ David Pion-Berlin and Harold Trinkunas, "Attention Deficits: Why Politicians Ignore Defense Policy in Latin America," *Latin American Research Review*, vol. 42, issue 3 (2007).
- ⁶⁶ Calle interview.