

The Feathers of Condor

The Feathers of Condor:

*Transnational State Terrorism,
Exiles and Civilian
Anticommunism
in South America*

By

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PREFACE

J PATRICE MCSHERRY

Operation Condor was a secret, cross-border abduction-torture-rendition-assassination program conducted among the military dictatorships of South America in the 1970s, and directed against exiles. Supported covertly by Washington, especially the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and the Pentagon, with the approval of civilian leaders in the Nixon and Ford administrations, Condor was responsible for hundreds, if not thousands—the number is still disputed—of exiles and refugees disappeared and murdered in the 1970s. They were people who opposed the coups and dictatorships in their own countries and included politically-conscious activists of all kinds: unionists, student leaders, well-known political figures, artists, political party officers and social critics. Some were guerrillas. All were regarded as “internal enemies” during the ferocious Cold War years, when Washington and the military regimes shared a fierce anticommunism.

There have been some excellent published studies about Operation Condor. In *The Feathers of Condor: transnational State Terrorism, exiles and civilian anticommunism in South America*, Fernando López takes these investigations further and adds new information and analysis that make a key contribution to our knowledge of Condor.

The author provides a global context and raises important questions. He asks, for example, why the militaries formalized the Condor apparatus in 1975 (previous research, including my own, has shown that Condor was already functioning in 1973 as a cross-border terrorist system of combined operations, albeit without a code name; as Colonel Manuel Contreras put it, on the basis of unwritten “gentlemen’s agreements”¹). The secret 1975 Condor “summit” in Santiago took place after years of rivalries and tensions among the militaries of South America and when the small

¹ Dirección de Inteligencia Nacional (DINA), “Primera Reunión de Trabajo de Inteligencia Nacional,” October 29, 1975, document obtained in the Paraguayan “Archives of Terror” in 1996. Contreras was the head of DINA, Chile’s fearsome “Gestapo.”

insurgent movements were already defeated or weak. Perhaps the most important contribution of this book is its evidence and analysis showing that Condor in fact mainly targeted not guerrillas, but rather the vast exile community, because of its political achievements globally. Tens of thousands of Latin Americans, forced to flee their countries and/or exiled by the military regimes in the 1970s, developed a powerful presence in many countries internationally. These exiles came to play a substantial role in developing international opposition to the dictatorships in peaceful solidarity and human rights movements that denounced the crimes of the regimes. López concludes that Condor “was established primarily to intimidate the exiles involved in the denunciation of human rights and to eliminate as many leftist leaders as possible, regardless of their methods of struggle”. In this sense the book complements the work of Thomas Wright and others, who have shown how the emerging global human rights movement was, ironically, consolidated and institutionalised as a response to the crimes of the Latin American dictatorships of the era.

Another central argument of this book is that the military regimes “grossly overstated the threat posed by the revolutionary movements” and particularly the *Junta Revolucionaria Coordinadora (JCR)* in order to justify their ruthless covert operations against exiles. The JCR was a short-lived coalition (1974-1976) among several South American insurgent forces: *Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores-Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo (PRT-ERP)* of Argentina, *Movimiento de Liberación Nacional-Tupamaros* of Uruguay, *Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria (MIR)* of Chile, and *Ejército de Liberación Nacional (ELN)* of Bolivia. López argues that the military dictatorships inflated the importance of the JCR deliberately in order to justify Condor’s transnational state terrorist operations and to destroy the effective human rights work of exile communities worldwide. That is, “the exiles’ activities posed a greater threat to these dictatorships than the armed guerrilla groups”. This is a key issue, as a few previous works have posited that Condor was formed as a reaction to the JCR and the threat it allegedly posed. López suggests that the exiles’ powerful condemnations of the coups and dictatorships in the international arena, their organising efforts, and their testimonies about the atrocities committed—and the impact these had worldwide—were a far greater preoccupation for the regimes and their allies (including Washington, a staunch defender of most of the regimes and militaries in the 1970s and 1980s). López effectively argues that “the JCR was a desperate and futile attempt to keep the [insurgent] organisations alive”. He provides substantial evidence, drawing on newly-available documents in Uruguay and elsewhere, secondary-source interviews with protagonists,

and theoretical references, to support this argument. In Chapter Two López also supplies detailed histories and nuances regarding the JCR: its organisations, their internal battles, and the ideological and strategic disagreements among them, as well as their differences with Cuba and Algeria. Chapter Two convincingly demonstrates the weakness of the JCR. The book persuasively shows that the JCR served as a convenient pretext for Condor's extraterritorial acts of terror.

Similarly, López's research on the New Latin American Right is original and important (Chapter Four) and his bibliography is impressive. He documents the formation of non-state right-wing organisations—sometimes directly aided by Washington and/or the CIA—and their role in helping to create a violent anticommunist climate and encourage state terror. The book's evidence on the World Anti-communist League and its associated civilian networks is persuasive in demonstrating the role of these understudied right-wing groups and their involvement with the military regimes, various death squads and the global anticommunist juggernaut. In short, this work fills a gap in the scholarly literature.

The author argues that we cannot understand the events in Latin America during this period as solely the result of unilateral US impositions. In this sense his work fits within a newly emerging branch of Cold War studies that examines the autonomous roles of Latin American and other governments, as well as social and political movements, both right- and left-wing, in the region. Importantly, López does not swing to the other extreme, that of denying the importance of Washington—a global anticommunist superpower—and its formidable intervention in Latin America. He also examines the importance of the pressures exerted by the civil rights, anti-war and human rights movements in the United States in the 1970s, and shows how Congress challenged interventionist US policies in Latin America—although executive branch leaders in the Nixon and Ford (and later Reagan) administrations disregarded them and pursued a hardline anticommunist and pro-military policy in the region. López also highlights other actors, demonstrating, for example, how the military government of Brazil played a key role in the Southern Cone, providing assistance to anticommunist militaries (declassified documents have shown that the Nixon administration secretly encouraged and supported Brazil's intervention in Chile and elsewhere as a “proxy force”). The book provides a balanced perspective that takes into account the roles and ideology of numerous actors, state and non-state, national and international.

The Feathers of Condor provides abundant documentation of the important influence of the exiles in making the world aware of the crimes

and violent repression of the dictatorships (Chapter Three). The Chilean exiles were especially successful in organising numerous protests and solidarity networks in many countries and in establishing contacts in parliaments (including the US Congress) and human rights organisations. These efforts resulted in human rights delegations to Chile, international commissions of inquiry, trade unions' refusals to unload Chilean ships, enormous marches and rallies, and boycotts of Chilean products around the world. In some countries the exiles were crucial in influencing governments to end military contracts, loans, and aid to the South American dictatorships. The exiles formed an "external front" that produced massive rejection of the military regimes by many of the world's people, robbed those dictatorships of legitimacy and stimulated the consolidation of a global human rights movement. This was the reason for the formation of Operation Condor and for its extralegal operations to "disappear", torture and murder exiles.

This book further deepens our knowledge of Operation Condor through a detailed examination of its political and social contexts and its reasons for being. The author's research on the JCR and its role is original and important, and adds significantly to the literature on this group and its associated members. Readers interested in the Cold War and in Operation Condor, and concerned about the damage wrought by covert operations and an "ends justifies the means" philosophy will find this book useful. *The Feathers of Condor* deserves a wide audience. I hope that this comes to pass, and that new generations of scholars will continue to investigate and analyse Operation Condor in the years ahead.

INTRODUCTION

Operation Condor was the codename given to what was secretly described by five South American intelligence agencies, and some US officials, in the mid-1970s as the coordinated sharing of intelligence between countries in the region to combat Marxist subversion. However, this plan was much more than a simple exchange of information between friendly nations. It was a plan to systematically eliminate any kind of opposition, especially key figures and groups involved in the denunciation of the regimes' human rights violations. Under the Condor umbrella, these intelligence services conducted operations in the participating countries and also the US and other European nations. As Patrice McSherry points out, this plan cannot be dissociated from the overall context of the global anticommunist alliance led by the US during the Cold War.¹

However, given that most writers in this field have clearly established that this plan's roots and its conception are found in a much earlier period, it remains unclear why Condor was formalised in late 1975. It is also not easy to explain the high levels of cooperation between the South American armed forces and the coordinated use of state terrorism. Most of the participating countries had significant military and political confrontations, including open war during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. As a consequence of such conflicts, the relationships between these armed forces had been undermined by distrust and deep antagonisms during that period. An explanation for the formalisation of the Condor alliance becomes even more difficult to understand when one takes into account that the most prominent revolutionary movements² were severely weakened or defeated by November 1975. At that time, only a small number of revolutionary groups remained committed to armed struggle in Argentina, including the Peronist *Montoneros* and the Trotskyite *Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo-Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores* (ERP-PRT).³ Although the most active and militant groups in South America

¹ J Patrice McSherry, "Operation Condor: Clandestine Inter-American System", *Social Justice* 26, No 4 (1999): 144-174.

² *Movimiento de Liberación Nacional-Tupamaros* (MLN-T) in Uruguay, *Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria* (MIR) in Chile, and the *Ejército de Liberación Nacional* (ELN) in Bolivia.

³ People's Revolutionary Army-Workers' Revolutionary Party.

at the time, these organisations had also received important, if not lethal, blows after the Argentine army launched *Operación Independencia* (Operation Independence), in early 1975.

Hence, this book aims to determine why the South American military regimes chose to transnationalise state terrorism at a time when most revolutionary movements in the region were defeated and in the process of leaving the armed struggle and resuming the political path to seek change. Two hypotheses will be tested to answer this question. The first is that these military regimes turned towards the coordinated use of state terrorism at that particular juncture because they, intentionally or unintentionally, grossly overstated the threat posed by the revolutionary movements and other political groups. The tendency to overstate the nature of a threat, according to Samuel Huntington, is imbedded in the role of the military man at the time of evaluating any threat to the state. According to this author:

The military man normally views with alarm the potency and immediacy of the security threats to the state ... recognizes the continuing character of threats to the state, but he also stresses the urgency of the current danger. The goal of professional competence requires the military man to estimate the threat as accurately as possible. [...] The military man's views also reflect a subjective professional bias, the strength of which depends upon his general level of professionalism. This professional bias, or sense of professional responsibility, leads him to feel that if he errs in his estimate, it should be on the side of overstating the threat. Consequently, at times he will see threats to the security of the state where actually no threats exist.⁴

In democratic systems, such evaluations are usually balanced with the views of civilian actors and institutions. However, when Condor was formalised, almost no civilian institutions were in a position to moderate, exert influence over, or control the military's evaluation of the situation. The only civilian authorities or influential figures in a position to exert any kind of influence over the military leaders supported the radical views of those regimes. Hence, in the absence of more moderate voices, the military regimes and their allies embarked on a mission to eliminate such threats in any way they thought appropriate, even to the extent of disregarding international conventions on human rights and laws concerning the treatment of prisoners of war. In addition to this, though most revolutionary movements were on the brink of collapse, the most radical factions within these organisations continued to engage in a rhetorical battle with the repressors. At times these groups even

⁴ Samuel P Huntington, *The Soldier and the State: the Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1957), 66.

intentionally magnified their capabilities and state of readiness without realising the implications of such actions.

The second hypothesis put forth in this book maintains that the global solidarity campaigns with South American exiles generated numerous headaches for the military governments and further isolated them internationally. The military dictatorships in the Southern Cone faced an increased number of challenges by the mid-1970s. These regimes took advantage of the global political polarisation generated by the Cold War to label those who opposed them as subversives or communists to discredit and neutralise their militancy and isolate them from the overall population. However, two important factors challenged these military governments: the exiles and the global human rights movement. The regimes underestimated the power and level of organisation of the tens of thousands of South American exiles that had been forced to flee their countries as a consequence of the brutal repression and harsh economic policies. They also misjudged the emergence of the transnational human rights movement, which opened a new front for resistance to the South American dictatorships. The cooperation between the exiles and the transnational human rights networks helped to neutralise and undermine the regimes' Cold War rhetoric and strategies.

Thus, Condor can be seen as a secret tool established by the South American regimes, with support from the US government and its intelligence agencies, as well as other influential local and international elites, to harass the exiles and discourage them from continuing their activities. This hypothesis seems to better explain the targeting of non-revolutionary groups such as the Uruguayan *Grupos de Acción Unificadora* (GAU) (Groups of Unifying Action) and the *Partido por la Victoria del Pueblo* (PVP) (Party for the People's Victory) in Argentina during 1976-1977; or the 1976 assassination of Orlando Letelier by the Chilean intelligence services in Washington DC, among many others.

Clarifications

Before discussing the pertinent literature, it is necessary to make a number of clarifications. The first one concerns the way in which this investigation will approach this so-called operation. Official documents and most scholars in this field describe Condor as an "operation". The *Oxford Essential Dictionary of the US Military* defines an operation as "a piece of organised and concerted activity involving a number of people, especially

members of the armed forces or the police...”.⁵ However, under the Condor umbrella, the participating military regimes carried out what can be described as a complex web of sub-operations or activities within and outside their borders. A more appropriate term to describe and to include such activities would be what the same dictionary defines as “Operation Plan”, or “Plan...for a single or series of connected operations to be carried out simultaneously or in succession...”.⁶ Thus, for the purpose of this investigation, and to facilitate the discussion of such sub-operations, this study considers Condor as a plan, rather than an operation. The term “plan” allows a more appropriate discussion of the different operations carried out throughout the period here discussed.⁷ Finally, it is necessary to point out that the translations of all the primary and secondary sources in Spanish cited in this book were conducted by the author. Hence, any mistakes or inaccuracies are his responsibility alone.

To facilitate the identification of possible gaps within the literature, the pertinent studies and writings are divided in two main groups: writings on the Condor Plan and those focusing on the National Security Doctrine. Other important issues such as, Soviet-Latin American relations, CIA operations, US military training of Latin American armed forces, literature focussing on social, political and economic matters in each country, the human rights movement and its connections with the South American exile communities, and a number of anticommunist groups and organisations from different parts of the world will be discussed in the different chapters of this work.

The Terror Archives and Pinochet’s extradition

Although the Condor Plan was officially launched in late 1975, little was known at that time about its dimensions or far-reaching consequences. An extensive wall of secrecy protected any information about it and, for decades, those responsible for its creation and implementation denied its existence in the public domain. Until the 1990s, most of the knowledge gathered on the repression and disappearance of victims came from the works of a few academics and journalists. These investigations relied on the testimonies of victims of the repression and their families, or the few documents that

⁵ Operation, "The Oxford Essential Dictionary of the US Military," in *Oxford Reference Online* (Oxford University Press, 2001), accessed 28 July, 2008, <http://www.oxfordreference.com.wwwproxy0.library.unsw.edu.au/view/10.1093/acref/9780199891580.001.0001/acref-9780199891580-e-5763?rskey=xHZwNc&result=2>.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ For example, Operation *Morgan* and *Zapatos Viejos* (Old Shoes) in Uruguay, and Operation *Colombo* in Chile.

emerged from investigations of some of the most notorious crimes committed under the Condor umbrella. The fall of several regimes, and the subsequent transition to democracy in those countries, facilitated new information about the repressive nature of these dictatorships. Two important events provided a valuable sources of material for furthering studies of the Condor Plan in the 1990s: the discovery of the *Archivos del Terror* (The Terror Archives) in Paraguay; and Spanish Judge Baltasar Garzón's request for extradition of General Augusto Pinochet in October 1998.

The first documents revealing the official existence and true dimensions of the Condor Plan were discovered in Paraguay in 1992.⁸ Immediately after the fall of the Stroessner regime, Martín Almada, a Paraguayan lawyer kidnapped in 1974 by Paraguayan security forces operating in Argentina and held in custody until 1977, began his campaign to find information about his arrest and the death of his wife.⁹ This search led him, and other victims, to a building holding thousands of secret documents from the Paraguayan intelligence service known as *La Técnica*. The material held at *La Técnica* accounts for:

... some 700,000 files referring to Stroessner's dictatorship actions; 740 books catalogued with a system of numbers and letters; 115 books with daily guard reports; 181 archive boxes and 204 cardboard containers [holding] documents and reports of diverse origin; 574 files with information about political parties, trade unions, maps, controls, etc; 8,369 individual files of detainees held in the Department of Information: Technical Section and Judicial Department. In addition to these, there is a library which contains the books and magazines obtained in [armed forces'] raids; 543 cassettes with recordings of panels, conferences, sermons, speeches, and talkback radio programs. [The archives also contain] some 28 register books with names [and police records], lists of union leaders, and others from the period prior to Stroessner.¹⁰

Keith Slack, one of the first investigators to evaluate the contents of this archive, argued that "speaking strictly from a documentation point of view,

⁸ McSherry, "Operation Condor", 150.

⁹ The Paraguayan intelligence services recorded Almada's torture sessions and then repeatedly played them back over the phone to coerce his wife to give information about her husband's activities. As a consequence, Almada's wife suffered a heart attack and died a few months after his arrest. For further readings on this particular case, see Stella Calloni, *Los Años Del Lobo: Operación Cóndor*, 1. ed., Biblioteca Del Pensamiento Nacional (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Continente: Peña Lillo, 1999); *Operación Cóndor: Pacto Criminal*, 2nd ed. (México: La Jornada, 2001). Chapters 2 and 10.

¹⁰ Calloni, *Los Años Del Lobo*, 35.

the evidence found ... strongly suggest[ed] the existence of formal organised repression across international borders, but the definitive 'smoking gun' [was] not contained within the archive".¹¹ Slack presented a detailed analysis of the material held at this archive but his search for a smoking gun undermined his final analysis and underestimated this archive's value. Despite his legalistic evaluation, however, the author acknowledged its importance for future studies. Since its discovery, the *Archivos del Terror* have been a key source of material for researchers, as well as for the prosecutors of crimes committed by the Paraguayan armed forces and other military regimes involved in the Condor Plan. More importantly, the archives provided the first key documents linking US government and security agencies like the CIA and FBI to the regional repression.¹²

Spanish Judge Baltasar Garzón's investigation of crimes committed under the Condor umbrella also revealed new information on this topic and led to the declassification of thousands of US documents. This inquest, particularly of the crimes involving the Chilean military junta, led to a request for the extradition of General Augusto Pinochet during his last visit to England.¹³ Garzón's appeal prompted the Chilean dictator's arrest by Scotland Yard, while he underwent treatment at a London private clinic in 1998. After several months of house arrest in London, Pinochet managed to avoid extradition to Spain as he was, controversially, found unfit to stand trial due to health concerns. Despite this outcome, Judge Garzón continued with his investigation and requested the US government to release all possible information regarding the Condor Plan. Consequently, the Clinton administration made available three tranches of declassified documents, the first of which came out in June 1999.¹⁴

Garzón's ground breaking court case, as McSherry points out, threw "new light upon the issue of human rights violations and crimes against humanity

¹¹ Keith Slack, "Operation Condor and Human Rights: A Report from Paraguay's Archive of Terror," *Human Rights Quarterly* 18 (1996): 492-506, 506.

¹² McSherry, "Operation Condor," 150.

¹³ Garzón's investigation also included the crimes committed by the Argentine military junta during the Dirty War. In 1997 the Spanish judge initiated court proceedings to investigate the death and disappearance of 330 Spanish citizens in Argentina during this period. In the same year, Judge Garzón ordered the detention of General Leopoldo Fortunato Galtieri (last president of the military junta). Consequently, the latter had to remain in Argentina and could not travel abroad for fear of detention. See Cesar Mariano Nilson, *Operación Cóndor: Terrorismo De Estado En El Cono Sur* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Lohlé Lumen, 1998), 127.

¹⁴ J Patrice McSherry, "Tracking the Origins of a State Terror Network: Operation Condor", *Latin American Perspectives* 29, No 1 (2002): 38-60, 40.

on the Western side of the Cold War...".¹⁵ Furthermore, the Pinochet Case, as it became known, marked a radical shift in the way in which crimes against humanity were prosecuted. When assessing its importance, Australian lawyer Geoffrey Robertson, QC, who has been involved in several high profile cases related to human rights violations, argued that:

The Pinochet Case was momentous because—for the first time—sovereign immunity was not allowed to become sovereign impunity. The great play of sovereignty, with all its pomp and panoply, can now be seen for what it hides: a posturing troupe of human actors, who when off-stage are sometimes prone to rape the chorus ... Pinochet's crimes in this class were no more Chile's business than they were Britain's business or Spain's business: they were committed against humanity in general because the very fact that a person can order them diminishes the human race ...¹⁶

In other words, state officials like Pinochet and many others responsible for committing crimes against humanity would, in theory, no longer be able to hide behind the shield of national sovereignty or diplomatic immunity. This legal precedent provided new avenues to overcome the barriers imposed by the military regimes involved in Condor.¹⁷ More importantly, it led to further court cases, and with them, the release of more documentation and evidence that became important sources for future researchers. The documents discovered at the Paraguayan archives and those obtained by Judge Baltasar Garzón reinforced the findings of several Truth Commissions¹⁸ carried out throughout the Southern Cone of Latin America in the eighties and early

¹⁵ J Patrice McSherry, "Cross-Border Terrorism: Operation Condor.(Report on Chile: Twilight of the General: Chile after the Arrest of Pinochet)", *NACLA Report on the Americas* 32, No 6 (1999): 34-35.

¹⁶ Geoffrey Robertson, QC, *Crimes against Humanity: The Struggle for Global Justice*, 2nd ed. (London: Penguin Books, 2002), 399.

¹⁷ Countries such as France, Spain and Italy have taken advantage of the precedent created by the Pinochet Case to prosecute several military officers involved in crimes against French, Spanish or Italian nationals during the Condor years.

¹⁸ For a thorough analysis of the format and outcome of several "truth commissions" carried out in the last two decades of the 20th century, see Juan E. Méndez, "El Derecho Humano a La Verdad: Lecciones De Las Experiencias Latinoamericanas De Relato De La Verdad", *Historizar el Pasado Vivo*, (2007), accessed 20 January, 2010, http://www.historizarelpasadovivo.cl/es_resultado_textos.php. There is an English version of this article entitled, Juan E Méndez, "The Human Right to Truth: Lessons Learned from Latin American Experiences with Truth Telling" in *Telling the Truths: Truth Telling and Peace Building in Post-Conflict Societies*, ed. Anne Tristan RIREC Project on Post-Accord Peace Building Borer (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006).

nineties.¹⁹ They also provided new leads to further explore the ramifications of this plan.

These events, however, are not the only sources of information for studies in this area. The political changes taking place in South America in the late 1990s and during the first decade of the new millennium propelled new investigations of the human rights violations that took place in the previous decades. Most of the newly elected centre-left governments in the region (eg Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay and Bolivia) have allowed judges and lawyers to expand the scope of their investigations dealing with the abuses carried out by the military regimes in the sixties and seventies.²⁰ As a consequence, new court cases have been opened and more information has become available. Nonetheless, until now, no other event produced the volume of documents

¹⁹ See the findings of Comisión Nacional sobre la Desaparición de Comisión Nacional Sobre la desaparición de Personas-CONADEP, *Nunca Más*, On Line ed. (Buenos Aires, Argentina: Editorial EUDEBA, 1984); Catholic Church. Archdiocese of São Paulo (Brazil) and Joan Dassin, *Torture in Brazil: A Report* (New York: Vintage Books, 1986); Chile Comisión Nacional de Verdad y Reconciliación, Phillip berryman, and University of Notre Dame. Centre for Civil and Human Rights, *Report of the Chilean National Commission on Truth and Reconciliation* (Notre Dame: Published in Cooperation with the Center for Civil and Human Rights, Notre Dame Law School, by the University of Notre Dame Press, 1993); Uruguay Servicio Paz y Justicia, *Uruguay Nunca Más: Informe Sobre La Violación De Derechos Humanos (1972-1985)*, 2nd ed. (Montevideo: SERPAJ, 1989).

²⁰ See for instance court cases in Argentina dealing with the *Masacre de Fátima*, (the Fatima Massacre); the court cases in Uruguay against army officer Jorge Néstor Troccoli and that country's judiciary's request for his extradition from Italy, and those of Retired General Gregorio Álvarez (key officer during the early years of the repression and last dictator prior to the transition to democracy), ex-President Bordaberry, ex-Colonel Raúl Calcagno (for crimes committed under the Condor Plan), and the case dealing with the possible poisoning of Cecilia Fontana de Heber (wife of a prominent Uruguayan politician). These are only a few of the investigations undertaken in the first half of 2008. (Sources: *El País* [Uruguayan newspaper], *La República* [Uruguayan newspaper], *Últimas Noticias* [Uruguayan newspaper], and *Página 12* [Argentine newspaper]. The Argentine judiciary is in the vanguard in the region and continues to investigate and process court cases dealing with the crimes of the military junta in that country. In 2013, the Argentine government and other human rights advocates also initiated numerous court cases directly linked to Condor and the clandestine detention centres used by the South American security forces under this multilateral plan on Argentine soil. For further readings on the ESMA, Condor, Automotores Orletti court cases, see Centro de Estudios Legales y Sociales-CELS, "CELS Juicios: Crímenes Del Terrorismo De Estado-Weblogs De Las Causas," CELS, accessed 16 August, 2011, <http://www.cels.org.ar/wpblogs/ingles>.

and evidence made available by the Terror Archives and Baltasar Garzón's investigation.

Writings on Condor

Although many have written about the Latin American militaries and their political formation, only a few have focused specifically on those involved in the Condor plan as a group. This has been predominantly due to the *lacunae* created by the wall of secrecy surrounding this plan. The legal barriers created by immunity laws introduced by military juntas prior to their fall, or by politicians immediately after as part of the process of transition to democracy, also enhanced this gap in the Condor member countries. Patrice McSherry and Raúl Molina Mejía studied the institutionalisation of impunity in various Latin American countries during their transition to democracy. They defined state impunity as "freedom from accountability or punishment for state crimes or abuses of power" and described how such impunity was institutionalised in different ways throughout the continent.²¹ Since their introduction, these laws became an insurmountable obstacle to the process of achieving reconciliation between victims and perpetrators, and limited the scope of any investigation concerning human rights abuses carried out by these dictatorships.

The wall of secrecy began to crumble during the late 1980s and early 1990s with the return to democracy and the launch of new investigations. Without doubt, the studies of the anatomy of State terrorism and, especially, of the Condor Plan greatly benefited from the academic works of Patrice McSherry²² and the investigations of writers such as John Dinges, Peter Kornbluh, Samuel Blixen, José Luis Méndez Méndez and Stella Calloni, to

²¹ Namely: "civil-military pacts of transition, executive decrees and pardons, amnesties or other legislation, and military court decisions". J Patrice McSherry and Raúl Molina Mejía, "Introduction to 'Shadows of State Terrorism: Impunity in Latin America'," *Social Justice* 26, No 4 (1999): 1-12, 1.

²² McSherry, "Cross-Border Terrorism"; "Operation Condor"; "Preserving Hegemony: National Security Doctrine in the Post-Cold War Era," *NACLA Report on the Americas* 34, No 3 (2000): 26; "Operation Condor: New Pieces of the Puzzle," *NACLA Report on the Americas* 34, No 6 (2001): 1-2; "Tracking the Origins of a State Terror Network"; *Predatory States: Operation Condor and Covert War in Latin America* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2005); "Death Squads as Parallel Forces: Uruguay, Operation Condor and the United States", *Journal of Third World Studies* 24, No 1 (2007): 13.

name just a few.²³ McSherry was the first to study Condor from an academic perspective. She identified the shortfalls of “liberal theories of pluralism and democracy” and Marxist theories in explaining how some states resort to the use of terrorism to achieve their goals.²⁴ According to McSherry, Michael Stohl’s discussion of realist theories, which imply that “states are obliged to use whatever means necessary to protect national security and state survival”, seemed to better explain why states resort to the use of terrorism to achieve some objectives.²⁵ In the context of the Condor Plan and, particularly, the Cold War, the military regimes in the Southern Cone considered the protection of national sovereignty from any internal or external threat (mostly from leftist revolutionary movements) as an important aspect of national security in their respective countries. Thus, they set out to neutralise those threats at any cost, even at the expense of allowing foreign intelligence services and international terrorists to operate freely within their own national territories.

National Security also addressed economic development and almost every area of policy-making undertaken by those governments. These regimes gave particular emphasis to the notion of the internal enemy, which was a distinct feature introduced to the United States’ National Security Doctrine (NSD) in the early 1960s and adopted by the Latin American militaries in their own countries. The concept of the internal enemy implied that these nations faced a threat from within their own borders. As a consequence of the Cold War, most South American governments and local elites considered the Latin American communist parties and the left in general as a threat during the sixties and seventies. These regimes, and more importantly, several US administrations, argued that the Soviet Union would support those parties financially and logistically to overthrow long-standing liberal democracies in the region and introduce communist governments in Latin America. As McSherry points out, these governments interpreted this as a direct challenge to Western, Christian civilisation.²⁶ Thus, the military regimes used any tool

²³ John Dinges, "The Dubious Document (Brief Article)", *Columbia Journalism Review* 38, no. 5 (2000); *The Condor Years: How Pinochet and His Allies Brought Terrorism to Three Continents* (New Pr., 2004); Peter Kornbluh, *The Pinochet File: A Declassified Dossier on Atrocity and Accountability* (New York: New Press, 2004); Samuel Blixen, *Operación Cóndor: Del Archivo Del Terror Y El Asesinato De Letelier Al Caso Berrios*, 1st ed. (Barcelona: Virus Editorial, 1998); José Luis Méndez Méndez, *Bajo Las Alas Del Cóndor* (La Habana, Cuba: Editorial Capitán San Luis, 2006); Calloni, *Los Años Del Lobo: Operación Cóndor*.

²⁴ McSherry, "Operation Condor", 145.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 147.

²⁶ See McSherry, *Predatory States*, 1-34.

at their disposal, including state terrorism, to prevent the spread of communism, and any other threat that could challenge their economic or political interests. Within this context, any action, no matter how brutal or illegal, was justified to protect the national security of those countries. It is for these reasons, as McSherry points out, that realist theories are useful when trying to explain and understand the actions carried out by the Condor members.

The writers that have focused on Condor (McSherry and Calloni in particular) directly challenged the widely accepted views that for decades portrayed counterinsurgency operations in the region, and particularly the Condor Plan, as a legitimate response to the widespread Marxist insurgency in the Southern Cone. Most officers within the Latin American armed forces and conservative politicians, as well as several US government officials during the 70s and 80s supported this view and continue to support it today. The investigations conducted by McSherry, Calloni and Dinges led to the consolidation of a new paradigm which, more appropriately, describes the Condor Plan as a secret intelligence network formally established in November 1975 by the intelligence services of Chile, Argentina, Paraguay, Uruguay and Bolivia²⁷ and supported by the Brazilian junta and the US government of the time.²⁸ Although most authors place this plan within the context of the Cold War, Patrice McSherry and Stella Calloni are the ones who most eloquently identify and explain this plan's connections with the overall global anticommunist campaign carried out by the US and its allies in the 1950s and 1960s.

This intelligence network has been officially described by the regimes and their supporters as a legitimate effort to combat several subversive groups in the region. However, it had far more sinister ramifications. The Condor Plan “represented a striking new level of coordinated repression among the anticommunist militaries in the region”, which enabled them to “share intelligence and to hunt down, seize and execute political opponents in combined operations ...” throughout the Americas and in Europe.²⁹ McSherry concluded that, to do so, the Condor members developed parallel structures relying on paramilitary groups and high-profile rightist terrorist organisations, in addition to a widespread network of clandestine detention centres, bypassing the frameworks established by international law regarding human rights.

²⁷ Ecuador and Peru joined the *Condor* network in 1978.

²⁸ Brazil supported the formalisation of this plan in November 1975 and attended that secret meeting as observers. However, the Brazilian security forces did not join this Plan officially until 1976.

²⁹ McSherry, "Operation Condor", 145.

McSherry has used the “conceptual construct of the parallel state”, drawing attention to “the secret forces and infrastructure developed as a hidden part of the state to carry out covert counterinsurgency wars”.³⁰ More importantly, she demonstrated that Condor was a “top-secret component of a larger inter-American counterinsurgency strategy—led, financed and overseen by Washington—to prevent and reverse social and political movements in Latin America in favour of structural change”.³¹ This study’s detailed analysis of the implementation of terror by the states and their close cooperation with paramilitary groups and rightist/fascist organisations is indeed a valuable contribution. Until its publication, that secret relationship and its links to Condor had escaped the attention of academics and other researchers.

There is almost unanimous agreement among scholars on what Condor was. However, some offer different explanations on the specific role of the *Junta Coordinadora Revolucionaria* (JCR) or Revolutionary Coordinating Junta as one of the main reasons for the creation of this Plan. Authors like John Dinges (and Peter Kornbluh to a lesser degree) argue that, prior to the 1975 founding meeting, a number of guerrilla groups in South America³² were in the process of reorganising and preparing a counteroffensive against the military regimes.³³ Dinges claims that this new regional revolutionary movement played a considerable part in the establishment of the Condor Plan. Patrice McSherry also acknowledges the existence of the JCR. However, she maintains that the former authors overstate the role of this revolutionary organisation in the process that led to the formalisation of Condor. Dinges argues that the arrests of Anibal Santucho of the Argentine ERP and Isaac Fuentes of the Chilean MIR, in Paraguay, triggered the multilateral operation between Paraguay, Argentina, Chile and the US that led to the discovery of the JCR’s operational plans, months before the meeting in Santiago, Chile.³⁴ Stella Calloni³⁵ and Patrice McSherry³⁶, on the other hand, argue that, if anything, the arrests served as an excuse for the military regimes to formalise the already existent multilateral cooperation

³⁰ McSherry, *Predatory States*, 241.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² Namely the Movimiento de Liberación Nacional-Tupamaros (MLN-T) from Uruguay; the Ejército de Liberación del Pueblo (ELP) from Bolivia, the Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo (ERP) from Argentina, and the Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria (MIR) from Chile.

³³ See Dinges, *The Condor Years*; Kornbluh, *The Pinochet File*, 43-56.

³⁴ Dinges, *The Condor Years*.

³⁵ Calloni, *Los Años Del Lobo; Operación Cóndor*.

³⁶ McSherry, *Predatory States*.

among them, as most of these revolutionary groups were in bad shape and already defeated. As John Dinges points out, little is known about this particular revolutionary organisation and further research is needed to clarify its role in the establishment of Condor.

The support provided by a number of high-ranking US officials in the Nixon and Ford administrations to the South American dictators is amongst the most controversial issues around Condor. Despite the empirical evidence incriminating these administrations, this particular point has been intensely debated by scholars and ex-US officials and has generated a series of heated exchanges between some of them. A clear example of this debate took place immediately after the publishing of Peter Kornbluh's *The Pinochet File*.³⁷ Based on the documents released in 1999 by the Clinton administration, this particular book exposed US participation in the systematic destabilisation of the democratically elected government of Salvador Allende and its support for the subsequent military coup carried out by General Augusto Pinochet. More importantly, it highlighted the earlier aspects of the Condor Plan. A review of this book by Kenneth Maxwell³⁸ in the *Journal Foreign Affairs* was angrily criticised on two occasions by William Rogers³⁹ who dismissed any suggestion that the US played a part in this coup.⁴⁰ According to Maxwell, Henry Kissinger and William Rogers consider "the accusation that the United States played a role in Pinochet's bloody overthrow [...] of the democratically-elected government of Salvador Allende [as] a 'myth' which is "lovingly nurtured by the Latin American left".⁴¹

The editor of *Foreign Affairs*, under "alleged" strong pressures from Henry Kissinger, did not allow Maxwell to reply to Rogers' last letter to the editor, which contained much inaccurate information. Although several prominent academics wrote to the editor supporting Maxwell's right of reply, the journal opted to end the debate, letting Rogers' comments stand

³⁷ Kornbluh, *The Pinochet File*.

³⁸ Kenneth Maxwell, "The Other 9/11: The United States and Chile, 1973", *Foreign Affairs* 83 (2004): 187.

³⁹ Rogers served as US Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs (October 1974-June 1976) and Undersecretary of State for Economic Affairs (June 1976-January 1977) under then-Secretary of State Henry Kissinger. Martin Douglas and Sarah Abruzzese, "William D Rogers Is Dead at 80; Planned US Policy in Latin America", *The New York Times*, accessed 30 August, 2007, http://www.nytimes.com/2007/09/30/us/30rogers.html?_r=0.

⁴⁰ William D Rogers, "Crisis Prevention," *Foreign Affairs* 83, No 2, (2004): 179-180.

⁴¹ Kenneth Maxwell, "The Case of the Missing Letter in Foreign Affairs: Kissinger, Pinochet and Operation Condor", *The David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies Working Papers on Latin America*, Harvard University (2004): 1-31, 5.

unchallenged.⁴² Consequently, Maxwell resigned his position as book reviewer in this journal and published an extensive letter in the journal of the David Rockefeller Centre answering Rogers' attacks and highlighting the inaccuracies of his remarks.⁴³ In 2013, the National Security Archives published a series of US government's declassified documents which confirm that Henry Kissinger "urged President Richard Nixon to overthrow the democratically elected Allende government in Chile ...".⁴⁴ These documents vindicated Maxwell's argument and further incriminated Henry Kissinger.

The denial by ex-US officials, such as Henry Kissinger and William Rogers, and their respective hostile reactions, illustrate the difficulties faced by researchers when investigating this sensitive issue. It is necessary to emphasise, however, that not all US politicians and government officials supported their government's policies and attitudes towards Latin America in general. To illustrate this point one can refer to the works of Senator Wayne Morse, Chair of the State Foreign Relations Subcommittee for the American Republics, who worked hard in the years prior to the formalisation of Condor to convince "Congress to deliberately limit the scope and details of American Military assistance".⁴⁵ Others, including Senator Frank Church, Democratic chair of the Senate Sub-Committee on Inter-American Affairs, Congressman Schroeder and Congressman Ted Kennedy also worked hard to limit US support for anticommunist military regimes in the region.⁴⁶ Notwithstanding these politicians' prominent work, the views of government officials like Kissinger and Rogers prevailed at the time. Despite these debates, Peter Kornbluh's work clearly reveals that the US government was actively involved in the circumstances that led to military coup in Chile on 11 September 1973, severely weakening the arguments of those like Rogers and Kissinger.

Peter Kornbluh investigated the Nixon administration's motives for overthrowing President Salvador Allende, its support for the military coup headed by Pinochet, and even some aspects of the Condor plan.⁴⁷ However, these events cannot be interpreted only as a one-way imposition from the US.

⁴² John Coatsworth et al., "Kenneth Maxwell", *Foreign Affairs* 83, (2004): 187.

⁴³ Maxwell, "The Case of the Missing Letter in Foreign Affairs", 1-31.

⁴⁴ Peter Kornbluh, "Kissinger and Chile: The Declassified Record", *National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book No 437* (2013), accessed 10 October, 2014, <http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB437/>.

⁴⁵ David Marcus Lauderback, "The United States Army School of the Americas: Mission and Policy During the Cold War" (Ph.D, The University of Texas at Austin, 2004), 120.

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, 295.

⁴⁷ Kornbluh, *The Pinochet File*.

The US government did play an important part in precipitating some of these events. Yet, the military leaders and other influential local elites involved in this process supported and executed these plans to achieve their own personal gains (eg perpetuate their position of power, geopolitical ambitions, political and economic interests, etc.). For instance, after the 1973 coup, the Chilean military as an institution greatly benefited from the economic assistance provided by several US Aid programs. The military government also received considerable assistance and loans from other international organisations, including the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, and the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB). Therefore, the stakes were high not only for the Nixon Administration, but also for the Chilean military and the local elites that benefitted from this financial aid. More importantly, these objectives would have not been consolidated without the support of local elites, as well as other transnational actors, who had their own economic and political interests.

The works of Samuel Blixen and José Luis Méndez Méndez also made important contributions to the studies on Condor. Blixen's *Operación Cóndor: Del Archivo del Terror y el Asesinato de Letelier al Caso Berríos* confirmed that the most secretive aspect of this plan, phase III operations, were not completely deactivated after the notorious assassination of Orlando Letelier and his assistant Roni Moffitt, in Washington DC in 1976, as was first thought.⁴⁸ The 1992 assassination of Chilean scientist and ex-DINA agent Eugenio Berríos in Uruguay, in a coordinated effort between Uruguayan and Chilean elements of the armed forces, illustrates that Condor's Phase III operations remained very much in place well into the 1990s. Blixen further explored the works of Berríos and Michael Townley⁴⁹ to develop sarin gas in a project code-named *Plan Andrea*.⁵⁰ Because of its qualities,⁵¹ this gas was produced to carry out Letelier's assassination. However, due to operational problems, those in charge of the operation dropped this option and decided instead to plant a bomb in the politician's car. Other investigations have suggested the possible links between this gas and the deaths of other high profile figures such as the Brazilian ex-presidents

⁴⁸ Blixen, *Operación Cóndor*.

⁴⁹ Townley was the DINA agent responsible for the assassination of General Carlos Prats and other high profile figures during the Cóndor years. He also had connections with the CIA. See Francisco Martorell, *Operación Cóndor, El Vuelo De La Muerte: La Coordinación Represiva En El Cono Sur* (LOM ediciones, 1999), Chapter II.

⁵⁰ This secret plan aimed to develop a way to produce mass quantities of this gas to be used in case of a possible war between Chile and Argentina for example.

⁵¹ Death induced by sarin gas produces symptoms very similar to those produced by a heart attack and the gas leaves no identifiable trace.

João Goulart and Juscelino Kubitschek de Oliveira.⁵² However, there is no conclusive evidence yet of the use of sarin gas in these cases and more research is needed to explore such a possibility.

Blixen's work shows how the very same tactics and operations carried out in the Condor Plan to eliminate high profile figures opposing the military regimes were used years later against one of Condor's own agents to erase incriminating evidence. Furthermore, as Stella Calloni points out, the subsequent investigations of the Berríos case exposed the fragile state of the democratic governments that succeeded the military regimes. When these governments attempted to investigate the Berríos case, hard-line senior officers within the Uruguayan and Chilean armed forces made it clear that they would not allow any investigation of this matter, and directly threatened those governments if they went ahead with their inquiries.⁵³

José Luis Méndez Méndez, on the other hand, focused on another of the most secret features of what McSherry has identified as the parallel structures developed by these military regimes: the close links between the Condor states and rightist terrorist groups.⁵⁴ Méndez provides a detailed investigation of the close associations between the Chilean *Dirección de Inteligencia Nacional* (DINA) (National Intelligence Directorate) and Cuban anti-Castro terrorists living in Miami, Florida, such as Orlando Bosch, the Novo brothers, Posada Carriles and Virgilio Paz. Although McSherry had previously identified the connection between DINA and several Cuban anticommunists,⁵⁵ Méndez further confirms that Chile, and the CIA, actively participated in the creation of the *Centro de Organizaciones Revolucionarias Unidas* (CORU) (Centre of United Revolutionary Organisations).

CORU was established in 1976 by members of several Anti-Castro organisations who met in the city of Bonao, Dominican Republic. CORU united and coordinated the clandestine work of the Cuban exile counterrevolutionaries, with direct support from the CIA. Méndez confirms that Orlando Letelier's fate was also decided at that meeting.⁵⁶ This particular finding directly challenged those who maintained that the US government knew nothing about the Letelier assassination until after it had occurred. The author also discusses the role played by the anticommunist Cubans in the attempt to assassinate the Chilean Christian Democrat Bernardo Leighton. All the authors within the field have discussed at length DINA's connection with

⁵² See the works of Uruguayan journalist Roger Rodríguez regarding the deaths of ex-Presidents of Brazil, João Goulart and Juscelino Kubitschek.

⁵³ Calloni, *Los Años Del Lobo*, 202.

⁵⁴ Méndez Méndez, *Bajo Las Alas Del Cóndor*

⁵⁵ See McSherry, *Predatory States*, 157-159.

⁵⁶ Méndez Méndez, *Bajo Las Alas Del Cóndor*, 64-95.

the Leighton case. However, Méndez focused his attention on the activities and operations conducted by the anti-Castro Cubans within this operation. The latter were responsible for cleaning up all traces incriminating the Chilean DINA in the assassination attempt. This study added a further dimension to Condor by placing the spotlight on the Anti-Castro organisations and their connections with the US, Chile and some of the most virulent sectors of the radical Latin American Right. Arguably, this investigation's most important contribution is that it reveals and documents the criminal activities and acts of terrorism conducted by these Cuban exile organisations in conjunction with the Chilean junta. However, by focusing on these groups, Méndez draws attention to only a small section of the entire secret network of non-state actors who lent their support to, and in some cases even worked with, the Condor intelligence agencies.

The political changes throughout Latin America in the past decade and the subsequent release of thousands of secret documents produced by South American intelligence agencies during the sixties, seventies and eighties brought about important developments regarding studies of the Condor Plan. Latin American scholars began to study other aspects of this plan and regional military cooperation during this period of dictatorial rule. While McSherry, Dinges, Calloni, Kornbluh and others explore the US role in the process that led to the formalisation of the Condor Plan, a number of Latin American scholars have chosen to analyse what Nilson César Mariano described as the “MERCOSUR of Terror”.⁵⁷ These authors do acknowledge the prominent role played by the US in influencing the political developments in the region, including Condor, however, they have shifted attention from the US as the hegemonic powerhouse to explore the role of local elites, individuals and the political, economic and military aspects of the South American dictatorships. They have also begun to analyse the Cold War from a Latin American perspective. These investigations have enriched the process of building the historiography of this particular period. They also uncovered a much more complex image of the South American political situation at the time, as well as the regional power relations involved in this Cold War environment. These studies demonstrate, among other things, that the US's interests for the region within the context of the Cold War did not always coincide with those of the South American dictators and local elites, particularly, in the early-to-mid 1970s. These authors also address the influential power struggles between countries in the Southern Cone, giving particular emphasis to the geopolitical ambitions of the Brazilian junta.

⁵⁷ See Nilson, *Operación Cóndor*, Chapter I, 15-23.

The work of Tanya Harmer on the inter-American theatre of the Cold War falls well into this latter category.⁵⁸ Harmer maintains that the Cold War in Latin America went beyond the clash between the East and West. It also included two well-defined axes: the first formed by Cuba and Chile, and the second by the US and Brazil. The clash between them reached its climax in 1973 with the overthrow of President Salvador Allende in Chile. Although Harmer's work addresses the role of the US in this context, she emphasises the role of the Brazilian junta and its attempt to establish Brazil as an active and influential power player in the Southern Cone. The Brazilian military junta followed with concern political developments in Bolivia, Chile, Uruguay and Argentina during the early 1970s. Harmer maintains that Brazilian intelligence analysts believed that the South American Left had achieved important gains and that those countries immediately drew closer to Havana.⁵⁹ Such alliances, the Brazilians believed, had the potential to weaken the inter-American defence system and open the door to the spread of communism in the entire continent.

Thus, Brazil deepened ties with the US to break a potential leftist encirclement and set out to maintain the region free of communism. Subsequently, in the early 1970s, the Brazilian junta actively cooperated and conspired with Chilean anticommunist elites and that country's military to overthrow President Allende. They also intervened in Bolivia to overthrow the progressive government of General Juan José Torres, and in Uruguay during and after the 1971 election.⁶⁰ Harmer's work focuses predominantly on the period 1970–1973. However, her detailed analysis of this period and the actors involved illuminate the circumstances that led to increased military intervention and cooperation in the Southern Cone. Furthermore, it provides a more accurate view of Brazil's position in the region at the time.⁶¹ Until recently, the Brazilian junta has been portrayed as a soft regime, often distant from political developments in the region or more civilised than their Chilean, Uruguayan, Paraguayan or Argentine counterparts. Although Harmer does not mention the Condor Plan, her work aids understanding of, and contextualises, the emergence of Condor and Brazil's participation in it. Brazilian representatives attended the November 1975 meeting as observers and officially joined the Plan in 1976. Since the mid-1960s, and with some rare exceptions such as the 1971 presidential elections in Uruguay, Brasilia

⁵⁸ Tanya Harmer, *Allende's Chile and the Inter-American Cold War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011).

⁵⁹ See *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ Brazil also supported the Stroessner regime in Paraguay and actively sought to undermine the Peruvian government headed by General Velasco Alvarado.

⁶¹ See Harmer, *Allende's Chile and the Inter-American Cold War*, 20–48.