

For My Part

By Ray Cromley



STUDY FIRMER MILITARY TIE TO BENEFIT LATIN AMERICA

There is a growing belief in the Pentagon and State Department that the U.S. military should play a larger peacetime role in promoting U.S. aims (and responsible government) in Latin America and other developing areas.

This belief has been strengthened by the apparent success of the Indonesian military (2,500 of whom have had U.S. training) in battling the Communists.

In bygone years, U.S. diplomats looked at Latin military leaders as irresponsible dictator types who would overthrow a constitutionally elected government at the drop of a saber.

But a State Department analysis of the role of the Latin military in recent years comes up with some surprises. By and large, the military has been a major force in pushing democracy in a number of South and Central American states.

THE MILITARY MEN have stepped in to oust dictators. They have followed through by calling for needed reforms (as in Brazil) and have promoted elections.

They have, in a number of instances, kept the Alliance for Progress aims in a country from

dying on the vine.

This change in the Latin military outlook, officials here reason, is the result of a change in the men who form its officer corps. The average officer today is most likely from the middle class, not the aristocracy. He expresses middleclass aims. He is not interested in preserving old privileges and traditions. Broader government, competitive economics and democratic elections are to his interest and the interest of his family.

Whether this reasoning is correct or not, it is clear the military is a dominant force in many Latin developing nations and elsewhere.

The military establishment is often the nucleus around which a new regime is forced to build. Military leaders thus become arbiters of political power.

WITH THIS ANALYSIS as a basis, here is how some key Pentagon and State Department officials think:

U.S. military leaders often enjoy close professional relations with key army, navy and air force men in the developing nations.

They can use this close contact to build personal friend-

ships.

They can "educate" the Latin (and other) military men in the U.S. concept of the proper relationship between the military and the civilian government — hopefully, gradually get the Latins to accept civilian superiority.

They can pass on to these fellow officers democratic concepts.

They can steer the armed forces of the Latin nations into three avenues:

1. Organizing public safety, public health and civil works projects to win the confidence of the people, make them more friendly to the government and less susceptible to Communist influence.

2. Educating draftees in reading and other skills they will need in civilian life afterward. Then the young soldier, often away from home for the first time, can return to assist his own community.

3. Building bridges, canals, communications, as did the U.S. Army in frontier days, to create the basic understructure needed to accelerate economic development.