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# Laird Denies U.S. Stirs Latin Revolts

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## Washington

Defense Secretary Melvin R. Laird considers the military "the only cohesive group" in most Latin American countries but denies that the Pentagon is encouraging military takeovers through its training programs, congressional testimony revealed yesterday.

At the same time, the Defense Department warns that the United States is losing and will continue to lose ground to European arms salesmen as long as U.S. arms sales to Latin America are limited by Congress.

These statements were made by top Pentagon officials, including Laird, during secret hearings held last March by the House Appropriations Committee. A heavily censored transcript of these hearings was released yesterday.

"I think it is important for us to bear in mind that the military is the only cohesive group in many of the countries of Latin America and that they are very important," Laird testified.

"No part of the U.S. train-  
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ing given Latin American officers is in any way related to overthrow of governments, but on the contrary is aimed at maintaining internal security and stability in order that economic progress can be achieved."

Laird said that the political attitudes of the Latin American military were a product of the environment in which they live. "Intervention by the military when it judges that the government has failed has been a widely accepted reaction in Latin America," he said.

U.S. military programs in Latin America "cannot be expected to negate the political beliefs and attitudes of a lifetime," he said. He cited the administration policy to the effect that "we have a clear preference for free and democratic processes, but we deal with governments as they are."

At present, the military controls — directly or indirectly — the governments of 11 Latin-American nations: Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Paraguay, Ecuador, Panama, Bolivia, Argentina, Brazil and Peru.

On the issue of military sales, Laird said it was "a great mistake" by Congress to have limited the United States to a \$75 million ceiling.

(Since those hearings, the administration doubled that ceiling to \$150 million, to the distress of a number of congressmen).

"This limitation that we have on sales has meant that Latin America has turned more and more to the French and the British suppliers, and they are moving in there with ever-increasing efforts," Laird said.