# Militarism in Spanish America, 1870-1910: Lessons in Globalization for Today


## Abstract

Nowadays, *globalization* is commonly thought of as a relatively recent phenomenon and is generally understood to refer to economics. This paper attempts to show that globalization does not have a short history, but has long affected numerous aspects of life; that militarism in Spanish America between 1870 and 1910, with its growing uniformity of matériel, strategies, tactics and dress, is a compelling illustration of the presence of globalization; and that important lessons for today can be drawn from the evolution of globalization during the period examined here.

In this talk, globalization will mean: *the process of incrementally forming worldwide relationships through the intra- and inter-national circulation of ideas, goods, systems, and populations*.


## A Word of Background

Every age can be divided into periods, each of which has essential attributes that differentiate it from those that precede it and those that follow. These attributes tend not to be limited to one country or region, but are usually transnational. However, these periods are never totally encapsulated between specific dates. Rather, whenever and wherever they appear, they manifest themselves first by showing subtle novelties from what currently exists; then they gradually build up to a synthesis of distinguishing features; and finally, they fade away as other trends with other features take hold and make life different.

Four trends characterize the 19th century. The first started in the 18th century and lasted through the first third of the 19th century. This period is known as "The Age of Reason." The military theories of Antoine-Henri Jomini (1779–1869) were a product of this age and its stress on rational thinking. Despite the fact that war is a very complex and disorderly phenomenon, Jomini conceived of war as a rational science—a kind of geometry—and his military art was expressed in prescriptive terms.

Although this period is usually called "The Age of Reason," it might more accurately be called the Age of Revolution. While we tend to think of the political revolutions of this time—namely, the American and French revolutions, and the Spanish American wars of independence—the world saw many other kinds of revolution. Among them were a revolution:

- in energy, from muscle power to steam power;
- in production, from small scale to large scale;
- in transportation, from horse-drawn on the land and wind-driven on the sea to mechanical in both settings;
- and in thought, from the belief that real knowledge is derived from religious sources, to a conviction that real knowledge stems from scientific observation and experimentation.

All of these revolutions developed from a passion to establish the hegemony of *liberté—liberté*, the foremost goal of the French Revolution—the goal for which everyone now seemed to be struggling. Even mercantilism—that long-standing economic doctrine by which centralized government took control of all of the nation's commercial interests—even mercantilism surrendered to a policy of free and open trade.

If the Age of Reason and Revolution was characterized by a passion to throw off objectionable limitations, the second quarter of the century saw the rise of an intense effort to move forward—to *progress*. Thanks to inventions like Fulton's steamboat (1807); Stephenson's locomotive (1825);[1] Hoe's rotary press (1843); and Morse's telegraph (1844), this could be described as the start of a real Age of Movement. A few years later, many remaining barriers to East-West thought and travel were removed by the Panama railroad in 1855, the transatlantic cable in 1866, and the Suez Canal in 1869.[2]

As for military theory, we find Carl von Clausewitz**,** author of *Vom Kriege* [On War, 1832], reacting against the absolute categories, standards, and values of theorists like Jomini. War, von Clausewitz affirmed, was not to be treated as a kind of static geometry. It was always moving, always dynamic, always driven by forces beyond the control of any individual or group. Therefore, it was unwise to make prescriptions for others to follow in conflicts yet to come. What was essential was to study the *Zeitgeist* or "spirit of the age" in which those wars would be fought, and not see them as repetitions of conflicts that took place in the past.

As the trends discussed above changed people's view of reality, a growing tide of acquisitiveness was taking place in the Western World. If the 18th century could be characterized by René Descartes' assertion (1596-1650), "I think, therefore I am," the third quarter of the 19th century could be represented by "I have, therefore I am." Acquisition elevated the sense of self-worth of governments, commercial interests,

and members of society, thus resulting in the search for new colonial holdings, new overseas markets, and greater personal wealth.

Ideas, images, and objects from all parts of Europe, Africa, and the Far East were sent to large and small population centers in the Americas. [3] There was more of everything and everything seemed to be getting bigger and heavier. This happened because, over the years, globalization—which started further back in time than we tend to recognize—was taking place at a faster rate than ever before.

The military didn't shrink from following the trend of acquisition. More guns, more ships, more ammunition, more wars:

| | |
|---|---|
| Franco-Prussian War | (1870-1871) |
| Aceh War | (1873-1904) |
| Third Anglo-Ashanti War | (1873-1874) |
| Russo-Turkish War | (1877-1878) |
| Second Anglo-Afghan War | (1878-1880) |
| Anglo-Zulu War | (1879) |
| **War of the Pacific** (Chile vs. Peru & Bolivia) | (1879-1883) |
| First Boer War | (1880-1881) |
| Sino-French War | (1884-1885) |
| Serbo-Bulgarian War | (1885-1885) |
| Third Anglo-Burmese War | (1885-1887) |
| Franco-Siamese War | (1893-1893) |
| First Sino-Japanese War | (1894-1895) |
| Fourth Anglo-Ashanti War | (1894-1896) |
| First Italo-Ethiopian War | (1895-1896) |
| Greco-Turkish War | (1897-1897) |
| Spanish-American War | (1898) |
| Boxer Rebellion | (1899-1901) |
| Second Boer War | (1899-1902) |
| Russo-Japanese War | (1904-1905) |

As this list shows, the War of the Pacific was one of the major conflicts during this period. Let's look at its causes.

For years, Chile, Bolivia, and Peru had been extracting nitrates from the coastal deserts. The nitrates were essential for the production of fertilizer and explosives, and therefore, were eagerly sought around the world. Although each of the three nations was involved in mining the nitrates, the mineral-rich areas in Peru and Bolivia were mostly exploited by Chilean companies backed by British interests.

Regrettably, from the time of independence in the first 1/3 of the century, a hazy boundary existed between Bolivia and Chile. In 1866, however, the two countries negotiated a treaty that recognized the 24th parallel south latitude as their boundary. This line was just south of Antofagasta, which was then a Bolivian port. In this treaty, Bolivia and Chile agreed to equally share all revenues generated by mining activities between the 23rd and 24th parallels.

Unfortunately, this seemingly positive agreement of 1866 between Bolivia and Chile was powerless to stave off conflict. Three major causes can be cited:

- First, in 1873, Bolivia and Peru signed a secret Treaty of Mutual Defense which was designed to guarantee the integrity, independence, and sovereignty of those two countries. Chile had no knowledge of this treaty at that time.
- Second, in 1875, Peru nationalized all nitrate mines in Tarapacá Province. This prevented Chile from continuing to exploit the minerals in this region and thus deprived it of a major source of revenue.
- And third, by 1878, Bolivia grew so dissatisfied with having to share its mining revenues with Chile, that it imposed a tax on the nitrates carried for export by the

> main railroad company [Compañía de Salitres y Ferrocarriles de Antofagasta], which belonged to Chile. Although Chile vehemently protested, Bolivia refused to withdraw the tax. The

This was a direct threat to the Chilean mining corporations and their backers. And on 14 February 1879, after Bolivia went further and confiscated the railway company's property, Chile's naval forces assisted its land forces in occupying the port of Antofagasta. In response, Bolivia declared war on Chile. However, because of Bolivia's secret treaty with Peru, Peru was also brought into the conflict. By 6 April 1879, all three nations were at war.

As we just saw, the War of the Pacific began as a naval operation. It continued in this form even after the land forces had engaged. Transporting troops and blockading harbors were basic tasks of each navy, but since the adversaries needed weapons and supplies, and these had to come from abroad, additional naval action was essential. In defense of its interests, Peru sent its warships along the Pacific coast as far south as Cape Horn in order to intercept war material that was being shipped to Chile from overseas. And Chile sent her warships far north in order to seize armaments that were being shipped to Peru from Europe and the United States across the Isthmus of Panama.

But what kind of war material did each nation have?

The naval strength of each country is shown below.

**Naval Strength**

| The Chilean navy had: | | Source | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 schooner: | *Covadonga* | Spain | 1859 |
| 4 corvettes: | *Esmeralda* | | 1855 |
| | *Abtao* | | 1870 |
| | *O'Higgins* | | 1874 |
| | *Chacabuco* | | 1874 |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 gunboat: | *Magallanes* | | 1874 |
| 2 ironclad frigates: | *Cochrane* | U.K. | 1875 |
| | *Blanco Encalada* | U.K. | 1875 |

The Peruvian navy had:

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 2 coastal monitors: | *Manco Cápac* | U.S. Catawba | 1864 |
| | *Atahualpa* | U.S. Oneonta | 1864 |
| 1 gunboat: | *Pilcomayo* | | 1864 |
| 1 corvette: | *Unión* | | 1864 |
| 1 ironclad: | *Independencia* | Scotland | 1865 |
| 1 sea-going monitor: | *Huáscar* | Britain | 1865 |

In addition to these vessels, both navies also had a number of torpedo boats. [4] Chile, for example, had 12 such boats; these had been built in Britain between 1880 and 1881. It also had a number of purpose-built landing craft.

Intent on outdoing each other, both Chile and Peru attempted to purchase additional ships abroad. In order to thwart its adversary in this regard, Chile established a special mission in Paris to track and foil Peru's purchasing efforts. It appears that this mission was successful.

For the most part, Chile's fleet was newer and more formidable than Peru's. Indeed, reports from contemporary U.S. sources indicate that, at the time the War of the Pacific took place, Chile had the most outstanding navy in the Western Hemisphere.

The land strength of each country is shown below.

**Land Strength**
**Chile**

**Troops:**

1879 about 3,000
1881 about 40,000

**Artillery:** over 120 artillery pieces including

Krupp field and mountain guns
British Blakely rifled muzzle-loading cannon

British Armstrong rifled breech-loading field guns

6 U.S. Gatling guns[5]

**Small arms:**

French Minié, Chassepot, and Gras rifles

Belgian Comblains

Dutch Beaumonts

U.S. Remingtons, Spencers, and Winchesters

**Peru**

**Troops:**

1879 about 6,000 inexperienced

1880 about 28,000 with little or no professional experience

**Artillery:** few pieces

Mainly British Blakely cannon dating from 1866

British Nordenfelt machine guns

U.S. Gardner and Gatling machine guns

**Small arms:**

France: Minié and Chassepot rifles

Belgium: Comblains

Britain: Sniders

U.S.: Peabody-Martini, Springfield, and Remingtons

**Bolivia**

**Troops:**

1878 about 2,200 inexperienced

1879 about 6,000 with little or no professional experience

**Artillery:** few pieces

**Small arms:**

From flintlock muskets to Martini-Henry, Snider, Winchester, and Remington rolling-block rifles

The above-mentioned diversity in weaponry is further evidence that globalization in military hardware was taking place in this part of Spanish America at the end of the 19th century.

The diversity in weaponry shown here is further evidence that a lively globalization was taking place in this part of Spanish America in the 19th century.

But let's not get bogged down in details. What's important is that—stronger on land as well as on sea—Chile won the war. And for its adversaries it was a truly humiliating defeat. Bolivia lost its access to the Pacific Ocean and became a totally landlocked country, with a frustration and anger so deep that they've lasted until today. And Peru—for three centuries the seat of Spanish power and culture in South America, and the center of pride that that prestigious position engendered—was humbled by the capture and pillaging of several cities including its capital, Lima. One of the most mortifying acts perpetrated by the victorious Chileans in Lima was their plundering of the contents of Peru's National Library, precious storehouse of books and documents that represented years of colonial glory. [6]

For Peru, the war with Chile ended on 20 October 1883 with the Treaty of Ancón. With this treaty, Peru ceded the region of Tarapacá to Chile in perpetuity and allowed it to occupy the regions of Tacna and Arica for 10 years. A final accord on the latter issue, however, had to wait until 1929 when, through the mediation of U.S. President Herbert Hoover, Tacna was given to Peru and Arica to Chile.

In 1884, Bolivia signed a truce that relinquished the entire Bolivian coast, including the province of Antofagasta and its nitrate, copper, and other mineral deposits. A 1904 treaty made this arrangement permanent.

Peru's defeat was hotly discussed after the war. But perhaps the most scathing criticism was voiced by Manuel González Prada (1848-1918), one of Peru's most outstanding thinkers. In a speech delivered in 1888, González Prada, who had fought in the war, stated that Peru had lost because of a lack of professionalism. In fact, lack of professionalism was

characteristic of the entire government. "Without specialists —or rather—with amateurs who presumed to be omniscient," he said, "we lived from experiment to experiment: experiments by amateurs in Diplomacy, experiments by amateurs in Political Economy, experiments by amateurs in Legislation, and even experiments by amateurs in Tactics and Strategy . . ." [7]

What a damning criticism!

In spite of this, some military-minded individuals believed that, although Peru lost the War of the Pacific because the military was not professionally trained, there was no reason for people to look down on war itself and harbor an opposition to military action. Such an attitude would be "baseless and illogical." [8]

Obviously, they said, the pacifists just weren't up to date. Hadn't Darwin declared that struggle is necessary for progress?

Hadn't informed thinkers affirmed that "War is an aide to thought, and to condemn it totally is . . . to renounce progress"? [9]

Hadn't the famous poet Rubén Darío (1867-1916) stated that "The peace that deluded prophets dream about is not human; constant activity makes war necessary"? [10]

The answer to the opponents of war, they insisted, was "educate the military and it will be the most zealous guardian of national honor." [11]

Of course, to make the Peruvian military an effective force, it was essential to acquire appropriate matériel and initiate intensive training. This could be done by means of a

four-step process:

- First, discover what equipment other nations were using. The *Revue Militaire Suisse* [12] was among the many foreign sources available for this kind of information.

- Second, prioritize all items found through this research, according to their utility and cost for Peru—items such as submarines built in Kiel, Germany; cannons like those built by Krupp; and rifles like the unique Mexican Mondragón rifle. [13] The solution was to choose weapons that would give the most bang for the buck to a military that was short of troops and of funds to supply them.

- Third, purchase the selected equipment. Krupp was represented all over Spanish America, and experience proved that German sales reps were first class—much better than the haughty British ones. German sales reps wouldn't limit their client base to the élite, like the British did, but would deal with any buyer. They would also offer their products at very good prices, and would provide the best terms of payment.[14]

  Adding to this inclination to deal with Germans were the conclusions of Clemente Palma (1872-1946), who had argued in his Bachelor's thesis *The Future of the Races in Peru* (1897) that Germans were physically strong, profoundly intellectual, scientifically minded, calm, energetic, tenacious, moral, and orderly—a truly superior race.

- And fourth, in addition to using the old training standbys by Jomini and von Clausewitz, the Peruvian Army could use a proposed work from Colombia: Manuel Briceño's five volume *Curso de arte militar aplicado a las Repúblicas Hispanoamericanas* [Course in the Military Arts for the Spanish American Republics (1882)].[15] The next step would be to go on meaningful military maneuvers.

Well, what about Chile? Couldn't she do the same as Peru to improve the effectiveness of her military? Sure. But Chile also had an ace in the hole. After the War of the Pacific, Chile decided to modernize its army. Seeing Germany's victory in the Franco-Prussian War (1870-71), its success in applying science to industry, and the admirable contributions that German settlers were making to Chile's progress, the German military was chosen as the model. In 1885, this pro-German bent led Chile's president Domingo Santa María (1881-1886) to contract Emil Körner, an outstanding Prussian artillery specialist and professor of military history, tactics, and ballistics to professionalize Chile's military. The result was a reorganization of the Officers' College (Escuela Militar), the establishment of a War Academy (Academia de Guerra), the restructuring of the military's curricula and regulations, and the introduction of Prussian-style uniforms.

While it's understandable that, in the wake of the War of the Pacific, Peru and Chile would want to build up their military, it's surprising to learn that, at the turn of the century, a peaceful country like Uruguay would consider steps to improve its army by introducing rudimentary military exercises in its high schools. Why?

There are at least two reasons for this. First, according to Lt. Jaime F. Bravo of Uruguay, as the 19th century ended and the 20th began, the U.S., Argentina, and Europe were arming. So if everyone was doin' it, wouldn't it be wise for Uruguay to do so too? **16**

But something beside fashion was behind this militaristic trend. It was the change from free trade in economic policy to protectionism. Free trade had brought Spanish America into step with the developed world. By 1896, however, there was evidence that attitudes were changing. One of these was that the degree of inspiration from foreign sources that Spanish American authors had welcomed during the free trade years was no longer sustainable. Inspiration, it was now believed, should not come from foreign sources, but from simple, familiar, national ones.

Many examples can be cited, **17** but, in summary, they asserted that foreign influence should now be limited. In its place there should be a Spanish American educational system, a Spanish American system of governance, a Spanish American art, a Spanish American literature, a Spanish American way of thinking.

This emphasis on things national also affected the feelings of Spanish Americans regarding immigration and investment from Europe. As a result, we see the open door/free trade policies of the past undergoing revision, and efforts being made to protect local interests.

And what better way to protect national and local interests than to have a professional military! In this regard, it should be noted that Chile's intensive efforts at professionalization were not limited to the armed forces. A brief example: from 1885 to 1915, a total of 205 German educators were imported to work in

Chile's teacher-training institutions as well as primary and secondary schools. This stress on professionalizing Chile's educational system was not unique during this period, but was another example of globalization, for the last quarter of the 19th century was an era of educational reform throughout the Western world.

But this is a subject for another time.

The subject for us now is "Militarism in Spanish America, 1870-1910: Lessons in Globalization for Today." So what are those lessons?

## Conclusion

One important lesson that the above discussion teaches is that despite their heterogeneity, the countries of Spanish America tended to follow global trends which changed with the passage of time. As examples, we find that in Spanish America, as in the rest of the Western world, there was:

- An Age of Reason and Revolution which led to widespread movement in many areas of life.
- This was followed by an Age of Acquisition, in which governments sought to acquire areas rich in raw materials; manufacturers sought to acquire markets for their products; and individuals sought to acquire as much personal wealth as possible.
- As the century progressed, there was a growth in the belief that adherence to the doctrines of Science would lead countries and institutions toward genuine progress.
- In commerce, there was a movement from mercantilism to free trade, and then to protectionism.
- And, as the turn of the century approached, there was a

trend toward professionalization of the military and the system of public education, both of which were seen as a means of guaranteeing the political and cultural integrity of the nation.

Another lesson that can be derived from the above discussion is that an image, a concept, or an aspiration can manifest itself in many ways and last for decades, even centuries. One example is the fact that the key ideals and aspirations of the French Revolution (liberty, equality, and fraternity) continued to motivate people forcefully. Just as the ideal of equality helped to encourage labor and socialist movements during and after the turn of the 19th century in Spanish America, that ideal manifests itself globally today in a multiplicity of ways, a major example being the striving for equal treatment of racial, religious, class, sexual, and physical differences.

Thus we conclude that while the passage of time may produce degrees of diversity locally, the local should also be studied as part of the global.

## Notes

**1** In an article published in the Toronto *Globe and Mail* newspaper on 3 March 2012 (p. F3), Jeet Heer reminded his readers that "In the 19th century, trains were the first widespread form of mechanical locomotion, and they transformed the world. . . . In a real sense, globalization is a byproduct of train travel."

**2** According to Jeet Heer, in 1857 Karl Marx stated that "[c]apital must on the one side strive to tear down every spatial barrier to . . . exchange, and to conquer the whole earth for its market."

**3** During the last quarter of the 19th century, the Western World experienced a trend toward orientalism. Until 1854, Japan followed a 200 year old policy of *sakoku* (national isolation) under which no foreigner was allowed to enter the country nor any Japanese to leave it. In March of 1854, Commodore Matthew C. Perry, supported by a naval squadron, succeeded in concluding a Treaty of Peace and Amity which opened two ports to the United States, guaranteed the safety of shipwrecked U.S. sailors, and established a foundation for the Americans to maintain a permanent consul in the port of Shimoda. As the century progressed and greater contact was made between East and West, Japan left its mark in Europe and the Americas. In Cuba, for example, poets (most of them men at that time) would write Japanese type *haikus* in Spanish, high-class ladies would hold parties in which they dressed and took tea in Japanese fashion, and members of the lower classes would

purchase Japanese knick-knacks for themselves in Havana markets.

**4** During the war, Peru developed the Submarino *Toro* ("Submarine *Bull*"). Although it was completely operational, the *Toro* never saw action, and was eventually scuttled to prevent her capture.
<http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/en/5/51/Submarinebull.PNG>

**5** Although developed in the early 1860s, the Gatling gun was accepted by the U.S. Army only after 1874, when a military report praised the weapon for "the lightness of its parts; the simplicity and strength of its mechanism; the rapidity and continuity of its fire without sensible recoil . . . its general accuracy at all ranges attainable by rifles . . . its great endurance." (Thomas J. Craughwell, *The War Scientists: The Brains Behind Military Technologies of Destruction and Defense*. New York: Metro Books, 2010, p. 147.) It is interesting to note that Chile was able to acquire this weapon only some 5 years after its acceptance by the U.S. military.

**6** The consequences of this act came to my attention in 1968 during my research in Lima when I discovered that many of the books that I wanted to consult were then housed in Santiago. Fortunately, in November 2007, almost 4,000 of the books that had been taken were returned to Peru.

**7** González Prada's speech was given in Lima's Politeama Theater, which with 2,000 seats, was the largest theater in Lima at that time.

**8** "El militarismo," *Neblina* [Lima], 23 May 1895, 523-24.

**9** A. L. [sic], "La guerra y la civilización," *Martín Fierro* [Buenos Aires], 12 May 1904.

**10** "Salutación al Aguila," *El canto errante*, Madrid, 1907.

**11** "El militarismo," *Neblina* [Lima], 23 May 1895, 523-24.

**12** Another example of globalization during this period is an 1887 entry in *La Revista Social* of Peru indicating that this periodical had established an exchange with 205 journals from 25 countries on 4 continents.

**13** The Mondragón rifle was designed by Mexican general Manuel Mondragón at the command of Porfirio Díaz. It was the first fully automatic firearm capable of being operated by a single rifleman. It was available with either an 8-round or 20-round box magazine and, after 1910, with a 100-round drum magazine. It was also possible to operate it as a simple straight-pull bolt action gun. Mondragón began his work in 1882 and patented the weapon in 1887.

**14** "Ciencia y fuerza alemanas," *La Revista Nueva* [Santiago, Chile], May 1900, 161-62.

**15** "Una obra nueva": Briceño, Manuel. *Conocimientos militares —Curso de arte militar aplicado a las Repúblicas Hispano-americanas* [with maps and 400 graphics], *Papel*

*Periódico Ilustrado* [Bogotá], 1 June 1882, 271.

**16** "Instrucción militar en los colegios del Estado," *La Revista* [Montevideo], April 1900, 375-80.

**17** Here are two examples of this protectionist focus on America:

In 1882, José Martí of Cuba published an article entitled "Nuestra América" (Our America) in which he counseled Spanish Americans that:

1. A Spanish American system of education should replace the foreign systems then in use.
2. The good governor in Spanish America is not the one who knows how the German or Frenchman governs, but the one who knows his own country intimately.

And as a way of summarizing this pro-Spanish American message, Martí declared, "Let our wine be made from bananas; and if it turns out sour, at least we know it's our wine!"

In 1897, Rufino Blanco Fombona (1874-1944) of Venezuela wrote "La teoría de Monroe aplicada a la literature (The Monroe Theory [i.e., Doctrine] Applied to Literature)," an article in which he said:

1. As far as Europe is concerned, let's not think that we're inferior to them or copy them like monkeys.
2. Let's admire their art, but let's create our own.
3. Europe can't conquer our territory; so let's not have it conquer our intellect.