**Igor Goicovic\***
Departamento de Historia, Universidad de Santiago de Chile, Santiago de Chile, Metropolitana, Chile
https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2183-7195

# The Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria (MIR) and the armed resistance in Chile during the institutionalization of the dictatorship (1978-1990)[1]

## Introduction

The purpose of this article is to analyze the characteristics of the political conflict that developed in Chile in the 1978-1988 cycle and to evaluate the incidence of the armed insurgency in its configuration. We argue that the Chilean military dictatorship began its institutionalization phase in 1977, which had as its most relevant milestone the enactment of the Political Constitution of 1980. In the framework of this process, it is possible to observe a gradual revival of the popular movement, especially from 1980 onwards. The confirmation of this process of revival led the Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria (MIR) to develop a strategy (Protracted People's War), which emphasized the deployment of violent forms of struggle (militia and guerrilla), which in turn favoured the overthrow of the dictatorship[2].

The MIR was a political-military organization, founded in Santiago de Chile in August 1965, which proclaimed itself Marxist-Leninist, that claimed armed struggle as a method of political action and that intended, through the taking of power, to build a State of workers and peasants that would lead the country towards socialism.

Between 1969 and 1973, the MIR achieved a significant level of adherence among the high school and university students, urban poor, landless agricultural workers and Mapuche Indians. Not surprisingly, immediately after the coup d'état of September 11, 1973, the MIR became the number one target of the dictatorship's repressive policy. Thus, between September 1973 and October 1975, the MIR was practically disarticulated. Hundreds of its militants were assassinated, among them most of its political commission and its central committee; others served long years in prison, and several had to go into exile in order to preserve their lives. By 1977 the MIR in Chile, was reduced to a small

group of no more than 50 militants who were trying to reorganize the party and put it at the forefront of the struggle against the dictatorship (Goicovic, 2020a: 111-119).

In this article, we propose to analyze the political context in which the reorganization of the MIR took place and to evaluate the scope of the resistance policy it deployed against the Chilean dictatorship (1973-1990), headed by Augusto Pinochet.

## The 1973 coup d'état and its re-foundational projections

The coup d'état carried out by the Chilean military on September 11, 1973 was not intended to be a temporary exercise of government and then return power to the traditional elites. It was an institutional intervention, involving all branches of the Armed Forces and the Carabineros de Chile, aimed at rebuilding Chilean society on new economic, social, and political foundations. It was, ultimately, a political movement with re-foundational expectations (Huneeus, 2005: 77-128; Yocelevsky, 2002: 69-103; Arriagada, 1998: 19-58). That is why the first element to bear in mind is that the military coup, although it was initially presented as an uprising directed against the Marxist left, quickly emphasized that the political class as a whole was responsible (by action or omission) for the arrival of the Marxist left to the government. The objective, therefore, was to create a new political system and form a new ruling class, which would not allow the Marxist experience to repeat in the country (Loveman, Lira, 2000: 393-424). This purpose, at first precariously outlined, began to develop in the early years of the dictatorship.

The first stage can be identified from September 1973 to March 1974, in which the Dictatorship consolidated its position of power through the most brutal and indiscriminate repression. This is the period in which the highest number of victims of the repression was verified: Disappeared Detainees, summarily executed, tortured, imprisoned, exiled, confined, etc. In this period, the repression affected, fundamentally, leftist militants, the working class, the peasantry and the inhabitants of the urban peripheries. In this way, repression became the most common tool used to counteract any hint of resistance or dissidence (Rettig, 1991).

Simultaneously, a series of institutional initiatives were deployed to erase from the political and social scene the organic intermediaries of the popular movement. In this way, through successive executive orders, all the leftist political parties, the Central Única de Trabajadores (CUT), and the large workers' confederations affiliated to it (mining, metalworking, textile, peasant, etc.), as well as the National Congress were declared in recess and, as a consequence, the political parties opposing the overthrown Unidad Popular government: The Partido Democracia Cristiana (DC) and the Partido Nacional (PN) were put out of the law.

In the second stage, which began in March 1974 with the creation of the Dirección de Inteligencia Nacional (DINA) and ended in April 1978 with the enactment of the Amnesty Law, the foundations were laid for the construction of the new society. Indeed,

with the creation of the DINA, political repression became selective. The strategy of social control, once the country had been pacified through terror, was aimed at preventing the reestablishment of the link between the leftist parties and the popular classes. Thus, the targets of the repression were the clandestine political leaderships of the Socialist Party (PS) and the Communist Party (PC) and, especially, the political-military cadres of the armed insurgency (MIR).

It should be noted that, from the moment of the 1973 coup d'état, the dictatorship assumed executive, legislative and constituent powers. In other words, they governed, passed laws and took on the task of defining a new institutional order for the country. Political repression was, therefore, an essential condition to guarantee the success of the re-foundational process and a key element to definitively destroy the close relationship between the political left and the popular movement.

The ideological elements that explain this positioning are linked to the National Security Doctrine (NSD). This doctrine, incubated among the Latin American armed forces and the conservative intellectual elite in the context of the Cold War, assumed the existence of an enemy, international communism, which undermined the foundations of national coexistence by introducing social and political disorder. The bearers of social dissolution were none other than the local communist parties and, by extension, the social and political organizations that were related or tributary to them (Choteau, 1983: 5-25).

For the military commanders, it was a war, which had the peculiarity of being an 'internal war', that is to say, it pitted the defenders of the democratic order against the defenders of Soviet communism. It was, moreover, a covert war, in which both sides deployed the methods of irregular and psychological warfare to defend or seize power. To this end, the National Security State defined a strategy: the Counterinsurgency Strategy. According to this strategy, the fundamental objective of the State was to pursue, locate and annihilate the internal enemy and its allies, while the methods to achieve this objective were those of an irregular war: torture, confinement, forced disappearance, assassination, snitching, etc[3].

It is important to note that the dictatorship was not isolated in this endeavor. On the contrary, the political and social support base of the regime was voluminous. It was constituted by the military apparatus of the State, the three branches of the armed forces and the security agencies, which experienced practically no fissures or significant dissidence regarding the fundamental objectives defined by the dictatorship. The old landowning oligarchy also closed ranks in support of the dictatorship, aspiring to recover the lands that had been expropriated by the agrarian reform process (1967-1973); the industrial, financial, and commercial bourgeoisie, affected by the economic policy of Salvador Allende's government (1970-1973) and by the outbursts of the popular rural areas. Particularly at the beginning of the dictatorship, the middle classes joined the dic-

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[3] The incidence of repression in the disarticulation of leftist organizations in (Goicovic, 2013).

tatorship: the professional associations of doctors, lawyers, and engineers, but also the transport workers, small and medium-sized merchants and an important fraction of the female world. Also supporting the dictatorship were the political right and an important segment of the DC, especially its most conservative tendency, represented by figures such as Eduardo Frei Montalva, Juan de Dios Carmona, and Patricio Aylwin. Finally, the incorporation into the dictatorial group of the judges of the Supreme Court of Justice and a significant number of magistrates from the different levels of the Judicial Branch should be highlighted.

At the international level, although the dictatorship was largely repudiated by the international community, it always had the support of the special agencies of the United States government, especially during the administration of Ronald Reagan, the government of Margaret Thatcher in Great Britain, the large transnational banks and the other Latin American military dictatorships.

From 1974 onwards, a new economic policy of neoliberal matrix began to emerge, introduced to the country by postgraduates in economics from the University of Chicago, who acceded to important positions in the different ministries and services of the area: Finances, Economy, Public Works, Internal Taxes, Treasury, etc.[4]. The new model favoured the exploitation of natural resources geared to the external market, thus, encouraging investment in the traditional copper mining industry, which was joined by the agro-industrial sector, forestry and fishing. In line with the above, taxes affecting foreign investment were reduced and the economy was opened to imports of industrial products (electronics, textiles, metal-mechanics, etc.). Similarly, public enterprises were privatized, especially those related to communication and transportation, energy and the financial sector (Fischer, Serra, 2007).

The changes were radical and their consequences profound. The national manufacturing industry, unable to compete in an open market with imported goods, collapsed, sending a large contingent of workers into unemployment (Campero, Flisfich, Tironi, Tokman, 1993: 17-28). In agriculture, the dismantling of the cooperatives formed during the agrarian reform, and the subsequent individual allocation of land, without access to credit or machinery, allowed the constitution of a land market that rapidly permitted the concentration of land and the constitution of modern export-oriented agro-industrial complexes (Vasconcelos, 2020: 209-242). However, the most important economic reforms were in the area of services. Pension funds destined for workers' pensions were taken out of the State administration and transferred to the Pension Fund Administrators (AFPs), which operate on the basis of individual capitalization and invest the global amount of the funds in different areas of the economy. A similar phenomenon occurred in the health system, with the creation of the Social Security Health Institutions (ISAPREs), which work with workers' health contributions in the financial market. Ed-

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[4]   A general approach on economic changes in (Larraín, Vergara, 2000).

ucation, in turn, was also deregulated with the expansion of the number and coverage of private schools and the emergence of a new administrative figure, that is, establishments with 'sustainers', which receive a public subsidy to operate in the system but autonomously administer the educational subsystem in which they function. This model involves both municipalities (which operate with the public system) and private sustainers who operate in the logic of the market (Vergara, 2005: 1-7).

The social consequences of the application of this policy were immediate. The transfer of public services to the private sector obviously involved the cessation of the functions of an important contingent of the labour force, which had historically identified with reformist political projects. On the other hand, the operation of these services, in a mercantile logic, resulted in the allocation of poor-quality public services for the poor, and extensive and diversified services for those who could pay for them. As a result, the gap between the well-off and modern segments of society and the poor and excluded became more pronounced every day.

The third phase of the transformation process began in 1978, with the enactment of the Amnesty Law, continued with the promulgation of the 1980 Political Constitution and was projected until the 1988 plebiscite. Indeed, in 1978, once the country was under political and military control, the dictatorship issued the Amnesty Decree Law, by means of which all crimes involving political or collateral causality (robberies, assaults, kidnappings, etc.) committed between September 1973 and March 1978 were not sanctioned (Ministerio del Interior, 1978). This regulation stipulated that the judges, faced with a case under the Amnesty Law, should abstain from investigating it. Accordingly, and given the characteristics of the repressive process experienced in Chile between 1973 and 1978, the beneficiaries of this Executive Order were members of the armed forces and security agencies involved in human rights violations (Nogueira, 2005: 107-130).

The second step in this phase was the promulgation, in 1980, of the constitutional text currently in force, which established the institutional frameworks within which the Chilean political system was to operate in the long term (Valdivia, 2006: 49-100). It enshrined a political system based on authoritarian institutions with a strong presidential power, a weakened parliament, appointed local governments, and armed forces that were autonomous from political power and played the role of guarantors of institutional order. The objective was to generate a society of subjects functional to the economic organization model and obedient to the government. To this end, the corresponding authorities were provided with legislative and operational instruments to identify the enemies of the State in order to proceed to their extirpation. Among the most recurrent instruments of the application of this policy are: the Antiterrorist Law (1984), the tightening of the Law of Internal Security of the State (1931-1958) and the Law of Control of Arms and Explosives (1972), the extension of the powers of the military courts (mainly to hear and resolve civilian criminal cases) and the militarization of the police secu-

rity agencies: the Central Nacional de Informaciones (CNI), the Carabineros de Chile and the Policía de Investigaciones (Goicovic, 2012: 50-63).

While the new institutional order was in full force (March 1990), the dictatorship administered power by relying on the 24 transitory provisions of the Constitution, which basically granted the executive discretionary prerogatives to decree different states of exception. The most frequently used, while the anti-dictatorial social protests raged (1983-1987), were the Status of Disturbance of the Internal Peace of the State and the State of Siege. These states of exception allowed the government to violate each and every one of the individual liberties established in its own Constitution, such as freedom of movement, association, confinement in public detention centers and freedom of the press.

## The rise of the armed struggle

By 1978, the organizations opposed to the dictatorship were reduced in their capacity for action. The Socialist Party of Chile (PSCh) was experiencing, especially in exile, a profound internal debate regarding the defeat of the Popular Unity and the projections of the struggle against the dictatorship, while the Communist Party of Chile (PCCh) was beginning a slow process of reorganization and redefinition of its strategic actions[5]. Only the Christian Democracy, a center party, with close relations with similar referents in Europe, managed to deploy an active public campaign of resistance to the changes imposed by the dictatorship. However, the political echo of this action among the population was relatively scarce (Yocelevsky, 2002: 171-224).

For its part, the policy of the MIR, as of 1978, was based, precisely, on the realization of the existence of a re-foundational model. For this organization, the process of re-foundation carried out by the dictatorship required the adoption of a long-term strategy (the so-called Protracted People's War), which was inspired by the experience developed by the Vietnamese people against the Japanese, French and American occupiers. The internal documents of the organization defined it as

[...] a political-military strategy, which based on Marxism-Leninism, will deliver the laws and principles that would guide the development of the revolutionary social force and its organic expression in a political force and a military force, fundamental element of the popular power of the proletariat that would allow the political and military defeat of the Chilean bourgeoisie and its imperialist allies. The political-military strategy of the Chilean proletariat has a unifying character of the set of small and large combats that the class is promoting, it articulates and develops them on the basis of the laws and principles governing the class struggle in the Chilean reality (MIR, 1980: 3).

In this context, armed propaganda became the link between the situation of the popular forces and the strategic orientation. To this end, the efforts of the MIR concentrat-

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[5]   The situation of the PS in clandestinity has been analyzed by (Rojas, 2014). For its part, the PCCh has been studied in depth by (Álvarez, 2003, pp. 21-191).

ed on strengthening the Central Force Structure, the main specialized nucleus of the party's combatants. For this purpose, those militants who were in exile and who were more willing to reintegrate into the political-military tasks in the interior of the country were recruited. From this moment on, the special tasks deployed by the Central Force Structure began to acquire an increasing relevance[6]. In mid-July 1980, the Director of the Army Intelligence School, Colonel Roger Vergara, was executed. Vergara, identified as one of the main leaders of the CNI, was ambushed by a MIR commando at the intersection of Manuel Montt and Puyehue streets, in the Providencia commune of Santiago. The relevance of the military man showed the vulnerability of the security apparatus commanders and constituted a hard defeat for the dictatorship (El Mercurio, 1980: A1, A20). The justification for the action was published in the official organ of the MIR.

It is no coincidence that this colonel was the Director of Army Intelligence, a position held only by people of great confidence in the dictatorship. And Vergara knew how to gain Pinochet's confidence because during the government of President Salvador Allende he was an active promoter of the coup within the ranks of the Armed Forces. After the overthrow of the Popular Government, he stood out for his repressive zeal, for which he was awarded the September 11 medal. His willingness to repress the people and to get his hands bloody in defense of the interests of monopoly capital and its allied generals, led him to be integrated into the group of officers who from the DINA-CNI, Investigative Police and the intelligence apparatus of the Armed Forces and Carabineros directed the repressive operations against the mass movement and the democratic forces (El Rebelde, 1980: 14).

During 1981, the most spectacular actions carried out by the MIR were the execution in Santiago (July 6) of CNI agent Carlos Tapia Barraza and the ambush (November 18) in which three agents of the Chilean Investigative Police, who were guarding the house of Army General Santiago Sinclair, lost their lives in the Providencia commune, also in the country's capital (El Rebelde, 1981: 9; El Mercurio, 1981: A1, A16). The following year, the priority was armed propaganda operations, such as the explosive attacks that affected the facilities of the Quinta Vergara recreational center in Viña del Mar, where the International Song Festival is held, the assault on trucks delivering goods and their subsequent distribution among the outlying populations of Santiago, Valparaíso and Concepción, and the placement of explosive devices in the national electricity system networks (El Rebelde, 1982a: 12; El Rebelde, 1982b: 11-12; El Rebelde, 1982c: 10-11; 14).

The operative action of the Central Force Structure of the MIR was accompanied by a growing degree of intervention of the Militias of the Popular Resistance and by the emergence of mass organizations that grouped and led the most radicalized sectors of the popular movement. Indeed, in this process, organizations such as the Workers Coordinating Committees (CCT) emerged and began to acquire growing relevance, grouping workers from the old industrial cordons, in manufacturing centers of Santiago de Chile

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[6]  The discussion on the nature (terrorist or emancipatory) of armed insurgency actions has systematically called upon specialists in the field. On this subject see (Wiewiorka, 2007; Witker, 2008; Pozzi, Pérez, 2012).

such as Panal, Madeco, Lanera Chile, Promatex, among others. The Coordinadora de Organizaciones Poblacionales (COAPO), which together with the Coordinadora Metropolitana de Pobladores (affiliated to the Communist Party), took the lead in the mobilizations and demonstrations of the population, also in the city of Santiago de Chile. The Unión Nacional de Estudiantes Democráticos (UNED) grouped the most radicalized students within the Chilean universities, standing out in the struggle for the democratic recovery of the student federations. And the Comité de Defensa de los derechos del Pueblo (CODEPU) took up the defense of human rights from the perspective of the anti-dictatorial struggle. Thus, the sabotage of public lighting, as well as the cutting of roads through the setting up of barricades, the placement of explosive devices, the scratching of anti-dictatorial slogans and the use of Molotov cocktails in the demonstrations, began to become commonplace. In the same way, the seizure of food transport vehicles and their subsequent distribution in the popular populations of Santiago, Concepción, Valparaíso and Viña del Mar, generated an important degree of adhesion to this movement among the poorest youth sectors of the urban peripheries (Palma, 2021: 145-186).

The armed operations of the MIR, especially those that struck at the repression or at the centers of accumulation of major capital, gave new impetus to the development of the clandestine and semi-clandestine struggle in Chile. An important part of society, especially in the urban peripheries, centers of study and factory units, observed that the dictatorship was vulnerable and that, consequently, the deployment of organized and radical action threatened its stability. From this moment on, the resistance committees began to multiply and, together with them, mass organizations arose and developed. The union struggle was revived, especially after the workers" strikes at Industrias Panal (1980) and those of the workers involved in the construction of the Colbún-Machicura hydroelectric power plant (1982-1983). In the same way, students in higher education centers initiated grouping and mobilization processes around the rejection of the General Law on Universities (1981). Meanwhile, on the outskirts of the big cities, the first land occupations began to develop. It should also be noted that between 1980 and 1982, anti-dictatorial rallies multiplied, especially on emblematic dates such as the 1st of May (International Workers' Day) and the 11th of September (commemoration of the death of former President Salvador Allende), and the first street demonstrations, known as the Hunger Marches, took place (Goicovic, 2015: 113-114).

One of the fundamental components of the MIR's policy in this period was the installation of two rural guerrilla fronts in the southern zone of Chile, one in the Nahuelbuta mountain range, near the Concepción-Talcahuano industrial area and the coal basin of Lota and Coronel, and the other in the locality of Neltume, in the interior of Valdivia, near the Panguipulli Timber and Forestry Complex. The installation of these fronts was directly related to the strategic definitions of the MIR, since the idea was to have permanent military forces capable of disputing the dictatorship's territorial control of certain areas of the country. This also considered the formation of a withdrawal territory

for the urban cadres and the formation of a rural mass movement that would broaden the revolutionary social force (Silva, 2011: 48-51). The experience of the group installed in the Neltume area was disastrous. Denounced by the peasants of the region, the guerrillas were first detected and later executed in a combined maneuver of the Army and the CNI. In the actions of encirclement and annihilation between September and October 1981, nine MIR fighters lost their lives, , including the group's leader, Miguel Cabrera Fernandez (known as Paine).

Thus, together with the revival of social movements and anti-dictatorial resistance, repressive action also increased. The dictatorship placed the MIR in the focus of its attention and, as a consequence, 34 militants of the organization were killed in the course of the 1979-1982 cycle[7].

The Central Force commands were practically decimated, and their contingents had to be relieved with militants coming from the ranks of the Resistance. Both phenomena had projections in the immediate future of the MIR. On the one hand, the capacity for operational intervention in the most important tasks decreased, while, on the other hand, the Popular Resistance experienced a systematic drain of cadres, which affected the relationship between the MIR and the mass fronts related to them.

## Popular protests and insurgent actions

After the international economic crisis of 1981-1982, the political and social situation in the country became increasingly complex. Between 1983-1987, discontent with the dictatorship was expressed through a series of popular street demonstrations that became increasingly violent[8].

The political confrontation became more acute and, under its protection, the opposition to the regime managed to rebuild its organizations. In this context, two alternatives for overcoming the dictatorship emerged. One, represented by the Movimiento Democrático Popular (MDP), brought together the parties of the historic left: the PCCh and the PSCh, which were joined by the MIR. Its programme involved the overthrow of the dictatorship, using all forms of struggle (including armed insurgency) and the construction of a popular democracy, which would introduce political, social and economic reforms that would guide the country once again on the road to socialism. The other, represented by the Alianza Democrática (AD), had the DC as its hegemonic referent and was joined by a social democratic faction of the PSCh and the former Radical Party (PR). Its political programme proposed the end of the dictatorship through social mobilization, but without the use of armed struggle. Their goal was to restore the

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[7]  Prepared by the author based on data provided by the Informe de la Comisión Nacional de Verdad y Reconciliación (Rettig, 1991).

[8]  The relationship between the precariousness of the living conditions of the population and their support for armed groups has been analyzed by (Lee, 2011: 203-245; Justino, 2000: 315-333).

democratic system in force in Chile before the military coup of 1973. Both alternatives assumed that an essential step to achieve their objectives was to repeal the 1980 Political Constitution, which was considered intrinsically antidemocratic.

In September 1986, the attempted execution of Pinochet by a commando of the Frente Patriótico, Manuel Rodríguez (FPMR), not only unleashed violent repression against the opposition movement. It also made it clear to all Chilean political actors and to those who were concerned about the political situation in Chile from abroad (especially the U.S.), that the social unrest and insurgent actions were quickly leading to the creation of a scenario of low intensity warfare, like the one that existed at that time in Central America, Peru and Colombia.

Under the auspices of the U.S. State Department and through the intermediary of the leadership of the Chilean Catholic Church, the representatives of the opposition political parties (articulated around the AD) and the political representatives of the dictatorship were called upon to reach a "great national agreement" that would prevent the outbreak of a civil war by politically isolating the "extremist groups", temporarily limiting the military mandate and restoring a diffuse democratic system (Gómez, 2010: 59-164).

Between 1987 and 1988, the negotiations carried out between both sectors resulted in the acceptance by the democratic parties of the political agenda and the institutional framework defined by the military authorities to restore democracy. For its part, the dictatorship, which aspired to extend its political mandate until 1998, accepted the adverse ruling of the ballot boxes in the plebiscite of October 1988 and the electoral results of December 1989, the winner of which was the representative of the Concertación de Partidos por la Democracia (the continuation of the AD), Patricio Aylwin Azocar, and handed over the government in March 1990. This opened the way for the political transition to democracy (Goicovic, 2020b: 147-182).

In this cycle, the military operations of the MIR were attenuated. The failure of the installation of the guerrilla contingent in Neltume (1981) and the strong repressive attacks on the Central Force considerably reduced the operational capacity of the group (Palma, 2021: 117-295). Thus, when the general insurrection of the popular camp began, from the protests of 1983, the military detachment of the MIR was already practically dismantled.

In the cycle that began in 1983 and ended in 1990, the most important operations of the MIR began with the execution of the Intendant of Santiago, Major General, Carol Urzua and two members of his bodyguard on August 30, 1983. Urzua, according to the background information provided by the MIR, was politically responsible for the repression against the popular protests that took place between May and August 1983, in his capacity as Intendant of the Metropolitan Region. In a public statement, published in the press at the time, the MIR pointed out

This action of execution against one of the most bloodthirsty exponents of the military dictatorship of the monopolies was carried out by the Miguel Enriquez commando. No crime against the people will go unpunished. The people have the legitimate right to use violence to combat crime, robbery and the usurpation of popular rights (La Tercera, 1983: 17).

In retaliation for the death of Carol Urzua, the security forces killed the leaders of the MIR and those responsible for its Military Commission, Arturo Villabela Araujo and Hugo Ratier Noguera in Santiago on September 7, 1983. In the armed confrontations, three other members of the organization were also killed. Subsequently, the MIR's actions became episodic. Other armed groups, such as the FPMR and the MAPU-Lautaro Group (MAPU-L), took over from the MIR in the armed struggle. Nevertheless, the MIR continued to carry out some actions of high operational complexity, regularly directed against security agents, accused of being responsible for human rights violations. Among them, there was the death of two CNI agents, René Lara Arriagada and Alejandro Avendaño Sánchez, at the Araucano Hotel in Concepción, on March 25, 1985. They were killed when a booby trap bomb exploded in one of the hotel rooms (La Tercera, 1985: 5). That same year (August 13) and in a similar procedure, in the town of Peñablanca, Valparaíso Region, Cesar Chesta Mousset, a lieutenant of the navy and a member of the CNI, was killed (El Mercurio, 1985: A1, C6). Finally, on January 26, 1988, a carabineros major and commander of the Special Operations Group (GOPE), Julio Benimelli Ruíz, was executed in Santiago with a booby trap bomb (El Mercurio, 1988: A1, A10).

Despite the severe exhaustion that the MIR had been experiencing from 1982 onwards, particularly as a result of the repressive policy of the dictatorship, its political leadership, seduced by the rise experienced within the mass struggle since 1983, continued to insist on the need to link the social struggle with the construction of a powerful military force. In 1985, a document of the organization pointed out in this respect

In this stage, the centrality must be the construction of the revolutionary and partisan force and the development of the armed struggle to make a qualitative leap in the people's war. And this must be assumed ideologically, politically and practically by the whole party. Tactical centrality should not be understood as any kind of reductionism. [...] we do not propose to discard the ideological struggle, the work of alliances, the construction of the party in the social movements, nor to leave aside the offensive social mobilization and the insurgency of the masses. Nor do we understand armed resistance or guerrilla struggle on the margins of the masses, as the confrontation of two military apparatuses. Our main concern is to build a party rooted in the organizations and natural fronts of the masses and a military force firmly anchored in the revolutionary bases of the masses (MIR, 1985a: 17).

The rise of the rupturist mass struggle suggested the option of a revolutionary solution to the crisis of the dictatorship. Indeed, since 1983 the popular sector had recovered its protagonism, the masses were deployed in the public space, questioning the economic policy and the repressive policy of the dictatorship, while the armed organizations and the militia detachments redoubled their political-military action. In this

process, the MIR stressed the need to search for an independent popular solution to the political crisis (MIR, 1985b: 1-2).

This phase in the political intervention of the MIR, although marked by a decrease in its armed actions, was characterized by an explosive growth of its mass and militia organizations. The militancy and the periphery of the MIR, especially among young population and university students, grew significantly.

In this scenario, the policy of popular uprisings, taken from the Central American experience, and implemented in the popular neighbourhoods of the periphery of the capital, starting in 1984, became the last attempt of the MIR to reverse the definitive collapse of the party structure, from the incorporation into the militia struggle of the hundreds of young population. The most important event of this stage of the rise of popular struggles was the so-called Pudahuel Communal Strike, held on July 26, 1984. On that occasion, thousands of residents of this populous commune in the western part of Santiago stopped their regular activities and mobilized throughout the day in a series of anti-dictatorial protest actions: street marches, cutting of public lighting, setting up of barricades, looting of supermarkets, harassment of informants and confrontations with the police (Peñafiel, 2010). The Popular Resistance Militias played a fundamental role in these actions, accompanying the social mobilization and protecting the deployment of the inhabitants. The evaluation made by the MIR of this local mobilization was particularly positive.

This first local strike reaffirms the power of the people, their capacity to combine in the same action their popular and militia organizations and forces, to develop all forms of struggle and to momentarily dispute the control that the dictatorship exercises over the territory. With or without repression, the example of Pudahuel will be followed in future days of struggle with new protests and communal strikes, on the road to the National, Workers' and Popular strike (MIR, 1988: 74).

But this effort was also unsuccessful. Immediately after the Pudahuel strike, a brutal repressive offensive was unleashed on the town, which resulted in the imprisonment and torture of hundreds of citizens, in the prolonged incarceration of several dozen and in the profound disarticulation of the social and militia organization of the town. However, the important level of organic insertion of the MIR among the most radicalized sectors of the urban poor movement did not allow it to recover the base of cadres lost by the repressive actions of the security agencies.

It should be noted that, together with the work in popular communities, the social and political recognition of the MIR increased significantly with the opening of spaces for the public representation of the Party, especially around the figures of its spokesmen, the priest Rafael Maroto and the leader Jeckar Neghme. But this did not translate mechanically into the strengthening of its own military line. On the contrary, it began to be strongly questioned by part of the organization's leadership, which became the starting point for the party's breakup. Indeed, the internal crisis that began in 1984, as a consequence of the failure of Operation Return and the death or imprisonment

of hundreds of militants, ended at the beginning of 1987 with the division of the party into two groups, with different strategic guidelines. The main core of the controversy was found in the strategy of political-military accumulation. While the group led by Nelson Gutiérrez emphasized the need to link the MIR more and more with the mass fronts, even accompanying the popular sectors in the experience of voting "No" in the 1988 plebiscite, the group led by the General Secretary of the Party, Andrés Pascal, insisted on the definitions adopted at the end of the 1970s: it was a matter of building a party, within the people, which would accompany the political and military deployment of the masses. However, both strategies would be confronted by a dizzying political scenario that led expeditiously to a negotiated transition, in which organizations such as the MIR had no place.

## Conclusions

The history of the MIR in the 1978-1988 cycle contributes to a better understanding of the political history of Chile in the institutionalization phase of the dictatorship. That is why it is necessary to emphasize that the historiographic balance of the concrete experiences of political violence in Chile is still pending. There is no doubt that in the last decade considerable progress has been made, but it is still not enough (Goicovic, 2014: 1-17). As previously indicated, it is necessary to clarify the relationship between the definitions adopted by the parties and movements that claimed violence as a method of political action and the concrete political practices of the organizations and their militants. To this end, it is necessary to make a systematic record of the operational activities of the revolutionary groups, but also to recreate the perceptions that the militancy has made of these experiences.

The first issue to consider is that the conditions for the development of political violence in Chile differ significantly from other Latin American experiences. Although the Cuban Revolution operated as a catalyst for the development of the revolutionary left in Chile, it is no less effective that this phenomenon is expressed more as a rise and sharpening of the mass struggle and not necessarily (as occurred in other countries of the region), as a configuration of guerrilla groups. In Chile, the interruption of the political process led by Salvador Allende (the so-called Chilean road to socialism) favoured the development (and in other cases the creation) of armed organizations capable of disputing the State's monopoly of violence.

Indeed, the Chilean dictatorship was probably the most successful of all Latin American dictatorships since it carried out a profound process of re-founding society as a whole. On the economic level, it advanced towards the implementation of a market economy (later accepted by Chilean social democracy), managed to individualize relations within society and profoundly restructured political institutions. This re-foundational process required the systematic exercise of repression in order to neutralize any initiative of re-

sistance. This was especially necessary in a society in which the popular movement had demonstrated, up to 1973, its strength and capacity to gather people together.

The exercise of political violence by the MIR could be explained, then, as an expression of resistance to the dictatorship. By this means the organization tried to demonstrate that the popular movement, and especially the revolutionary movement, continued to represent a political alternative. This explains why the offensive actions unleashed by the MIR, within the framework of Operation Return, were directed, fundamentally, against the armed apparatus of the State. The aim was to demonstrate that the fundamental power of the dictatorship, repression, was vulnerable. The executions of several agents of the security agencies and the deployment of militia actions, expressed as territorial occupations, pointed in that direction. From this perspective, the offensive cycle of the MIR's military actions (1978-1982), explains the process of revival that the mass movement began to experience after 1978 and the subsequent development of popular protests (1983-1987).

But this obviously placed the MIR at the center of the repressive actions of the dictatorship. Indeed, the MIR was the organization most severely hit by the repression between 1978 and 1982. The annihilation of the Central Force Structure in the previously mentioned cycle led the MIR leadership to transfer cadres to the military apparatus, from the militia structures and from the social fronts, to fill the gaps left by the repression. However, repression continued to hit these structures, while the militias and mass organizations were weakened as a consequence of the emptying of their cadres.

The critical analysis of this process built within the leadership structure of the MIR led, around 1987, to the division of the organization into two groups and its subsequent fracturing into multiple micro-factions. With the end of the dictatorship and the beginning of the process of transition to democracy, the MIR had ceased to exist as a political organization, but its cadres had blurred in the social sphere, giving rise to the so-called Mirista culture.

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**Abstract:** The Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria (MIR) was a political-military organization of Marxist ideology which between 1978 and 1990 defined and deployed in Chile a strategy of armed struggle to confront the dictatorship led by Augusto Pinochet Ugarte. Its objective was to prevent the dictatorship from completing its project of re-founding Chilean society (economically, politically, socially and culturally) and, in this way, to advance towards the development of a socialist revolution.
**Keywords:** MIR, dictatorship, armed struggle, Chile