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THE MILITARY IN
CENTRAL AMERICA:
THE CHALLENGE
OF TRANSITION

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THE MILITARY IN CENTRAL AMERICA: THE CHALLENGE OF TRANSITION

The armed forces of Central America have been important and often decisive political actors over the last 15 years. In three cases – El Salvador, Guatemala and Nicaragua – this importance derives immediately from the waging of civil war, where operational considerations came to determine much of public policy. However, in all the countries the military were influential in politics before the generalisation of the conflict in the mid-1970s. In Guatemala this dominance has a particularly long history and appears to transcend alterations in the ideological landscape at home and abroad. In other cases, such as Panama and Honduras, the influence of the soldiery emerged much later and proved to be ideologically more malleable, albeit highly resilient in strictly institutional terms. Nicaragua has manifested a persistent strain of partisan armies (Liberal and Constitutionalist until the 1920s; Guardia Nacional (GN) and Sandino's nationalist guerrillas; Ejército Popular Sandinista and the contras), each linked more or less directly to an ideological current since the 1850s. In the case of El Salvador, a most energetic and confident civilian political elite was displaced from administration of the central state by officers in the 1930s, and when they returned thanks to US pressure 50 years later even the most reactionary elements remained prey to the military lobby, which retained important powers of veto.

Whilst open military dictatorships of a type frequently encountered in South America were to be found in the isthmus before the wars of the 1980s, such regimes were not common outside of Honduras or Panama, where harsh repression was not visited upon the popular sectors. Instead, the pattern was of armies either establishing their own 'front parties' (Partido Institucional Democrático (PID) in Guatemala; Partido de Conciliación Nacional (PCN) in El Salvador; to some degree Partido Revolucionario Democrático (PRD) in Panama) or engaging in variable civilian alliances (Partido Nacional (PN) in Honduras; Movimiento de Liberación Nacional (MLN) in Guatemala) or providing the coercive wing of a more integrated/corporatist political system, as in the case of Nicaragua under both the Somozas (GN) and the Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional (FSLN) (Ejército Popular Sandinista – EPS). It is worthy of note that during the 1980s, when military operations extended throughout the isthmus and fierce fighting took place in three of its states, it was only in Guatemala that open military dictatorship prevailed for any length of time (Ríos Montt and Mejía Victores, 1982-85).

This fact is frequently interpreted as a reflection of US influence – which is assuredly the case – but it should also be seen as reflecting a longer-term

local pattern of 'mixed regime' in which the division of coercive, ideological and administrative labour differs not only from the classic prescriptions of liberal democracy, but also from the experience of the rest of Latin America (with some partial exceptions in the cases of Mexico and Paraguay). Such a local pattern prior to the 1980s might be explained by a combination of small military establishments – no army over 15,000 strong, no significant navy or (outside Honduras) air-force; the relatively narrow set of managerial controls required for plantation-based societies; the extreme difficulty of securing institutional anonymity (and even caste-like differentiation) in small nation-states. One important consequence of such a pattern – especially after the formidable expansion of the military in the 1980s – has been the renegotiation of the precise parameters of institutional responsibilities, it often requiring major conflict to achieve what appear from the outside to be distinctly minor alterations. However, because the exercise of the military *fuero* has generally been most decisive at the margins we will here address these matters of detail at greater length than some might consider justifiable. Equally, whilst the military may be monolithic in both its self-image and the eyes of its (many) victims and critics, one has to recognise the organisational (and sometimes ideological) stress caused in recent years which is conducive to internal differentiation.

During the 1980s the combination of severe social conflict, increased US influence and correspondingly enhanced international attention served either completely to destroy or to alter the internal balance of the region's regimes. This process, which effectively began in 1978 with the FSLN offensive in Nicaragua and a marked upturn in violence in El Salvador and Guatemala, sharpened recognition of the importance of regional strategy within Central American armies. However, neither Somoza's tardy pleas nor Washington's rather disorganised efforts to revive the regional defence system (CONDECA), which lacked a real operational core, served to produce a significant shift towards centralised military coordination. Such collaboration as was identifiable related to intelligence matters and ad hoc operations in border areas, such as the infamous Río Sumpul massacre of 1980 involving Salvadorean and Honduran troops. The cool relations between the Salvadoreans and Hondurans caused by the 1969 war were, though, not properly repaired by the 1980 treaty over the frontier; relations between Honduras and Nicaragua lacked an historic or cultural animosity to complement ideological antagonism; right-wing Guatemalan nationalism overlapped sufficiently with radical *Sandinismo* to complicate support for Washington against the FSLN, whilst the Guatemalan officers were able to keep their distance from the noisily US-dominated operations in El Salvador, where most of the fighting was away from their shared border.

Although events since 1987 have made public much material and information on the armed forces, a great deal of military activity still has to

be analysed outside normal scholarly procedures. This naturally increases the premium on anecdotal and impressionistic sources as well as rooted assumptions/prejudices for which no countervailing evidence yet presents itself. As a result, our paper echoes much civilian material on the military in addition to courting the risks of speculating about contemporary events at a time of change. There is, however, a very strong case for attempting to assess the specifically institutional features of civil-military relations in a period of political change, when short-term arrangements and matters of detail acquire enhanced importance. It is both for this reason and because it is still too early to hazard the construction of a serious model for relations between the state and civil society for the post-conflict era that the analysis here is on the military apparatuses themselves. Moreover, we have not here focused on the role of the USA which arguably provides much of the framework within which the shifting relations of power have been disputed. However, even if one must accept the importance of North American 'circumscription' of Central American affairs, there is no corresponding need to subscribe to those (generally North American) theories which ascribe a preordained logistical 'logic' to isthmian developments and which see the 'invisible hand' of Washington behind every major move in the region. The picture we paint is one of difference, detail and, often, fluidity. The enormous weight of US influence seems, by contrast, to have been directed in this period towards cajoling regional actors into negotiating in general rather than to determining the precise nature of the matters that are the concern of this paper.

El Salvador

The military settlement in El Salvador is distinctive in a number of ways. First, it stemmed from a strategic impasse on the battlefield, and thus must be seen as involving two military institutions (the armed forces of the state and the rebel Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional – FMLN). Secondly, it resulted from sharp, direct and public pressure from Washington on San Salvador. But in threatening to withdraw its patronage the USA was no more able to enforce precise decisions than it had been over the previous decade, when it was almost unreservedly supporting the state against the guerrillas. Thirdly, the negotiation (1990-91) and implementation (1992-94) of the settlement depended heavily on the United Nations (UN), which in both New York and San Salvador (ONUSAL) interpreted its notably broad brief in a dynamic and usually innovative manner. Finally, the terms for ending the twelve year civil war formally agreed at Chapultepec Castle, Mexico, in January 1992 themselves embodied substantial structural changes to the military institutions as well as laying out a procedural framework for demobilisation and transition.

These changes involved the total demobilisation and disarmament of the FMLN; the (constitutional) removal from the armed forces of all normal police functions; the dismantling of the five Rapid Response Infantry Battalions (BIRIs) created during the 1980s as the army's 'shock-troops'; a substantial (40-50%) reduction of the military's overall enlistment; the abolition of the military intelligence service (Departamento Nacional de Inteligencia - DNI), to be replaced by a civilian body (Oficina de Inteligencia del Estado - OIE); the dismantling of the powerful paramilitary security forces - Guardia Nacional (GN) and Policía de Hacienda (PH) - and the quite extensive Civil Defence and territorial reserves; the establishment of a new National Civil Police (PNC), to include significant numbers of ex-FMLN fighters and personnel from the existing Policía Nacional (PN), itself to be phased out by October 1994. At the same time, the Chapultepec agreement gave great weight to the establishment of two investigative commissions - the Ad Hoc Commission (composed of Salvadoreans) to investigate the human rights and professional records of individual members of the army's officer corps, and the 'Truth Commission' (composed of non-Salvadoreans) to investigate and publicly identify human rights abuses by all parties since 1980, during which time some 75,000 people had been killed.¹

It is worth noting that the Accords did not allow for the integration of the FMLN into a new military apparatus. Neither did they provide for a civilian defence minister, legislative oversight of the details of the military budget or promotions and postings. Equally, they did not address the issue of military control of a string of state bodies regulating infrastructure and communications.² Nonetheless, the implementation of the accords in 1992-93, whilst uneven and hotly contested, was largely successful in the narrow military terms that concern us here. This achievement should not, however, be interpreted as corresponding to a broadly applicable model; it is derived, rather, from general policies and instruments for settling a conflict that was as violent as those in Guatemala and Nicaragua, but possessed its own particular character. This is perhaps best summarised as a developing stalemate between 1981 and 1989 between the Salvadorean armed forces, the FMLN and the USA in which the civilian interests/allies/components of each of these actors clashed with further pursuit of purely coercive activity for both internal and external reasons.

By 1990 there were very good military as well as political reasons for Washington to accept a cease-fire. The expenditure of \$1,020 million in military aid to El Salvador since 1980 had produced some very poor results indeed. There had been modest progress towards realising the slogan of 'KSSSS' - 'Keep it simple, sustainable, small and Salvadorean' - and even before the FMLN offensive of November 1989 it was plain that the US Military Group had failed to achieve the three core aims it had set in 1981: i) that the Salvadorean officer corps subordinate itself to civilian authority;

ii) that it respect human rights; and iii) that it 'rationalise its own internal methods of governance so that talent was nurtured, success was rewarded, incompetents were weeded out, and the officer corps became operationally effective'.³ In November 1989 the indiscriminate aerial strafing of the capital's *tugurios* combined with the patently planned execution of the Jesuit priests was so similar to the methods employed almost nine years earlier – the massacre of El Mozote and the killing of the Maryknoll nuns – that it was difficult to credit that in the interim the military had been expanded sixfold (regular forces from 7,250 to 43,500; paramilitary forces from 5,000 to 12,600); that 1,000 had been trained in the USA and at least 60 US advisors had worked near (sometimes on) the 'front line' for eight years; or that its equipment had been comprehensively upgraded (to include 42 combat aircraft and 27 armed helicopters).⁴ Whereas in the early 1980s the trading in Washington of military aid (wanted by the Reagan administration) for formal human rights 'conditionality' (required, then requested, by Congress) was a theatre that suited both parties – as the executive and Salvadorean military bluntly recognised – this was now neither diplomatically nor operationally viable. Moreover, the long-standing conviction amongst Salvadorean officers that Washington would continue to fund the war effort regardless, because of its immovable anti-communism, was no longer justified and was even provocative to the North Americans.⁵

The FMLN's interest in a settlement stemmed, of course, from the reasonable expectation that its offensive would guarantee a negotiated reward whereas the full capture of state power by force was no longer viable or – for some – desirable.⁶ Equally, the rebels' relatively low reliance on external allies made the collapse of the Soviet Bloc, and then Sandinismo, an important but not decisive issue. In terms of their own military objectives the key issue was 'purification' of the state army – long seen as intrinsically necessary and a prerequisite for fusion with FMLN forces. This purge was not only necessary, in the eyes of the FMLN, because of the general levels of brutality exhibited by the state forces – over half of the 482 bodies found at El Mozote were of children – but also because whilst the rebels generally observed the Geneva Convention (the exceptions are individually identified), the government forces did not: not a single rebel prisoner of war was taken between January 1980 and July 1982 (during which time 34,000 people were killed).⁷ However, in September 1990 the rebels suddenly proposed complete demilitarisation along Costa Rican lines. This was rejected and in November UN negotiator Alvaro de Soto made a confidential counter-proposal that called for the abolition of the two paramilitary forces and the military intelligence service together with investigation of human rights violations and removal of those responsible.⁸ The UN proposal coincided almost exactly with the halving of US military aid by Congress because of inaction over the Jesuit killings, and it was immediately followed by a string of fierce FMLN attacks that badly mauled the military. The first part of de Soto's proposals

was agreed in Mexico in April 1991, and in September of that year the FMLN finally accepted that it could not win both a purge of the armed forces and the inclusion of its own cadre within a reformed institution, settling instead for the purge and some representation in the Policía Nacional Civil (PNC).

The army itself resisted any negotiation until May 1990, but it was already prey to increased civilian pressure over the cost of the war – not least in terms of military corruption – amidst sharp economic recession. It also confronted the proven inability of first the large-scale ‘hammer and anvil’ and then the more mobile ‘*cazador*’ strategies. Lastly, of course, it faced the tangible threat of a US pull-out, raising a spectre that had plenty of precedents for those more inclined to celebrate than denounce US intervention. Moreover, with the capture of the high command by the 1966 *Tandona* graduating class in late 1988 and the election of the ARENA government in March 1989 the most belligerent civil-military alliance was now in power and yet was palpably failing to secure a result. The seven-year excuse provided by the Christian Democrats had gone. For many in ARENA the purely political challenge posed by the FMLN would be slight whereas the military’s veto on cease-fire talks restricted the rebels to a sphere where their destructive capacity was high.⁹ De Soto’s proposals and the 1991 agreements certainly posed a grave threat to many in the officer corps, but, as we have seen, they also fell short of a total dismantling of the institution. They effectively separated a partisan high command closely associated with death-squad activity, command of the paramilitary forces and direction of the massacres of the early 1980s from a now large – 2,300 – officer corps for which the reasonable prospect of institutional survival, peace, US support and more modest (but more solid) funding was evidently an acceptable exchange for selective expulsions without any intake of ex-guerrillas.

The arrangements for demobilisation proceeded with only two short delays – in June and November 1992 – caused by government efforts to evade the letter of the Accords on other matters. By 15 December the entire rebel force was disbanded, and the FMLN command reported to the UN that it had surrendered all its arsenal. However, an explosion in the Santa Rosa neighbourhood of Managua on 23 May 1993 revealed a hidden cache there, greatly embarrassing both the ex-guerrilla leadership and the UN, which subsequently collected weapons from another 128 sites in El Salvador, Nicaragua and Honduras that accounted for almost a third of the total rebel arsenal.¹⁰ UN Secretary General Boutros-Ghali called this the ‘gravest violation of the peace accords’, and it confirmed a predictable response by the guerrillas to the risk of completely disbanding themselves whilst their erstwhile enemy was only reduced in size and thereby acquired, for the first time in 15 years, a monopoly on armed force. The energy and interventionism of ONUSAL was aimed at alleviating this natural fear, which

was, in fact, not without real foundation. Although the seventh ONUSAL report – for the first quarter of 1993 – identified only six politically-motivated killings and 32 resulting from robbery, by June the national human rights commission (CDHES) reported 308 illegal killings (against 225 in all 1992), and in the first week of November five senior FMLN figures were shot in an apparently concerted operation by at least one death squad.¹¹ This development was considered sufficiently serious to the precarious state of the law nearly a year after rebel demobilisation that Boutros-Ghali sent his envoy Marrack Goulding to San Salvador and ordered an ONUSAL investigation whilst Cristiani, claiming sovereignty for the judiciary, established a state investigation and called in bi-lateral foreign aid. However, the risks attached to repudiating the UN precisely at the moment when the transition it had brokered was in greatest danger were apparent to the most novice politician. ONUSAL was reincorporated into the process, and the issue of death-squad activity moved into the formal political arena (now agitated by an election campaign), where allegations of past ties became sharper with the publication of US documentation.¹²

Demobilisation of government forces produced a reduction of the total military from a claimed 63,175 (in reality probably 55,000) to some 31,000 personnel. A good proportion of this reduction came from the paramilitary security forces (GN and PH), which the government first attempted to retain simply by changing their names and legal status, provoking a halt in FMLN demobilisation and sharp ONUSAL intervention, but by the end of June 1992 they had been abolished, most non-conscripted troops entering a new *Policía Militar*. Similarly, the army's five 'elite' battalions (BIRIs) were dismantled, some troops being redeployed, others re-entering civil society. Perhaps more telling, the formal abolition of the controversial military intelligence agency (DNI, often seen as central to death-squad activity) in June 1992 produced not a single applicant for posts in its civilian successor, which likewise inherited no files.¹³ In a similar vein, the leadership of the new civilian police (PNC) – which had to train and equip 5,700 new recruits in two years with slight and insecure funding – was altered from parity to favouring the PN (11 posts) at the expense of the FMLN (six), although the left accepted this under protest. Those veterans of both sides who were not incorporated into the police or reformed army were entitled to benefit from the distribution of land, which, as in Nicaragua, is evidently a necessary (if insufficient) resource for the disarming of large forces in a rural society. Yet this process too, whilst better administered and more advanced than in Nicaragua, proceeded very slowly: by September 1993 only 1,024 of the 22,000 veterans assigned rights had benefited, and landlords were denouncing invasions of property and direct action in a manner depressingly reminiscent of the 1970s.¹⁴ Greater success was registered in the much less taxing tasks of amending the constitution to remove the military from responsibility for internal order, drafting a Basic Law of National Defence, and forming a new

civil-military academic council responsible for the curriculum, staffing and intake of the military academy.¹⁵ Similarly, the army's commitment to adjust its arsenal to the revised needs of a national defence was a necessarily far more extended and negotiable process than the surrender of powerful automatic weapons by the GN, PH and PN.

Undoubtedly, the most publicised, controversial and even dangerous aspect of the Salvadorean demilitarisation experience lay in the provisions for investigation of human rights violations and the purge of military personnel over which the FMLN had remained insistent when negotiating in 1991 and which were represented in the reports of the Ad Hoc Commission (delivered 23 September 1992) and the Truth Commission (published 15 March 1993). The Ad Hoc Commission only began work in mid-May 1992, and even though its work was extended for a month beyond the original schedule, it managed a detailed review of the records of only 232 senior members of the officer corps.¹⁶ Of these its confidential report recommended the removal (or in a very few cases, reassignment) of 102 men, including all but two of the army's five generals and all its full colonels. This effectively purged the existing high command led by General René Emilio Ponce and thus created a political crisis, out of which Cristiani sought to escape by delaying the implementation and disguising the form of the officers' removal. It was only in June 1993 that the high command was replaced – by a group from the 38th *tanda* headed by the pugnacious Colonel Humberto Corado Figueroa – and even at the end of 1993 at least eight affected officers were still formally in post. All those identified by the Commission retained their residual rights upon retirement.

The report of the internationally staffed Truth Commission created even more bitterness because its detailed findings were made public. The Commission consulted 2,000 direct sources on 7,000 victims and indirect information on another 20,000 of the 75,000 people adjudged to have been killed since 1980. It paid particular attention to the massacres of 1980-83 and the internationally famous killings of priests, nuns and lay workers. In addition to finding state forces responsible for 85% of the total death toll, the Commission, which had an observer on the Ad Hoc Commission, named 40 officers – all bar a handful in the high command – that it recommended removed from the armed forces. This step distinguished the Truth Commission from that led by Judge Rettig in Chile, where direct assignation of responsibility had been scrupulously avoided despite the prior existence of an amnesty applicable to most of the crimes covered. No such amnesty had been introduced in El Salvador, but once the detail and directness of the Commission's report was apparent, the government moved immediately to introduce one – although this also benefited 15 FMLN commanders deemed responsible for the execution of 11 mayors (rebel forces being identified as causing 400 deaths and 200 disappearances).¹⁷

The amnesty caused widespread outcry – even the dismay of the US government – but its apparent restoration of impunity received some tacit support from the FMLN, most notably ERP leader Joaquín Villalobos (one of the commanders named by the Truth Commission), who had vigorously defended the confidentiality of the Ad Hoc Commission's report and had earlier been identified as favouring an improved land deal for ex-guerrillas in return for allowing Cristiani to implement the purge in a graduated (and possibly partial) manner.¹⁸ Here the logic of the ex-guerrilla command was less transparent than in the case of the arms caches since the question of human rights and a purge of the military had been at the heart of their demands from January 1980. The issue is still cloudy, and many sympathetic to the FMLN, such as those at the Universidad Centroamericana (UCA), found this position incoherent in its inconsistency. This may reflect the very specific divisions of the Salvadorean leadership or it might be an expression of a broader pattern of changing priorities as the position of erstwhile antagonists alters with the implementation of the peace settlements. (Some parallels with the activities of the Nicaraguan EPS in 1993 might well be drawn). In all events, the outcome was that the issue of war crimes and a military purge caused far less institutional crisis than public outcry during 1993. This, together with the continued high-profile of ONUSAL, surely fortified the transition in the short-term. Yet doubts must remain as to the medium-range consequences in a society where vigilante violence had become firmly rooted.

Equally, the election of a government less sympathetic to the officer corps than was ARENA under Cristiani could readily complicate – if not reverse – the amnesty concordat, as might also a new Supreme Court ruling on specific eligibility or constitutional propriety.¹⁹ These, though, should be considered matters of 'consolidation', being problems that would not even have arisen had there not already been demilitarisation – as in Guatemala – or if there was – as in Nicaragua – such an erosion in institutionality that direct action ('justice') continues to compete with law. In these respects the Salvadorean experience is both more advanced and more secure.

Nicaragua

Since the electoral defeat of the Sandinistas in February 1990, Nicaragua has undergone a process of extensive demilitarisation, of both government and insurgent forces, quite without precedent in the region. However, whilst stability has been largely maintained throughout, the composition of the military and the extent of its functions continues to be highly contested both within and beyond Nicaragua's borders. The end of the Nicaraguan civil war (which had claimed some 50,000 lives since 1979) was a result of regional

negotiations (Esquipulas), substantive changes in the position of the FSLN and – under the Bush administration – a shift in US policy from backing a military option to support for a political settlement, albeit one conditioned by the continued existence of the contra rebels. The contras themselves, who had proved manifestly incapable of winning the war and who remained exclusively dependent on the USA for funding, had relatively little say in the final outcome. Of equal importance in achieving a political settlement to the conflict was the considerable skill demonstrated by the FSLN in negotiating within the parameters laid down at Esquipulas. In the area which concerns us here, it is of fundamental relevance that no formal negotiated settlement between the Ejército Popular Sandinista (EPS) and the contras ever took place. The extensive reduction of EPS forces which has occurred since 1990 rests largely on the Transition Accords reached between the executive of President Violeta Chamorro and the FSLN immediately after the February 1990 election.

Following the Sandinista victory in July 1979, the Somocista Guardia Nacional (GN) dissolved and its remaining members either surrendered or went into exile. Ex-GN members, notorious for their abuse of human rights, took no part in the new revolutionary army, which was composed exclusively of guerrilla troops. From an estimated 5,000 at the time of the overthrow, the EPS expanded rapidly to approximately 18,000 in the first months after the revolutionary triumph.²⁰ The FSLN had drawn a number of lessons from the 1973 overthrow of Unidad Popular in Chile and its leaders, anticipating a US backlash, were determined from the outset that the new military would be loyal to the revolutionary government. Contra operations began by the end of 1981, after which the rebel force grew from approximately 500 combatants to some 15,000 at the height of the conflict in 1985-1986. Fears of a possible US invasion also increased after US troops were sent to Grenada in 1983. The FSLN's response was vastly to increase the country's defensive capability: in 1983 a national draft was introduced and regular EPS troops grew from 24,000 in 1981 to some 75,000 by 1986.²¹

Although the 1979-1990 regime became highly militarised in response to the external threat, the EPS remained subordinate to the ruling Sandinista *Dirección Nacional* (DN) and was directly controlled by the Ministry of Defence. The Policía Sandinista (PS) and the state security forces came under the purview of the Ministry of Interior, and the Sandinista Popular Militias (MPS) were controlled by both ministries acting in tandem.²² Although the PS was a civilian force, there was no clear division between police and military functions. After 1979, the security apparatus was developed not only to perform normal peacetime functions of the maintenance of domestic order, but also to guard against counterrevolutionary activity from within and beyond Nicaragua's borders. However, in contrast to other Central American countries, police activities remained under the supreme control of the

executive (*Dirección Nacional*), rather than operating as an autonomous *fuero* of the armed forces.

The Nicaraguan civil war was the most 'international' in character of those under consideration here, the insurgent forces funded by Washington and the conflict itself affecting the civil-military balance throughout the entire region. The peace settlement was also, by necessity, more dependent on external than domestic factors. The main thrust of the Esquipulas Accords signed by the Central American presidents on 7 August 1987 was to demobilise the contras. After initial rejection of the Arias plan, the Sandinista government signalled its willingness to compromise on the question of the internal political reforms stressed in the accords in exchange for an end to support by neighbouring states for insurgent forces and their backing for the plan agreed at Tela on 7 August 1989, which provided for voluntary demobilisation, repatriation and relocation of the contras by the end of the year and the moving forward of the Nicaraguan elections to February 1990.

By 1989, the contras looked like a spent force; support in the US Congress had eroded considerably since the Iran-Contra scandal became public in 1986 and in 1988 the blocking by Congress of \$36 million aid precipitated the first direct talks between the insurgent leadership and the FSLN at Sapoá in 1988.²³ In March 1989, US Secretary of State Baker brokered a bipartisan agreement on Central America, securing \$49 million in 'humanitarian' aid for the contras but prohibiting further military assistance. This was recognition of the fact that Congress would no longer support the military option in Nicaragua, and the Baker team brought considerable behind-the-scenes pressure to bear on the rebel leadership to return to Nicaragua and take part in the forthcoming elections.²⁴

External brokerage of the peace settlement in Nicaragua was only paralleled in the region by events in El Salvador. In the transition period responsibility for the contras' demobilisation was allocated to a joint Organisation of American States (OAS)-UN force, the International Commission for Support and Verification (CIAV); a UN force, ONUCA, was responsible for ensuring that rebel weapons were turned in and that sufficient guarantees of security were extended to those demobilised; in addition, ONUVEN (UN Observer Force for the Verification of the Nicaraguan Elections) was appointed to oversee the February 1990 poll.

The issue of the EPS moved centre-stage after the UNO's electoral victory. President Chamorro herself consistently advocated values of reconciliation and compromise (a broad political amnesty was passed on 25 April), and stressed the need for demilitarisation. Stability has rested essentially on the consensus achieved between Chamorro, Minister of the Presidency Antonio Lacayo, and the FSLN leadership. The Transition Accords, signed a week

before Chamorro's inauguration, signalled both recognition by the new regime that some degree of continuity was necessary for the preservation of order and acceptance by the FSLN that reform of the military was vital to guaranteeing the post-election peace. Resisting calls by the UNO far-right for a wholesale purge, the agreement protected the existing privileges and rank of Sandinista officers serving in the EPS, guaranteed the integrity and professionalism of the armed forces and also reaffirmed Chamorro's constitutional role as Supreme Chief of the Armed Forces (a feature not without considerable symbolic importance at the time). In June 1990 it was announced that a 50% reduction of the armed forces would take place within one year (from some 82,000 to 41,000), although these were to be principally drawn from the ranks of draftees and the popular militia, leaving the professional army largely intact.²⁵ The Sandinista leadership had already accepted the need for a reduction in the armed forces prior to their electoral defeat, mainly in response to the reduced contra threat and the economic crisis which gripped the country by 1988.²⁶ The EPS budget declined from \$104 million in 1990, to \$71 million in 1991, \$42.9 million in 1992 and \$36.5 million in 1993.²⁷

The incoming administration had made it clear that Sandinista officers would not be replaced by ex-members of the GN or the contras, a move which would have been totally unacceptable to the EPS, the FSLN leadership and the vast majority of the Sandinista rank-and-file. A number of reforms were subsequently implemented: the military draft, previously suspended in the run-up to the elections, was abolished and both the Ministry of the Interior and the Sandinista state security apparatus was disbanded. President Chamorro subsequently assumed the post of Defence Minister, but retained Sandinista General Humberto Ortega as Head of the Armed Forces. The failure to remove Ortega was loudly denounced by the far-right of the UNO coalition, led by Vice-President Virgilio Godoy, and echoed in the US Senate by Jesse Helms. The contra leaders, themselves excluded from a transition agreement which they saw as sanctioning continued Sandinista control over the armed forces, joined Godoy in calling for Ortega's removal.

The Godoy faction also made persistent calls for reform of the police. Following the elections, about half of the *Policía Sandinista* (PS) had left the force, a result of both ideological disenchantment and notoriously low levels of pay. The vacuum was subsequently filled principally by ex-contra members, a fact which perhaps partly explains the unprecedented levels of force used to break up demonstrations of striking workers in Grenada in October 1991. Some limited reorganisation of the PS took place in 1990, such as the changing of the name to the less partisan *Policía Nacional* (PN). However, the existing command structure – as in the case of the EPS – was guaranteed by the Transition Protocol and continued to be staffed by Sandinista sympathisers. Controversy first surfaced in November 1991, when

Interior Minister Carlos Hurtado declared a plan for creation of a municipal police force, envisaging a contingent of some 6,000 funded from local taxes and under the direct orders of mayors. Given that the most ultramontane elements of UNO – such as the mayor of Managua, Arnoldo Alemán – had their political stronghold in the municipalities and had long since demanded the transfer of police control to local government, the proposal increased FSLN fears of the creation of anti-Sandinista paramilitary forces. FSLN leader Daniel Ortega denounced the plan as unconstitutional and threatened to rearm the popular militias if the proposals were passed.²⁸ Hurtado was forced to resign in April 1992 as a result of differences with Lacayo and the proposed changes were never implemented. However, several members of the contra ‘Commanders Council’ were appointed to leadership positions within the PN, particularly in their traditional strongholds in the northern region.²⁹ Even this proved insufficient to meet Washington’s demands for reform, and in July 1992 \$116 million in US aid was frozen in protest at the Chamorro government’s failure to restructure the security forces and the EPS. Chamorro subsequently announced the ‘departmentalisation’ of the police, which effectively gave control to the mayors and removed it from the regional police headquarters (run by Sandinista officials). Plans for a new police academy were also announced.³⁰ Further insistence by US Secretary of State James Baker led to the removal in August 1992 of Sandinista police chief René Vivas, along with twelve other high ranking Sandinista police commanders, before the \$116 million was finally unfrozen, demonstrating that, even without the contras, US influence remained considerable – a fact due in no small measure to the parlous state of the Nicaraguan economy. Vivas was subsequently replaced by Fernando Caldera Azmitia, also a Sandinista. However, the simultaneous creation of the post of Vice-Minister of Government with special responsibility for police affairs (filled by Antonio Avilés Iglesias, a cattle-rancher and former contra collaborator) effectively marked the placing of police affairs under civilian control, a measure which elicited considerably less enthusiasm on the part of the Nicaraguan left than amongst their Salvadorean or Honduran counter-parts, indicating the marked absence of any regional ‘transition prototype’ for establishing the formal division of powers.

Despite ongoing conflicts over political control of the EPS and PN, remarkable progress in demobilisation has been achieved since February 1990. The EPS was cut to 28,000 by 1991 and stood at some 15,200 by early 1993, a reduction of approximately 75% against 1985 levels.³¹ Perhaps even more impressive has been the reintegration of some 30,000 contra troops, particularly given the violence and bitterness of the civil war and the large numbers of civilian casualties it entailed. On 19 May 1990, a formal agreement was reached between the outgoing Sandinista government, the incoming Chamorro administration and the contra leadership (represented by Oscar Sovalbarro, ‘Comandante Rubén’) which pledged special assistance

and development projects in return for demobilisation by the end of June. The demobilisation and reintegration, supervised by the CIAV, allowed the rebels to move into designated 'security zones' within Nicaragua prior to giving up their arms. Despite slow progress – many weapons handed in were old and rusty, indicating that a substantial portion of the contra's armaments had been salted away in hidden *buzones* – the vast bulk of the insurgent forces were successfully demobilised.

However, demobilisation was accompanied by a general increase in violence and banditry, a situation resulting in no small measure from the fact that a substantial sector of the Nicaraguan population either possessed or retained direct access to automatic weapons.³² From 1991 onwards, some embittered elements of the contras reacted with violence to the government's failure to deliver on promises to provide land and credit, particularly in the north of the country.³³ In a parallel move, after 1990 a limited number of demobilised EPS members ('recompas') also resorted to arms to press their demands for land, credit and severance payment. Recontra and recompa activity increased throughout 1993, and in the first six months of the year over 300 were killed in clashes between the EPS and the recontra.³⁴ In July 1993, recompa troops under the command of ex-EPS major, Victor Manuel Gallegos ('*Pedrito el Hondureño*') occupied the northern town of Estelí. The EPS proceeded to reimpose order by force, including resort to aerial bombardment; this course of action elicited widespread condemnation from the Sandinista rank-and-file, but it was significant in signalling the loyalty of the EPS to the Chamorro executive and consolidating their status as the *national* army of defence. The use of force in Estelí – where approximately forty people, including civilians, were killed – contrasts with the army's reaction to the July 1990 national strike called by the Sandinista Frente Nacional de Trabajadores (FNT), when the EPS eventually intervened to restore order but restrained from using direct force against the strikers. Between November and December of 1993 the EPS launched an offensive in the northern and central departments of Matagalpa, Jinotega, Estelí and Nueva Segovia to guarantee the coffee harvest and to wipe out remaining recontra bands. Following bloody exchanges in January, a peace deal was signed on 25 February 1994 between the government, the EPS and the recontra Northern Front 3-80 (FN-380), the last remaining rebel band. This provides for demilitarisation of the northern region and the incorporation of demobilised FN 3-80 combatants into the ranks of the local police force.³⁵ Whilst sporadic fighting continues to pose a threat to public order in some areas, demobilisation of rebel forces has largely been secured throughout most of the country. Isolated skirmishes do not significantly threaten either the post-1990 peace or the institutions of state. In this sense at least, conflict in Nicaragua appears to have shifted decisively from the military to the political arena.³⁶

The decision by Violeta Chamorro in September 1993 to remove General Humberto Ortega from the head of the EPS was largely in response to the tit-for-tat kidnappings of August 1993.³⁷ It was also the culmination of sustained pressure from the Godoy faction of UNO and the US far-right (led by Helms), the latter having successfully managed to withhold disbursement of \$104 million in US economic aid since June 1992 in protest at the Chamorro government's tacit alliance with the FSLN.³⁸ It should be noted that after the Estelí uprising in July 1993, many Sandinista supporters were also calling for the removal of General Ortega, who had previously outraged the rank-and-file by inviting the then head of the Honduran Armed Forces, General Cantarero López, to Managua (August 1990) and presenting the Order of Camilo Ortega to US Embassy Defence Attaché, Lt. Colonel Dennis Quinn (February 1992). Ortega was also criticised by the left for calling for access to US and Panamanian military academies for the training of EPS officers.³⁹ However, this merely served to highlight the very real problem the absence of a national military academy continues to pose for the future formation of the Nicaraguan officer corps. General Ortega made it quite clear that he would only step down once the new law determined the length of his mandate, thus guaranteeing the institutional arrangements of the EPS. Respect for the existing promotions structure – which remained a *sine qua non* of the FSLN-Lacayo-Chamorro pact – make it highly probable that General Ortega (who has announced his interest in the 1996 FSLN presidential nomination) will be replaced by EPS Chief of Staff, Sandinista General Joaquín Cuadra.

At present the EPS looks set successfully to negotiate the transition from revolutionary army to fully institutionalised army of national defence. The new statute governing the armed forces is expected to be introduced to the National Assembly in the first months of 1994 and, given recent defections from the hard-line UNO camp, will probably be passed.⁴⁰ In addition to setting a date for General Ortega's retirement, the proposed law will address the question of officer training and also regulate the important question of military pensions by formalising the statutes governing the new Instituto de Previsión Militar. Officers had no pension scheme during the 1980s and since 1990 had dealt with the problem in an ad hoc fashion by selling off Soviet tanks and helicopters on the international arms market (the Kremlin turned down an offer to buy back the weapons).⁴¹ However, although the Nicaraguan IPM is gaining in importance, the EPS lacks the economic muscle of its Honduran or Guatemalan counterparts, having failed to acquire any economic base during eleven years of Sandinista rule (although this may of course be subject to future change).

Another feature which separates the EPS from other militaries in the region is its human rights record: systematic abuse of human rights was never a feature of the Nicaraguan military after 1979 and this continues to be the

case, despite isolated cases of revenge killings by both government troops and recontra rebels. In this respect, reform of the armed forces in Nicaragua is a very different question from that in neighbouring states, where the heart of the peace settlement is concerned with issues of punishment for crimes against humanity and purging the armed forces and security apparatus of those responsible for the violation of human rights. The question of the internal political conditionality required for an effective peace settlement has in this sense been quite distinct in Nicaragua, economic rather than moral compensation constituting the critical variable. Although the possibility of a return to violent and widespread conflict in the event of a breakdown in the post-1990 accord between the FSLN and the centre-right elite cannot be ruled out, the increasing weakness of the UNO right-wing greatly improves the current prospects for further institutionalisation of the EPS.

Honduras

Civil war was absent in Honduras in the 1980s, the militarisation which occurred throughout the decade being more a consequence of the Reagan administration's covert war against Nicaragua than a response to the domestic insurgent challenge (which was negligible in both scale and impact). Given the weakness of the left, a negotiated settlement was neither a necessity nor a possibility. However, after an amnesty was decreed in 1990 the guerrilla renounced the armed struggle and most exiles have since returned.⁴² With the end of the contra war, US aid to the Honduran military was massively reduced and the US embassy, along with international lending agencies and the greater part of the Honduran private sector, was in the forefront of calls for a reduction in the size of the armed forces. The latter, to date, have steadily resisted such demands but some shrinkage looks increasingly inevitable as aid returns diminish. Since 1990, as a result of both domestic and US pressure, some tentative advances were made towards reforming the security forces and ending the long-standing tradition of military impunity. However, it remains to be seen to what extent the domestic body politic is willing or indeed able to reduce the power of the military.

Institutionalisation of the Honduran armed forces took place after the Second World War. In 1954 the first Bilateral Military Assistance Treaty was signed with the US and to date US influence has predominated. In 1956 the military made their first foray into national politics, intervening to restore the Constitutional order after a particularly inept bid at *continuismo* by Vice-president Lozano Díaz. The Constitution passed the following year by the interim military *triumvirato* granted the armed forces effective autonomy from the Executive, an autonomy which continues to the present day.⁴³ The historically weak and divided nature of civilian elites in Honduras favoured

consolidation of a central role for the armed forces in national political life. Following an anti-communist coup in 1963, the first institutionalised military government (led by General López Arellano) was installed. After defeat in the 1969 war with El Salvador, a more reformist tendency within the army briefly gained the upper hand and the military administration which governed between 1972 and 1975 was characterised by a mixture of structural reforms (most notably land reform) and partially successful cooption of the popular movement. A transcendental change occurred in 1975, when decision-making within the armed forces changed from what had been essentially a form of personalised *caudillo* rule towards a more collegiate form embodied in COSUFFAA (Consejo Superior de las Fuerzas Armadas). However, military reformism in Honduras lacked both strategic vision and ideological coherence, and by 1978 had reached an advanced state of decomposition, being largely characterised by selective repression of the popular movement and increased corruption within the officer corps. Formal power was handed back to civilian government in 1981, Liberal Party candidate Roberto Suazo Córdova assuming the presidency. However, the transition to civilian rule in Honduras was accompanied by an unprecedented increase in the power of the armed forces.

Honduras's transition to elected government coincided with the election of the Republicans to the White House, and the unprecedented military build-up which occurred during the early 1980s was primarily a consequence of the regional strategy developed by Washington. Between 1978 and 1982 US military aid to Honduras increased almost twenty-fold, whilst the armed forces doubled in size to some 23,000 troops (from a 1980 figure of 11,000).⁴⁴ In 1982 Honduras became the second largest recipient of US aid in Latin America (after El Salvador), the \$31.3 million disbursed in that year almost equalling the \$32.5 million received between 1946-1981.⁴⁵ General Alvarez Martínez, Head of the Armed Forces between January 1982 and March 1984, developed close links both with Suazo Córdova and US ambassador John Negroponte and lent his full support to the covert war against the Sandinistas. The US base at Palmerola, Comayagua (built 1983) operated as the logistics centre for US army operations in the country and large-scale joint military manoeuvres involving thousands of US and Honduran troops continued to be held on a regular basis until 1991. After 1981, Honduras was also host to the contras, a force which at its height came near to equalling the size of the Honduran military itself.

By regional standards, human rights abuses in Honduras were relatively limited. However, the traumatic effect of the 'dirty war' of the early 1980s on the national psyche should not be underestimated. By 1980, an extensive counter-insurgency apparatus was already in place, including Battalion 3-16, a paramilitary group composed of operatives from the police force FUSEP (Fuerzas de Seguridad Pública), police intelligence section DNI

(Departamento Nacional de Investigaciones), and the army. Selective assassinations of government opponents began in 1980, and after 1981 Battalion 3-16 orchestrated a campaign of disappearances and assassinations targeting both the Honduran and Salvadorean left. Coordination with Guatemalan and Salvadorean military intelligence was stepped up, often to devastating effect.⁴⁶

The anti-communist zeal of Alvarez Martínez led him frequently to pressure for a full-scale military invasion of Nicaragua, a fact which created almost as much unease amongst his allies on Capitol Hill as it did amongst his fellow officers. Despite relatively successful attempts to cultivate support for the counter-insurgency amongst political and business sectors, Alvarez's belligerent line, combined with his increasingly wayward evangelical predilections and almost total marginalisation of the Consejo Superior de las Fuerzas Armadas (COSUFFAA), were eventually to lead to his removal in 1984 by officers led by air force commander, Colonel Walter López Reyes.⁴⁷ This internal coup was prompted by Alvarez's attempts to reduce COSUFFAA from 52 to 21 members and to restrict its mandate. Under López Reyes, COSUFFAA's former influence was restored. In this sense at least, Alvarez's autocratic, strong-man rule is best viewed as a 'blip' in the trajectory of a military command structure largely characterised by traditions of *mando colectivo*. A high degree of *esprit de corps* amongst the different graduating classes (*promociones militares*) has been a feature since the 1970s. In 1985 COSUFFAA forced the closure of the controversial Regional Military Training Centre (CREM), which had played host to thousands of Salvadorean troops since its establishment under US auspices in 1983, thus raising the hackles of local officers. López Reyes was subsequently forced to resign, in 1987, by the hard-line General Humberto Regalado, whose alleged involvement in drug-trafficking later earned him the sanction of the USA. Discontent within COSUFFAA led to Regalado's replacement in late 1989 by his preferred successor, General Arnulfo Cantarero López. Cantarero, lacking a base of support within the army, maintained a tenuous hold on power and was unceremoniously replaced in February 1991 by General Alonso Discua Elvir, one of the most powerful officers of the sixth promotion.

The Honduran armed forces comprises four branches: army, navy, air-force and police (FUSEP). The army is by far the largest branch and in 1991 numbered some 27,000 troops.⁴⁸ The air-force, equipped by the US with F-5 fighters in 1987, is the most powerful in Central America. The navy is very small (with less than a dozen patrol boats) but as drug-trafficking operations are extended in the region its importance is steadily increasing. The FUSEP has been controlled by the military since 1963, although it has its own organisational structure.⁴⁹ FUSEP controls a number of security bodies including the traffic police, treasury police, counter-insurgency battalion

(‘Cobras’) and the intelligence and investigation unit, the DNI, formed in 1976. Figures for 1991 show the FUSEP had some 14,000 members, making it the second most important branch of the armed forces after the army.⁵⁰

Since the end of the contra war, the US has radically reduced its support to the Honduran military, annual aid falling from \$77.4 million in 1984 to \$16.2 million in 1992.⁵¹ In the face of the refusal of the high command to sanction a cut in troops, US ambassador Cresencio Arcos finally imposed a unilateral *fait accompli* by reducing military aid to a mere \$2.7 million in 1993.⁵² Domestic pressure for a reduction of the armed forces is also considerable, particularly given the extensive cuts imposed on other areas of national expenditure by the structural adjustment package introduced in 1990.⁵³ To date the armed forces continue to play the anti-communist card and have rejected all entreaties to reduce their size. The historical weakness of the domestic political parties mean they are singularly ill-placed to demand substantive concessions, although there is some evidence that their confidence and independence from the military sphere has grown in recent years. In 1992 Congress failed to protest Discua Elvir’s manoeuvres to extend his term and lent their seal of approval to an amendment to the armed forces law which permitted the General to remain in post for a second consecutive term.⁵⁴

Another factor militating against reduction in military influence is the substantial increase in their economic power over the past decade. In September 1991 the Instituto de Previsión Militar (IPM) bought the newly privatised state cement company, much to the displeasure of COHEP, the national private sector association.⁵⁵ The IPM (established 1973), one of the ten largest business concerns in the country, also holds interests in banking, insurance, real estate, palm oil production, a radio station and a funeral parlour; the institution’s 1992 profits were estimated at some \$40 million. The division between public and private sphere is (as in Guatemala and El Salvador) considerably blurred, the armed forces maintaining responsibility for, *inter alia*, immigration, national cartographic activities and the postal service. The imminent privatisation of the military-run state telecommunications monopoly, HONDUTEL, is currently proving a source of conflict, with local capital interests locked in a battle to prevent the IPM acquiring a majority share. Less institutionalised economic interests were also extended in recent years: drug-trafficking operations by the military were already considerable under the regime of Policarpo Paz García (1978-1980) but multiplied during the period of the contras’ presence in Honduras.⁵⁶

However, since 1991 a number of cases have focused both domestic and international attention on reducing the military’s traditional immunity from prosecution for human rights abuse, constituting the most serious challenge

to their power to date. Advances have been both gradual and cautious, but are nonetheless significant. The May 1991 killing of five *campesinos* involved in a land dispute in El Astillero, department of Atlántida, led to a considerable public outcry and repeated calls for the alleged intellectual author of the massacre, Colonel Galindo, to stand trial in a civilian court. The following month, the failure of a military tribunal to sentence Colonel Erick Sánchez for shooting and permanently paralysing a civilian in a bar-room brawl in Tegucigalpa elicited widespread condemnation of the use of the *fuero militar* to protect members of the armed forces guilty of crimes against civilians. Despite repeated calls from the media and the popular movement, the Supreme Court failed satisfactorily to resolve the issue of competing jurisdictions. However, it was the rape, murder and mutilation of school student Riccy Mabel Martínez in July 1991 and the sustained protest campaign this generated which finally provoked a change in traditional practice. In July 1993 the officers implicated, Colonel Angel Castillo Maradiaga and Sergeant Eusebio Llovares Fúnez, were sentenced to sixteen and ten years respectively. Intervention by the US embassy in the case was instrumental in securing the convictions: Ambassador Cresencio Arcos sent forensic samples to the USA for analysis by the FBI, signalling a growing impatience on the part of Washington with both the intransigence of the military and the manifest weakness of the local judiciary.

Allegations of the use of torture had long been levelled at the DNI and FUSEP by local human rights groups and since 1990 certain procedural measures to improve police practice had been instigated with US support.⁵⁷ However, steps towards substantive reform of the security forces were made in 1993, following a spate of drug-related assassinations by the San Pedro Sula DNI. In March 1993 President Callejas, in an astute move to deflect rising criticism, set up an Ad Hoc Commission with the specific remit of drawing up reforms to the security forces and judicial system. The Commission recommended the formation of a civilian-controlled Public Ministry, to be responsible for the new DIC (División de Investigaciones Criminales), to replace the scandal-ridden DNI. The military themselves appeared only too happy to be rid of the DNI, which had long since become a distinct liability. However, the DNI itself has passed through various permutations in its chequered history and a certain scepticism regarding the extent of the current reforms would appear justified. A point of particular concern is whether or not DNI officers accused of human rights abuse will be incorporated into the DIC. Although not explicitly recommended by the Ad Hoc Commission, the transfer of the FUSEP to civilian control looks certain to be an issue in 1994, Innovation and Unity Party representative Carlos Sosa Coello having tabled a bill to Congress in December 1993 to separate FUSEP from the military and create a civilian police force. The extent of the concessions the military will be forced to make remains unclear; although the Public Ministry statute was approved in December 1993 the high

command continued to contest the proposed transfer of anti-narcotics operations to the new ministry.

Another area where the military have recently come under considerable pressure is the question of human rights trials for the events of the early 1980s. Despite the absence of civil war in Honduras, the question of war crimes has considerable resonance, precisely because of the traumatic impact of events of the early 1980s on a society historically accustomed to comparatively low levels of overt violence. More recently, the 'demonstration effect' of the Salvadorean Truth Commission (published March 1993) should be noted. The long-standing call by local human rights organisations for a Truth Commission came to the fore when the disappeared became an issue in the 1993 election campaign. In an attempt to divert attention from what was proving to be a serious electoral disadvantage for PN presidential candidate Oswaldo Ramos Soto (signalled by human rights groups for his involvement in forced disappearances), President Callejas appointed the Human Rights Ombudsman, Dr Leo Valladares, to carry out an investigation. The final report, published on 29 December 1993, proved something of a bomb-shell, constituting the first official acknowledgement of the hundred-and-fifty-plus disappearances which occurred during the 1980s.⁵⁸ The Commission led by Valladares gained unprecedented access to confidential files in the US State Department, revealing evidence of a systematic campaign of human rights abuse by the armed forces and details of the involvement of US and Argentine officers in training both the Honduran military and the contra in kidnapping and torture techniques. Battalion 3-16 was found to be still active, despite claims by the high command in 1987 that it had been disbanded. The report named a number of high-ranking officers implicated in the disappearances, including Generals Regalado Hernández, Walter López Reyes and Discua Elvir, and recommended that they stand trial.⁵⁹

At present the military maintain that the 1991 Amnesty Law protects them from prosecution. However, public pressure on the new Liberal Party administration of Dr Carlos Roberto Reina (inaugurated 27 January 1994) to pursue prosecutions is considerable. One might speculate that a limited number of punitive trials would not be looked on unfavourably by the USA, anxious to clip the wings of the recalcitrant Honduran military.⁶⁰ More problematic would be securing the neutrality of the majority of the officer corps. In one sense, the collegiate style of the high command might lend itself to the eventual sacrifice of a handful of officers, at least in the form of a limited internal purge if not through the domestic courts.⁶¹ However, the pound of flesh which would inevitably be extracted in return may prove more than the Reina administration is currently willing or able to provide. Although the current conjuncture has the armed forces on the defensive, a tendency sharpened by the current campaign to abolish compulsory

conscription, the leverage of the civilian authorities remains decidedly limited. It would appear, however, that the gradual pace of reform may yet deliver durable results and contribute to a lasting shift in the civil-military balance in Honduras.

Panama

The nature of the modern military – and therefore of the ‘military question’ – in Panama is quite different to that in the rest of the region. In fact, the military, known as the Panamanian Defence Force (FDP), was formally abolished on 12 February 1990 following the US invasion of 20 December 1989. However, this core element of a most insecure ‘imposition of democracy’ by force was not subsequently consolidated.⁶² In the first place this was because the *de facto* abolition of the FDP only gave way to a profusion of not dissimilar police and paramilitary bodies. Perhaps more important, though, was the result of the referendum of 15 November 1992 on reforms to the 1983 Constitution, when 64 percent of the voters rejected the proposal that, ‘the Republic of Panama shall have no army’ along with 57 other (less publicised and controversial) proposed amendments. It is undoubtedly the case that this result reflected the genuine unpopularity of the Endara regime. Nonetheless, the opposition Frente Nacional Pro-Constituyente (FRENO), led in this respect by the erstwhile pro-Noriega Partido Revolucionario Democrático (PRD), clearly exploited rising nationalist sentiment after the invasion and gave it an acutely practical application by questioning how it would be possible for Panama without a military force to assume its obligations to defend the Canal from the year 2000 under Article V of the 1977 Treaty.⁶³ Indeed it is a reflection not just of the political position after December 1989, but also of the anomaly at the heart of Panama’s existence since 1903 that the PRD should attract significant support for its own anti-militarist formulation that included US forces: ‘There shall be no army in the Republic of Panama’.⁶⁴

The abolition of the FDP in 1990 was the second time that the USA had disbanded the armed forces of Panama, the first occasion being under the 1904 Taft Agreement when Washington backed the Conservative president Amador, killed off the development of a regular army and set up a notionally non-partisan police force. This service was institutionally weaker and more lacking in ideological foundation than the ‘constabulary forces’ established in Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Haiti and Nicaragua by Washington in the same period (although over time a comparable praetorianism did develop).⁶⁵ Between 1903 (Bunau-Varilla-Hay Accord) and 1936 (General Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation) US forces were deployed in Panamanian territory nine times, consonant with the Republic’s effective protectorate status and Washington’s administrative disposition up to the ‘Good

Neighbour' policy. However, in addition to the presence of US troops in the Canal Zone – where Panamanian sovereignty was so theoretical as to exclude the flying of the national flag until 1959 – Washington's interference went as far as the confiscation of all the rifles held by the police in 1916, a move that many held responsible for the ease with which Costa Rican forces were able to occupy and hold disputed territory in February 1921.⁶⁶ After the 1936 Treaty, which revoked Washington's formal right to intervene, the police was gradually expanded (to 2,000) and, during World War Two, again provided with some armament beyond hand-guns. A basic training school was established in 1948 under the command of Colonel José Antonio Remón; the Guardia Nacional (GN) was only established in 1953, after Remón had become president through a mix of populist rhetoric and aggressive exploitation of the spoils system (particularly around the Colón Free Trade Zone) that was later to be developed by Torrijos and Noriega.

The GN, like its namesake in Nicaragua, was not strictly an army, and most of its 6,000 (predominantly black and mestizo) members at the time of the 1968 coup were effectively police officers. On the other hand, by the end of the 1960s almost half of the GN's enlistment had received training at the US School of the Americas (where they accounted for one-ninth of all pupils up to the School's closure in October 1984), and the officer corps were sent to regular military academies abroad, including Mexico and Peru where there was an institutional ethos discernably at variance with the Pentagon model. It is notable that the GN lacked the repressive trajectory of its Nicaraguan counterpart, had no need to engage in serious counter-insurgency operations (even after 1968), and was restricted to barracks during the 1964 riots over the Canal Zone when 18 students were killed.

The coup of October 1968 – initially provoked by Arnulfo Arias's attempt upon entering office to remove the Presidential Guard from GN control – changed this position appreciably, not least by opening the country's first real experience of military government. Over the following decade the GN's enlistment rose to 15,000, its absolute budget rose tenfold, and under the fiercely corporatist 1972 Constitution (which continues to provide the basis for subsequent amendments) it became the country's leading political institution and acquired administrative functions which further expanded its management of patronage, contraband and a swathe of semi-licit enterprise. The fact that political parties were banned for a full decade (1968-78) and that the assemblies elected under the 1972 Constitution were explicitly limited to rubber-stamping decisions made by Torrijos and the high command confirm the GN's authoritarian pedigree.⁶⁷ Equally – rather as in Honduras, but within the more consequential context of the Canal negotiations – it was pressure from the Carter administration which eventually secured a modicum of political competition and formal democratic administration. (This process was quite distended, lasting from the first set of constitutional amendments

in 1978 to the 1984 elections, but Torrijos's death in 1981 played an important part in causing such a delay at a particularly charged moment in regional politics). However, the GN's direct assumption of power during the 1970s was unusual in its form and rationale, and this only fell into line with local traditions of military-backed 'officialist' parties after 1984 (and even then the PRD, formed in 1978 on the eve of the Nicaraguan Revolution, is not usefully seen in the same light as the Guatemalan Partido Institucional Democrático or the Salvadorean Partido de Conciliación Nacional). Equally, proper recognition should be given to the scope for restricting and violating human rights: whilst the GN was indisputably authoritarian and systematically corrupt, it killed very few people, arresting, abusing and exiling numbers on a scale quite comparable with elected regimes elsewhere in Latin America. (Within Central America, its abuse of authority was closer to the levels witnessed in Costa Rica than Honduras, at least in the early 1980s).

At the same time, the circumscription of democratic rights was matched by an expansion of some social liberties (the 1972 Labour Code), public expenditure and public employment (rising from 51,998 in 1971 to 107,000 in 1980, or from 13 to 25 per cent of the total labour force).⁶⁸ It is certainly the case that this high-spending and redistributionist trend was funded first (1971-82) by a markedly cavalier fiscal policy – Panama has one of the highest debts *per capita* in the world – and then (1983-89) by reliance upon taxing, laundering and occasionally directly generating cocaine revenues. Neither phase, then, possessed much greater 'substantive democracy' than that of a procedural character. Yet both assuredly militated to the benefits of sectors of the country's poor as well as giving the regime a critical quota of autonomy from the USA at a time when its political and military influence was directly focused on the isthmus.⁶⁹

Although the democratising reforms to 150 of the Constitution's 275 articles were approved in April 1983, the GN was transformed into the Fuerzas de Defensa de Panama (FDP) under a separate law hurriedly enacted in October of that year. It thereby acquired a much more traditional military aspect with a very small air-force and coastguard, the immunity of its commanding officer from presidential removal (a matter forgotten by President Delvalle when he tried to oust Noriega in February 1988), and, under Ley 20 designed to prepare it for defence of the Canal, direct responsibility for the country's ports and the (highly profitable) control of migration. It was at this juncture that Noriega (previously Chief of Intelligence and then Chief of Staff) took overall command. As a result, one should identify the quality of individual leadership as well as institutional expansion as a factor in an enhanced regional profile (sponsorship of Contadora; controversial ambivalence towards the Sandinistas), increased (and justified) civilian apprehension that the new FDP was seeking to deepen

its political domination, and the increased role given to intelligence and specialist elites by the military.⁷⁰

Noriega's early period of power was marked by the electoral fraud of 1984 and the infamous murder of radical oppositionist Hugo Spadafora (for which seven of the ten FDP members later charged were acquitted in September 1993). However, it was really only from 1987 that the FDP resorted to aggressively partisan intervention in politics, and this generated internal division with dangerous coup attempts in 1988 and 1989. Noriega's reliance upon populist mobilisation and anti-US rhetoric might be viewed as a renewal of the *torrijista* heritage – certainly sections of the PRD saw it thus – but there is a more convincing interpretation of the rabble-rousing and fixing of the 1989 poll in the antics of a desperate *caudillo* against whom neither the FDP's structures (which did not include the 'Dignity Battalions') nor US ineptitude nor the divisions of the domestic opposition provided short-term guarantees. By concentrating on the first of these the post-invasion management of civil-military relations has proved to be lop-sided, superficial and probably self-defeating in its evasion of the long and short-term dilemmas inherent in the nature of the Panamanian state.

The 1989 invasion was almost immediately successful, obviating the need even for formal surrender arrangements, let alone any negotiated political settlement. Aside from Noriega himself, who was removed to US jurisdiction on 4 January 1990, there were two broad prejudiced parties: the civilian and military supporters of the regime who were detained or persecuted by the invasion forces, and those citizens who were killed, injured or lost their property in the less than precise bombing and fire-control of the US troops. This latter group had the formal backing of the Endara regime for its compensation claim against the US government. This was eventually filed on behalf of 286 named victims at the end of 1993 even though the US Supreme Court had already rejected the Panamanian government's claim for some \$400 million in reparations, largely for local enterprise.⁷¹ On the other hand, the Endara government itself refused for over four years to concede an amnesty that might free around 60 Noriega supporters, allow 40 to return from exile, and drop charges against 800.⁷² The PRD predictably led the campaign for such a move, which was also backed by the organisations of those injured by the invasion, but the government no less predictably refused to issue an amnesty on the grounds that this would benefit many who were guilty of torture, fraud and murder, especially in the suppression of the 1988 and 1989 coup attempts.⁷³

The difficulty with the government's position was that soon after the invasion it was re-employing hundreds of FDP personnel, including senior members of its anti-terrorist and intelligence branches, to serve in the new security apparatus. This burgeoning institutional network was founded on the

Fuerza Pública (FP), which in three years came to number 11,650, including 11,000 in the Policía Nacional (PN), 300 in the National Maritime Service and 350 in the National Air Service.⁷⁴ Whilst the budget for these forces was under strict civilian control, and they possessed no proper military equipment or formal mission, their size approximated to that of the FDP, ex-members of which comprised at least 6,000 of the total enlistment. Subsequently, the government, asserting (controversially and without tangible evidence) that it was the target of several coup attempts, created three further forces: the investigative Policía Técnica Judicial (PTJ), under the authority of the Contraloría, the 500-strong Servicio de Protección Institucional (SPI) intelligence service, and the Tactical Weapons Unit, equipped with automatic weaponry and staffed by specially trained members of the PN, PTJ and SPI.⁷⁵ Indeed, Panama witnessed a veritable renaissance of paramilitary activity after 1990 with the creation of a Municipal Police in the capital and the existence of some 200 security firms employing 12,000 guards.⁷⁶ It can be argued that the frequently changing leaderships of some of these state forces (notably the PN and the PTJ) contributed to rather than curbed lawlessness, and only the FP was clearly subject to legislative oversight and authority.⁷⁷ Meanwhile, some 6,000 of the 9,000-strong US garrison in the Canal Zone were almost constantly engaged in a series of 'manoeuvres' known as 'Strong Roads' and largely dedicated to road-building and developing the new military installations at Veraguas. Their activities helped to sustain the campaign, led by Canal Zone workers, for renegotiation of the 1977 Treaties and a prolonged US military presence. Yet only once, in December 1990, did Endara rely directly on foreign troops to resolve a domestic crisis – when PN officers occupied their HQ in demand for improved conditions, and the president, claiming that this was a coup attempt, persuaded the SouthCom commander to surround the building with 500 soldiers and break up the protest.⁷⁸ It was this event that prompted Endara's creation of the new police forces, but his nationalist identity was already sufficiently tarnished that the matter failed to develop into a major crisis.

Very few of the developments noted above assisted the settlement of civil tension, so sharply evident in the high crime rates, or the political impasse expressed by the failure of Endara and the USA to secure constitutional reform as well as by the impressive resilience of the PRD. Under no circumstances can they be argued to have reduced the level of the drug-trade, about which Washington continues to be seriously concerned. A sober appraisal of the post-invasion position could, then, stress the continuation of a paramilitary elite in a new institutional guise, the notable failure to reach a codified arrangement for the country's security forces, the absence of an amnesty or any formal negotiation with the quite numerous servants and supporters of the old regime, and the continued corrosive effects of *narcotráfico*. Against this, the maintenance of the electoral cycle, the evident

capacity of Panamanian constitutions to withstand piecemeal reform, a still peaceable adaptability of the GN/FDP/FP continuum, and the absence of any guerrilla conflict before or after the transition could all be interpreted as bolstering the redistributive aspects of a notably 'grey' service sector and reducing the threat of political violence. Neither scenario, however, involves a qualitative 'demilitarisation' of Panama, within the Canal Zone or without it.

Guatemala

At present, demilitarisation of Guatemalan society seems a distant prospect. The nature of military control has undergone a profound transformation in the past decade: the counter-insurgency strategy developed after 1982 extended the influence of the armed forces into the lives of the rural population to an unprecedented extent. Partly in consequence, the division between civilian and military spheres in Guatemala – substantive and perceived – is blurred to a degree without parallel in the rest of the region. Peace negotiations with the Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca (URNG) insurgents have developed intermittently since 1987, but the central issue of human rights has to date proved an insurmountable block. It remains to be seen if the recent commitment by the URNG and the de León government to reach a peace agreement by the end of 1994 will bear fruit. Despite the transition to civilian rule in 1986, the military remain the final arbiter of national politics. Developments since 1988 indicate a resurgence in popular organisation after the widespread and generalised repression of the early 1980s. However, it remains doubtful whether either developments in 'civil society' or the negotiations themselves will be able fundamentally to alter the balance of civil/military power within the foreseeable future.

The use of military force in Guatemala's civil war has been both more brutal in its impact and more transformative in its effect than elsewhere in the region. Ample documentation exists of the legacy of systematic human rights abuse by the armed forces, which reached its peak during the 1978-1983 period. The campaign against the highland civilian population left over 100,000 killed or 'disappeared' and over 1 million displaced.⁷⁹ Following the scorched earth policies employed during the Lucas García regime (1978-1982), military strategy shifted to more sophisticated counter-insurgency policies aimed primarily at controlling the rural civilian population. Mechanisms included: mandatory participation in civil patrols (Patrullas de Autodefensa Civil, PACs); forced resettlement of the displaced rural population in camps or 'model villages', grouped together in army-controlled 'development poles'; and inter-institutional coordinating councils which centralised administration of all development projects at every level of

government under military command. All these institutions were legalised in the Constitution of 1985.

It is generally agreed that the return to civilian rule in 1986 was part of a long-term military strategy begun under the regime of Mejía Victores (1983-1986), intended to improve the country's international image and facilitate greater aid flows. Following elections for a constituent assembly in 1984, presidential and congressional elections were held in 1985. However, although formal political power was returned to the civilian administration of Vinicio Cerezo in 1986, military control of the rural population has remained non-negotiable in the transition. The limits of Cerezo's room for manoeuvre were evident from the outset of his administration. Prior to leaving office, the Mejía Victores regime had passed an amnesty law (DL No. 8-86) covering the period March 1982 to January 1986. Cerezo accepted this in the hope of obtaining at least some measure of neutrality from the bulk of the officer corps – the transition was underpinned by the understanding that there would be no prosecutions for human rights abuses.⁸⁰ As Cerezo himself stated: 'We are not going to be able to investigate the past. We would have to put the entire army in jail'.⁸¹

By 1990, human rights violations were again mounting in response to renewed guerrilla activity and urban mobilisations protesting the worsening economic crisis. A disgruntled sector of hard-line military officers (the '*Oficiales de la Montaña*') supported by elements in the private sector federation Cámara de Agricultura, Comercio, Industria y Finanzas (CACIF) and the ultramontane Movimiento de Liberación Nacional (MLN) staged attempted coups in both 1988 and 1989, and only the firm support of Defence Minister General Gramajo maintained Cerezo's rule. However, for all his polished *civilista* discourse, Gramajo's primary concern lay with preserving military unity rather than shoring up the beleaguered civilian president. Following the subsequent accession of Serrano Elías to the presidency, a series of rapid changes occurred within the civilian political sphere (the abortive *autogolpe* in May 1993, the overthrow of Serrano and his eventual replacement by former human rights ombudsman, Ramiro de León Carpio). It is worth noting that the high command did not decisively back either Serrano or his ill-fated Minister of Defence, General Samayoa, in their *autogolpista* pretensions, nor did they intervene against de León after his sudden accession to the presidency. To this extent, the 'back to barracks' tendency within the army has been significantly consolidated, even if in practice retreat from the exercise of power remains formal rather than substantive. The lack of a civilian political project, combined with the manifest weakness and corruption of Guatemala's political parties, has only served further to underline the centrality of the armed forces in national politics.

The distinction within the Guatemalan military between hard-liners, who favour a no-holds-barred military solution to the civil war, and those, currently in ascendance, who tend towards a negotiated solution, is often noted. However, such divisions are essentially fluid and their utility for analysing shifts within a military so steeped in a rigid and seemingly immutable culture of anti-communism remains debatable. Differences amongst the officer corps to date have essentially been about tactics rather than ideology. Nonetheless, limited advances should be recognised: there is now no military veto on the peace talks (as there was in 1987) and the possibility that a section of the officer corps is prepared to negotiate on substantive issues such as the abolition of the *Patrullas de Autodefensa Civil* should not be ruled out.

Despite considerable advancement since the first formal talks held between the URNG insurgents and the government of Vinicio Cerezo (1986-1991) in 1987, a negotiated end to the civil war in Guatemala remains far from imminent. Indeed, in the six years since the signing of the Esquipulas Accords, not even a partial cease-fire has been achieved. The Guatemalan military are notable both for their operational and ideological unity and for the almost total historical absence of a tradition of negotiation and compromise. No troop demobilisation has occurred to date and indeed troop numbers increased after the signing of the Esquipulas Accords in 1987: in 1985, troops totalled 51,600 but had reached over 60,000 by 1991.⁸² Illegal conscription into the army continues to occur and, in addition, some 500,000 or more individuals remain organised in the paramilitary PACs. The guerrilla challenge in Guatemala is far weaker than that of the FMLN in El Salvador and, unlike the contra in Nicaragua, has not relied significantly on any external sponsors capable of bringing pressure to bear in peace negotiations. Totalling between 1,000 and 2,000 armed combatants, the URNG's military activities in recent years singularly failed to shift the military balance sufficiently to affect substantially the terms of negotiations (as the 1989 FMLN offensive did in El Salvador). The Guatemalan military see themselves as the victors in the civil war and many officers are particularly opposed to the granting of concessions at the negotiating table to an opponent who has proved unable to extract the same on the battlefield.

The first meeting in October 1987 between the URNG and the *Comisión Nacional de Reconciliación (CNR)* – the latter set up within the framework of the Esquipulas Accords and headed by Bishop of Esquipulas, Monsignor Rodolfo Quezada – was vetoed by the army after the series of proposals presented by the URNG proved unacceptable to the high command. The most obvious demands were for the abolition of the apparatus of counter-insurgency – civil patrols, model villages and ‘development poles’. However, it was the demands for establishment of a Truth Commission on past human

rights abuses and the setting up of demilitarised zones which ultimately proved unacceptable to the officer corps.

A significant shift in external factors had occurred by the time of the second meeting in Oslo in March 1990. In the aftermath of the Cold War and the electoral defeat of the Sandinistas, the Bush administration began to push for a negotiated settlement in Guatemala. However, in contrast to El Salvador, US leverage against the Guatemalan military is minimal. Progress in the negotiations is consequently dependant on internal factors to a far greater extent than in the other countries examined here. The Guatemalan army has long prided itself on its independence, and its ability to secure alternative sources of aid – notably from Taiwan and Israel – during periods when US military aid was cut in protest at human rights violations has increased both its nationalist disposition and its operational autonomy. The amount of US military aid currently received by Guatemala is negligible.⁸³ However, mounting economic difficulties may yet mean that finding favour with the USA is more important to the Guatemalan elite than in the past. Certainly a powerful sector of the domestic business elite anxious to profit from regional economic integration is currently in favour of a negotiated settlement. Such calculations inevitably continue to affect civil-military relations. It should be remembered, however, that the Guatemalan armed forces have gained a degree of economic influence commensurate with their political power, long presiding over the most extensive economic interests of all the Central American militaries. The armed forces owns the state electricity and telecommunications monopolies, along with the national airline, extensive ranching, banking, insurance and real estate interests and at least one national television channel (*Canal 5*). Additional economic muscle is provided by involvement in drugs-smuggling, this last a source of increasing concern to the USA. The US DEA estimated that in 1991 and 1992 150 tonnes of cocaine passed through Guatemala annually.⁸⁴ Unlike their Salvadorean counter-parts, the military in Guatemala are economically reliant neither on the domestic bourgeoisie nor on US aid.

In contrast to the Reagan administration's failure to condemn human rights abuses during the 1980s, under Bush military aid was suspended in January 1991 in protest at the lack of action regarding the notorious June 1990 murder of US citizen Michael Devine by soldiers in the Petén, the abduction, rape and torture of Ursuline nun, Dianna Ortíz, and the December 1990 massacre of fifteen villagers in Santiago Atitlán. Washington's tougher stance encouraged a renewal of negotiations and the first official round of talks in April 1991 in Mexico City established an eleven point agenda for negotiation. The second round at Querétaro the following June achieved agreement on the first (and least controversial) point around the definition of 'democratisation'. However, three subsequent meetings in September and October 1991 and January 1992 failed to reach agreement on the issue of human rights. For

over a year the URNG insisted on a set of demands wholly unacceptable to the government negotiating team.⁸⁵

Issues surrounding a cease-fire, rebel demobilisation and reincorporation into civilian life also proved a constant block to negotiations, given the rebels' understandable fear of reprisals and the tendency of a significant part of the officers corps to see talks merely as a negotiated surrender by the URNG. A new insurgent proposal in May 1992 postponed debate of demobilisation issues, instead focusing on refugee resettlement, constitutional reform, indigenous rights and economic change. In August 1992 agreement was reached to freeze recruitment into the PACs. However, the army only gave this undertaking on condition that recruitment could recommence in the event of an insurgent offensive. Since 1990 the URNG have met with a number of national social and economic groups, including the private enterprise confederation CACIF, and the cumulative effect of such contacts on future development should not be underestimated, even if the rebels' demands have yielded few tangible results to date.

Negotiations were at a virtual impasse throughout most of 1993; attention focused instead on the political crisis surrounding the May autogolpe and its immediate aftermath. Initial expectations that the de León administration might reach a rapid settlement with the URNG were soon disappointed when in October 1993 the hawkish Héctor Rosada (who replaced Bishop Quezada as mediator in the talks), presented a new peace plan to the URNG which attempted to separate technical negotiations for a ceasefire from talks on social and political reform and offered neither concrete guarantees for human rights nor the possibility of a Truth Commission. This was immediately rejected by the URNG. The January 1994 agreement to restart peace talks signals an appreciable advance after the previous months of dead-lock, the URNG scoring a notable victory in the adoption of the 1991 Mexico Agenda as the basis for talks. This 11-point document includes substantive and operational aspects of a peace settlement, spanning the issues that gave rise to or have arisen from the war, and aspects relating to bringing about the end to the armed conflict.⁸⁶ The role accorded to the UN as mediator in the negotiations (and in subsequent verification of any accord reached) must be seen as a positive step. The presence of UN Undersecretary Marrack Goulding at the recent talks to agree the agenda for talks indicates the prospect of an increasingly active intervention by the UN in this most obdurate of the Central American conflicts.

The issue of human rights is at the heart of any future accord in Guatemala, which will almost inevitably be focused on securing certain basic guarantees for both ex-combatants and the civilian population rather than on significant troop demobilisation or restructuring of the armed forces, issues the high command has to date ruled off the negotiating agenda. However, although an

agreement establishing formal guarantees for future observance of human rights may be eventually achieved, the military continue to unite in resisting the setting up of a Truth Commission to investigate past war crimes (a point insisted on by local human rights organisations). The lack of realistic prospects for any investigation into past abuses in Guatemala is symptomatic of the persistence of military power and a singular lack of interest on the part of civilian elites. Despite some moderate advances registered in recent years, such as the bringing to trial of some lower-ranking members of the armed forces and members of the civil patrols in cases of major abuse (Santiago Atitlán, the murder of sociologist Myrna Mack), the immunity of senior officers remains absolute and the military's counter-insurgency role unaltered.⁸⁷

Given the persistence of the civil war and the long-standing involvement of the police corps in counter-insurgency activities, it is perhaps unsurprising that little advance on the separation of military from police functions and the transfer of police control to civilian authorities has been made in Guatemala. Some attempts to reform the police occurred during the Cerezo administration. However, the central question of political control has never been addressed.⁸⁸ Under Serrano, joint police-military operations were stepped up in an attempt to improve lacklustre police performance, through such mechanisms as the creation of a joint permanent patrolling operation, the 'Servicio de Protección Civil' (SIPROCI) which coordinated anti-narcotics operations with the US DEA. In May 1991 Interior Minister Hurtado Prem announced the creation of a Civil Guard to unify the Treasury and National Police (to be trained by Chilean *Carabineros*). However, although the various police bodies are nominally under the jurisdiction of the Interior Ministry, they effectively remain under army control. In March 1992, SIPROCI was replaced by 'Hunapá', a joint force comprising army and Treasury Police members and commanded by a military officer, Col. Herman Grootewold.⁸⁹ After Hunapá troops were implicated in the killing of one student and the disappearance of at least 15 others in April 1992, they were replaced in November 1992 with an Integrated Task Force (FTI), comprised of 2,200 agents from the Treasury Police, National Police and Military Ambulatory Police, and – like Hunapá – ultimately subject to military command. Since 1990, the extension of such 'anti-delinquency' bodies indicate an increase rather than a decrease in military control of the police. The recent decision to transfer police intelligence services to the office of the Presidency may signal a growing acceptance of certain 'professionalising reforms' by a sector of the military; however, the net effect of the recent transfer has yet to be seen and it should be noted that the military's own intelligence sector remains inviolate.

Despite the absence to date of a formal settlement in Guatemala, a number of developments since 1987 indicate important shifts within what might

rightly be called 'civil society', indicating that certain calculations are being made against the possibility of an end to the civil war. These include: an increase in popular mobilisation and the emergence of indigenous organisations at national level; the return of refugees from Mexico; and growing resistance to the civil patrols. In the wake of the Serrano-*golpe*, the hegemony of the political parties has all but collapsed in Guatemala and civil society is cautiously emerging as a political actor distinct and separate from the insurgent forces of the URNG. The guarantees obtained to treat returning refugees as civilians and grant them three years exemption from military service or participation in the civil patrols constituted a significant concession by the armed forces. However, progress to date has been uneven; many refugees have returned to highly militarised areas where the army continue to control most aspects of daily life, and on a number of occasions returned refugees have been forced to cross the Guatemalan-Mexican border in flight from army attacks. The emergence since 1990 of the internally displaced Comunidades de los Pueblos en Resistencia (CPRs) in the Ixcán, Petén and highlands of the Ixil triangle signals a challenge to the army's counter-insurgency hegemony in the *altiplano*, given the CPRs' refusal to participate in the civil patrols or to live in model villages. However, army attacks against the CPRs continue, evidencing the fragility of gains and cautioning against an over-optimistic reading.

As Richard Wilson has argued, the army have so enmeshed themselves into indigenous culture in rural Guatemala, that any prospect of immediate 'demilitarisation' in the broadest sense of the word is unlikely.⁹⁰ The persistence of the civil patrols and the army's omnipotent presence in all rural development efforts mean that the militarisation of rural society in highland Guatemala has long since exceeded the boundaries of physical coercion alone. It is questionable indeed whether in the case of such a traumatised society subject to such wholesale penetration by military counter-insurgency operations it is meaningful to talk of demilitarisation in the terms of a peace settlement or its immediate aftermath. The impact of developments in civil society may yet prove the key to a slow and cautious process of change in civil/military relations in Guatemala. Nonetheless, given the numerous precedents which exist, a return to widespread repression cannot be ruled out.

The Guatemalan military is now firmly locked into the negotiating process which will continue to be a focus throughout 1994. However, given the military's refusal to make substantive concessions on the question of human rights, peace in the short term seems unlikely.⁹¹ Calls in November by the UN human rights expert appointed to Guatemala, Mónica Pinto, for the immediate abolition of the PACs were flatly refused by Defence Minister General Mario Enríquez. De León himself has publicly reaffirmed his commitment to the PACs on numerous occasions. De León's support for the

peace process is intrinsically linked to his domestic political fortunes, the latter far from guaranteed. Given the history of cyclical violence in Guatemala and the manifest inability of the URNG to guarantee the physical safety of its members were they to disarm and attempt reintegration, it seems that the presence of a UN international peace-keeping force (proposed in the agreement signed by both sides in January 1994) will be essential in the event of any future settlement.

Conclusions

Although the formal process of cease-fire, peace-making and (regime) transition is much more advanced in some countries of Central America than in others, it has nowhere reached a point at which a new, regular path of military behaviour and civil-military relations is clearly evident. As a result it would be misguided to talk yet of any 'consolidation' or firm pattern. Correspondingly, care should be exercised in drawing clear policy conclusions from experiences that are still underway, palpably fragile, and, on both internal and external fronts, liable to mutation and even reversal. Nonetheless, by early 1994 a number of broad tendencies can be identified.

Although, as stated at the outset, the Central American armies were preoccupied primarily with achieving settlements on a national basis, neither the absence of a regional war nor the quite differing approach taken by three US administrations should obscure a perceptible regional aspect to the process of peacemaking and transition. Indeed, it is possible to assert the existence of a 'knock-on effect' starting with Esquipulas (1987), taking off with the first substantial Nicaraguan ceasefire (March 1988), accelerating in late 1989 (the FMLN offensive in November; the US invasion of Panama in December), being consolidated with the defeat of the FSLN in the February 1990 elections, and reaching a natural – if scarcely 'logical' – peak with the 1991-2 Salvadorean settlement. The region's officer corps observing these developments must have drawn mixed and divergent conclusions, but if the Guatemalans – predictably the last in line – evidently sought to avoid repeating the Salvadorean experience, they surely gained a certain sense of confidence from the shifting local and international conditions. It may be that the January 1994 uprising in Chiapas put a brake on this, not least if one takes the plausible view that the region's conflicts have been pursued far more upon local considerations than as expressions of the shifting balance of world forces and ideologies. But even if this proves to be the case and Guatemalan 'exceptionalism' is further prolonged, it is unlikely to persist in the same form and will undoubtedly manifest the influence of developments in the surrounding states.

The process of ceasefire and transition has been shadowed by declining interest and involvement on the part of the US government. Indeed, with respect to the Clinton administration (1993-) there is a strong case for arguing that Central America was so low on the policy agenda that the military question was just as prey to congressional whim (as manipulated by Sen. Helms) as to any view in the State Department, let alone the White House. In the same vein, it would be misguided to assume that there was a coherent shift in US doctrinal influence on the armed forces, although in rapidly changing circumstances US military advisers sometimes plainly held and persuaded their audiences. Perhaps the most plausible scenario for the last years of the century is that which obtained during the 1960s and early 1970s, when US management of military matters was largely tactically determined at embassy and attaché level and without significant financial considerations. However, if there is now no guerrilla threat (or one that is massively reduced) at local level and no challenge emanating from Cuba, the region's armies have still been irreversibly transformed in some respects, not all of which are acceptable to Washington.

One signal trend in the current transition, no doubt related to the rapid decline in US military aid from 1980s levels, is that towards consolidation and diversification of the armed forces' institutional economic structures. Whilst the antecedents and extent of such corporate holdings vary greatly across the region, a shift in the nature of the military's interests is evident throughout. Whereas previously accumulation of wealth amongst the officer corps constituted a kind of 'primitive individualism', personal fortunes amassed through such semi-licit means as land purchases, logging deals and trade in emeralds, IPMs throughout the region are currently extending the institutional portfolio of the armed forces into the areas of manufacturing, finance and commerce. Whilst criticism of 'burguesías armadas' are not without justification, this institutionalisation might, in some circumstances, more accurately be seen as a guarantor of current efforts to demilitarise – as in Nicaragua, where the development of the IPM constitutes an attempt to attend to the welfare claims of large numbers of decommissioned personnel. Military demands for a *quid pro quo*, or at the very least some minimal financial guarantees, in exchange for reduction in numbers or substantive withdrawal from the public sphere are only to be expected; it is arguably preferable to give retiring officers an officially structured and sanctioned pay-off which at least provides a more plausible framework for official oversight. However, clearly it is not only desirable but also imperative that those officers found guilty of human rights violations receive no such benefits and are dishonourably discharged. If the traditional impunity of the region's military is truly to be reduced, then trials and punitive sanctions are the preferred, if not always the most politically acceptable, option in such cases.

Another consequence of the 1980s was the massive expansion of the military's involvement in cocaine and heroin trafficking throughout the region, a wholly less salubrious form of capital accumulation. Already significant in Central America by the end of the 1970s, *narcotráfico* took off in the subsequent decade, inevitably encouraged by the generalised climate of impunity prevailing across the isthmus. Such lawlessness was additionally fomented by the Reagan administration's drug-running operations to supply the contra which, by providing both sanction and substantial logistical support, aided those officers involved in cocaine smuggling to consolidate their hold on power. Particularly acute amongst the Guatemalan and Honduran armed forces – and almost *sui generis* in the case of Panama – the expansion of drug-trafficking by the military poses a serious threat to the formal command structure and *escalafón*, exacerbating factionalism amongst officers and inevitably increasing instability. This constitutes not only a threat to civil society but to the very foundations of the military institutions themselves.

Drugs are but one factor behind the climate of increased crime, violence and *delincuencia común* which has accelerated throughout the region with the end (or in the case of Guatemala, scaling down) of the civil wars. Whether rooted in motives of revenge (El Salvador) or a corollary of generalised socio-economic collapse (Nicaragua), the net effect of this phenomenon has been to validate the official role of police forces in the maintenance of domestic order, even though police practice in many specific instances continues to provide considerable cause for concern. In contrast to El Salvador, where guidelines governing the establishment and functions of the PNC were drawn up as part of the peace negotiations, the make-up and institutional remit of police forces elsewhere in the region is a function of various factors including: securing the demobilisation of rebel forces (Nicaragua), the abolition of the army (Panama), or the degree of control still exercised over the police by the armed forces (Honduras and Guatemala). In the present climate, the need for more stringent and efficient institutional regulation of the police is ever more apparent. However, the acute partiality and corruption demonstrated across the region by that very highest of legal institutions, the Supreme Court, raises the question of which bodies are indeed capable of carrying out this oversight. Whilst an examination of the judiciary is beyond the scope of this paper, it might reasonably be reckoned that the recent performance of Supreme Court Presidents Juan José Rodil Peralta (Guatemala), Oswaldo Ramos Soto (Honduras) – both of whom presided over highly politicised and allegedly corrupt bodies – or Mauricio Gutiérrez Castro, currently running for reelection in El Salvador (this despite being singled out for criticism in the UN Truth Commission report), have done little to encourage faith in the impartiality or regulatory abilities of the courts.

Perhaps the most noxious and enduring consequence of the civil wars of the 1980s is not, indeed, directly institutional at all but, rather, the influence they had on the outlook and behaviour of the societies affected, well beyond those who participated or were directly prejudiced by the conflicts. In the immediate aftermath of the wars in Nicaragua and El Salvador both lawful and peaceable conduct were distinctly tenuous, and there was a profusion of armaments as well as a proclivity – as yet contained – for acts of revenge. However, in the still unresolved case of Guatemala one may readily refer to a ‘militarised culture’ – at least in many zones of the country – that extends well beyond current or former soldiers in the state and rebel armies. If Honduras has witnessed a strong reaction to this in the campaign to abolish conscription – one of the central expressions of military authority in civil society – it is notable that this has been resisted with unswerving resilience in Guatemala, not just for recruitment to the regular military forces but also for the salients they have driven deep into society via the *Comisionados* and the PACs. Here, then, one should beware the extension of the ‘culture of war’ generated by the awful exigencies of fighting to one that follows this experience but still prescribes behaviour in ‘peacetime’ that is based on the same brutal assumptions.

NOTES

1. *Acuerdos de Chapultepec* (San Salvador, 1992); Joseph Tulchin (ed.), *Is There a Transition to Democracy in El Salvador?* (Washington, 1992); George Vickers and Jack Spence, ‘Endgame: A Progress Report on Implementation of the Salvadorean Peace Accords’, Hemispheric Initiatives, Boston, 3 December 1992; Knut Walter and P.J. Williams, ‘The Military and Democracy in El Salvador’, *Journal of Inter-American Studies*, Vol. 35, no. 1 (1992).
2. As of late 1992 the military still controlled telecommunications, water and drainage, development support, national statistics and censuses, customs, civil aviation and the post office.
3. A. Bracevich, J. Hallum, R. White and T. Young, *American Policy in Small Wars: The Case of El Salvador* (Washington, 1988), p. 44.
4. Walter and Williams, *op. cit.*, p. 78; Knut Walter and P. J. Williams, *The Military Balance 1991/92* (London, 1992), p. 198. The Atlacatl Battalion had been involved (under different commanders) in both the El Mozote massacre and the execution of the Jesuits.

5. 'As the officers understood only too quickly, the ultimate sanction that the Americans could brandish – turning off the aid spigot – threatened to hurt the Americans themselves as much as it would the Salvadoreans, since the American fear of a communist El Salvador taking its place alongside Sandinista Nicaragua had become overriding'. Mark Danner, 'The Truth of El Mozote', *The New Yorker*, 6 December 1993, p. 61. The view of some US advisors that Salvadorean officers were deliberately keeping the war at an optimum level for their own financial needs is reported in B. Schwarz, *American Counter-Insurgency Doctrine in El Salvador* (Santa Monica, 1991), p. 21. If the US Congress's human rights conditions were largely inconsequential in terms of conditions within El Salvador, the restriction on the number of advisers, whilst often evaded, still impeded the influence and effectiveness of MilGroup, and advisers complained bitterly about it. See the comments of Col. John Waghelstein in Tommie Sue Montgomery, 'Fighting Guerrillas: The United States and Low Intensity Warfare in El Salvador', Conference Paper No. 52, New York University, 26 April, 1991, p.11; Bracevich et al., *op. cit.*, p. 41.
6. The proposal to establish a mixed and provisional 'Gobierno de Amplia Participación' dated from 1983 and envisaged a military solution short of outright victory for the FMLN. Whilst for some time after its publication this objective might have been largely for propaganda purposes, it subsequently provided an authentic framework for guerrilla negotiations and strategic adjustments. Sara Miles and Bob Ostertag, 'The FMLN: New Thinking', in Anjali Sundaram and George Gelber (eds.) *A Decade of War: El Salvador Confronts the Future* (London, 1991). The ERP, which switched the content of its title from Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo to Expresión Renovadora Popular, displayed an even sharper shift away from its radical origins than its sister-parties in the FMLN.
7. Americas Watch and American Civil Liberties Union, 'Report on Human Rights in El Salvador', Washington, 20 July 1982, p. 11.
8. For De Soto's explanation of his role – in the midst of negotiations – see Tulchin, *op. cit.*.
9. For an impressionistic but persuasive depiction of the attitudes of leading conservative planters, see Jeffrey Paige, 'Coffee and Power in El Salvador', *Latin American Research Review*, Vol. 28, no. 3 (1993).
10. *Central America Report*, 18 June 1993; 13 August 1993; 17 September 1993.
11. *Ibid*, 20 August 1993; 22 October 1993; 5 November 1993.
12. *Ibid.*, 16 November 1993; 10 December 1993.

13. Vickers and Spence, *op. cit.*, p. 13.
14. *Central America Report*, 7 May 1993; 8 October 1993.
15. The Constitutions of 1950, 1962 and 1983 provided the military with an unqualified internal security role. For example, clause 12, article 168 of the 1983 Constitution states: 'Disponer de la Fuerza Armada para el mantenimiento de la soberanía, el orden, la seguridad y tranquilidad de la República...' Amended on 30 January 1992, this clause now reads: 'Disponer de la Fuerza Armada para la Defensa y Soberanía del Estado, de la Integridad de su Territorio. Excepcionalmente, si se han agotado los medios ordinarios para el mantenimiento de la paz interna, la tranquilidad y seguridad pública, el Presidente de la República podrá disponer de la Fuerza Armada para ese fin. La actuación de la Fuerza Armada se limitará al tiempo y a la medida de lo estrictamente necesario para reestablecimiento del orden y cesará tan pronto se haya alcanzado ese cometido...' *Constitución de la República*, San Salvador, March 1992, pp. 63, 129. It is perhaps worth noting that it was the refusal of the high command to subordinate itself to the orders of the governing (civil-military) junta issued on 28 December 1979 that effectively sealed the polarisation over the following twelve months, leading to outright civil war.
16. The Chapultepec Accords state: 'the evaluation will take into account the record of each officer, including especially: i) his history in terms of observing the legal order, with particular emphasis on respect for human rights, both in his personal conduct and the vigour with which he has corrected and penalised irregular acts, excesses or violations of human rights carried out under his command, especially if serious or systematic omissions are observed in this respect; ii) his professional competence; iii) his ability to adapt himself to the new reality of peace, within the context of a democratic society, and to promote democracy in the country, guarantee unrestricted respect for human rights and reunify Salvadorean society...' *Acuerdos de Chapultepec*, pp. 3-4.
17. *Central America Report*, 2 April 1993.
18. *Ibid.*, 15 January 1993; 5 February 1993.
19. *Ibid.*, 15 January 1993; 5 February, 1993.
20. Thomas W. Walker, 'The Armed Forces' in Thomas W. Walker (ed.), *Revolution and Counterrevolution in Nicaragua* (Boulder and Oxford, 1991), p. 81.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 86.

22. Both the Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Defence were responsible to the joint FSLN National Directorate, of which Interior Minister Tomás Borge and Defence Minister Humberto Ortega were both members.

23. A unilateral cease-fire was declared by the EPS as a result of the Sapoá talks but was later cancelled in 1989 in response to increased contra attacks in the run up to the 1990 elections.

24. Following the February 1990 polls, US Special Envoy Harry Shlaudeman and US Ambassador to Honduras Cresencio Arcos travelled to contra headquarters in Yamales, Honduras and told the insurgent leadership they must lay down their arms and demobilise before the USA would fund their transition to civilian life.

25. One observer maintains that a large number of draftees (who constituted some 40,000 members of the EPS) had deserted during the 1990 elections. See Jack Child, *The Central American Peace Process, 1983-1991: Sheathing Swords, Building Confidence* (Boulder and London, 1992), p. 89.

26. The percentage of the national budget devoted to defence had expanded from 20.4% in 1980 to 34.1% in 1985 and 41.3% by 1987, a state of affairs which was unsustainable after 1988. In 1989 the military budget had been cut by some 30%. Richard Stahler-Sholk, 'Stabilization, Demobilization and the Popular Classes in Nicaragua, 1979-1988', *Latin American Research Review*, Vol. 25, no. 3 (1990); Thomas W. Walker, *Revolution and Counterrevolution in Nicaragua*, p. 91. In addition, the suspension of Soviet and Cuban arms transfers since early 1989 had also affected the EPS's operational capacity.

27. *Central America Report*, 16 April 1993.

28. The 1986 Constitution prohibits the existence of any armed force apart from the EPS and the Sandinista Police within national territory: 'No pueden existir más cuerpos armados en el territorio nacional que los establecidos por la ley. la cual regulará las bases de la organización militar'. Art. 95, Constitución Política de la República de Nicaragua, *La Gaceta*, Managua, 8 January 1987.

29. Jaime Zeledón ('Comandante Bolívar') became police chief of Jinotega; members of the contra were also appointed as police chiefs in San Rafael del Norte and Yali, and as assistant police-chiefs in Pantasma and Wiwilí. *Central America Report*, 24 January 1992.

30. *Ibid.*, 17 July 1992.

31. *Ibid.*, 20 September 1991; 18 June 1993.

32. The Sandinista government had distributed some 50,000 AK-47s to its militia during the war and another 20,000 to civilian supporters between the election of February 1990 and the inauguration two months later. Child, *The Central American Peace Process*, p. 110.

33. Despite calls from recontra leaders for the removal of General Humberto Ortega as Supreme Chief of the Armed Forces, the demands of the recontra were primarily economic and social rather than political. However, it should be noted that the February 1991 assassination of ex-contra leader and GN colonel, Enrique Bermúdez, in the car-park of the Intercontinental Hotel in Managua, led to numerous protests from contra members, protests which increased when the subsequent police investigation failed to clarify the killing.

34. *Central America Report*, 16 July 1993.

35. *Central America Report*, 18 February 1994.

36. Contra members have now organised their own political party to pursue ex-contra demands through legal channels. The first national congress of the party, *Resistencia Nicaraguense*, was held on 4 December 1993 and was attended by more than 1,000 representatives of the *desmovilizados*.

37. Recontras of the Northern 3-80 Front led by José Angel Talavera ('El Chacal') demanding the removal of Humberto Ortega and Antonio Lacayo held nearly 40 Sandinista officials hostage and provoked a similar hostage-taking exercise in Managua by Sandinista supporters.

38. In a breath-taking piece of hyperbole, Helms's aid Deborah De Moss claimed in a 1992 report that Nicaragua was 'the most heavily militarised state in Central America'. *Central America Report*, 18 September 1992. It may be that De Moss's recent marriage to Honduran Instituto de Previsión Militar Chief, Colonel Héctor René Fonseca, had somewhat clouded her judgement with regard to the extent of militarisation elsewhere in the region.

39. *Central America Report*, 7 February 1993; CRIES, *Centroamérica '93: Anuario* (Managua, 1993), p. 51. The visit of Cantarero López signalled the start of a gradual rapprochement between the EPS and other regional militaries: in November 1990 the EPS signed an agreement with the Honduran armed forces which provided for joint operations to fight arms trafficking and contraband along the border.

40. The National Assembly was boycotted throughout most of 1993 by the majority of the UNO alliance. The FSLN and the UNO centre-group – which continued to participate in the legislature – agreed on some ninety reforms to the 1986 Constitution (including the prohibition of active military officers

running for President) by mid-December 1993. The UNO alliance was deeply split over the question of Constitutional reform, those on the far-right demanding elections for a constituent assembly. In the first week of January 1994, the UNO Political Council expelled the Christian Democratic Union (UDC), the Nicaraguan Democratic Movement (MDN) and the Popular Conservative Alliance (APC) for siding with the FSLN and the UNO centre-group on the issue of constitutional reform. The 1994 session of the National Assembly session began on 10 January with 71 deputies in attendance (of a full complement of 92).

41. The IPM was set up with an initial budget of \$5 million acquired through the sale of helicopters to Peru and Ecuador. *Central America Report*, 18 June 1993.

42. The guerrilla groups are: Fuerzas Populares Revolucionarias 'Lorenzo Zelaya' (FPL) est. 1980; Frente Morazanista de Liberación Nacional (FMLH) est. 1979; Movimiento Popular de Liberación (MPL or Cinchoneros) est. 1980; and Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores Centroamericanos (PRTC) est. 1979. In 1983, together with the Honduran Communist Party (PCH), these groups formed the Dirección Nacional Unitaria (DNU). Despite some initial resistance, all four insurgent groups have now laid down their arms and switched their focus to the electoral arena, although they have little chance of breaking into what is essentially a two-horse race.

43. Although in theory the Head of the Armed Forces is selected by the President, in practice changes in the military hierarchy are decided internally, presented to the Executive as a *fait accompli* and then rubber-stamped by Congress.

44. Tom Barry and Deborah Preusch, *The Central America Fact Book* (New York, 1986), p. 112.

45. Latin American Bureau, *State for Sale* (London, 1985), p. 88.

46. On 14 May 1980, Salvadorean troops massacred approximately 600 civilians at the Sumpul river, Morazán, on the Salvadorean-Honduran border. Honduran troops prevented the fleeing refugees from crossing into Honduran territory. A few days prior to the massacre, the Honduran press had carried reports of a secret meeting in Ocotepeque, Honduras, between high-level military officers from Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador: Comisión Nacional de Protección de los Derechos Humanos, *'Los Hechos Hablan por Sí Mismos': Informe Preliminar Sobre los Desaparecidos en Honduras, 1980-1993*, mimeo (Tegucigalpa, 1993), Vol. I, p. 39.

47. Alvarez promoted the formation of APROH, Asociación para el Progreso de Honduras, an anti-communist grouping of business and trade union leaders and key figures in both the National and Liberal parties. Past members of APROH include ex-President Rafael Leonardo Callejas and PN candidate for the 1993 poll, Oswaldo Ramos Soto.

48. *Central America Report*, 15 November 1991.

49. Article 1 of the *Ley Constitutiva de las Fuerzas Armadas* defines the same as 'una institución de carácter permanente, esencialmente profesional, se instituyen para defender la integridad territorial y la soberanía de la República, para mantener la paz, el orden público y el imperio de la Constitución, velando por que no se violen los principios de libre sufragio y de la alternabilidad en el ejercicio de la Presidencia de la República', assigning responsibility for both external defence and internal security to the armed forces. *La Gaceta*, Tegucigalpa, 25 February 1975.

50. *Central America Report*, 15 November 1991.

51. *Ibid.*, 14 June 1991 and 2 April 1993.

52. *Ibid.*, 2 April 1993.

53. A total of \$32 million was cut from the governmental budget in 1991. Calls for a \$3 million cut in military allocations were rejected. Officially military spending in 1991 represented 8% of the national budget, but this figure was widely disputed. *Ibid.*, 14 June 1991. One estimate put military spending in 1992 at an estimated \$47 million, representing 33% of the national budget. *Envío*, Vol. 11, No. 130, May 1992, Managua.

54. *Central America Report*, 16 October 1992.

55. *Ibid.*, 13 December 1991.

56. The assassination attempt against the son of ex-armed forces chief Regalado Hernández in January 1993 was widely suspected to be drug-related. See *Tiempo* (Tegucigalpa and San Pedro Sula), 15 January 1993.

57. In 1991 the US State Department sponsored the opening of an office (Oficina de Responsabilidad Profesional, ORP) where individuals could make formal complaints against the police. The citizenry, not unsurprisingly, proved in the main unwilling to brave the Cuartel General to protest police brutality. They were hardly encouraged by the declarations of armed forces chief General Discua Elvir, who in 1991 added his voice to the debate over police reform

stating, 'yo creo que la policía debería ser más violenta para que la respeten más'. *La Tribuna*, Tegucigalpa, 14 December 1991.

58. Denial has long since been a feature of Honduran politics. Both Suazo Córdova and his successor, President José Azcona de Hoyo persistently maintained there were no contra forces in Honduras, despite the effective occupation of large swathes of the departments of Danlí and Olancho for much of the 1980s. However, official protestations of innocence notwithstanding, in October 1987 a landmark judgement by the Inter-American Court of Human Rights gained Honduras the dubious distinction of becoming the first state to be found guilty in an international tribunal of carrying out disappearances against its own citizens.

59. Comisionado Nacional de Protección de los Derechos Humanos, '*Los Hechos Hablan Por Sí Mismos*': *Informe Preliminar Sobre los Desaparecidos en Honduras, 1980-1993*, mimeo (Tegucigalpa, 1993), Vol. II.

60. One suspects that current antagonisms have more to do with the growing problem of *narcotráfico* than with any *a priori* commitment to human rights by the USA.

61. Discua Elvir's centralising, autocratic style and his notorious track record of human rights abuse (he was the first commander of Battalion 3-16) have earned him the enmity of a considerable sector of the officer corps, particularly those that lay some claim to the reformist heritage of the 1970s.

62. Panama is properly given as an example of 'imposition of democracy' in Laurence Whitehead, 'The Imposition of Democracy', in Abraham Lowenthal (ed.), *Exporting Democracy: The United States and Latin America* (Baltimore, 1991).

63. Article V of the 1977 Treaty reads: 'After the termination of the Panama Canal Treaty, only the Republic of Panama shall operate the Canal and maintain military forces, defense sites and military installation within its National Territory'. According to the Panamanian government, the USA spends some \$750 million a year on Canal defence whereas anticipated fees for 1999 were \$500 million. The 1991 security budget was \$85 million. In September 1990 Vice-President Ricardo Arias Calderón declared, 'a military defence of the interoceanic canal similar to the proportions of the US is outside the concrete, practical and economic scope of Panama'. *Central America Report*, 21 September 1990. In May 1990 SouthCom commander General Marc Cisneros made a peculiarly engaging contribution to the anti-military campaign in stating, 'Panama doesn't need to have an army since there is no danger of invasion'. *Ibid.*, 8 June 1990. Although the FDP is abolished, the Fuerza Pública does not formally replace it, and is a new body.

64. *Ibid.*, 10 July 1992. Caution should be exercised in extrapolating from the referendum result. In March 1993 a poll found that 78% of Panamanians wanted the USA to stay beyond December 1999, and only 17% wanted all US forces out by 2000. William L. Furlong, 'Panama: The Difficult Transition Toward Democracy', *Journal of Inter-American Studies*, Vol. 35, no. 3, 1993, p.56.

65. The deficiencies of the constabulary force are well summarised in Alain Rouquié, *The Military and the State in Latin America* (Berkeley, 1987), pp. 120-177.

66. Michael Conniff, 'Panama since 1903', in Leslie Bethell (ed.), *Cambridge History of Latin America*, Vol. VII (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 611-2.

67. The 1972 Constitution provided for elections every six years to an assembly composed of some 500 non-party *corregidores* who would meet once a year to elect the President, Vice-President and Jefe de Gobierno, who could simultaneously command the GN. In September 1972 Torrijos was elected 'Jefe Supremo de Panamá'.

68. Steve Ropp, 'Explaining the Long-Term Maintenance of a military Regime: Panama before the US Invasion', *World Politics*, Vol. 44 (1992), pp. 213, 217.

69. Ropp estimates that some 45,000 poor workers were employed by the public sector by the mid-1970s, when central government borrowing – largely from private banks – was running at 5% of GDP (against a regional average of 2%). *Ibid.*, pp. 219-20. By the late 1970s *narcotráfico* was also exercising an influence, but attention should be paid to the fact that by 1979 the GN-administered Colón Free Trade Zone was handling 7% of Latin America's imports. For more anecdotal references to the political exploitation of Panama's shady economy, see Larry LaRae Pippin, *The Remón Era* (Stanford, 1964) and Frederick Kempe, *Divorcing the Dictator: America's Bungled Affair with Noriega* (London, 1990). Such matters effectively require a suspension of academic protocols for referencing, but if Kempe (pp. 270-2) is right that maintaining the 'populist bureaucracy' at the end of the 1980s cost between \$55 million and \$65 million, this could certainly have been off-set by cocaine revenue.

70. Panama City rather resembles Beirut and Vienna in its importance as a regional intelligence/espionage centre. The coups of October 1968 and December 1969 are sometimes explained in terms of rivalry between the CIA and the US army's 407th intelligence battalion, and both bodies clearly had an interest in retaining Noriega's services during the 1980s. Under Noriega the FDP developed the UESAT anti-terrorist unit, the 'Machos del Monte' and 'Batallón 2000' elite groups.

71. Many human rights organisations claimed a greater number of casualties were caused, the matter acquiring importance within US politics as well as between the USA and Panama. In December 1993 the Inter-American Human Rights Commission and the OAS accepted Panamanian demands for compensation, and although the USA has not ratified the IAHR Accord, it is a member of the OAS, and rejection of its recommendations on this issue would imply a refusal to be bound by the OAS Charter's articles on human rights.

72. *Tico Times*, San José, 6 April 1993.

73. *Central America Report*, 30 April 1993. Panamanian relations with Peru soured considerably at the end of 1991 when Colonels Gonzalo González (CO of the Machos del Monte) and Heraclides Sucre (CO Batallón 2000), held responsible for the murder of fellow officers in the abortive coup attempt of October 1989, 'escaped' from 'house arrest' in Lima, where they were in exile. Peru (under the García government), Mexico, Ecuador and Cuba condemned the 1989 invasion. *Ibid.*, 22 November 1991.

74. *The Military Balance 1991/2* (London, 1992), p. 203. The police was initially planned to be only 4,000-strong.

75. *Central America Report*, 17 May 1991; 31 January 1992; 7 February 1992; Furlong, 'Difficult Transition', pp. 26-7.

76. *Central America Report*, 4 September 1992.

77. Amongst several examples, the case of Máximo Pinzón and Luis Varela, respectively ex-chief of the FDP's intelligence unit and the leading suspect in the Spadafora murder, both subsequently in senior positions (chief of intelligence and chief of the homicide department) in the PTJ. Lt. Colonel Eduardo Herrera, the second of four directors appointed to the PN throughout 1990 and figurehead of the PN December 1990 mutiny, was Endara's favourite target and was jailed on at least two occasions for subversion without any trial or any more public evidence against him than existed against his erstwhile comrades who continued to hold posts.

78. The matter was quite serious, involving 150 officers and 500 US troops. Amongst the police's demands were a wage rise, guaranteed apolitical status, and full compensation for the relatives of those killed in the invasion. *Central America Report*, 14 December 1990.

79. Susanne Jonas, *The Battle for Guatemala: Rebels, Death Squads and US Power* (Boulder and London, 1991), p. 149.

80. For a critical assessment of the Cerezo period see James Painter, *Guatemala: False Hope, False Freedom* (London, 1987).

81. WOLA, *The Administration of Injustice: Military Accountability in Guatemala* (Washington, 1989), p. 2.

82. Ricardo Córdova, *Los Efectos Económicos de la Militarización en la Región Centroamericana (1979-1986)*, Occasional Paper No. 20, March 1987, Latin American and Caribbean Center, Florida International University; *Central America Report*, 15 November 1991. *CAR* gives the figures as 46,000 for the military and 17,500 for the police.

83. US military aid was first suspended in 1977 under Carter and was renewed in 1985 (when Guatemala received \$0.5 million, compared to \$136.3 million for El Salvador and \$67.4 million disbursed to the Honduran military). During the Cerezo administration US military aid increased from \$4.5 million in 1986 to \$9.4 million in 1989, although the figure was reduced to \$3.3 million in 1990. The total defence budget for the Guatemalan military in 1991 was \$91 million. In 1993, US military aid had fallen to \$0.4 million. *Central America Report*, 11 January 1991; James Dunkerley, *The Pacification of Central America*, Institute of Latin American Studies Research Paper No. 34 (London, 1994), p. 171.

84. CIIR Comment, *Guatemala: Transition from Terror* (London, 1993), p. 29.

85. The URNG's demands included: repeal of the 1985 amnesty; establishment of a Truth Commission; abolition of the civil patrols and obligatory military conscription; removal of the *fuero militar* so that military officers could be tried for common crimes in civilian courts.

86. The Mexico Agenda includes: i) human rights; ii) strengthening civilian power and the role of the military in a democratic society; iii) identity and the rights of the indigenous population; iv) constitutional reform and electoral processes; v) socio-economic issues; vi) agrarian situation; vii) resettlement of population displaced by the armed conflict; viii) basis for incorporation of the URNG into national politics; ix) arrangements for a definitive cease-fire; x) time-table for implementation, compliance and verification of the accords; and xi) signature of an Accord for Firm and Lasting Peace and Demobilisation. *Central America Report*, 14 January 1994.

87. A pertinent reminder of the difficulties of investigation was the August 1991 death squad killing of José Mérida Escobar, chief of the police homicide division, who had implicated an army agent in the September 1990 murder of Mack. The Supreme Court recently ruled the case open again, despite the conviction of Sergeant Noel de Jesús Beteta to 30 years for the murder. This

raises the possibility of a civil action against General Edgar Godoy Gaitán, former head of the Presidential Military Staff (EMP), suspected of ordering the killing. *Central America Report*, 18 February 1994.

88. Article 244 of the 1985 Constitution states that the main function of the armed forces is 'the maintenance of independence, sovereignty, national honour, territorial integrity, peace and internal and external security', reserving the task of internal security for the armed forces. *Constitución Política de la República de Guatemala*, Ministerio de Educación (Guatemala, 1991), p. 120.

89. *Central America Report*, 20 March 1992.

90. Richard Wilson, 'Continued Counterinsurgency: Civilian Rule in Guatemala', in Barry Gills, Joel Rocamora and Richard Wilson, *Low Intensity Democracy: Political Power in the New World Order* (London, 1993).

91. In February 1994, Defence Minister General Mario Enríquez – identified as a 'progressive officer' in the *gramajista* tradition – rejected the formation of a Truth Commission, saying it would be a 'revenge commission' which would favour the guerrillas and discredit the armed forces. *Central America Report*, 18 February, 1994.