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MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA

THESIS

**CRIMINAL VIOLENCE AND STATE RESPONSES IN
THE NORTHERN TRIANGLE**

by

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December 2016

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**CRIMINAL VIOLENCE AND STATE RESPONSES IN THE NORTHERN
TRIANGLE**

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ABSTRACT

This thesis analyzes the effect of high levels of criminal violence on military missions and civil–military relations. Specifically, it examines how the criminal violence in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras changed the militaries and subsequently altered the civil–military relations in each country. In order to determine the change, each country is evaluated in terms of military missions immediately after transitioning to a civilian democracy and then again in present day. Similarly, each country is then evaluated for the state of civil–military relations at the end of military authoritarianism, and then again in present day. The results of the research show that the militaries have changed in three distinct ways: 1) the overall missions have shifted from traditional to internal, 2) the equipment used and procured is best suited for internal missions, and 3) the doctrine and training of the militaries supports an internal role. The civil–military relations research shows that there is an imbalance as a result of the criminal violence. The violence minimized the time for civilians to fully establish defense knowledge and civilian-controlled institutions, such as the Ministry of Defense, resulting in a heavily involved and politicized military.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ARENA	National Republic Alliance
CICIG	International Commission against Impunity in Guatemala
DNI	National Intelligence Department
FCN	National Convergence Front
FMLN	Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front
MS	Mara Salvatrucha
PMOP	Military Police of Public Order
TCO	transnational criminal organization
UN	United Nations
URNG	Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unit
WOLA	Washington Office on Latin America

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I. INTRODUCTION

At approximately 7:00 p.m. on Christmas Eve 2004, people were finishing their last-minute Christmas shopping and returning home on a city bus in San Pedro Sula, Honduras, when a truck containing about six men cut-off the bus driver and proceeded to open fire on the 70 passengers.¹ The passengers and the bus were chosen at random by the shooters, who left a note on the bus that claimed the attack was a result of the Honduran government's harsh crackdown on crime and violence.² This is just one example of the rampant crime and violence that takes place daily in the Northern Triangle countries of Central America. The criminal element permeates all social and political institutions in this region, including the military as an institution and its relation to civilian leadership. This leads to two research questions. First, how does the constant presence of criminal violence in a country change its military? Second, what impact do these changes have on the civil-military relations? To answer these questions, I will focus on the countries of El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala, which all exhibit heightened levels of violence and organized crime, post-civil war.

This chapter will highlight the current state of the literature on the two pertinent questions, followed by the main arguments that are addressed in the analysis. Next, this chapter will discuss the methods employed in this research and the logic behind the selection of the cases used. Finally, this chapter will highlight the overall organization of the thesis.

A. LITERATURE REVIEW

The following literature review will address the current research pertaining to the two main research questions. First, I will cover the criminal violence and the role of the military. Specifically, this literature will cover three main arguments about the military's role to internal security: The military will intervene regardless of their mission, the

¹Ginger Thompson, "Gunmen Kill 28 on Bus in Honduras; Street Gangs Blamed," *New York Times*, December 25, 2004, http://www.nytimes.com/2004/12/25/world/americas/gunmen-kill-28-on-bus-in-honduras-street-gangs-blamed.html?_r=0.

²*Ibid.*

military can be used successfully as a police force, and the military should not be employed in an internal security role. Second, I will provide literature on the criminal violence and civil–military relations, and the two main arguments addressed in this research. The first argument is that there exists a lack of incentives for civilians in Latin America to gain control over defense matters, and the second is that civilians must increase defense knowledge and be cognizant of what they do not know.

1. Criminal Violence and the Role of the Military

Criminal Violence and the Role of the Military. To answer the question on the impact of criminal violence on the military, I look at the civil–military relations area of studies that look at militaries with police missions. Despite the popularity using the military to address criminal threats, there are many different viewpoints on the use of the military to combat internal security problems. There are three schools of thought addressing this issue. The first argues that the military will intervene in public security, regardless of their mission, and hence the impact of violence on the military itself is non-existent: the military remains military. In this vein, other factors matter more for shaping military behavior. The second viewpoint is that militaries can be used successfully to counter internal violence and thus become like police with no negative impact. Finally, the last school of thought views the use of the military in internal missions as an inappropriate use of the military, compelling the military to engage in human rights abuses and corruption. Each will be discussed below.

a. The Military Is as the Military Does

The first group acknowledges that the military may intervene in politics or situations of concern to them, regardless of their mission. In this regard, it is important to understand the ideology of the militaries in Latin America. The militaries of the world have proven repeatedly that they will intervene when, and if, they must. Samuel Finer describes the reason for intervention as the militaries three advantages over civilian organizations: “a marked superiority in organization, a highly emotionalized symbolic

status, and a monopoly of arms.”³ With this in mind, it is easier to grasp the mindset of Latin American militaries and their defense of the homeland. According to Brian Loveman, “Defending *la patria* (the nation, or fatherland) against internal and external threats is the historical mission claimed by Latin American armed forces.”⁴ In other words, the militaries in Latin America will do what they must in order to defend everything they love and hold dear. As threats change shape and bring on new meaning in the twenty-first century, the militaries in Latin America will continue to uphold their historical tradition of guarding and protecting.⁵ These groups of authors would likely argue that the constant presence of violence in a region would not change the role of the military at all. According to these viewpoints, the military, historically, has been involved in internal security matters, as it deems necessary.

b. Military as Police Force

The second group of viewpoints believes that the military can be used successfully to counter internal violence. Within these views, the success of use and level of involvement vary. The original theory that many rely on today is the idea that the military can be turned into a constabulary force, capable of dealing with police work. According to Morris Janowitz, “the military establishment becomes a constabulary force when it is continuously prepared to act, committed to the minimum use of force, and seeks viable international relations, rather than victory, because it has incorporated a protective military posture.”⁶ According to this concept, there is no distinction between wartime and peacetime, and therefore, it relates to a policing mentality.⁷ In a related study, Brian Reed and David Segal examined the military’s participation in

³Samuel E. Finer, *The Man on Horseback: The Role of the Military in Politics* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 2002), 6.

⁴Brian Loveman, *For la Patria: Politics and the Armed Forces in Latin America*, (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources Inc., 1999), xi.

⁵*Ibid.*, 279.

⁶Morris Janowitz, *The Professional Soldier: A Social and Political Portrait*, (New York: The Free Press, 1960), 418.

⁷*Ibid.*, 419.

“nontraditional operations” and what effects it might have.⁸ This study determined that the military, for the most part, accepted the nontraditional missions and believed these missions fell into the purview of the military.⁹ Similarly, Derek Lutterbeck argues that the post-Cold War security challenges blur the lines between internal and external threats, and, therefore, require a convergence of police and military responsibilities in the form of gendarmeries or paramilitary forces.¹⁰ The last viewpoint within the realm of using the military to combat internal security threats acknowledges the convergence of the functions of the police and the military. In this idea, the belief is that the use of the military is possible; however, there would be “a substantial alteration in the organizational cultures of both professions, as each profession adjusts to new orientations, new norms, and new values surrounding its core purpose.”¹¹ These groups of viewpoints and authors would agree that, in the presence of constant criminal violence, the military is forced to take on a police-like structure and role. The authors would contend that the military, or a military style force, would be a viable option to counter excessive domestic violence.

c. *The Dark Side of Military in Public Security*

The third group of viewpoints, which are also very important to consider, view the use of the military in internal missions as an inappropriate use of the military. The arguments that support this view the roles of the military and police as too different. One argument states that “democratic policing especially is undermined by military involvement,” and continues to state that militaries “recognized long ago that police duties were antithetical to their war-fighting mission.”¹² Another view expresses the

⁸Brian J. Reed and David R. Segal, “The Impact of Multiple Deployments on Soldiers’ Peacekeeping Attitudes, Morale, and Retention,” *Armed Forces & Society* 27, no. 1 (2000): 57.

⁹*Ibid.*, 74.

¹⁰Derek Lutterbeck, “Between Police and Military: The New Security Agenda and the Rise of Gendarmeries,” *Cooperation and Conflict: Journal of the Nordic International Studies Association* 39, no. 1 (2004): 45-46.

¹¹Donald J. Campbell and Kathleen M. Campbell, “Soldiers as Police Officers/Police Officers as Soldiers: Role Evolution and Revolution in the United States,” *Armed Forces & Society* 36, no. 2 (2010): 346.

¹²David H. Bayley, *Democratizing the Police Abroad: What to Do and How to Do It* (Washington, DC: U.S. Dept. of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, National Institute of Justice, 2001), 38-39.

concern for the constabularization of the military to function as a police. According to Doron Zimmermann, if the police are not equipped or able to handle the security threat, and the military is trained to use maximum force, then a third option—a paramilitary as a separate entity—is the best choice.¹³ According to this argument, changing the military’s role to a policing force will inadvertently change the very structure of the military from its main job of using maximum force to win wars.¹⁴ Lastly, another argument that fits in this realm of thought is that the reliance on the military for internal policing is bad for both the military and the public it is trying to protect.¹⁵ The argument is that “no one should suffer the illusion that military forces could ever execute the laws with the same sensitivity to civil liberties as regular police forces. To do so is at odds with the central imperatives of military service. Moreover, a successful policization of the armed forces may well render it incapable of defeating authentic external military threats.”¹⁶ These authors would argue that the presence of constant criminal violence should not change the function of the military from an external mission oriented, maximum use of force organization to an internal security force. To do so would leave a weakened military and an increase in civil–military tensions.

The three differing viewpoints on the use of the military in internal security matters is a great starting point for further research. The main problem with the current literature is the lack of a relation to criminal violence. The literature focuses a great deal on the actual use or non-use of the military but fails to tie it into a specific reason for use. The research in this thesis will attempt to make the correlation or causal relationship between the constant criminal violence present in a region, and the deployment of military forces for internal security missions.

¹³Doron Zimmermann, “Between Minimum Force and Maximum Violence: Combating Political Violence Movements with Third-Force Options,” *Connections: The Quarterly Journal* 4, no. 1 (2005): 44.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, 54.

¹⁵Charles J. Dunlap, Jr., “The Police-ization of the Military,” *Journal of Political and Military Sociology* 27 (1999): 217.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 227.

2. Criminal Violence and Civil–Military Relations

In answering the questions about the impact of criminal violence on civil–military relations, I naturally look towards the area of work that concentrates on civilian control. Specifically, what is required for civilian control, and what are the arguments about civilian control in the Latin America region? The literature has an array of different definitions for civilian control, but this review will focus in on the foundational ideas of civilian control, and then review two distinct arguments about the success or failure of civilian control in Latin America.

In the book, *The Soldier and the State: The Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations*, Samuel Huntington introduces the idea of “objective civilian control.”¹⁷ This type of control focuses on the professionalization of the military. For Huntington, civilian control “is that distribution of political power between military and civilian groups which is most conducive to the emergence of professional attitudes and behavior among the members of the officer corps.”¹⁸ Another key component to Huntington’s definition of civilian control is the requirement of the civilians to possess enough knowledge to create and advise senior civilians on defense policies.¹⁹ Similarly, Felipe Agüero argues that civilians should be well versed in defense so as to be able to formulate and implement defense policy, and outline defense organization and goals without the explicit assistance or interference of the military.²⁰ J. Samuel Fitch contends that in a civilian controlled relationship the civilians must be able to “define the threats against which the country must be protected and the missions to be assigned to the armed forces,” as well as be able to solve defense budget problems in a situation with limited resources, implying a vast knowledge of national security and defense.²¹

¹⁷Samuel P. Huntington, *The Soldier and the State: The Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1957), 83.

¹⁸*Ibid.*

¹⁹*Ibid.*, 434, 441, 450.

²⁰Felipe Agüero, *Soldiers, Civilians, and Democracy: Post-Franco Spain in Comparative Perspective* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 19-20.

²¹J. Samuel Fitch, *The Armed Forces and Democracy in Latin America* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 37.

a. *Lack of Incentive for Civilians*

The first key argument in the literature about the civil-military relations in Latin America is that the “political leaders have had considerable success at subordinating their militaries to civilian rule, but they have done so without a fundamental knowledge of or interest in defense affairs.”²² The argument that David Pion-Berlin makes is that militaries in Latin American countries do not have a real external threat of war from outside their own borders, and therefore, there is no need or incentive for civilians “to worry about investing the necessary time to understanding defense, strategy, tactics, preparation, budgeting, deployment, doctrine, or training.”²³ Pion-Berlin argues that the militaries in Latin America need political leadership, not defense leadership, which he admits is counter to the widely accepted terms and definitions of civilian control over the military in the literature.²⁴ According to this argument, constant criminal violence would not have a significant effect on the status of civil–military relations, or civilian control of the military, regardless of the role of the military in combating the violence. Due to the lack of knowledge, and the lack of a requirement to increase knowledge on defense, the constant criminal violence would not play a role in the status of civil–military relations.

b. *Defense Knowledge Is a Must*

In response to the argument presented by Pion-Berlin, Thomas Bruneau and Richard Goetze presented another argument, which acknowledges the differences in Latin American civil–military relations compared to the majority of the civil–military relations, but also counters Pion-Berlin’s theory of minimal defense knowledge. Bruneau and Goetze argue that “civilians must know enough to be able to ensure that the armed forces are doing what they are required to do, not only in terms of submitting to civilian control but also in successfully fulfilling the current very wide spectrum of roles and

²²David S. Pion-Berlin, “Political Management of the Military in Latin America,” *Military Review* 85 (January-February 2005): 19.

²³*Ibid.*

²⁴*Ibid.*

missions assigned to security forces in Latin America.”²⁵ This argument acknowledges that civilians will not have as much of an in-depth understanding or expertise on defense or national security, but contends that they must have some amount of understanding, and they must also be cognoscente of what they do not know.²⁶ According to this viewpoint, the presence of constant criminal violence would likely play a significant role on the status of the civil–military relations in a country. Depending on the change in the military’s role, the requirement for an increase in defense knowledge may increase, or shift to a domestic security, paramilitary knowledge. If this shift does occur, in order to maintain the civilian control of the military, the civilians would need to focus on the military’s new roles and functions.

B. ARGUMENT

When considering the first main question in this thesis, how does criminal violence change militaries, the cases studied reveal that in Central America specifically, the military is changed in three distinct ways. First, the overall mission of the military is changed from one of a traditional, external threat force to one that focuses internally. Second, the equipment used and procured by the military begins to shift to a counter-crime focus, resulting in an ill-equipped military in terms of its ability to combat external threats and defend sovereignty from outside aggressors. Lastly, the doctrine and training are modified to be better suited to combat the internal security threat, leaving the traditional and counter-insurgency roles as an afterthought.

The changes that can be seen in the military are counter to the typical viewpoint of a military in a consolidated democracy and highlights the problems that can arise in the presence of criminal violence. The first problem is that the new military roles create a perception that the police forces—the democratic institution that should be combating crime within a country—are unable to do their job. This may very well be the case. The next problem is that it creates a military force that is lacking in its ability to combat

²⁵Thomas C. Bruneau and Richard B. Goetze, “Civilian-Military Relations in Latin America,” *Military Review* 88 (September-October 2006): 67.

²⁶*Ibid.*

external aggressors, depending on the enemy, if the need ever arises. This is due to several factors, such as being ill equipped to fight and having doctrine and training that lends itself to internal police-type missions rather than external military missions.

In addressing the second question, how does the violence affect the civil–military relations, the case studies reveal that due to the rapid appearance of criminal violence following the civil war settlement, civilian elites did not have the time or incentive to increase defense and public security knowledge, and therefore the Ministry of Defense has been handed over to military control, ultimately resulting in an imbalance in civil–military relations where the military has become more politically powerful. Despite having a framework in place immediately after the transitions to civilian power, each country was unable to capitalize on the plans because of the need to fight and try to solve the problem of the extreme violence in the countries.

The imbalanced civil–military relations in each of these countries are a step in the wrong direction for young democracies. At a time when civilian control needs to be the strongest, it appears that the military is once again running itself with more political power than they should have. Since the transition, the progression of control within the military has continued to increase, without any solution to the violence coming to the forefront.

C. METHODS AND CASE SELECTION LOGIC

The research conducted in this thesis will not be the typical theory testing research. Instead, it will focus more on theory building. Specifically, this thesis will be conducting a plausibility probe. According to Alexander George and Andrew Bennett, plausibility probes are “preliminary studies on relatively untested theories and hypotheses to determine whether more intensive and laborious testing is warranted.”²⁷ In other words, will the theories or arguments developed as a result of this research be strong enough to merit further studies? The goal of this research is to provide initial theories strong enough to answer the relatively unanswered question of how criminal violence

²⁷Alexander L. George and Andrew Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2005), 75.

affects militaries and civil–military relations, which can then be expanded upon with further research and case studies.

The independent variable throughout the research for this thesis will be the constant presence of high levels of criminal violence. The violence will be measured in terms of the homicide rate, the presence of *maras*, and the presence of transnational criminal organizations (TCO) such as drug traffickers and cartels. The dependent variables that will be examined are the roles of the military as a result of the criminal violence, and the effect on civil–military relations. The change in the roles of the military will be examined by researching the military’s roles and missions after the initial transition to democracy in each country, and then by researching the current roles and missions the military fulfills. The civil–military relations variable will be studied by researching the structure of the defense ministry in each country to determine if there have been any significant changes from the democratic transition and the present day.

The countries that will be studied are all within the Northern Triangle region of Central America, where there is an increased level of criminal violence from drug traffickers, *maras*, and TCOs. Specifically, the countries that will be studied are El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras. All three of these countries exhibit excessive levels of violence. This violence is associated with high levels of homicide, corruption, and human rights violations. Despite efforts by the local governments, and assistance from outside entities, the violence remains a major concern for the government and citizens that reside in the region. Nicaragua, despite being located adjacent to the Northern Triangle, lacks the criminal violence necessary to be included as a case study. The timeframe that will be evaluated is post-civil war (for El Salvador and Guatemala), and post-transition to democracy (for Honduras) to present day. It is important to evaluate these countries during this timeframe because all three of these countries transitioned from authoritarian regimes to democratic regimes.

D. ORGANIZATION PLAN FOR THE THESIS

This thesis will be organized into three distinct chapters. The second chapter will discuss the foundation of violence in the region and the current violence that the countries are facing. The third chapter will address the question: How does the criminal violence affect the militaries? The fourth chapter will address the question, how does the criminal violence affect the civil–military relations? Within each of these chapters, the cases being utilized will be separated into separate sections, with analysis following. The fifth and final chapter will be a conclusion with a summary of the findings from the research, along with recommendations for the region being studied, as well as recommendations for further research to continue to expand the knowledge gained from this project.

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II. A HISTORY OF VIOLENCE IN THE NORTHERN TRIANGLE

To understand the situation that is taking place in Latin America necessitates a review of the legacy of violence in the region, which has existed since the discovery of Latin America. Many scholars believe this violence is proof that Latin American nations are examples of failed democracies; however, there are also scholars that have a better understanding of the violence and argue that the violence is an important foundation for democracy in the region.²⁸ These authors argue, “Instead of viewing violence as indicative of democratic failure, we can, from a violently plural perspective, understand violence as critical to the foundation of Latin American democracies, the maintenance of democratic states, and the political behavior of democratic citizens.”²⁹ These violent democracies are the legacy of a long and bloody past.

The following will provide a very brief historical explanation for why violence has thrived and continues to thrive in all of Latin America today. Specifically, the Spanish *Reconquista* (reconquest), which occurred prior to the discovery of Latin America, established a mentality of violence in the region as the Spanish began to colonize the region. The nature of the colonialism itself also lends to the violence that can be seen today, as it was extractive in nature and established the authoritarian style of government, which dominated the region for decades to follow. Lastly, the independence era set the grounds for violent battles and opened the door to a power vacuum that ultimately led to the period of *caudillismo*—strongman leadership after the wars of independence—and more violence.

A. SPANISH RECONQUISTA

The Spanish Reconquista of the Iberian Peninsula can arguably be labeled as the single most important event in history that ultimately led to the violence that has plagued Latin America for centuries to follow. This reconquering of the Iberian Peninsula

²⁸Enrique Desmond Arias and Daniel M. Goldstein, eds., *Violent Democracies in Latin America* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2010), 5.

²⁹*Ibid.*

occurred from approximately 711 A.D. until 1492 and was the result of the Spanish Christians violently pushing out the Muslim African Moors who were occupying the territory.³⁰ This period in history was the beginning of the military traditions in Spain and established a warrior-priest mentality that brought together the military machine with religion, conquest, subordination, and ultimately an authoritarian type of government.³¹

As a result of their success in pushing the Moors out of the peninsula, the military was rewarded with land and privileges, and were sometimes given special statuses within society. Ultimately, “this tradition of religious-cultural warfare, rewards for conquest, military privileges, and fusion of military and government authority came with the *conquistadores* (Spanish conqueror) to the new world that Spain called *las Indias*.”³² This imperialist style of dominance and conquering has been named the original sin of Latin America, as the generations to follow in Latin America are still inheriting the violence to this day.³³

From the Spanish Reconquista, the conquistadores brought the institutions and religious intolerance that they learned with them to the new world and applied it to the native population they encountered. The whole experience created a system based on racism, militarism, religion, and land that continued into the different colonies that Spain and Portugal established in the new world. From the discovery of Latin America, the region was doomed to be a haven for extreme violence and intolerance. Had the warrior-priest mentality not existed, Latin America would have been settled and colonized in a very different way.

B. COLONIALISM

With the precedent being set from the Reconquista, the colonization of the new world began in a less than desirable fashion for the natives in the region. The emergence of the colonies in Latin America brought about new themes in the region, such as

³⁰Loveman, *For la Patria*, 1.

³¹*Ibid.*

³²*Ibid.*

³³John Charles Chasteen, *Born in Blood & Fire: A Concise History of Latin America*, 3rd ed. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2011), 11.

pigmentocracy, mercantilism, and even stronger forms of authoritarianism. These themes were present from the time the new world was discovered in 1492 until 1810, as the moves towards independence began to emerge.

One key component of the Spanish and Portuguese colonization of the new world to remember is that a hierarchy was established early on in regards to citizen status based on the color of one's skin, or the birthplace of said individual. This is even more important as the slave trade brought Africans to the region to work in the harsh environments that the Spanish and Portuguese would not. As more people showed up in the region, there was a mixing of cultures and skin colors, known as transculturation. This mixing of people occurred as Native Americans, Africans, and Spanish/Portuguese people lived closely with one another and resulted in "new and distinctive Latin American cultures—not Spanish or Portuguese, not indigenous or African, but fusions of two or more elements, varying from region to region in kaleidoscopic combinations."³⁴

The very nature of the colonies can also be attributed to the violence that the region faces. The colonies were extractive, meaning that all of the resources and products produced by the Latin Americans were sent back to Europe, and then sold to the Latin Americans, leaving the wealth with the Spanish and Portuguese. This system of mercantilism left very little wealth to be made for the locals and kept the classes based on skin color and birthplace in place.

Lastly, colonization established stronger forms of authoritarianism in the region, as the local population was dominated and subjugated by outside rule. According to John Chasteen, "Historians explain colonial control of Latin America as *hegemony*, a kind of domination that implies a measure of consent by those at the bottom."³⁵ In the eyes of the colonizers, as long as the locals remained quiet, they were consenting to rule by an outsider and a class structure that always kept them at the bottom, while Europeans were the leaders of the government.

³⁴Chasteen, *Blood and Fire*, 63.

³⁵*Ibid.*, 57.

C. INDEPENDENCE MOVEMENTS AND POWER VACUUM

The independence movements in Latin America occurred between 1810 and 1820 and varied greatly from location to location in terms of violence and struggles. Overall, the independence movements brought about new themes in the region—weapons, armies, and destruction, while the post-independence period brought about a new period in the area characterized by a power vacuum, which opened the door for caudillismo leadership, civil wars, and a lack of professionalized armies.

The movement towards independence was inspired by the examples of the Haitian, American, and French revolutions. These revolutions gave rise to the idea that Latin America could also have their independence from the colonial rule of Spain and Portugal, and give rise to nationalism and liberalism. Not all of the independence movements were as violent as the others, and some struggled more in the aftermath to piece together a sort of nation by linking together people that had no similarities other than they possessed the same dominant ruler before independence, which led to the difficulties of the independent nations.³⁶ As the dust from the independence movements settled, one thing was clear, “independence did not undo colonialism in Latin American nations. Rather, it made them postcolonial—now self-governing, but still shaped by a colonial heritage.”³⁷

The sudden void in leadership amongst the former colonies of Spain left a vacuum that needed to be filled. This power vacuum, plus the violence and destruction that came with the wars and rebellions during the fights for independence needed to be filled by someone or something. The politics that followed the postcolonial region were failing, and the military strongmen, or *caudillos*, soon took over the role of leadership in the loosely defined nations. These military leaders would control large amounts of territory, especially in the rural areas outside of cities, and offer protection to the people and in turn, form militias. According to Loveman, the caudillos “set important precedents

³⁶Chasteen, *Blood and Fire*, 89.

³⁷*Ibid.*, 108.

for the role of military forces in the region's international wars and internal conflicts during the next chaotic half-century.”³⁸

The periods following the independence timeframe—conservative and liberalism—continued to change the politics of Latin America into the eventual democracies that can be seen today. The precedent of authoritarianism, violence, and militarism in government was set from the very beginning of Latin American history, and can still be seen in the modern day violence that is present today.

D. MODERN-DAY VIOLENCE

Latin America, more specifically Central America, also faces threats today that continue the trend of violence in the region. The current problem with the *maras*, or street gangs, as well as the presence of drug traffickers and other TCOs, has brought about the next wave and level of violence in the region. With the abundance of violence in the region, the Northern Triangle (El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala—Figure 1) is considered to be one of the most dangerous areas in the world.³⁹ As a result of the violence, “government policies seeking to crush or suppress the *maras* are politically popular in most Central American countries.”⁴⁰

³⁸Loveman, *la Patria*, 33.

³⁹Thomas Bruneau, “Introduction,” in *Mara: Gang Violence and Security in Central America*, eds. Thomas Bruneau, Lucía Dammert, and Elizabeth Skinner (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011), 1.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*

Figure 1. Central America and the Northern Triangle⁴¹



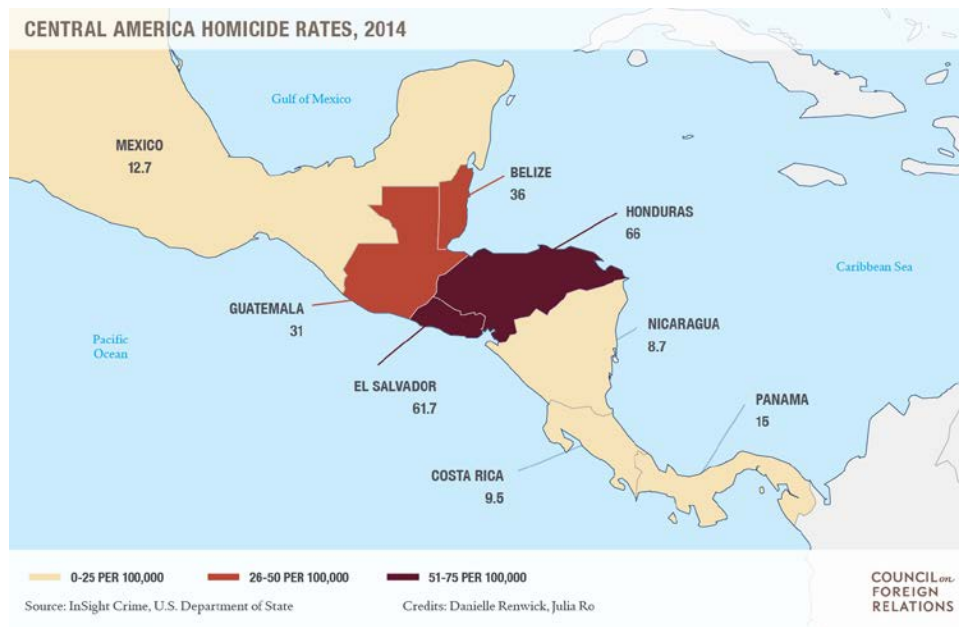
The violence that the region is known for is brought on by many factors. Each of the countries in the Northern Triangle shares common vulnerabilities that must be taken into account when discussing the high levels of violence in the region. According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, the five main vulnerabilities are “geographic vulnerabilities, demographic, social, and economic vulnerabilities, limited criminal justice capacity, a history of conflict and authoritarianism, and displacement and deportation.”⁴² On top of these vulnerabilities, the notorious street gangs, Mara Salvatrucha 13 (MS-13) and the 18th street gang, are the cause of many homicides and violent acts. Homicide rates have remained high in recent years (Figure 2) and remained

⁴¹Source: Randy Krehbiel, “Central American Child Immigrant Surge Has U.S. Drug-Trade Link,” *Tulsa World*, July 28, 2014, http://www.tulsaworld.com/news/government/central-american-child-immigrant-surge-has-u-s-drug-trade/article_ff0a4158-13e3-5ad7-9a91-c59df574aea8.html.

⁴²United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, *Crime and Development in Central America: Caught in the Crossfire*, UN May 2007, 1.

steady in 2015 for Honduras and Guatemala, with a significant rise in El Salvador (Figure 3). To add to this, the drug cartels, especially the Zetas and the Sinaloa cartel, have moved into the region to continue the trafficking of large amounts of cocaine, marijuana, and heroin. Having a better understanding of the violence in each country is vital to understanding how the governments are trying to fight it.

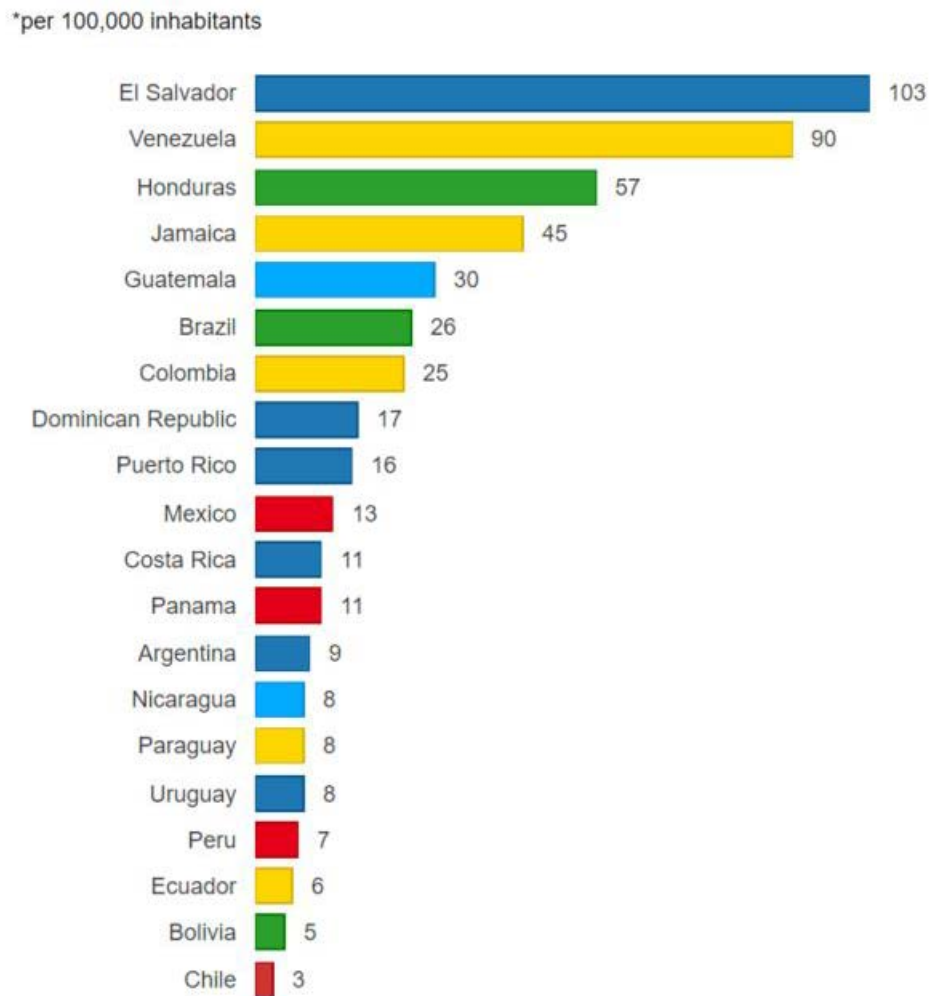
Figure 2. 2014 Homicide Rates in Latin America⁴³



Violence in El Salvador has changed with the times, making the job of preventing it much harder. El Salvador is home to many different street gangs, but the most notorious, MS-13 and 18th street gang, are responsible for most of the violence. Combined with the shipment of massive amounts of illegal drugs and weapons, and human trafficking, the violence continues to grow.

⁴³Source: Danielle Renwick, "Central America's Violent Northern Triangle," *Council on Foreign Relations*, January 19, 2016, <http://www.cfr.org/transnational-crime/central-americas-violent-northern-triangle/p37286>.

Figure 3. 2015 Latin America and Caribbean Homicide Rates⁴⁴



The world-renowned gang, MS-13, grew in El Salvador. The gang began like most other gangs, out of the desire to protect one's neighborhood and to have a safe haven where one could fit in. These problems were the result of the deportation of gang members from the United States back to El Salvador, where they had no ties to anyone. As a result, gangs formed out of desperation. According to Sonja Wolf, the gang problem in El Salvador has become more violent through the years as members have transitioned to more heavy weapons and changed their role in violence, now participating in murder,

⁴⁴Source: David Gagne, "InSight Crime's 2015 Latin America Homicide Round-up," *InSight Crime*, January 14, 2016, <http://www.insightcrime.org/news-analysis/insight-crime-homicide-round-up-2015-latin-america-caribbean>.

extortion, and drug sales.⁴⁵ The changing environment of the gangs, combined with the corruption of the police force, and lack of an effective anti-gang policy has caused a major security threat to the country.⁴⁶

The gangs, particularly MS-13, have also evolved in other ways. As Mexican drug cartels began to operate in the area, MS-13 partnered up in a way to contribute to the drug sales and trafficking in the region.⁴⁷ The primary partner of the MS-13 in El Salvador is the Zetas cartel, along with other local and regional drug traffickers.⁴⁸ This relationship with the Zetas has become a very lucrative source of income for the gang, as they operate with the cartel to traffic humans as well as drugs.⁴⁹ Also evolving are the weapons that are readily available to the gang members. It is not uncommon for gang member in El Salvador to have access to automatic weapons, grenades, rocket launchers, and high explosives.⁵⁰ As a result of the increase in weaponry, and relationship with TCOs, such as the Mexican drug cartels, the homicide rate in El Salvador was the second highest in the region from 2008–2010, at 64.8 murders per 100,000 people, and is the highest in the region as of 2015 at 103 murders per 100,000 people.⁵¹

As a result of the increasing homicide rate, a very controversial gang truce was declared between the leaders of the MS-13 gang and the 18th street gang in El Salvador in 2012. There is much debate as to the role of the Salvadoran government in arranging the truce between the two gangs, but the fact remains that after the truce was declared, and the homicide rate dropped from an average of 14 murders per day to four murders per

⁴⁵Sonja Wolf, “Street Gangs of El Salvador,” in *Maras: Gang Violence and Security in Central America*, eds. Thomas Bruneau, Lucía Dammert, and Elizabeth Skinner (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011), 48.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, 69.

⁴⁷Douglas Farah and Pamela Phillips Lum, “Central American Gangs and Transnational Criminal Organizations: The Changing Relationships in a Time of Turmoil,” February 2013, 9.

⁴⁸*Ibid.*

⁴⁹*Ibid.*, 15.

⁵⁰*Ibid.*, 9.

⁵¹José Miguel Cruz, “Criminal Violence and Democratization in Central America: The Survival of the Violent State,” *Latin American Politics and Society*, Vol. 53:4 2011, 3; Gagne, “2015 Latin America Homicide Round-up.”

day.⁵² In exchange for the truce, the leaders of the two gangs would be moved from their maximum-security prisons to a prison where they would be allowed to have visits, use cell phones, and continue to manage the truce. The reduction in violence was a great step for El Salvador, but unfortunately, it was not as a result of reforms and anti-gang policies from the state, but rather as a result of the gang's decisions. The lower homicide rates did not last long, as they increased by 57% in 2014.⁵³

There is debate as to the relationship between the MS-13 and 18th street gangs with TCOs in El Salvador, but one thing is clear, the gangs in El Salvador have become a more serious threat to security and the problem needs to be addressed. According to Wolf, "Given El Salvador's long history of social repression, this culture of violence clearly developed over many decades, but the country's intense and protracted civil war aggravated it in important ways."⁵⁴ The Salvadoran government must address the problem as a whole with an anti-gang policy.

Not all that dissimilar from El Salvador, Guatemala, has been facing problems of violence since its bloody civil war. Guatemala has a large number of youth gang members, as well as a high presence of the violent Sinaloa and Zeta Mexican drug cartels due to its bordering with Mexico. To add to the problem, Guatemala has been facing an increasing level of vigilantism because of the lack of policy from the corrupt police force.

The youth gang presence in Guatemala that is causing problems today has been around since the 1980s.⁵⁵ These gangs have transformed from that time in order to adapt to the changing environment of Guatemala. These gangs—MS-13 and 18th street gang most predominately—seemed to become more violent in response to an increase in detention from the police force. It can be argued that the gangs actually became stronger, more centralized, and more violent as a result of the crackdown on gang members in

⁵²Farah, "Central American Gangs," 24.

⁵³Clare Ribando Seelke, "El Salvador: Background and U.S. Relations," *Congressional Research Service*, May 19, 2015, summary.

⁵⁴Wolf, "El Salvador," 53.

⁵⁵Elin Cecilie Ranum, "Street Gangs of Guatemala," in *Maras: Gang Violence and Security in Central America*, eds. Thomas Bruneau, Lucía Dammert, and Elizabeth Skinner (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011), 71.

Guatemala.⁵⁶ It would be unfair, however, to blame all of the violence in Guatemala on the youth gangs. As a matter of fact, many of the gang members are considered to be less of a security threat in the region than other factors. Never the less, the gangs of Guatemala are a part of the “rampant lawlessness that warrant considerable alarm.”⁵⁷

Probably of more concern than the youth gangs in the context of extreme violence are the Mexican drug cartels. The cartels seem to operate in the region with impunity. Both the Zeta and Sinaloa cartels are the cause of high levels of crime. According to a study of crime in the region in 2010, “the principal driver of violence in the region was the illegal drug trade, outranking other possible factors such as the prevalence of youth gangs, the availability of firearms, and the legacy of past conflict.”⁵⁸ These cartels are also recruiting skilled gang members of MS-13, providing military style training, and then utilizing them for killings in the region.⁵⁹ To make matters worse, Guatemala suffers from extremely weak institutions, which allow the cartels to operate freely without fear of the justice system.

Weak institutions, especially with security and human rights, are a key underlying factor that has led to an increase in violence in the country.⁶⁰ The police force is corrupt, and often times are controlled by the cartels. The prisons in Guatemala are controlled by the gangs, oftentimes resulting in uprisings, bloody fights between rival gangs, and assaults on prison guards.⁶¹ According to Elin Cecilie Ranum, “Guatemalan authorities have not managed to institutionalize a legal framework for either repression or prevention of violent crime, which shows Guatemala’s institutional weakness.”⁶²

As a result of the high number of youth gangs and cartel activities, and the lack of legal success in investigating and prosecuting violent acts, citizens of Guatemala have

⁵⁶Ranum, “Street Gangs of Guatemala,” 81.

⁵⁷Michael Shifter, “Central America’s Security Predicament,” *Current History*, February 2011, 51.

⁵⁸International Crisis Group, *Guatemala: Drug Trafficking and Violence*, Latin America Report No. 39, October 11, 2011, 7.

⁵⁹Farah, “Central American Gangs,” 10.

⁶⁰Ranum, “Street Gangs of Guatemala,” 76.

⁶¹*Ibid.*, 81.

⁶²*Ibid.*, 80.

begun to turn towards acts of vigilantism.⁶³ The main victims of the vigilante groups are young men involved in gang activity. The idea of “social cleansing” has been born from the many problems and lack of solutions on part of the Guatemalan government. These extrajudicial killings are actually becoming part of the bigger problem of violence. Unfortunately, in the absence of a solution or policy from the state, the citizens feel that taking matters into their own hands is the best solution. The citizens involved in planning and carrying out the killings range from local citizens trying to defend themselves from violence to high-level politicians, such as former congressman and police officers.⁶⁴

Overall, Guatemala’s high level of violence is the result of a history of conflict, weak institutions, youth gangs, cartels, drug trafficking, and vigilantism. As gangs adapt and the drug trade continues, the violence will continue to grow. The government must find a solution to end the violence, and has institutions in place that are taking steps to promote the rule of law and enforce democratic judicial standards, such as the International Commission against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG).⁶⁵

Criminal violence in Honduras is just as prevalent, if not more so than in the other Northern Triangle countries. It is important to note that even though Honduras did not face a bloody civil war like El Salvador and Guatemala, the foundation of violence in the society was still established during the 1980s and 1990s. This violence is based on several key components, such as youth gangs, drug trafficking, cartels, corrupt police forces, extreme poverty, and broken families.

The gang epidemic that El Salvador and Guatemala face did not escape Honduras. Just like its neighbors, Honduras has the same problem with the MS-13 and 18th street gangs. The history of the gang activity in Honduras extends back to the 1980s with localized street gangs in the region.⁶⁶ These smaller, local gangs were no more than a

⁶³Ranum, “Street Gangs of Guatemala,” 84.

⁶⁴Shifter, “Security Predicament,” 51.

⁶⁵“About CICIG,” *International Commission against Impunity in Guatemala*, <http://www.cicig.org/index.php?page=about>.

⁶⁶Joanna Mateo, “Street Gangs of Honduras,” in *Maras: Gang Violence and Security in Central America*, eds. Thomas Bruneau, Lucía Dammert, and Elizabeth Skinner (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011), 88.

nuisance to the local populations and were not considered a security threat by today's standards.⁶⁷ However, as the United States began to increase the number of criminals being deported, the same cycle of violence that the other countries faced occurred in Honduras as well. The deported gang members brought with them a more organized and violent type of gang mentality and soon absorbed the local gangs that were prevalent in Honduras.⁶⁸ As with the other countries in the region, the MS-13 and 18th street gangs became the most popular gangs in the country and are responsible for contract killings, assaults, robberies, extortions, kidnappings, and drug sales.⁶⁹ Despite the relatively peaceful history of Honduras—compared to the civil wars of El Salvador and Guatemala—Honduras has been noted as having the highest number of gang members in the region.⁷⁰ This is a result of the extreme poverty and broken families that many Honduran youths are raised in. One difference that is important to note in Honduras is that the gangs are, for the most part, absent from the drug trafficking business. The gangs are usually not present in the specific regions of Honduras where the drug traffickers and cartels are operating.⁷¹ In addition, the gangs are viewed as “undisciplined and unreliable partners” from the cartels.⁷²

It is argued that the presence of cartels in Honduras is a major contributor to the high levels of violence and crime. Specifically, the Sinaloa cartel has been noted as running their entire Central American operations from Honduras.⁷³ With the lack of gang presence in the regions where the cartels are working, there has been increased violence amongst cartels and TCOs as they attempt to control territory to benefit their operations.⁷⁴ These TCOs and cartels have also been operating with impunity in the

⁶⁷Mateo, “Street Gangs of Honduras,” 88.

⁶⁸*Ibid.*, 95.

⁶⁹*Ibid.*, 88; Peter J. Meyer, “Honduras: Background and U.S. Relations,” *Congressional Research Service*, May 20, 2015, 9.

⁷⁰Mateo, “Street Gangs of Honduras,” 88.

⁷¹Farah, “Central American Gangs,” 29.

⁷²*Ibid.*

⁷³*Ibid.*, 16.

⁷⁴Meyer, “Honduras,” 9.

country due to the weak institutions and high levels of corruption in the military, police, and justice institutions. They have specifically been identified as infiltrating these institutions in Honduras.⁷⁵

Despite lacking a civil war, the legacy of violence in Honduras remains. From local gang problems to TCOs, the levels of violence continue to rise. As seen in the other Northern Triangle countries, the use of hard tactics and policies has only caused an increase in violence and the increased capabilities of the criminals. Gang members are adapting to their environment and are now harder to identify and detain as a result of these policies.⁷⁶ The more recent developments in Honduras to promote gang prevention rather than anti-gang policies is a step in the right direction, but with the state of the economy, lack of sufficient funding and coordination between programs, violence is likely to remain.

⁷⁵Cruz, "Criminal Violence," 24.

⁷⁶Mateo, "Street Gangs of Honduras," 98-99.

III. MILITARY ROLES IN THE PRESENCE OF VIOLENCE

A. INTRODUCTION

On January 8, 2016, the *New York Times* published the story of the recapture of one of Mexico's most notorious drug lords, El Chapo Guzman.⁷⁷ The images released from Mexico depicting El Chapo being escorted in handcuffs by both Mexican Soldiers and Marines, instead of police officers, bring to mind a central question in the study of military and society. As in other parts of the world, several Latin American countries are utilizing their military forces to aid the police in an attempt to gain the upper hand on the violence. How does the constant presence of criminal violence in a country change its military as an institution? How does using the armed forces as police change the military itself? Why do the governments of the Northern Triangle countries choose to utilize their militaries to address the growing levels of violence? Some of the conventional arguments recommend that militaries should not, if at all possible, be used as a police-like force. I argue that using the police as military changes the armed forces in the following ways. First, the armed forces overall training and doctrine shifts from a focus on counter-insurgency and external defense to one of internal security. Second, the armed forces find themselves ill equipped to conduct external-defense missions, as the operational equipment they employ and operate is suited to internal security threats. Third, the overall mission changes the military to a force that is unable to successfully operate in traditional military roles as a result of the changes noted above. The reason for the use of the military is that it is a stronger bureaucratic apparatus in which to accomplish the security needs than the police forces, which were gutted by post-civil-war reforms, and the government is seeking an immediate solution to the violence and views the military as the best answer.

⁷⁷Azam Ahmed, "El Chapo, Escaped Mexican Drug Lord, Is Recaptured in Gun Battle," *New York Times*, January 8, 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/2016/01/09/world/americas/El-Chapo-captured-mexico.html?_r=0.

In order to address the question more fully, and to elaborate on this argument, this chapter unfolds as follows. First, I analyze the cases of El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras. Second, I provide analysis as to how the militaries in the region have changed. Last, I provide analysis on the benefits and detriments of using militaries in a police mission.

B. CASE ANALYSIS OF EL SALVADOR, GUATEMALA, AND HONDURAS

As discussed in Chapter II, Central America has had its share of violence. These states have experienced violence throughout their history from fighting amongst Mayan city-states, the bloodletting of the Spanish conquest, indigenous rebellions, and cold war. These conflicts have imprinted themselves on the institutions of the region. Today, criminal violence is the course de jour. To contend with this violence, the state relies on both the police and their military institutions. How does the presence of criminal violence affect the role and missions of the military? More specifically, what were the missions of the military immediately following transitions to democracy, and what are the follow-on modern-day missions of the military since democratic governments were established? The delta between the two will help answer this question.

1. El Salvador—Military Missions and Role after 1992 Peace Agreement

El Salvador has historically been one of the most violent states in Central America. Prior to the establishment of a democratic regime, El Salvador was plunged into a violent and bloody civil war from 1980 until 1992. On January 16, 1992, the official peace agreement between the government of El Salvador, and the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN) guerrilla group was signed in the Chapultepec Castle in Mexico City.⁷⁸ The 1992 peace agreement became known as the Chapultepec Peace Agreement. With the assistance of the United Nations (UN), the agreement was going to be implemented, ultimately ending the civil war and establishing a democratic regime in El Salvador.

⁷⁸Philip J. Williams and Knut Walter, *Militarization and Demilitarization in El Salvador's Transition to Democracy* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1997), 151.

The most important chapter of the peace agreement was chapter one, which detailed the specific requirements of the military as they transitioned from a political force to a democratic institution under the purview of the civilian control. According to chapter one, the military had 13 specific tasks or requirements that had to be met in order to successfully implement the agreement.⁷⁹ The most important sections of the agreement pertaining to the armed forces for the purposes of this chapter of the research, were doctrinal principles of the armed forces, educational system of the armed forces, reduction, public security forces, and paramilitary bodies. The following will discuss the requirements of each of these sections below in more detail.

The first section of importance—doctrinal principles of the armed forces—established the very basic guidelines for the military forces in El Salvador to follow. It specifically states, “The mission of the armed forces is to defend the sovereignty of the State and the integrity of its territory.”⁸⁰ The section also details the expectations of the armed forces as “obedient, professional, apolitical, and non-deliberative,” in their role as an institution of the state.⁸¹ Of most importance, the doctrinal section differentiates the missions of defense of the nation and security.⁸² Specifically, it identifies that the defense of the nation from external military threats is the responsibility of the military, and security is a broader idea that includes “economic, political and social aspects which go beyond the constitutional sphere of the competence of the armed forces and are the responsibility of other sectors of society and of the State.”⁸³ According to the section, fighting against an internal security threat is outside the realm of the military, unless the other institutions are unable to meet the threat, in which case the use of the military is an

⁷⁹Chapultepec Peace Agreement, 16 January 1992, *United States Institute of Peace*, April 16, 2001, Chapter 1, “Armed Forces,” http://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/file/resources/collections/peace_agreements/pa_es_01161992.pdf.

⁸⁰*Ibid.*

⁸¹*Ibid.*

⁸²*Ibid.*

⁸³*Ibid.*

option as a last resort.⁸⁴ Understanding this section of the agreement is imperative in order to grasp the democratic ideals that El Salvador was trying to move towards.

The next important detail outlined in chapter one of the peace agreement outlines the educational system for the military. According to this section, the military was to be educated in many different areas in order to fulfill the professional role that they were required to be. Specifically, the military was to be trained in “the pre-eminence of human dignity and democratic values, respect for human rights and the subordination of such forces to the constitutional authorities.”⁸⁵ Furthermore, the members of the armed forces were encouraged to participate in the country’s universities in order to further develop themselves as well-rounded and educated individuals.⁸⁶

Another important aspect of the changes the military would face after the peace agreements were implemented was the reduction of the size of the military force. The agreement called for the scaling back of the military in several areas, including individual units, personnel, officer corps, equipment, facilities, and spending.⁸⁷ The agreements make note that the size of the force must be appropriate to the missions and doctrine that was outlined in the first section of chapter one. A significant reduction in personnel was the highlight of the requirements. The force had to be “reduced to approximately thirty-one thousand over a two-year period.”⁸⁸ One thing the agreements made clear was that the size of the force needed to be reduced in order to minimize the chances of the military gaining control again, both militarily and politically.

Further requirements for the military were outlined in the public security forces and paramilitary bodies sections of the peace agreement. According to the public security forces section, the internal security of El Salvador is the responsibility of the National Civil Police, which is a separate entity, controlled by a different civilian authority than

⁸⁴Chapultepec Peace Agreement, Chapter 1, “Armed Forces.”

⁸⁵Ibid.

⁸⁶Ibid.

⁸⁷Ibid.

⁸⁸Williams and Walter, *Militarization and Demilitarization*, 153.

the military.⁸⁹ Furthermore, the National Guard and Treasury Police, which were functioning as security forces within the country, were to be abolished and absorbed into the army, leaving public security entirely to the police.⁹⁰ Under the paramilitary bodies section of the chapter, the agreement states that any civil defense unit must be banned, and any private security force or paramilitary force must be governed by the rule of law and transparent in their activities.⁹¹ The main purpose behind these specific requirements was to ensure that no military group or military-style group was able to slip into the same style of control that led to the civil war and violence in the first place.

2. Recent Military Missions in Democratic El Salvador

Since the establishment of democracy in 1992, El Salvador has had many successes, despite the continuing growth of violence and street gangs. The presidential elections have been fairly executed, with the majority of the competition being between the National Republic Alliance (ARENA) and the FMLN. The economy was still struggling, with a large portion of the GDP coming from remittances from those Salvadorans that fled to the United States during the bloody civil war. The main problem that has continued to plague the country to this day is the high level of violence from the street gangs and drug cartels that operate in El Salvador. In an attempt to mitigate these problems, the presidents of El Salvador have leaned on the military to take to the streets to assist the PNC with securing the state internally, despite the requirements laid out in chapter one of the 1992 peace agreement.

There have been major changes to the military in El Salvador. The first and most noticeable one is the successful reduction in the sheer size of the Salvadoran military. At the peak of the violence in the civil war, the Salvadoran military numbered approximately 63,000 personnel, but was successfully cut to the required number according to the peace agreement, and then continued to cut to approximately 15,000 personnel by 1999.⁹² The

⁸⁹Chapultepec Peace Agreement, Chapter 1, “Armed Forces.”

⁹⁰Ibid.

⁹¹Ibid.

⁹²Jennifer N. Ross, “The Changing Role of the Military in Latin America,” *FOCAL: Canadian Foundation for the Americas*, Policy Paper 04-11, 8.

current number of personnel in the Salvadoran military remains steady, with 14,200 in the army, 1,175 in the navy, and 790 personnel in the air force.⁹³ This movement towards a smaller, and ideally, less politically powerful military is imperative in diminishing the control and resources the military has had available to it in the past.

Despite the diminished size of the military, the missions they have performed are not necessarily in-line with the detailed missions and doctrine spelled out from the peace agreement. As a matter of fact, many of the presidential candidates running for office in El Salvador have run with a *mano dura*, or iron fist, mentality, and have promoted the use of the military to fight against violence in the country. President Francisco Flores Pérez was the first to implement the tough policies against gangs, with President Antonio Saca following in his footsteps.⁹⁴ When President Mauricio Funes took office, he officially implemented the use of the military to combat the violence on the streets of El Salvador, despite initially running for office with an alternate approach than *mano dura*.⁹⁵ The initial plan presented by Funes was going to use 3,000 troops combined with an equal number of police but ended with the use of approximately 6,300 troops from the army.⁹⁶ This precedent opened the door for continued use of the armed forces for internal security threats.

The Salvadoran Army remains at the forefront of the fight against gangs and narcotics, despite the requirements and attempts to transition to an external threat-based force. There are currently four battalions within the army that fight with the police in a national security effort, titled, “Plan de Campaña Nuevo Amanecer,” or Campaign Plan New Dawn, each of which have their own task forces.⁹⁷ The most recent developments include the development of a new rapid reaction force, comprising of 600 troops and 400

⁹³*IHS Jane's*, “El Salvador-Army,” 25 April 2016, <https://janes.ihs.com.libproxy.nps.edu/Janes/Display/1767049>; *IHS Jane's*, “El Salvador-Navy,” 3 November 2015, <https://janes.ihs.com.libproxy.nps.edu/Janes/Display/1322674>; and *IHS Jane's*, “El Salvador-Air Force,” <https://janes.ihs.com.libproxy.nps.edu/Janes/Display/1319028>.

⁹⁴Booth, *Understanding Central America*, 155-56.

⁹⁵*Ibid.*, 158-59.

⁹⁶*IHS Jane's*, “El Salvador-Army.”

⁹⁷*Ibid.*

police officers.⁹⁸ The underdeveloped and under-resourced Salvadoran Navy also plays a role in counter-drug operations as they patrol the country's territorial waters and attempt to mitigate drug smugglers from moving drugs in and out of the country; however, the navy also consists of a naval infantry unit, consisting of approximately 185 personnel, which trains and fights with the army.⁹⁹ The air force is also doing its part in the drug interdiction mission by assisting the navy and army with support from the air.¹⁰⁰

Examples of the military's involvement in internal security can be seen throughout the news. According to Insight Crime, President Salvador Sánchez Cerén announced in May 2015 that the country would be sending three battalions, with approximately 200 troops in each, to ramp up the fight against the gangs and violence in the country, totaling approximately 7,000 troops deployed within the borders of the country to assist police officers in the fight against violence.¹⁰¹ In other news releases, the new 1,000 man strong team of police officers and military troops made headlines as the president announced that the team will find and capture the top 100 gang leaders who are currently hiding in the countryside since the gang crackdown in the cities has left them with nowhere to hide.¹⁰²

3. Guatemala—Military Missions and Role after 1996 Peace Accord

Guatemala, like El Salvador, was faced with an extremely violent and bloody civil war, which lasted for 36 years, and ultimately, ended up taking over 200,000 lives. The transition away from a military authoritarian regime and toward a democracy was initiated when President Álvaro Arzú began a series of agreements between the government and the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unit (URNG) that ultimately

⁹⁸*IHS Jane's*, "El Salvador-Army."

⁹⁹*IHS Jane's*, "El Salvador-Navy."

¹⁰⁰*IHS Jane's*, "El Salvador-Air Force."

¹⁰¹Loren Riesenfeld, "El Salvador to Deploy Special Forces to Combat Gangs," *InsightCrime*, May 8, 2015, <http://www.insightcrime.org/news-briefs/el-salvador-to-deploy-special-forces-to-combat-gangs>.

¹⁰²Gabriela Gorbea, "El Salvador is Creating a Special Military Unit to Hunt Gang Members," *Vice News*, April 22, 2016, <https://news.vice.com/article/el-salvador-is-creating-a-special-military-unit-to-hunt-gang-members>.

ended with the signing of the Final Peace Accord on December 29, 1996.¹⁰³ The agreement of the most importance to this research specifically—the Agreement on the Strengthening of Civilian Power and on the Role of the Armed Forces in a Democratic Society—was signed on September 19, 1996, which resulted in a limit on the military’s authority within the borders of the country, and specified the role, doctrine, size, deployment, and training of the Guatemalan armed forces.¹⁰⁴

The agreement detailed all of the different branches of the government and provided the requirements for the armed forces within the required branches. The first important piece within the agreement that pertains to the military, states that the army is only responsible for the “protection against external armed threats,” and the “protection against threats to the public order and internal security” are the priority of the police.¹⁰⁵ However, the document also states that the military’s involvement in other mission areas is only to be of a cooperative nature, as they are solely responsible for defending the sovereignty and territory of Guatemala.¹⁰⁶ Along the same line as in El Salvador, the agreement defines the military as a “permanent institution in the service of the nation,” which is “unique and indivisible, essentially professional, apolitical, loyal and non-deliberative.”¹⁰⁷

Further detail on the new missions and role of the military is specified in the agreement under the military doctrine, size and resources, and educational system sections. According to these sections, the military’s new doctrine is based on the constitution, with strict adherence to human rights, and a strong enforcement of the borders, sovereignty, and independence of Guatemala.¹⁰⁸ When it comes to the size of the armed forces, the agreement has two locations that discuss the new requirements for

¹⁰³Booth, *Understanding Central America*, 185-86.

¹⁰⁴*Ibid.*, 185; Peace Agreements: Guatemala, “Agreement on the Strengthening of Civilian Power and on the Role of the Armed Forces in a Democratic Society,” 19 September 1996, *United States Institute of Peace*, 20 November 1998, http://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/file/resources/collections/peace_agreements/guat_960919.pdf.

¹⁰⁵Peace Agreements: Guatemala, “Strengthening of Civilian Power.”

¹⁰⁶*Ibid.*

¹⁰⁷*Ibid.*

¹⁰⁸*Ibid.*

the country. The first location merely states that the size of the military will only be as big as needed in order to successfully complete the mission—defending the borders and sovereignty of the country; however, the second location within the agreement provides further detail, stating that the military should be reorganized in 1997 in order for them to meet the tasks of “national defence, border patrol and protection of sea, land and air jurisdiction,” and should be reduced by 33 percent in total size.¹⁰⁹ One unit that is specifically called out in the agreement as being required to disband is the mobile military police, based on the newfound peace that Guatemala was expecting to be in.¹¹⁰

Similar to El Salvador, Guatemala detailed the training and education requirements for the armed forces in their peace agreement. The education system is supposed to be based on the rule of law, with a foundation of democracy, and especially focusing in on human rights and Guatemalan history.¹¹¹ The training received by the armed forces was directed to highlight the position of the armed forces in the eyes of the public, and “to guarantee the dignity of those involved.”¹¹² The agreements made it very clear that the military was no longer going to be receiving training to use the maximum force necessary, but rather to have a use of force escalation scale that would allow them to resolve any conflicts at the lowest level, and always with the people and their rights in mind.

The last major takeaway from the peace agreements in terms of the military is the president’s ability to use the military. According to the agreement, “when the ordinary means for the maintenance of public order and domestic peace are exhausted, the President of the Republic may exceptionally use the armed forces for this purpose. The deployment of the armed forces shall always be temporary, shall be conducted under civilian authority and shall not involve any limitation on the exercise of the constitutional rights of citizens.”¹¹³ Guatemala specifically gave the president permission to use the

¹⁰⁹Peace Agreements: Guatemala, “Strengthening of Civilian Power.”

¹¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹¹Ibid.

¹¹²Ibid.

¹¹³Ibid.

military in an internal security role, so long as the president followed strict protocol and guidelines. This allows more flexibility within the government to combat any violent threat or opposition to the state that becomes too powerful for other democratic institutions—such as the police—to effectively negate the threat.

4. Recent Military Missions in Democratic Guatemala

The democratic periods of Guatemalan politics, from 1996 to present, has continued to face many problems with inequality, human rights violations, corruption, and high levels of violence. There were many setbacks throughout the democratic regimes that tested the will of the Guatemalans. The trend of violence from local street gangs, drug cartels, and organized crime continued to be the biggest problem for the democratic regime. As a result, in 2004, President Óscar Berger ordered the military onto the streets to fight the violence with the police force.¹¹⁴ Homicide rates continued to rise, as did the problems with the government. More recently, the violence has declined slightly, but the problems within Guatemala still remain. The more recent 2007 and 2011 elections resulted in killings of numerous politicians and activists, proving that the high crime rate is still linked to the same problems that were seen in the civil war.¹¹⁵ As Guatemala moves forward, the economic inequalities, human rights violations, and violence will continue to be on the forefront of the minds of the politicians, military, police, and citizens of the country.

As mentioned above, the president in Guatemala has the ability to deploy military personnel within the borders of the country in order to combat the violent threat that runs the country. It was not long before this practice began, and seemed to become a permanent use of the military. In 2004, Berger, in response to high levels of crime and violence, ordered approximately 1,600 military personnel to the streets to assist the police force with stopping the murders and violence.¹¹⁶ From this point forward, the military has become an expected part of everyday security within Guatemala.

¹¹⁴Booth, *Understanding Central America*, 189.

¹¹⁵*Ibid.*, 191-93.

¹¹⁶*Ibid.*, 189.

One aspect of the military side of the peace agreements that Guatemala was successful in transitioning after the regime shift was the reduction in size of the military. Like El Salvador, Guatemala made a dramatic change in the size of the military force, shrinking down to the current size of 19,200 in the army, 576 in the navy, and 990 in the air force.¹¹⁷ These numbers are far less than the number of armed forces during the bloody, 36-year long civil war that politicized and strengthened the military.

The overall mission of the armed forces has not been a conventional military mission, but rather a non-traditional mission that includes internal security, despite the requirements listed in the military peace agreement. The army's role in fighting crime and violence was steady from the 1996 peace agreements until 2010, when President Otto Pérez Molina decided to strengthen the army's presence in the streets as well as increase their funding, leading to new brigade-sized units being created.¹¹⁸ The Guatemalan Navy, which serves the purpose of a coast guard unit due to its minimal size and lack of resources, focuses its patrols to counter narcotics and attempts to keep the border secure from Belize along the inland rivers that separate the two countries.¹¹⁹ In the latter role, the navy is functioning in more of a traditional role by protecting the sovereignty and borders of Guatemala. The air force also seems to be functioning more in-line with traditional military missions by protecting Guatemalan air space and assisting with natural disasters, as well as assisting with other law enforcement agencies when needed.¹²⁰

As in El Salvador, it is easy to find current examples of the Guatemalan armed forces participating in non-traditional missions in the news. According to David Gagne, the United Nations have shown their disagreement with Guatemala's choice to deploy its military in the country for internal security missions, stating that that use of the military has not helped minimize the violence, but instead has possibly been a contributing factor

¹¹⁷*IHS Jane's*, "Guatemala-Army," 25 April 2016, <https://janes.ihs.com/Janes/Display/1319232>; *IHS Jane's*, "Guatemala-Navy," 3 November 2015, <https://janes.ihs.com/Janes/Display/1322689>; and *IHS Jane's*, "Guatemala-Air Force," 29 February 2016, <https://janes.ihs.com/Janes/Display/1319040>.

¹¹⁸*IHS Jane's*, "Guatemala-Army."

¹¹⁹*IHS Jane's*, "Guatemala-Navy."

¹²⁰*IHS Jane's*, "Guatemala-Air Force."

to the rise in the homicide rate in the country.¹²¹ Other news criticizes President Jimmy Morales for his announcement that the military would continue to assist the police force with internal security after he already stated that he would begin to remove the military presence from the joint police/military efforts during the second half of 2016.¹²² Despite the requirements laid out in the agreement, it appears as though the Guatemalan armed forces are going to continue to function in a police-like role until further notice.

5. Honduras—Military Missions and Roles after Transition to Democracy

Honduras, unlike El Salvador and Guatemala, transitioned to democracy on their own free will, not because of a bloody civil war that led to a peace agreement. The initial transition took place when General Paz—the leader of the military authoritarian regime—decided it was best for the military to relinquish power to the civilians instead of taking the chance to have a civil war or revolution that would likely hurt the military.¹²³ One can argue that without a civil war taking place, the military was able to maintain power behind the scenes—and without civilian control—despite having democratically elected presidents in charge of the government. It was not until 1996 that the military really felt the effects of democracy with a cut in the budget, a reduction in the size of the force, and a transfer of power to civilian control, which is why some argue that Honduras was not a civilian democracy until 1996.¹²⁴ Despite these facts, Honduras did transfer control from the military to the civilians and based the government off of a newly founded constitution, which was signed in 1982. Within the new constitution, the armed forces had specific requirements, though they were not as stringent as they were in El Salvador and Guatemala.

Within the Honduran Constitution, there is a specific chapter dedicated solely to the armed forces: Chapter X. This chapter contains several articles from article 272 to

¹²¹David Gagne, “UN Chastises Guatemala on Militarization of Security,” *InSight Crime*, 26 March 2015, <http://www.insightcrime.org/news-briefs/un-chastises-guatemala-on-militarization-of-security>.

¹²²Michael Lohmuller, “Guatemala Extends Use of Military in Policing Role,” *InSight Crime*, 6 July 2016, <http://www.insightcrime.org/news-briefs/guatemala-extends-use-of-military-in-policing-role>.

¹²³Booth, *Understanding Central America*, 218.

¹²⁴*Ibid.*, 220.

article 293, each providing different nuanced information about the requirements of the armed forces. According to the first article, the Honduran armed forces “are a National Institution of permanent and essentially professional, apolitical, obedient and non-deliberative character.”¹²⁵ The military is specifically tasked with the defense of the borders and sovereignty of Honduras, as well as maintaining peace and good order, and enforcing the rule of law.¹²⁶ A major difference between the peace agreements of El Salvador and Guatemala and the constitution of Honduras is that Honduras does not provide as much detail in the mission areas or separation of internal and external security. For example, the only specific tasks of the armed forces detailed in the constitution are to “cooperate with the Executive Power in the tasks of literacy training, education, agriculture, conservation of national resources, highways, communications, health, agrarian reform and in emergency situations.”¹²⁷ Furthermore, the constitution specifically detailed that the armed forces of Honduras would operate under the direct supervision of the “Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces,” who would be controlled directly by the Honduran president.¹²⁸

Several articles later in the constitution made it clear that the entire country would be organized and divided into different military regions for “reasons of national security.”¹²⁹ The Commander-in-Chief of the military also allowed for each region to be divided further into districts in order to delineate the areas of responsibility for each unit. This mentality is quite different than what was seen in El Salvador and Guatemala, which were trying to limit the use of the military within the boundaries of the country for any reason. This is all due, in part, to the way in which civilians took control of the country. The military was still able to remain powerful and active within the country because there was not a civil war that led to the minimization of power that the armed forces had.

¹²⁵Constitution of the Republic of Honduras, 1982 (as Amended to 1991), <http://www.parliament.am/library/sahmanadrutyunner/Honduras.pdf>, Article 272.

¹²⁶Ibid.

¹²⁷Ibid., Article 274.

¹²⁸Ibid., Article 277.

¹²⁹Ibid., Article 284.

Other key differences that highlight the continued strength and political power of the military in Honduras after the initial transition to democracy are outlined in Articles 288 and 289, which discuss the commission and training of the armed forces. Specifically, Article 288 states that personnel who desire a commission into the armed forces will be formerly educated at designated military training facilities, which will train them on the requirements that the military needs at the time.¹³⁰ Next, Article 289 identifies the College of National Defense as the premier institution for military education, “responsible for the training of select military and civilian personnel so that they may participate jointly in the national strategic planning in the political, economic, social and military fields.”¹³¹ This article alone highlights the fact that the military is still strategically placing itself in the position to affect the political outcome of the country, despite being a democracy led by civilian rule.

6. Recent Military Missions in Democratic Honduras

The majority of the problems that Honduras has faced have been in recent years after the military transferred power to the civilians. The division amongst the people in the country grew, but transitions between leaders after elections were very smooth, giving hope that Honduras was on its way to a full-fledged democracy. The crime rate from both gangs and organized crime became a major issue facing politicians in Honduras during the recent period of civilian rule. Homicide rates were high, and the government opted to utilize the military to assist the highly corrupt police forces in combating the violence.¹³² To make matters worse, in 2009, a coup removed President Manuel Zelaya from office in an attempt to allow democratic leadership to continue.¹³³ As the legal battle and conflict between political parties and the military continued, crime organizations—gangs, organized crime, and drug traffickers—utilized the distraction to infiltrate the country

¹³⁰Constitution of the Republic of Honduras, 1982 (as Amended to 1991), Article 288.

¹³¹*Ibid.*, Article 289.

¹³²Booth, *Understanding Central America*, 222.

¹³³*Ibid.*, 225.

even more.¹³⁴ Honduras is in a politically dangerous position at this time, with major problems of corruption and violence.

With the use of the military as a policing force becoming the norm in Honduras, as with El Salvador and Guatemala, the government has been making the necessary changes to the constitution. The changes began in November 2011, when the government declared a state of emergency in order to grant the military policing powers, and was followed up in 2013 when the Honduran Congress approved a bill allowing the creation of a new unit consisting of elite military personnel with the capacity to operate in a policing mission in order to combat the organized crime that the country was facing.¹³⁵ Also, in 2012, President Porfirio Lobo Sosa of Honduras, envisioning the fight against crime as a long-term confrontation, made a proposition to amend the constitution in order to give the military the power to perform internal policing missions indefinitely.¹³⁶

Despite the political power the military retained after the initial transition to democracy, the armed forces in Honduras are considerably smaller now than they were prior to civilian rule, as the many changes to the constitution have occurred. Currently, the Honduran Army is at a rather low strength of 7,200 personnel, consisting of five brigades, five independent battalions, one armored cavalry regiment, and two special-forces battalions.¹³⁷ The navy currently has 1,400 personnel with 500 reserve personnel, and the air force strength is slightly larger with 2,250 personnel.¹³⁸ Even though the original changes to the constitution did not regulate the required size of the military, the Honduran armed forces have seen many ups and downs in their strength and equipment.

The current missions of the army, navy, and air force are also in-line with El Salvador and Guatemala, with the government re-purposing the forces to combat the growing internal violence in the country. The army is still in existence with the primary

¹³⁴Booth, *Understanding Central America*, 224.

¹³⁵“Honduras,” *InSight Crime*, 21 June 2016, <http://www.insightcrime.org/honduras-organized-crime-news/honduras>.

¹³⁶*Ibid.*

¹³⁷*IHS Jane’s*, “Honduras-Army,” 16 September 2016, <https://janes.ihs.com/Janes/Display/1319235>.

¹³⁸*IHS Jane’s*, “Honduras-Navy,” 21 September 2016, <https://janes.ihs.com/Janes/Display/1322694>; *IHS Jane’s*, “Honduras-Air Force,” 20 September 2016, <https://janes.ihs.com/Janes/Display/1319045>.

purpose of external defense, but as with the other Northern Triangle countries, the external threat is minimal, if it is in existence all, so the army has been used in the policing role, especially in the anti-gang/organized crime and counter-drug areas.¹³⁹ The navy, not really serving in the “blue-water” mission area serves primarily as a coast guard, but is relatively inefficient due to a lack of equipment and technology.¹⁴⁰ The air force used to be the premier military branch in Honduras, however, the function of the air force has diminished and it serves to assist the other branches as well as conduct counter-drug operations.¹⁴¹

Examples of the armed forces operating within the borders of Honduras as a policing force can be seen in the media sources just the same as El Salvador and Guatemala. One of the publicized events that took place in recent years was the creation of a new elite military police unit known as the Tigers. Combining 200 total personnel from both the military and the police, the “Troop of Intelligence and Special Security Response Teams (Tigers, for its initials in Spanish),” was the first major development in the countries use of the military to fight organized crime.¹⁴² The next major event in Honduras was the creation of the Military Police of Public Order (PMOP). The PMOP was created out of 900 military personnel to work in a wide range of missions “from recovering city spaces that have been taken over by street gangs to combating organized crime and making arrests.”¹⁴³ More recent developments with the PMOP came as President Juan Orlando Hernández requested a popular referendum in order to include the unit in the constitution, despite the Congress voting against the inclusion of the unit.¹⁴⁴

¹³⁹*IHS Jane’s*, “Honduras-Army.”

¹⁴⁰*IHS Jane’s*, “Honduras-Navy.”

¹⁴¹*IHS Jane’s*, “Honduras-Air Force.”

¹⁴²Hannah Stone, “Honduras to Set Up ‘Tigers’ Military Police Unit,” *InSight Crime*, 31 August 2012, <http://www.insightcrime.org/news-briefs/honduras-to-set-up-tigers-military-police-unit>.

¹⁴³Marguerite Cawley, “Honduras Gives Greens Light to Military Police,” *InSight Crime*, 23 August 2013, <http://www.insightcrime.org/news-briefs/honduras-gives-green-light-to-military-police>.

¹⁴⁴Arron Daugherty, “Honduras President Sidesteps Congress on Military Police,” *InSight Crime*, 27 January 2015, <http://www.insightcrime.org/news-briefs/honduras-president-sidesteps-congress-on-military-police>.

The referendum will be voted on in November 2017 during the upcoming election cycle.¹⁴⁵

C. ANALYSIS PART I: HOW DOES POLICE WORK CHANGE THE MILITARY?

The changes that occurred in each country from the initial transition to democratic governance to the current times mark a significant change in the direction and mindset of the militaries. The original plan in the Northern Triangle countries was to remove the military from the political sphere and minimize their power within the state by strictly defining the militaries' role to protection of the borders and sovereignty of each country. This view of the military—as a strictly democratic institution—quickly began to shift, however, as the crime wave in each country grew to a level that was unable to be mitigated with a police force alone. As a result, the presence of crime and violence changed the military in the primary equipment they use, the training and doctrine they focus on, and as demonstrated above, the overall missions and focus of the militaries.

Evaluating the current equipment inventory for each country's military reveals a major change in the missions and mindset of the militaries—from one of external defense to internal security. In El Salvador, the Army's primary equipment consists of armored patrol vehicles, with the three newest purchases (in 2009, 2011, and 2013) consisting of Humvees and armored vehicles that offer protection for the soldiers conducting raids and other internal operations in a city environment.¹⁴⁶ According to Santiago Wills Pedraza, "Army Troops are using M1151 Enhanced Armament Carriers, upgraded versions of the HMMWVS (Humvees), M1165 Control MRC Radio Trucks, modified pick-up trucks and locally made armored vehicles like the VCTA1 and VCTA2 to provide cover and support during urban operations."¹⁴⁷ Similarly, the Salvadoran Air Force and Navy is more equipped for internal security, as the Air Force's planes consist of A-37

¹⁴⁵Daugherty, "President Sidesteps."

¹⁴⁶*IHS Jane's*, "El Salvador-Army."

¹⁴⁷Santiago Wills Pedraza, "El Salvador's Army Deploys Armored Vehicles in Fight Against Violent Gangs," *Diálogo Digital Military Magazine*, 24 July 2015, <https://dialogo-americas.com/en/articles/el-salvadors-army-deploys-armored-vehicles-fight-against-violent-gangs>.

Dragonfly's for interception and several other platforms only used for transport or surveillance and reconnaissance, and the Navy's ships consisting solely of patrol craft for inshore, coastal, and riverine operations.¹⁴⁸

Guatemalan and Honduran militaries are no different with the primary focus of their equipment being suited to combat the internal security threat. In Guatemala, the Army's only major purchase since the peace agreements came in 2013 when they bought 53 Jeep CJ8s to provide a light armored vehicle for patrols within the country.¹⁴⁹ The Guatemalan Air Force and Navy are also better equipped to fight internally with the majority of the Air Force serving the transport and utility purpose and the Navy serving the coast guard purpose with patrol craft and interceptor craft operating in the littorals.¹⁵⁰ Almost identically, the Honduran Army, Air Force, and Navy are ill-equipped to actually face any severe external threat. The Army is lacking in armored vehicles and is focusing on the need to have patrol vehicles and command and control components to be better suited to fight the organized crime in the country.¹⁵¹ The Air Force and Navy are in the same position with intercept aircraft, logistics and utility planes, and intercept watercraft, and coastal and riverine patrol craft in the Navy, with no ability to operate in the blue-water arena.¹⁵²

Also, as noted in the aforementioned cases, the overall mission of the militaries has changed as a result of the high levels of crime and violence in the countries. This change in missions, coupled with the reduced size of the militaries has had a direct impact on the training and doctrine. The doctrine in El Salvador, which was initially focused on a counter-insurgency role during the civil war has been adjusted as necessary to include the new role of combating the countries rampant drug trafficking and gang problem.¹⁵³ The same changes from traditional military operations and counter-

¹⁴⁸*IHS Jane's*, "El Salvador-Air Force;" *IHS Jane's*, "El Salvador-Navy."

¹⁴⁹ *IHS Jane's*, "Guatemala-Army."

¹⁵⁰ *IHS Jane's*, "Guatemala-Air Force;" *IHS Jane's*, "Guatemala-Navy."

¹⁵¹ *IHS Jane's*, "Honduras-Army."

¹⁵² *IHS Jane's*, "Honduras-Air Force;" *IHS Jane's*, "Honduras-Navy."

¹⁵³ *IHS Jane's*, "El Salvador-Armed Forces," 2 November 2015, <https://janes.ihs.com/Janes/Display/1302184>.

insurgency roles in the Guatemalan armed forces and Honduran armed forces to counter-crime roles have required adaptations and changes in the military's doctrine. In Guatemala, realization that an external threat is minimal added with the military's internal security role has changed the doctrine to focus more on the actual threat than on the ideal military missions of external defense.¹⁵⁴ Honduras was attempting to return to a normal military mission mindset until 2011, when they were once again being utilized internally to fight the counter-narcotic mission, ultimately changing their doctrine to focus internally, as the primary threat to the nation's sovereignty is the wide range of violence within the borders.¹⁵⁵

D. ANALYSIS PART II: WHY DO GOVERNMENTS USE MILITARIES AS POLICE?

In the context of the violence, as described in Chapter II, why do the governments of the Northern Triangle countries choose to utilize their militaries to address the growing levels of violence? There are many different opinions and answers to this question, but the primary reasons that will be addressed all have to do with the government's and citizen's desire to end the violence now, the weak institutions that exist in Central America, the lack of resources, and the lack of alternate options. All of these reasons justify the use in the eyes of the governments.

As El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras transitioned from military authoritarianism to a democratic regime, the desire was to minimize the use of the militaries since they were the main source of repression and violence. In order to better understand why the use of the military and military force is considered an option, one must first identify the threat to security, the nation, and the people of the countries. As David Pion-Berlin discusses in his book, *Military Missions in Democratic Latin America*, the threats that these countries are facing with the above-described groups—TCOs, drug traffickers, cartels, and street gangs—are considered to be mid-level threats that do at

¹⁵⁴IHS Jane's, "Guatemala-Armed Forces," 27 January 2016, <https://janes.ihs.com/Janes/Display/1302218>.

¹⁵⁵IHS Jane's, "Honduras-Armed Forces," 21 September 2016, <https://janes.ihs.com/Janes/Display/1302252>.

times threaten national security and always threaten public security.¹⁵⁶ As such, it is not unexpected that a military response is a reasonable solution, especially when considering that these threats can possibly match the military in capabilities, numbers, and weapons.¹⁵⁷ In other words, one must fight crime with a reasonable and appropriate level of force. It is also important to note the institutional differences between the police and military forces. Police forces are not trained to fight in a coordinated effort with other police officers, and would, therefore, be at a disadvantage when fighting the larger and more organized drug cartels, no matter how many police officers were present.¹⁵⁸ The police forces also differ from the military in regards to their capacity to use high levels of force. Typical police officers would carry pistols as well as an array of non-lethal or less-than-lethal weapons such as pepper spray and batons.¹⁵⁹ The military, on the other hand, is trained to fight with coordination and command and control with a larger amount of the needed firepower than the police have.¹⁶⁰ Police officers transit from one location to another in their patrol cars, which have limited capability in combating violence, whereas military units have many more options such as armored personnel carriers and tanks.¹⁶¹ The military forces are trained from early in their careers to follow orders and to use any means necessary to complete the assigned mission, and police are trained to “respond as individuals to citizens in distress.”¹⁶² For all of these reasons, it is evident why the military is a better option to fight the criminal organizations that are rampant in the region.

The weak democratic institutions also play a major role in the reason for why the military is being used for internal security. As mentioned time and again above, the institutions in all three of the Northern Triangle countries are weak and suffer from

¹⁵⁶David Pion-Berlin, *Military Missions in Democratic Latin America* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan Press, 2016), 77.

¹⁵⁷*Ibid.*, 79.

¹⁵⁸*Ibid.*, 80-81.

¹⁵⁹*Ibid.*, 81.

¹⁶⁰*Ibid.*

¹⁶¹*Ibid.*

¹⁶²*Ibid.*

corruption and an inability to satisfactorily complete the job. The police suffer from the inability to do their job, a lack of proper training, and high levels of corruption.¹⁶³ The criminal justice systems also add to the problem with ineffective investigations, lack of convictions, prison overpopulation, lack of reform for inmates, and corruption. As a result of these problems, the military is relied upon to serve as a “stop gap” and a quick fix for the violence in the region.¹⁶⁴

Another important aspect to consider is the desire of the people. An overwhelming majority of the people in each of the countries of the Northern Triangle would like to see the military being used as an internal police force. Studies in El Salvador show that as many as 83 percent of the people who were asked do favor having the military on the street to serve as an additional police force, with similar numbers appearing in Guatemala and Honduras.¹⁶⁵ In fact, the people have been noted as pressuring their political leaders to enforce tough anti-gang policies and use military force to even the playing field.¹⁶⁶ With the corrupt police forces and weak judicial institutions that plague the region, people are viewing the military as the only viable option to mitigate the crime epidemic.¹⁶⁷ It is quite a surprise to see the masses in support of the military given the violent history of repression and brutalities that ensued prior to the democratization of the states. The support of the military by the people, therefore, should be viewed as a sign of a last resort.

Another aspect that could be viewed as a reason for the use of military personnel in internal policing and security is the lack of alternate resources. It would be an understatement to say that the police in each of the three countries are overwhelmed with

¹⁶³Washington Office on Latin America, “Using Militaries as Police in Latin America: A Discussion on Citizen Security and the Way Forward,” WOLA, September 8, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9Cs4-HHmzYg>.

¹⁶⁴Washington Office on Latin America, “Militaries as Police,” WOLA, podcast audio, August 23, 2013, http://www.wola.org/publications/militaries_as_police.

¹⁶⁵Washington Office on Latin America, “Violent Responses to Crime in Central America,” WOLA, May 20, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iXsJrnjBhTY>.

¹⁶⁶Pion-Berlin, *Military Missions*, 82.

¹⁶⁷Ross, “Changing Role,” 9.

the task of fighting the violence in their countries.¹⁶⁸ Not only are they overwhelmed by the seemingly impossible task of countering the violence, but they are also lacking the resources in terms of weapons, personnel, tactics, and will to fight. As a result, the military is viewed as a good option that has all of the necessary resources to counter the gangs and drug cartels. Another aspect of the police is that they simply are not ready. According to Sarah Kinoshian during her podcast with the Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA), the reforms that are taking place within the police forces take time, and the government does not have the time to sit and wait for the reforms to be effective before they counter the violence.¹⁶⁹ The government must act now if they want to lower the homicide rate and minimize the impact that the criminals are having on their countries; therefore, they tend to rely on the military to engage immediately. Another interesting aspect to consider is that the militaries in these countries do not really have any other missions that take precedence. The country's militaries are not conducting missions against external enemies or fighting other countries for control of territory; therefore, the military is a viable resource that can be utilized to assist the police forces.¹⁷⁰ For these reasons, some might view not using the militaries as a failure on the part of the governments.

The decision to use the military for internal security can also be viewed as a practice from habit. Prior to the democratization of the states, the military authoritarian regimes used their military strength to repress the people whenever they protested or rioted for their rights. The military would fight back against the guerrilla insurgencies and “granted themselves authority to engage in widespread intervention.”¹⁷¹ It should come as no surprise that, despite attempts to minimize military roles post-military regime, the government's natural response when faced with high levels of violence and insurgent-like behavior from crime organizations is to employ the military. According to José Miguel

¹⁶⁸Washington Office on Latin America, “Using Militaries as Police in Latin America.”

¹⁶⁹Washington Office on Latin America, “Militaries as Police.”

¹⁷⁰Ross, “Changing Role,” 2, 9.

¹⁷¹Pion-Berlin, *Military Missions*, 73.

Cruz during his talk with WOLA, this structural response from the government stems from over twenty years of containing threats with the use of force.¹⁷²

1. Military as Police: Benefit or Detriment?

Despite all of the many reasons in which El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras turn to their militaries as a solution to the violence they are facing, the end result may or may not be the best in the long term. There seem to be many supporters of the new role of the militaries, as seen by the high number of citizens that want the military on the streets.¹⁷³ However, on the other end of the spectrum, there are many critics that disagree with the use of the military. The following paragraphs will present both sides of the story in a fair manner.

a. Benefits

There are many benefits that can come from the use of the military as a police force in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras. Some of these benefits have already been touched on in previous paragraphs, but the following will cover each more specifically and offer some further benefits that have yet to be covered. All of the benefits are important to consider when determining whether the use of military force is worth the risks that are also associated with it.

The first benefit to consider is the military's capability to more evenly address the level of violence that is present in the region. As Pion-Berlin alludes to in his book, there are many differences in the capabilities of the police force and the military force, and given the level of crime and violence in the entire Latin American region, it is crucial to use the military.¹⁷⁴ Given their capabilities, training, and armament, the military forces more evenly match the capabilities of the major crime organizations in the region and therefore increase the chances of success in thwarting the high levels of violence.

¹⁷²Washington Office on Latin America, "Violent Responses."

¹⁷³Ibid.

¹⁷⁴Pion-Berlin, *Military Missions*, 80-82.

Without this benefit, there really may not even be a reason to send the police force alone because they would be outgunned and outnumbered.

Another benefit that can be derived from the use of the military is that it answers the call from the citizens. This is an important aspect to consider, especially given the newer democratic regimes that are in place. The fact that the citizens are requesting the political leaders to use the military on the streets and it is actually happening is a win for democracy. This benefit satisfies the request of the people and also puts efforts in place to solve the problem at hand, which is a two-fold benefit, depending on which side of the coin one falls on.

Connected to the benefit of satisfying the citizens, the use of the military can also help to minimize the creation of vigilante groups. As Cruz brings up in his talk with WOLA, the forming of civilian vigilante groups is a problem that is sometimes even promoted by the government themselves.¹⁷⁵ Employing the military and satisfying the desires of the citizens can possibly reduce the citizen's need or desire to take matters into their own hands. Vigilante groups only add to the violence, and the region does not need any more violence than it already has.

Using the military for policing matters can also lead to greater support in an international context. As military forces focus their efforts on specific targets and have successful missions, there may be a significant drop in homicide rates, as seen in Honduras' more focused approach on taking down known criminal networks.¹⁷⁶ These success stories are viewed from outsiders in terms of the decline or increase in the number of homicides in the country. When the military is successful, the results are beneficial.

The military can also serve to give citizens a greater sense of security in their everyday lives. Given the amount and level of violence that the everyday citizen in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras can be exposed to, it is important for the political leaders to do anything they can to ensure the people are taken care of and feel safe.

¹⁷⁵Washington Office on Latin America, "Violent Responses."

¹⁷⁶Ibid.

Placing the military on the streets to be a presence and conduct patrols could provide citizens with a greater sense of security and safety.

The last benefit to be discussed is the possible reaction the police force will have as a result of the military being used for internal security and policing. It is no secret that the resources—financial backing, personnel, training, pay, etc.—are limited in the region, and with such a strain on the resources, there is a possibility that the police will view the military as a barrier to those resources. This could lead to healthy competition between the two institutions for resources, which could ultimately lead to a better police and military. It could encourage the police to push through with reforms and to better serve the public.

b. *Detriments*

Just as there are many benefits that can come from the use of the military as a police, there are also many negative side effects that can be detrimental to society and the health of democracy. The following paragraphs will discuss a handful of these detriments in an attempt to provide a clear case for the opposition to the use of the military. These negative effects are vital for political leaders to discuss as they look to the future of policing in their countries.

The first, and most discussed, detriment that can be taken away from the use of the military is the potential for an increase in human rights abuses. Human rights abuses run rampant through the entire Central America region and have always been an area of concern. The military's job during the civil wars in El Salvador and Guatemala and prior to transitioning to a civilian-led government in Honduras was to repress the people and end the guerrilla insurgencies that were fighting against the authoritarian regime for the security of the state. In conducting their mission, "they repeatedly sacrificed individual rights and freedoms on behalf of the national security state."¹⁷⁷ Many view the use of the military, and the potential human rights abuses that are associated with it, as unnecessary because the situation does not improve in the long-term.¹⁷⁸ As Pion-Berlin states it, to

¹⁷⁷Pion-Berlin, *Military Missions*, 73.

¹⁷⁸Washington Office on Latin America, "Using Militaries as Police in Latin America."

use the military “would be to invite harm to citizens, whether intentional or unintentional.”¹⁷⁹

The military as police can also be viewed as a step in the wrong direction towards peaceful democratic control. As the civil wars ended and the transition to democracy began, the militaries in each country were supposed to lose political power and control, and reform to both minimize force size and reshape the leaders and missions. Removing the military from power was the first, and arguably the most important, step towards democracy.¹⁸⁰ To give the military the power to interact with citizens and take control of policing efforts is a step in the wrong direction.

Another impact of using the military is the line from military to police or police to military force is blurred and confused.¹⁸¹ As Pion-Berlin describes in his book, the job of a police officer and the job of a military officer are two very distinct jobs, with very specific training and tools that are used to carry out the specific missions they are assigned.¹⁸² Blurring these lines can result in the militarization of the police force, which is typically met with resistance as evident by the U.S. reaction to the police force used to control the riots in Ferguson, MO.¹⁸³

Another problematic result of the new role of the military is the potential for continuing, or increased, extrajudicial killings of criminals or people perceived to be criminals. This goes hand-in-hand with the human rights abuses but is of a nature so violent that it deserves its own attention separately than other human rights abuses. Military and police have been operating with impunity in the region and extrajudicial killings are the byproduct of that impunity. Given the training and operational style of military tactics, and the lack of fear of repercussions, the military may be a big contributor to the problem.

¹⁷⁹Pion-Berlin, *Military Missions*, 73.

¹⁸⁰Washington Office on Latin America, “Militaries as Police.”

¹⁸¹*Ibid.*

¹⁸²Pion-Berlin, *Military Missions*, 80-82.

¹⁸³*Ibid.*, 81.

Accepting the military as the only solution to the violence also means that the country is accepting the failure of its institutions. It is best said by Jennifer N. Ross: “Bypassing civilian institutions and using the military in civic tasks sends exactly the wrong message—an acceptance of the ineffectiveness or even the failure of civilian institutions.”¹⁸⁴ It is known that the weak institutions in Central America are part of the reason why the crime and violence are so high today, but using the military instead of pushing ahead on police reforms and cracking down on the corruption and lack of capability that the police have been facing is setting the wrong precedent for the future. If democracy is going to continue and thrive, the civilian institutions must overcome their difficulties and push ahead. Giving the military the responsibility is only demonstrating that the military should have more power and more political control—possibly reverting back to the days of the military authoritarian regimes.

Previously mentioned as a benefit, the competition between military and police for limited resources can also turn into the demotivation for the police to continue their reforms and fight for resources. If the police perceive that they are no longer needed, there is a chance that they will relinquish all responsibility to the military and cease to function at all. The police must continue to function and reform their policies and ways of accomplishing the mission in order to not only fight the violence but maintain peace and trust with the citizens after the violence has ended.

Clearly, based on the delta between the initial missions and plans for the use of the armed forces and the most recent examples of the actual missions the armed forces are conducting, the presence of criminal violence has led to the implementation of the use of the military to conduct internal policing-style missions. This is, however, only one part of the equation. The following chapter will provide more insight as to the nature of the civil–military relations. The current state of civil–military relations is important to determine whether or not the use of the military internally is a detriment to democracy or not, as well as the status of the police force as an institution designed to be the primary force for internal security.

¹⁸⁴Ross, “Changing Role,” 9.

E. CONCLUSION

The Northern Triangle states' history of violence has left a negative legacy that continues to be filled today. This violence has left its mark on every institution within the states and continues to be one of the biggest problems within the region. In an attempt to counter the internal security threat that the high level of violence has become, the states are relying on the power and experience of their militaries to combat the high levels of crime and violence. How does the presence of criminal violence affect the role and missions of the military? Overall, the military is changed in three distinct ways. First and foremost, the missions and mindsets shift from one of traditional, counter-insurgency missions to one of internal, policing missions. As a result, the militaries change the primary equipment they use and procure in order to better complete their new tasks. Furthermore, the training and doctrine shifts as the focus shift from external missions to defend sovereignty to the new internal counter-crime missions. The use of the military is justified in the region, however, as it is the best institution available to assist the police force.

IV. CIVIL–MILITARY RELATIONS IN THE PRESENCE OF VIOLENCE

A. INTRODUCTION

On June 28, 2009, the first military ousting of a democratically elected Latin American leader in over thirty years took place in Honduras. President Manuel Zelaya was forced from power by the military after having threatened their use to skew elections in his country.¹⁸⁵ The significance of this event is that it highlights that instability in civil–military relations can still persist in Central American states, despite the consolidation of democracy. The precarious nature of civil–military relations is compounded by the increasing internal role that the militaries have begun to take in public security. This begs the question, with the Northern Triangle countries using their military forces to aid the police in an attempt to gain the upper hand on the violence, what has happened with the civil–military relations? What will the future of civil–military relations in the region look like? Will the high level of violence in the region, coupled with the military function play a role in the top civilian leaders changing their viewpoint of defense knowledge? Will this situation give civilians the incentive to become more knowledgeable? The first primary argument contends that Latin American civilian leaders do not have a reason to be knowledgeable in defense due to the lack of an external threat, and the second argues that civilian leaders must have defense knowledge, and must also be aware of what they do not know in order to maintain the control over the military. I argue that the criminal threat present in each country has undermined the civilian-controlled institutions and impulse of civilians to become knowledgeable about defense-related issues. The result is a civil–military imbalance, where the predominant anti-crime strategy is the military preferred *mano dura* policies. Should civilians gain expertise in public security and defense policy, alternative strategies could possibly come to the fore.

¹⁸⁵Elisabeth Malkin, “Honduran President Is Ousted in Coup,” *New York Times*, June 28, 2009, http://www.nytimes.com/2009/06/29/world/americas/29honduras.html?_r=0.

In order to address the question more fully, and to elaborate on this argument, this chapter unfolds as follows. First, I analyze the cases of El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras. Last, I offer analysis as a whole for the region based on the situations discovered in the cases of each country in the Northern Triangle. Specifically, this chapter will evaluate the civil–military relationship in each country at the start of the democratic era and then again during the current day to determine the change in civil–military relations. The difference or evolution of the civil–military relationship in each country will then help to answer the question: How does the presence of criminal violence affect the civil–military relationship in each country?

B. CASE ANALYSIS OF EL SALVADOR, GUATEMALA, AND HONDURAS

As discussed in Chapter III, Central America has turned toward its police and military institutions to combat the high levels of violence they are facing. How does the employment of the military within the borders affect the status of civil–military relations in each country? The following case studies will look into each country in more detail, identifying the plans for increasing civilian control as civilian democracy took shape, and then studying the actual situation that is present in the Northern Triangle. The disparity between the two timeframes will help answer this question.

1. El Salvador—Established Civil–Military Relations after Peace Agreement

Similar to Chapter III, El Salvador was very careful when detailing the requirements for civilian control over the military and described the plan in detail in the 1992 peace agreements. However, the peace agreements did not have a separate, full chapter dedicated to detailing the transition from military control over the political apparatus to civilian control. Instead, the agreements contained a single section, within chapter one, that defined the requirement for civilian control. According to this section, “the President of the Republic, in exercise of the power of discretion conferred on him by the Constitution, may appoint civilians to head the Ministry of Defence. In any case, appointees must be persons fully committed to observing the peace agreements.”¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁶Chapultepec Peace Agreement, Chapter 1, “Armed Forces.”

Another important aspect of civil–military relations to take into account is the demobilization of the FMLN, while simultaneously creating the FMLN political party. Within the agreements, chapter six details that the former FMLN guerrilla fighters, after disarming and agreeing to the requirements set forth within the entire peace agreement, will have the full rights to participate in the civil and political functions of the country.¹⁸⁷ Furthermore, with the appropriate legislation, the FMLN would become a full political party, and be able to practice as such to include, “Freedom to canvass for new members; the right to set up an appropriate infrastructure (premises, printing works, etc.); free exercise of the right of assembly and mobilization for FMLN leaders, activists and members; freedom for FMLN to purchase and use advertising space in the mass media.”¹⁸⁸

Another area that was placed under the direction of civilian control is the intelligence services for the country. Specifically, the peace agreement stated that “the National Intelligence Department shall be abolished and State intelligence services shall be entrusted to a new entity to be called the State Intelligence Agency, which shall be subordinated to civilian authority and come under the direct authority of the President of the Republic.”¹⁸⁹ The peace agreements emphasized the democratic use of intelligence services, with the oversight of the legislative branch and the constitution.

In addition to the above components of the peace agreements, it is important to note that the requirements of the military set forth in chapter one of the agreement, outlined in the previous chapter, are all imperative to the civil–military relations within El Salvador. Specifically, the requirements to reduce the size of the military, require specific education, and define the military as an institution through constitutional reforms are key components to the transition to civilian control. Without these components, the military

¹⁸⁷Chapultepec Peace Agreement, 16 January 1992, *United States Institute of Peace*, April 16, 2001, Chapter 6, “Political Participation by FMLN,” http://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/file/resources/collections/peace_agreements/pa_es_01161992_ch6.pdf.

¹⁸⁸*Ibid.*,

¹⁸⁹Chapultepec Peace Agreement, Chapter 1, “Armed Forces.”

would stand the chance to remain a major political influence in the country, despite the requirement for the Minister of Defense to be a civilian.

2. Evolution of Civil–Military Relations to Modern-Day El Salvador

Despite the requirements set forth in the peace agreements to aid El Salvador in a transition to civilian control, the country has struggled in following its own plan to have a civilian as the Minister of Defense. This problem started at the writing and language of the peace agreements. As noted above, the peace agreements state that the president “may” appoint civilians to head the Ministry of Defense or anyone that is committed to abiding by the requirements within the peace agreements. This opened the door from the start for the military to remain in control of the military by running the Ministry of Defense. According to the deputy chief of staff at the time, General Mauricio Vargas, the civilians did not possess the required knowledge and political background to successfully run the ministry.¹⁹⁰

When it comes to intelligence, the Salvadoran military is once again still heavily involved with intelligence gathering with a focus on internal security. Even after the peace agreement was implemented, the military intelligence apparatus kept operating, and arguably grew stronger after absorbing some of the former members that worked under the previous agency, the National Intelligence Department (DNI).¹⁹¹ While it is widely understood that a military has the need to gather and disseminate intelligence for external threats, the opposite—gathering intelligence internal to the country—can be viewed as a breakdown in democratic principles. With the high levels of criminal violence within the borders of the country, there exists a need to gather this type of intelligence, however, the intelligence apparatus for internal gathering should not be left to the military, but rather a civilian counterpart.

Currently, the minister of defense in El Salvador is General David Munguia Payés. The selection of General Payés came under President Mauricio Funes in 2011, when he was selected for the position of Minister of Security and Justice, which was

¹⁹⁰Williams and Walter, *Militarization and Demilitarization*, 169.

¹⁹¹*Ibid.*, 166.

heavily criticized and ultimately ruled on in May 2013 by the Constitutional Chamber of the Supreme Court and deemed to be unconstitutional.¹⁹² After the ruling, General Payés was selected for the position of the Minister of Defense as of June 1, 2014.¹⁹³ Even though there have been problems with selecting a civilian to head the Ministry of Defense, El Salvador has made many changes and has come a long way since the initial transition to democracy. El Salvador appears to be on the right track for now, with great strides being made in increasing the power civilians have, but still has a long way to go in order to completely transition the military to civilian control.

3. Guatemala—Plans for Strengthening Civilian Authority after 1996

Guatemala established a framework in the 1996 peace agreements that would ultimately strengthen the civilian control over the military. Similar to the peace agreement in El Salvador, Guatemala detailed the necessary changes in 1996 with the hope that it would allow for a strong civilian leadership and an apolitical military. As such, Guatemala recognized that in order to shift the balance in civil–military relations they needed to strengthen and reestablish the civil institutions.

Within the “Agreement on the Strengthening of Civilian Power and on the Role of the Armed Forces in a Democratic Society,” the Guatemalan government specifies changes that must be made to the constitution and society in order to accomplish their goal. The main areas of importance to highlight are the state and its system of government (Section I), the legislative branch (Section II), the executive branch (Section IV), and operational considerations resulting from the end of the armed conflict (Section VII).¹⁹⁴

Each of the sections plays an important role in the bigger picture of civilian control. Individually, they would not be successful in changing the relationship, but as a whole, they provided an excellent framework for Guatemala to carry forward as

¹⁹²Booth, *Understanding Central America*, 159.

¹⁹³IHS Jane’s, “El Salvador-Internal Affairs,” 7 October 2016, <https://janes.ihs.com/Janes/Display/1302181>.

¹⁹⁴Peace Agreements: Guatemala, “Strengthening of Civilian Power.”

democracy took root. In Section I, the agreement acknowledges the democratic nature in which the government will take shape moving forward, and notes that “Public authority, in the service of the common good, must be exercised by all the institutions of the State in such a way that no person, social sector, military force or political movement can usurp its exercise.”¹⁹⁵ In Section II, the agreement highlights changes for the legislative branch. Specifically, the legislative branch must be a representation of the people, must function in the interest of the people, must be transparent with matters that concern the nation, and must discharge the duties towards the other branches of government in order to be strengthened.¹⁹⁶

Section IV of the agreement—the executive branch—contains six subsections, all of which contain crucial requirements for the strengthening of civilian control. Within the first subsection (the security agenda), the agreement identifies the needs to create an advisory council on security in order to “help the executive branch to implement [the] concept of integral security.”¹⁹⁷ The council would encompass a broad representation of the people of Guatemala, selected by the president, and would serve to present recommendations and solutions to the president based on the major threats the country is faced with.¹⁹⁸ Another component of the executive branch portion of the agreement to consider is the constitutional reform, which dictates that the president is in charge of the military, and that orders shall be issued “through the Minister of Defence, whether he is a civilian or a member of the military.”¹⁹⁹ Lastly, the executive branch section lays out the specifics for the intelligence gathering components within the country. Specifically, it identifies the role of the Intelligence Department of the Office of the Chief of Staff for National Defense as being limited to the military, and announced the creation of the Civilian Intelligence and Information Analysis Department, which would operate under

¹⁹⁵Peace Agreements: Guatemala, “Strengthening of Civilian Power.”

¹⁹⁶*Ibid.*

¹⁹⁷*Ibid.*

¹⁹⁸*Ibid.*

¹⁹⁹*Ibid.*

the Ministry of the Interior and would serve to gather the intelligence needed to fight the internal security threat of crime.²⁰⁰

The last important area to highlight from the agreement in terms of strengthening civilian control comes from Section VII—Operational considerations resulting from the end of the armed conflict. As discussed in the previous chapter, this section details the requirements for the reduction of both the size and budget of the country's military forces, as well as the new requirements for the training of the military.²⁰¹ All of which are vital requirements to minimize the political power that the military had during the civil war period from 1960–1996.

4. Current Civil–Military Relations Status in Guatemala

Despite having a good framework laid out initially for increasing civilian control, problems with weak institutions and military-political strength have continued to be the norm from 1996 until present time. The story of increasing civilian control and implementing the agreements within the peace accords seems to be a story of missed opportunities and disagreements, resulting in a country that cannot move forward with democratic institutions and practices.

The problem with increasing the civilian control and power within the country started with implementing the 1996 agreements. In order to make the necessary constitutional changes and reforms, the Guatemalan constitution requires that congress has to have a two-thirds majority vote to approve the changes, followed by a majority vote involving all citizens.²⁰² As the changes to the legislation were brought before congress, it took approximately two years for the vote to be reached to make the changes, but was followed-up with a dismal turnout on behalf of the citizens to vote the changes

²⁰⁰Peace Agreements: Guatemala, “Strengthening of Civilian Power.”

²⁰¹Ibid.

²⁰²Guatemalan Constitution, Articles 280 and 173,
http://www.right2info.org/resources/publications/laws-1/guatemala_constitution_eng.

in, with only 19 percent of the eligible voters in the country making it to the polls.²⁰³ In the end, the constitutional referendums were defeated due to low support and political will of the people. As such, the open-ended possibility from the peace agreements of having a civilian Minister of Defense faded as well because the Guatemalan Constitution requires the Minister of Defense to be a “general officer or colonel or his equivalent in the Navy.”²⁰⁴

Looking back to the situation ten years after the peace agreement was established, Guatemala appeared to constantly be close to change, but not quite making it. Not only does the constitution require the Minister of Defense to be an active-duty officer, but the position started to gain “more power than the chief of the general staff of the armed forces.”²⁰⁵ The Ministry of Defense did make steps toward change by having a handful of civilians on the staff that had experience in the necessary areas of concern, such as defense policy; however, there is an annual change of personnel for each committee, which does not allow the knowledge to grow.²⁰⁶ Another area that was failing at the ten-year point was the civilian intelligence role and oversight from the different branches of government toward the intelligence-gathering apparatus in the country.

At the 15-year anniversary since the 1996 peace agreements, there was still minimal change, if any, towards the strengthening of the civilian control in the country. The high levels of criminal violence present in the country were causing the democratic institutions designed to swing the control in the favor of the civilians to be useless. Even more so because the military power was either still prevalent, or was embedded in the same criminal organizations that were undermining the civilian institutions, resulting in a perpetually weak state that seems legitimate to the people, but will never be able to overcome the violence and corruption.²⁰⁷ Also troubling for the future of the civil–

²⁰³Rebecca Tran, “Guatemala’s Crippled Peace Process: A Look Back on the 1996 Peace Accords,” *Council on Hemispheric Affairs*, May 10, 2011, <http://www.coha.org/guatemalas-crippled-peace-process-a-look-back-on-the-1996-peace-accords/#comments>.

²⁰⁴Guatemalan Constitution, Article 246.

²⁰⁵Bruneau and Goetze, “Civilian-Military Relations in Latin America,” 72.

²⁰⁶*Ibid.*

²⁰⁷Tran, “Guatemala’s Crippled Peace Process.”

military relations is the current state of affairs with President Jimmy Morales and the suspected involvement of his party—the National Convergence Front (FCN-Nation)—with retired military officers that have been accused of human rights abuses.²⁰⁸ The situation advanced even further as 18 of the former military members with ties to the president were arrested on charges of human rights abuses during the 36-year long civil war, further weakening the civilian control in the country.²⁰⁹

5. Honduras—Civilian Control Based on the 1982 Constitution

As previously noted, unlike El Salvador and Guatemala, Honduras did not experience a civil war that led to the transition of power from military authoritarianism to civilian controlled democracy. Instead, the military initiated the transition in order to avoid a bloody civil war, and ultimately retain as much power as possible. This military initiated transition resulted in a still very powerful military retaining control and delaying the full transition to democracy for many years. Without the peace agreement that occurred in the other Northern Triangle countries, Honduras relied on a new constitution to make the necessary changes in their society. The result was an initial constitution that did not allow for the increase in civilian control.

Per the constitution of 1982, Honduras did not create articles specifying that civilians would take control over the armed forces, but rather provided the military with more control and autonomy. According to article 277, the military was placed under control of the Commander-in-Chief, who was directed by the president.²¹⁰ The constitution also specified that the Commander-in-Chief “must be a General or Superior Officer with the rank of Colonel of the Army or its equivalent, on active service, a Honduran by birth, and shall be elected by the National Congress from a list of three

²⁰⁸Orlando J. Perez, “Guatemala’s Uncertain Future after the Elections,” *Latin America Goes Global*, October 28, 2015, <http://latinamericagoesglobal.org/2015/10/guatemalas-uncertain-future-after-the-elections/>.

²⁰⁹Jeff Abbott, “New Year, New Administration, and New Trials Against Former Guatemalan Military Officials,” *NACLA*, January 26, 2016, <https://nacla.org/news/2016/01/26/new-year-new-administration-and-new-trials-against-former-guatemalan-military>.

²¹⁰Honduran Constitution of 1982 (amended to 1991), Article 277.

proposed by the Superior Council of the Armed Forces.”²¹¹ Some changes began to take shape after the election of President Carlos Reina in 1993, as military power was decreased at the hands of the president and congress, resulting in the actual transition to civilian democracy in 1996.²¹²

6. Increasing Civilian Control in Honduras after 1999

Civilian control took a turn for the positive during, and after the Reina presidency. His successor, President Carlos Flores, was elected in 1998 and made even more changes to turn the table in favor of civilian control. After the Hurricane Mitch tragedy struck Honduras, leaving 11,000 people dead, the military was activated to assist with the disaster relief effort. Instead of proving their ability and power, the military was unable to perform as they should have, ultimately undermining their position of authority and control in the eyes of Hondurans, and gave Flores the chance to make constitutional amendments, subjecting them to direct civilian control from the president.²¹³ Furthermore, in 1999, Flores fired the Honduran military’s commander and several other high-ranking officers in power, putting an end to the military’s intervention in the political sphere in Honduras for ten years.²¹⁴ Within Flores’ amendments of 1999, the important changes took place in articles 277 through 280. Decree 245 of 1998 amended these articles and decree number two of 1999 ratified the amendments to remove the military Commander-in-Chief position within the military and replace the position of responsibility to the President of the Republic as the Commanding General of the military.²¹⁵ The Secretary of State in the Office National Defense was established and detailed to be a civilian, who was selected by the president, with an active duty Chief of Staff.²¹⁶

²¹¹Honduran Constitution of 1982 (amended to 1991), Article 279.

²¹²Booth, *Understanding Central America*, 220.

²¹³Booth, *Understanding Central America*, 221.

²¹⁴*Ibid.*

²¹⁵Honduran Constitution with Amendments through Decree 36, 2005, <http://www.honduras.com/honduras-constitution/>, Article 277-280.

²¹⁶*Ibid.*

7. Honduras—Steps in the Wrong Direction

After ten years of civilian control and movement towards a better balance of civil-military relations, Honduras had a major backslide on June 28, 2009. As noted above, the Honduran military was involved in a coup d'état, ousting President Manuel Zelaya from office and extraditing him to Costa Rica. In the aftermath, the civilian control over the military vanished as the de facto government took control in the absence of a civilian president.

The crisis began when President Manuel Zelaya attempted to hold a referendum to determine if the people of Honduras wanted to add a ballot item for a constituent assembly for the upcoming elections that were to be held in November of that year.²¹⁷ Despite the legislative and judicial branches—plus other political institutions—ruling the referendum unconstitutional, Zelaya continued to push forward, ultimately bringing the military back into the political realm, by ordering the military, as the Commanding General per the constitution, to participate in enforcing the referendum.²¹⁸ The resulting de facto government enforced strict curfews, suppressed protests, and violated the rights of Hondurans until the November election took place, resulting in President Porfirio Lobo winning the election.²¹⁹

Since the 2009 coup, Honduras' actions can best be characterized as militarization. Amid the chaos of the coup and the confusion that followed it, criminal organizations and street gangs took advantage of the situation and ultimately left the government with no choice but to turn to the military, as discussed in Chapter III. Honduras is currently in an unbalanced state of civilian control, with heavy reliance on the military and the police to enforce political requirements on the country as a result of the war on crime.

²¹⁷J. Mark Ruhl, "Trouble in Central America: Honduras Unravels," *Journal of Democracy* 21, no. 2 (2010): 100, <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.0.0170>.

²¹⁸*Ibid.*, 100-101.

²¹⁹Booth, *Understanding Central America*, 225-226.

C. ANALYSIS

The status of civil–military relations in all three countries is best described as unbalanced, with more power falling to the military than the civilians. The cases studied above show the difference between the plan at the initial transition to democracy to increase civilian control and the actual outcome of the transition that can be seen today. The question remains, how does the presence of criminal violence result in the civil–military imbalance? The following analysis provides the answer in five parts. The first part of the answer starts with the transition from military authoritarianism to a consolidated democracy. The second part of the answer has to do with the criminal violence itself. The third piece of the answer is the civilian apparatus to control the military—the Ministry of Defense—coupled with the fourth piece—the civilian incentive to learn more. The final piece is the result that combines all of the other parts to the puzzle that have occurred over time.

The transition to democracy established the framework for the increase in civilian control in each country. El Salvador and Guatemala generated a solid roadmap that, if followed, would result in a balanced civil–military relationship, with the civilians ultimately controlling the military. In Honduras, the framework was not as clear, but still, the constitution that was established presented the initial steps necessary to increase civilian control. From the onset of transitioning, all three countries appeared to be heading in the right direction—minimizing the political power of the military while simultaneously increase civilian control.

The presence of violence in all three countries is not a new phenomenon that they are dealing with. As discussed in Chapter II, the region was established under violent conditions, which evolved over time. The civil wars in El Salvador and Guatemala were a new form of violence, with military and police ultimately ruling society through the political elite. As all three countries transitioned, so did the violence. With so many displaced families as a result of the bloody civil wars, young children turned to gangs for a sense of family. In Honduras, the initial transition did little to nothing in terms of ending the impunity for death squads and military personnel. Rather, it allowed the increase in power and violence at the hands of the military, further driving the country

into violence. The rise in crime and violence occurred without delay, ultimately wreaking havoc on the transition plans established at the end of military rule.

The Ministry of Defense, initially planned to be a civilian-centric institution designed to increase civilian control over the military, was a failure overall. Despite some success stories in each of the countries, the general trend continues that the military runs the organization. The reason for this is simple. As the crime, mentioned above, increased without delay, the civilians had little to no time to establish the proper civilian-controlled institutions necessary, or to become experts in defense related matters. The civilians needed to increase their defense knowledge and implement a Ministry of Defense that allowed them to grow in experience in order to maintain civilian control over the military, as Bruneau suggests.²²⁰ The best response at the time was to implement the military and their *mano dura* policies to combat the crime. Therefore, the presence of crime ultimately resulted in the military controlling the Ministry of Defense.

Directly related to the Ministry of Defense shortfalls, is the lack of civilian incentive to learn defense, as Pion-Berlin suggests.²²¹ As the military was utilized more and more in the countries, and they became further entrenched in the Ministry of Defense, the civilians began to lose any incentive they had for expanding their defense knowledge. There simply was no need to learn more. Furthermore, the civilians began to rely solely on the knowledge and experience of the military, instead of expanding their own. This further created problem in the civil–military relations, ultimately providing more political power and control back to the military.

The result of the above chain reaction is an imbalanced civil–military relationship, where the military has grown in political might, civilian control has declined, and the military is relied on as the only solution. This may not be the worst-case scenario for civil–military relations, as the presidents in each country are still democratically elected civilians, but it is a step in the wrong direction. If the immediate presence of crime was not there, the story may have ended differently.

²²⁰Bruneau and Goetze, “Civilian-Military Relations in Latin America.”

²²¹Pion-Berlin, “Political Management.”

D. CONCLUSION

The two main arguments presented in the literature review present varying viewpoints as to the situation in Latin America. The first argument contends that civilian leaders in the region do not have a reason or incentive to increase their defense knowledge, and the second argument offers that the civilian leaders must possess some degree of knowledge, and insight into the knowledge they do not know in order to establish and maintain control of Latin American militaries. How has the presence of violence changed the civil–military relations in these countries? I argue that the foundation was laid in each country to increase the level of control civilian leaders had over their militaries, but the violence quickly derailed the plans. As the violence arose, the civilians did not have the necessary time to increase their knowledge or strengthen the civilian-controlled institutions—such as the Ministry of Defense—that were needed to implement the framework established after the transition to democracy. As a result, the military has monopolized the Ministry of Defense, further reducing the incentive for civilians to increase their knowledge. This has resulted in the civil–military imbalance that is present in each of the Northern Triangle states, where the anti-crime strategy has tended to lean back on the militaries *mano dura* policies.

V. CONCLUSION

On November 15, 2016, the Northern Triangle countries of El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras launched a new task force known as Fuerza Trinacional contra las Maras y Pandillas (Tri-National Force Against Maras and Gangs).²²² The new unit consists of a combination of military personnel, police, and intelligence units from all three countries in an attempt to increase coordination and cooperation as gangs and other internal security threats commit crimes and flee across borders to evade law enforcement.²²³ This new task force highlights the importance of studying the effect that high rates of criminal violence have on countries' militaries and civil-military relations. As violence continues to be a central theme for the Northern Triangle countries, they will continue to make changes in their militaries and civil-military relations in order to combat the rampant crime.

This thesis argues that high levels of criminal violence and internal security threats play a major role in the implementation of the military and civil-military relations in all three of the countries studied. Specifically, the criminal violence has changed the military and the civil-military relations in each of the Northern Triangle countries. The military missions have changed from a focus on external defense and traditional counter-insurgency missions to a focus on internal security threats. These new missions are being conducted in an attempt to thwart or minimize the high levels of violence that have been plaguing the region since the transitions from military authoritarianism to civilian democracy took place. Furthermore, the military's equipment and future acquisition plans lend to a stronger ability to counter organized crime than they do defending sovereignty against outside threats. This change in focus on equipment that is better suited to combat drug traffickers and gangs has made a serious change in the militaries' ability to conduct traditional military missions. Last, as a result of the changed missions and equipment, the

²²²David Gagne, "Northern Triangle Deploys Tri-National Force to Combat Gangs," *InSight Crime*, 15 November 2016, <http://www.insightcrime.org/news-briefs/northern-triangle-deploys-tri-national-force-to-combat-gangs>; César Panting, "Fuerza Trinacional contra las Maras y Pandillas inicia operaciones," *La Prensa*, 15 November 2016, <http://www.laprensa.hn/honduras/1018037-410/fuerza-trinacional-contra-las-maras-y-pandillas-inicia-operaciones>.

²²³Gagne, "Tri-National Force."

militaries' training and doctrine has also shifted to an internal mission mindset, leaving very little room to focus on external aggressors. Naturally, as the missions have taken on new form, and the equipment procured to conduct these new missions has become the primary focus, the doctrine and training that follows has adapted to now focus more on policing and internal missions than on the ability to defend the national sovereignty of the state.

Similarly, the civil-military relations in each country have been effected by the constant presence of criminal violence. This thesis argues that the immediate presence of violence after transitioning from military rule to civilian democracy left very little time and room for civilians to increase their knowledge on defense matters. As a result, the Ministry of Defense became a military-controlled institution instead of the civilian-controlled institution it was hoped to be. This structural and organizational change in the Ministry of Defense ultimately relinquished civilian control over the military from civilians back to the military. This resulted in a politicized military and an imbalance in the civil-military relations in each country. Despite the framework for increased civilian control from the peace agreements and constitutions, the civilians have not been successful at implementing the required checks and balances to ensure the militaries remain apolitical.

A. RESEARCH RELEVANCY

The research and analysis contained in this thesis contribute to the federal government and our foreign policy, academics, and American citizens. Why is this research important for the military and U.S. government? The U.S. military has been and will likely continue to be involved in the region with training and operations. It is important for the military personnel traveling to these countries and this region to have a better understanding of the dilemma that the host nations are facing. This understanding will help the U.S. military and government to better position themselves for success in the region as they train and operate within the Northern Triangle. Understanding that the militaries in the countries are focused on counter-narcotics and counter-crime missions will help the way in which U.S. military forces train. Furthermore, this knowledge will

help tailor the U.S. military units that are required to train to those that are best suited for these missions, whether it be special forces, conventional troops, or a combination of both.

How can this analysis be used to reshape foreign policy? The U.S. government needs to have a better grasp on the situation that the countries of the Northern Triangle are facing in order to better guide the policy makers on the best course(s) of action in terms of U.S. foreign policy towards the region. This research provides the insight needed in regards to the political and security matters that the Northern Triangle is facing. Specifically, the use of the military for internal security matters, and the departure from typical democratic civilian control over the military is a vital key to keep in mind when directing foreign policy to the Latin America region. With this research in mind, foreign policy decision makers may be inclined to redirect the foreign investment from the United States to specific Non-Governmental Agencies. In doing so, the U.S. foreign policy may be better equipped to handle the real problems within the countries—the socioeconomic issues that are likely to blame for the high crime rates—instead of sending money to further train and equip the military and their *mano dura* policies, ultimately resulting in more human rights abuses and a minimal effect, if any, on the crime rate. U.S. foreign policy to the region is not something that should be taken lightly, as the problems that are being faced in the Northern Triangle are geographically close to the United States. What affects Latin America can ultimately affect the United States, as the region is vital to U.S. national security. This research could also possibly assist foreign policy decisions in other areas of the world if the results of the study can be applied to different regions. In this case, this research could be used as a way to create alternate policy options that might not have been readily apparent.

Beyond the political utility, there is an intellectual one. Thus, it is relevant to academia and to society more broadly. The study of how the presence of constant criminal violence affects militaries and civil–military relations—or any other aspect of society—is a relatively understudied field. This research can be used as a springboard for further research into the field. As the field receives more attention, the chances of finding viable solutions to high levels of crime will increase, and actual solutions will become

more apparent. Furthermore, this area of study is important because it could possibly be applied to other areas of the world that academics are interested in studying as well. Why should American citizens be concerned about this research? Studying the situation in the Northern Triangle is important for everyday American citizens because Latin America is an important security partner with the United States. Given the geographic proximity, the debates on immigration, and the movement of illegal drugs through the Central American bridge states, all U.S. citizens are affected in one way or another by what is taking place in the region. Being educated on situations and problems that are occurring in Central America can benefit anyone that is interested in civil–military relations, military involvement in security affairs, and high levels of criminal violence.

B. POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH

The answers to the questions addressed in this research bring up questions about future U.S. foreign policy in the region. How should the U.S. address the situation in the Northern Triangle? How should the U.S. military adjust its support and training to the military forces in the Northern Triangle? The following recommendations are based on the research conducted for this thesis.

Future U.S. policy towards El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras should be viewed through the lens of the crime and violence the countries are facing. Financial aid from the United States should be utilized in an attempt to address key areas that can be improved in order to fight the violence. Specifically, the foreign aid should be focused on improving infrastructure within the countries. Further improvements should be focused on education for school children, as well as the creation of afterschool and youth programs aimed at keeping kids out of the street gangs that are ruining the countries. Incentives could be provided to families that are able to keep their children in school and active within their communities. Police reform and anti-corruption programs—such as CICIG—should be a major focus, as the police need to take on a bigger role in fighting the countries internal security threats, and corruption negates the rule of law. Reforming the police and increasing their level of responsibility for internal security will allow the militaries to transition back to traditional military roles of external security and border

defense. Furthermore, additional training and monitoring on human rights abuses should be a focus, as the military is continuing to patrol in the streets without the proper training in policing and use of force on civilians. Last, and most important, the foreign policy should attempt to promote the rule of law in the Northern Triangle in order to restore the judicial and legislative systems and to increase the trust that local citizens have in their own democratic governments. Focusing foreign policy and aid in these key areas would begin to address the real problem in the countries, and could possibly begin to diminish the violence.

As time progresses, it is important to continue the research in both areas—military missions and civil–military relations—to determine any further change in the status. The military missions may or may not begin to shift focus back to external defense if the crime rates begin to settle and diminish. Further research should also include the status of the police forces within each country to determine the impact, if any, they have on reducing the crime rates. Perhaps police reforms will eventually take hold and minimize the need for the military to assist in the internal security role within each country. Additional research is also needed in the civil–military relations realm in each country. Another possible answer to the question posed in this research could be that there is not an incentive problem, or even a problem as a result of the criminal violence at all. The answer may simply be that the civilians within the government do not care to participate in defense matters, and are satisfied with the military running the Ministry of Defense. Perhaps the outside influence from the United States and the UN forced the hand of each country to establish more civilian control over the military on paper in the peace agreements, without any real intent to implement the new controls. These areas of research will further help to identify the answers addressed in this thesis.

This thesis aimed to provide insight into the affect of criminal violence on militaries and civil–military relations in the Northern Triangle. The knowledge gained from this research should be built upon by academics with the goal of improving the information base and ultimately identifying theories that can be applied to the world at large.

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