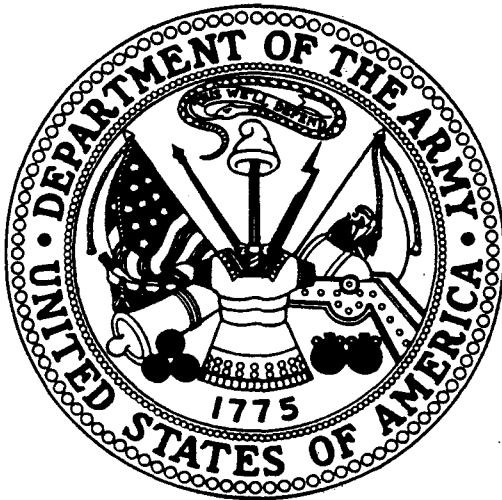




CLIC PAPERS

**U.S. MILITARY CIVIC ACTION
IN HONDURAS, 1982-1985:
TACTICAL SUCCESS,
STRATEGIC UNCERTAINTY**

**Army - Air Force Center for Low Intensity Conflict
Langley Air Force Base, Virginia**

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US MILITARY CIVIC ACTION IN HONDURAS, 1982-1985:

TACTICAL SUCCESS, STRATEGIC UNCERTAINTY

by

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October 1988

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Pending	The Literature of Low-Intensity Conflict

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FOREWORD BY A-AF CLIC

The Civil Affairs programs conducted in the USSOUTHCOM area of operations continue to be a hot topic for discussion. This CLIC PAPER is a primer for interested persons to gain a better understanding of these programs and the major role they have played in CINCSOUTH's regional strategy. Major Ben Harvey originally completed this study in December 1986 as a USAF Research Associate Project.

To fully appreciate the insights in the paper, the reader should recall the many developments impacting civil affairs in low-intensity conflict which have occurred since December 1986. Changes have taken place in national security strategy, in legislation, in organization, and in doctrine.

National security strategy and policy for low-intensity conflict has been codified in a National Security Decision Directive, and several organizations have been formed under the LIC umbrella dealing with the Civic Affairs programs discussed in this paper. An office for an Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low-Intensity Conflict has been created and a Unified Special Operations Command has been put in place. Both these organizations have responsibilities for and are active in the Civil Affairs arena.

New congressional authorizations for military humanitarian and civic assistance (HCA) operations have complemented some of the programs outlined in this paper. The legislation permitted military HCA in developing countries, with permission of the Secretary of State, in conjunction with normal military operations. Funding for these new authorizations began in fiscal year 1987 and falls under Title 10 (Defense) of the US Code.

Doctrine for LIC, including Civil Affairs concerns, has also been evolving. This paper refers to FM 100-20, Low-Intensity Conflict, dated January 1981, which was replaced by FC 100-20, Low-Intensity Conflict, dated July 1986. This latter document is now being expanded into Army-Air Force multiservice doctrine and will be published as FM 100-20/AFM 2-20, Military Operations in Low-Intensity Conflict. Additionally, JCS Pub 3-07, Doctrine for Joint Operations in Low-Intensity Conflict, is being developed as part of the JCS Joint Doctrine Master Plan.

During the security and policy review of this paper, the following comments were received from the Department of the Army.

The historical review and background set forth in this article does not address the Draper Committee and the report it submitted to the President and the Congress after completing its assessment of the US Economic and Military Assistance programs.

As a result of the Draper Committee's recommendations, Congress defined Military Civic Action in the Mutual Security Act of 1961, as amended. This definition was the basis on which the JCS and Service definitions were promulgated.

Later on, Congress amended and broadened the definition to permit US military personnel to directly engage in civic action and authorized the use of DoD supplies and equipment. The purpose of the JCS action, which the author states was taken to add clarity to a point of ambiguity, was actually to make JCS and Service definitions consistent with Congressional legislative guidance and intent. Congressional intent was that military civic action was to encourage our host nation military counterparts to undertake activities designed to help their civilian populations help themselves.

The bulk of the military civic action programs undertaken were cast in this mold. However, in Vietnam, Navy Seabee units were deployed for training to engage in civic action activities. The Seabee approach was characterized by direct action. United States personnel did the work with little civilian counterpart "sweat equity" involved in the effort. Similar projects were undertaken by other US forces which built ambitious projects such as orphanages and dispensaries, despite USAID recommendations to the contrary. These projects, as predicted by USAID, were doomed to failure with the departure of the sponsoring US forces.

The Armed Forces Assistance to Korea Program (AFAK), directed by President Eisenhower, was a forerunner of Civic Action. It was Presidential intent to keep US forces occupied in the post hostilities period. The AFAK program did not authorize use of US troop labor except in clearly defined voluntary activities.

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**US Military Civic Action in Honduras, 1982-1985:
Tactical Success, Strategic Uncertainty**

INTRODUCTION

Military Civic Action: The use of preponderantly indigenous military forces on projects useful to the local population at all levels in such fields as education, training, public works, agriculture, transportation, communications, health, sanitation, and others contributing to economic and social development, which would also serve to improve the standing of the military forces with the population. (DA, 1981: 275)

Background

This study began as an attempt to determine if the US military presence in Honduras, which increased dramatically in 1982, might have become sufficiently irritating to the Honduran people to serve as a catalyst for a major insurgency against the Honduran government. The US stepped-up its military contingent not to destabilize Honduras, but to ensure its survival in the face of an external military threat. How ironic if the US military presence should threaten the developing Honduran democratic system.

Research convinced the author that for several reasons there was no People's War (such as Mao Zedong's in China) looming on Honduras' horizon. Historically, Honduras has a limited record of revolution or severe political violence. Whereas, in surrounding states, it has been common to violently attack ones political opponents, bloodless coups have been the norm in Honduras. Geographically, the people have been too isolated to mass for major sustained violence. Socially, they have benefited from a labor movement that cuts across social, economic, regional, and political barriers (Morris: 32-33). Economically, the people continue to hope progress is just around the corner.¹ Politically, the people tend to see the government as at least trying to meet their needs and to be responsive to their desires. These basic tendencies are sufficient to prevent a serious insurgency when viewed from academic theory on insurgent warfare.

According to Robert Taber in The War of the Flea, for a major revolution (or People's War) to be launched three preconditions must be met. If any one is not, the revolution will not begin. First, there must be a cause so compelling that people are willing to risk death to redress the wrong. Second, they must believe there is some hope of success for the revolution. Third, there must be no alternative to violence. The key lies in the people's perceptions. They must think that

each of the three criteria exists. Violence will not begin in earnest if the people do not perceive a sufficient cause, that violence may bring an improvement, and that there is no reasonable alternative to bloodshed. Take away any of these beliefs and the revolution is stillborn.

Public opinion polls and the existence of very limited political violence suggest that only a small minority of Hondurans advocate bloodshed. The majority believe that an alternative to violence exists. They support the government because they believe it is acting in their best interests. Besides, violence has not improved conditions in bordering nations, and patience with a slow but responsive government is preferred by most Hondurans. However, while revolution is unlikely in the near-term, it is not impossible in the long-term.

Honduras suffers from conditions serious enough to provoke revolution if the problems are left unattended. According to James Morris, author of the most widely respected historical examination of modern Honduran political conditions, 90 percent of rural children under 5 years of age receive insufficient daily calories. Rural life expectancy in 1978 was only 50 years. The early 1980s saw severe economic deterioration, capital flight, business failures, employee layoffs, underemployment, and growing external public debt. (Morris: 24, 90-93)

In addition, basing American troops even temporarily in Honduras caused some to question the government's apparent compromise of political independence and national sovereignty. Popular perceptions remained the key. Even if no sacrifice of national independence occurred, the perception of compromise with the "colossus of the north" could lead to strong antigovernment sentiment.

Despite the risks, both the Honduran and US Governments believed an augmented American military presence was necessary in 1982 to prevent external aggression. To make the mutually agreed upon American military presence as palatable as possible to the Honduran people, a military civic action program was implemented in 1983.

Thesis

United States military civic action (MCA) in Honduras, 1982-1985, fulfilled its tactical purpose of helping to improve economic and social conditions in the near-term, improving the popularity of the military forces with the population, and motivating the Honduran military to engage in MCA as part of a national development plan (DA, 1981: 77, 140, & 275; and AF: 3). Activities such as building roads, digging water wells, and treating Honduran medical patients opened some new economic opportunities to Hondurans, relieved suffering, and improved

social conditions. Through limited MCA involvement, the Honduran Armed Forces and the national police forces maintained their already strong popularity; the US military improved its popularity. In addition, the Honduran Armed Forces developed a stronger bureaucratic interest in MCA between 1982 and 1985. Attainment of these short-range objectives constituted a tactical success. Strategic success, i.e., fulfilling three long-range goals, could not be determined by the end of 1985. The long-term objectives of MCA were to facilitate economic and social development, maintain popular support for the indigenous government, and prevent insurgency (Departments of the Army, the Navy, and the Air Force: 29-30). Whether MCA would help Honduras develop socially and economically, strengthen or weaken Honduran governmental popularity, or prevent the development of a major insurgency could not be predicted with certainty.

Definitions

The US Army definition of military civic action resembles that of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS). However, the JCS adds the following to clarify a point of ambiguity: "US forces may at times advise or engage in military civic actions in overseas areas" (JCS: 225). Without the added sentence one cannot determine whose military forces are to benefit from improved standing with the population. With the additional sentence, it becomes clear that either the indigenous or American troops may benefit, but the primary recipients of increased popularity should be the indigenous military. The DOD Humanitarian Task force of 1984 emphasized this point. It found that US assistance should be a catalyst to self-help rather than the main factor. United States forces can participate, but they should not be the primary actors on a sustained basis. If American soldiers were to become the main agents of MCA activities, they could defeat an important purpose of MCA to increase the popularity of the indigenous troops and, thereby increase, the popularity of the host government. To appreciate the full impact of the DOD Humanitarian Task Force's admonition, one must understand MCA's role in counterinsurgency theory (DOD, 1984: 12).

Many counterinsurgency theorists agree that the most effective way to prevent the outbreak of insurgent warfare is for the government to meet the legitimate needs and strong desires of the population. In other words, if the government "wins the hearts and minds of the people," then the people will support the government, and insurgency becomes less likely. Military civic action can be an important method for winning support for the government. This is clearly the intent of the Joint Manual For Civil Affairs, the basic military doctrinal guidance for the conduct of civic action activities. The Joint Manual contends that MCA has to be incorporated into all phases of counterinsurgency operations, but it is most important to start MCA early along with other preventive measures. The reason?

Civilian populations will not readily give aid to insurgents if they perceive the constituted government as the most likely guarantor of their best interests (Departments of the Army, the Navy, and the Air Force: 29). The Army's Field Manual for Low-Intensity Conflict, FM 100-20, echoes the words of the joint guidance. Its direction is that before insurgency begins or during the very early stages, MCA is crucial and emphasizes socioeconomic development for both ongoing and short-term benefits (DA, 1981: 77). Early and strong action provides the best hope for convincing the populace that the government (through its military representatives in the countryside) has the people's best interest in mind. Both counterinsurgency theory and DOD guidance teach that a strategic goal of MCA is to increase the popularity of the host government. An increase in the popularity of the indigenous military may serve as an interim step to reach that goal. American troop involvement can serve the same purpose, but only on a limited basis.

Military civic action and counterinsurgency operations are not ends, but means. Both are tools of US foreign policy. Another foreign policy tool is foreign aid--giving help where needed to promote the orderly conduct of relations among nations and to protect "fundamental national interests" (DOD, 1986: Volume I, 9). There are three major types of US foreign aid: development assistance, humanitarian assistance, and security assistance.² As an instrument of US foreign policy, according to the Defense Security Assistance Agency (DSAA), security assistance helps our friends and allies provide for their own defense, thus deterring possible aggression. It is tangible evidence of our support for the independence and territorial integrity of friendly countries, especially those whose continued survival constitutes a basic objective of our foreign policy. By helping to alleviate the economic and social causes of instability and conflict, security assistance, according to DSAA, promotes regional peace (DOD, 1985: 1). Military civic action, usually administered by the US Army through its civil affairs units, also promotes regional peace.

Civil affairs includes any activity of a nation's military and security forces which entails relations between the local people and civil/military authorities. While the civil affairs program takes on a more pervasive role when conducted in conjunction with combat operations (such as the American military occupations of Japan and Germany at the end of the Second World War), its peacetime functions are substantially the same. Its major responsibilities include prevention of civil disruption of military operations, support of government activities, community relations, population and resources control, civil defense, and military civic action. The overall objective of civil affairs is to "mobilize and motivate the population to help government and military forces" (DA, 1981: 75). Interestingly, as MCA is designed to affect public attitudes, it can be a tool not only of

the civil affairs program but of the psychological operations (PSYOPS) plan as well.

Psychological operations can involve attempts to psychologically disarm belligerents, but it can also help, "to gain, preserve, and strengthen civilian support for the host country government and its internal defense and internal development programs" (DA, 1981: 72). Note the similarity between the stated purposes of MCA, civil affairs, and PSYOPS. Although they are quite distinct and each has several purposes, they share one important *raison d'être*, to help win the hearts and minds of the people for the government. While humanitarian assistance occasionally shares that purpose, humanitarian assistance should be clearly distinguished from MCA. Unfortunately, humanitarian assistance and MCA are sometimes incorrectly used interchangeably, potentially creating confusion.

Humanitarian assistance entails a broad concern for the welfare of mankind, a more encompassing concept than MCA which is administered by military personnel in support of national and foreign policy goals.³ Most humanitarian assistance can be categorized as welfare and emergency relief, rendered through food programs for mothers and children, plus school nutrition programs. A more familiar category, but second in size, consists of disaster aid, emergency relief, and refugee assistance given most commonly during natural disasters and war. The Agency for International Development and the International Development Cooperation Agency, working with the US Department of Agriculture, administer most humanitarian assistance programs. (DA, 1981: 104).

Brief History of US Military Civic Action

United States Lieutenant Colonel Edward Lansdale, while serving in the Philippine Islands as an adviser to Ramon Magsaysay, reportedly coined the term "civic action." In September of 1950, Magsaysay was appointed Minister of Defense and charged with responsibility for defeating the Hukbalahap (Huk) guerrilla insurgency against which the Philippine Government was on the verge of losing a four-year-long battle. A charismatic humanitarian, Magsaysay turned the tide of the war almost overnight. He implemented two dramatic changes to the government's anti-Huk campaign. His orders to the Philippine Army were simple. "Be friends to the people and kill Huks." To kill Huks more effectively, he reorganized the Philippine Army and gave it primary responsibility for military operations against the guerrillas.⁴ To make friends with the people, he instituted an innovative and effective program of government and military civic action. By mid-1951, the Huks had ceased to exist as an effective guerrilla movement.⁵ Edward Lansdale properly advised Ramon Magsaysay.⁶ Not coincidentally, Lansdale later served as a principal US military adviser to Ngo Dinh Diem,

President of the Republic of Vietnam, the scene of a major MCA program and the testing ground for the Kennedy Administration's theories of counterinsurgent warfare.

President John Kennedy believed in the ability to build nations from within so as to make them resistant to Communist expansion. In 1961, the Kennedy Administration gave DOD "a specific mission to utilize its broad system of security and assistance pacts as a supplementary medium for nation building" (Walterhouse: 5). This mission became law in the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961 which stated, "To the extent feasible and consistent with the other purposes of this part, the use of military forces in less developed countries in the construction of public works and other activities helpful to economic development shall be encouraged" (Walterhouse: 13). The resultant Military Civic Action Program⁷ permitted US military members to advise or aid local military forces overseas in activities aiding in social and economic development of the host country. Military civic action programs subsequently developed in many parts of the world.

In Southeast Asia, MCA became a massive program designed to promote US strategic objectives. For example, under the Civilian War Casualty Program, as many as 1,100 hospital beds were dedicated to civilian patient care. Eventually, the Vietnamese were allowed space-available access at all US medical facilities in South Vietnam. As former Green Beret Charles M. Simpson wrote, "[MCA] was not simply a give-away program or a humanitarian, do-gooder effort" (Simpson: 172); rather, it was considered integral to the strategic counterinsurgency program. In Latin America, the same strategic purpose motivated the creation of an MCA program.

Under a 1960 State Department-DOD initiative, Guatemala was one of the first Latin American nations introduced to the civic action concept. Guatemalan President Miguel Ydigoras Fuentes asked the US to develop a civic action package for his country. With the support of US Ambassador to Guatemala John J. Muccio, the Army Office of the Chief of Civil Affairs presented a proposal to the Guatemalans. As Harry Walterhouse explained, "The Guatemalan Army, with a scattering of skepticism among some of its leaders about the wisdom of spending military time, manpower, and material [sic] on matters they believed more properly belonged within civilian channels, commenced its new mission" (Walterhouse: 101). By 1963, the relatively sophisticated Guatemalan MCA plan had an annual budget of approximately \$1.5 million. In fact, the program had grown so much that, "To mesh its training functions with the new emphasis upon social consciousness in the Guatemalan Army . . . a full-time Civic Action adviser was added to the Military Mission of the US Army" (Walterhouse: 102). The results of both the Southeast Asian and Guatemalan MCA programs were inconclusive,

but demonstrate the US Government and the US military did not then and do not yet have a reliable method for evaluating MCA.

Overview

This paper will examine MCA in Honduras by laying out its advantages and disadvantages. The introduction defined essential terms, briefly discussed the history of US MCA involvement, and outlined MCA's history in Honduras until the early 1980s.

The first section focuses on medical civic action as a vehicle for examining the tactical success and strategic potential of MCA in Honduras for several reasons. First, space precludes examining in detail more than one of the many forms of civic actions.⁸ Second, one may ask similar questions of any form of military civic action to learn more about the other types, such as: How much has been done? Where did it occur? What did participants and observers say about it? What did it accomplish? Third, all forms of MCA have their proponents and antagonists, thus allowing examination of a healthy debate already in progress. Finally, while medical MCA seems simple as do most forms at first glance, it is really quite complex. This section unravels some of medical civic action's complexity by briefly recounting the history of MCA in Honduras, and chronologically detailing medical civic action projects during the 1980s.

The second section examines the rationale and justification for United States MCA activities in Honduras from several vantage points: the White House and State Department; the Department of Defense and its military components, especially the Army; general commentators in Honduras; and other analysts.

Just as there were many interpretations of the rationale for US involvement in military civic action in Honduras during the first half of the 1980s, there were many analyses of the results of that involvement. They ranged in tone from absolute enthusiasm to dramatic condemnation. However, even the most critical analysts begrudgingly admitted that medical MCA produced some good. The third section attempts to bring order to what appears to be a chaos of opinion, to demonstrate that MCA was tactically successful, and to discuss civic action's potential strategic pitfalls of which DOD authorities were aware. The final section summarizes the paper's arguments and suggests areas requiring further study.

NOTES

1. Some public opinion polls indicate that Hondurans tend to view the future with hope. A 1985 Spanish International Network preelection survey found that 75 percent of the Hondurans polled felt that, "things in general will get better . . . in Honduras in the next few years" (Spanish International Network: 3). A 1984 US Information Agency report also found relative optimism. When asked, "Over the next two or three years, do you expect that economic conditions in our country are going to get much better, somewhat better, will stay about the same, will get somewhat worse, or much worse?", 36 percent said better, 32 percent worse. About their personal economic situations they were more positive: 40 percent said better, 20 percent worse (US Information Agency, 1984: 73).

2. United States foreign aid takes three forms: (1) development assistance designed to promote the long-term improvement in economic and social infrastructure; administered by State through its agencies like the Agency for International Development, Food for Peace, and others, and with help from a variety of private sector organizations such as Project Hope, and CARE; (2) humanitarian assistance rendered on an immediate need basis in the face of natural and manmade disasters; administered under the auspices of State and the US Country Team in the recipient country; and (3) security assistance designed to provide protection to the host government and its people so that development can occur economically, socially, and politically; administered under the auspices of the US Country Team leader (the senior diplomatic representative of the US Government residing in country) through US military organizations and AID.

3. Humanitarian assistance is not defined in FM 100-20, but is discussed in Chapter 6, "US Foreign Internal Defense Operations."

4. The Philippine Constabulary had the responsibility before.

5. The death knell of the Huks was sounded by the elections of 1951 which were so honest that four Huks were elected and allowed to take their seats in Congress.

6. Note that the US involvement in MCA in the Philippine Islands was restricted almost exclusively to advice and monetary and materiel support. It was a Filipino run program with US support, not vice versa.

7. Section 505(b), PL 87-195, 4 September 1961.

8. The Joint Manual for Civil Affairs (Departments of the Army, the Navy, and the Air Force: 31) lists 24 examples of MCA projects; 2 of the 24 fall under the category, "Medical Civic Action."

EXAMINATION OF US MEDICAL MILITARY CIVIC ACTION PROJECTS

Despite a military history as proud in construction as in combat and despite the fact that nation-building has become inextricably woven into plans to prevent or counter unrest, organization for civic action within the armed forces of the United States still appeared in 1964 little more than incidental to the primary business of preparations for a shooting war. (Walterhouse: 125)

1982 and Earlier

United States MCA programs operated in Honduras nearly two decades before their reintroduction in 1982. President John Kennedy's fascination with counterinsurgency theory and international development led to the creation of US military involvement in civic action activities in nearly every Latin American nation during the early 1960s. In 1965, a US Army Special Forces team in Honduras was deeply engaged in a serious MCA venture. According to Charles Simpson, the 30 US troops were very effective in a joint Honduras-US civic action program of vocational and technical assistance. The program offered instruction in veterinary medicine, sanitary engineering, automotive mechanics, welding, agriculture, and food processing, among others. Colonel Simpson stated that, "On a cost effectiveness basis, or on any terms, it was one of the best run and most serviceable programs in the history of US aid, military or otherwise" (Simpson: 88-89). The contention that MCA was cost effective and serviceable was not analysis but merely subjective conjecture. Unfortunately, Colonel Simpson's dilemma still confronts US military planning staffs today. Reliable, tested methods for evaluating the tactical and strategic effectiveness of MCA projects have yet been developed.

Since the mid 1950s, American military dealings with Honduras have been governed by the 1954 Bilateral Military Assistance Agreement between the Government of the United States of America and the Government of Honduras. The Agreement formalized the intent to maintain a long-term, mutually beneficial friendship characterized by cooperation and respect for national sovereignty. It was not a defense treaty which would require one nation to come to the aid of the other in the event of attack, but consummated both countries' desire for amicable relations. A 1982 Memorandum of Understanding between Honduras and the United States signaled an increase of bilateral military activity.

According to a US Southern Command report, "SOUTHCOM implemented a security development plan designed in part to renew emphasis on Humanitarian Assistance (HA) initiatives" (US Southern Command, 1984: 1). Developed in response to Honduran

President Suazo Cordova's request for US military aid to deter potential aggression against his homeland, the purpose of the plan was to combat insurgency, promote internal stability, and to help Latin American militaries implement their own humanitarian assistance programs. Activities included basic health care, water and sanitation improvements, road and school building, refugee support, and disaster relief. The results of the medical portion of this "Humanitarian Assistance" plan seem to have gone unrecorded, a reflection of their being part of a program in its infancy. By the next year the program was maturing; at least the US Southern Command staff began to compile records.

1983

Tasking

Along with the change of command in 1983 came a change in focus for US military activities in US Southern Command's theater of responsibility. Although the previous commander had initiated involvement in civic assistance and psychological operations, the new commander, General Paul Gorman, broadened and deepened the counterinsurgency program in Central America (Sereseres). His concept did not call for a large increase in the number of soldiers needed to counter existing and potential insurgencies. Rather, it demanded revitalization of their operational methodology and included MCA as an important adjunct to military operations. As part of the reorientation program, US Southern Command was tasked to coordinate "high impact civic action missions" in conjunction with planned military exercises (US Southern Command, 1983: 1). The medical portion of the MCA missions included short-term rural visits by combined (Honduran/US) teams of medical and veterinarian professionals and by medical personnel from US Navy professional development courses; the airlift of supplies and distribution of excess DOD medical materials; and emergency medical evacuation by aircraft (US Southern Command, 1984: 1).

Ahuas Tara I

The first major exercise resulting in a significant quantity of MCA was known as Ahuas Tara I or Big Pine, conducted in the northeast Mosquitia region during February 1983. Working under the guidance of a Honduran Armed Forces colonel, the combined Honduran-US political-military affairs staffs identified three civic action projects for possible inclusion in the Ahuas Tara I exercise plan. The first called for repairing a pier at Puerto Lempira. Because neither the US Agency for International Development nor the Honduran Government could provide the needed lumber, the project could not be accomplished as MCA. Because of restrictive US Navy regulations, building a C-130 parking ramp near the Puerto Lempira landing strip also could not be done as civic action. Sending medical action teams to visit villages in

the exercise area became, by default, the only preprogrammed MCA initiative (US Southern Command, 1983: 1). As it turned out, the medical MCA program--planned by three Honduran Armed Forces officers--was a handful.

According to an official memorandum, "The size and scope of civic action missions mushroomed beyond any planned expectation" (US Southern Command, 1983: 1). The US Southern Command staff ended up calling for a "total integration" of resources including US military from the Puerto Rico National Guard, the 193rd Infantry Brigade from Panama, and the Seabees, as well as members of the Honduran Armed Forces. Among the sites to be aided in Gracias a Dios Department were Puerto Lempira, Laka, Cauquira, Barra de Caratasca, and Wanpusirpi. Of the 30 team members, 18 were Honduran (doctors, dentists, nurses, and medics), and 12 were from the US (with specialties in dermatology, infectious diseases, OBGYN, pediatrics, and tropical diseases). They were divided into five teams, each with a Honduran leader. During the first 5 days of February 1983, they used more than \$2,500 in medicines provided by the USS Boulder to treat over 4,000 medical and dental patients. The most common medical complaints were typical of the Honduran people: intestinal parasites, skin infections, upper respiratory infection, and malaria. Two people were medically evacuated because of the severity of their conditions. While the raw numbers did not prove productivity, they indicated a high degree of diligence among the participants.

Subjective comments provided more insight into the nature of MCA activity. Peace Corps worker Judy Seitzer traveled and worked with group five. Following the project, a US Southern Command memorandum reported that, "this was the most worthwhile project in her Peace Corps experience and [that she] requested further Peace Corps integration in[to] future medical civic action projects" (US Southern Command, 1983: 1-2). Balancing Seitzer's glowing report was the more mixed critique of Captain Robert S. Perry of the Plans, Policy & Political Military Affairs Directorate at US Southern Command (SCJ5).

Captain Perry complained that "the tremendous PSYOP potential of the civic action initiatives went underdeveloped" because of the "total lack of press coverage." Members of the press, he went on to say, were willing to cover the tactical part of the exercise, but would not stay in isolated areas to cover MCA. He was all the more frustrated because he felt the civic action was so productive. He wrote that it "not only promoted the HO [Honduran] nation building process, but also generated a considerable reservoir of confidence in and good will toward the [US forces]. Additionally, it modeled the military's multidimensional capabilities in responding to regional instability caused by economic and social under-development [sic]" (US Southern Command, 1983: 3). It would appear that the lack of media coverage was another indication of the unrefined

nature of US Southern Command's civic action program in early 1983. During 1984, and especially by 1985, the press was no longer a problem. Press coverage was built into the training exercise planning packages. If the civilian press corps could not or chose not to cover MCA to the military's liking, US Southern Command provided their own military reporters and photographers. Although the "PSYOP potential" of MCA does not depend totally on press coverage, the positive impact of aid can be extended beyond the immediate recipients by well written articles accompanied by photographs.

May 1983

The next reported medical MCA exercise compiled even larger statistics than Ahuas Tara I. A large combined medical action group divided into smaller teams which operated in El Valle and Choluteca, 4-8 May 1983. The 66 participants consisted of 50 Hondurans, 15 Americans, and one Panamanian. During their 5 days of operations, they treated some 12,000 patients. In addition, they gave \$30,000 in excess medical materials to the hospital in Nacaome (US Southern Command, 1984: 1-2). These numbers pale, however, when seen in the light of medical MCA performed during Ahuas Tara II.

Ahuas Tara II

Ahuas Tara II or Big Pine II was a larger and lengthier joint training exercise (JTX). Lasting from August 1983 until February 1984, it was "executed to improve the readiness of US forces based in the continental United States which have contingency missions in Latin America and elsewhere" (US Government Pamphlet: 3-4). United States troops worked with the Honduran Ministry of Health to procure medicines and to provide substantial medical care in a short period of time. The combined teams, commonly working out of the modified Army combat support hospital at Palmerola Air Base (AB)¹ saw some 47,000 medical and 7,000 dental patients, and administered more than 200,000 immunizations (US Government Pamphlet: 3-5). In addition, the veterinarians treated over 37,000 animals and were credited with helping to prevent two potential outbreaks of serious animal disease (DOD, 1984: 33). According to the informational pamphlet given to all American troops arriving in Honduras, the medical units taking part in Ahuas Tara II "had a unique opportunity to perform medical services in tropical field conditions at the only field hospital currently operated by the US armed forces." Many doctors rotated through for short tours of duty in Honduras and received valuable training and experience with tropical medicine and tropical disease. In DOD's view, "The medical training program was both effective and well received" (US Government Pamphlet: 3-5). The US can military could certainly boast that it had helped the Hondurans render a great quantity of medical aid, had relieved a lot of suffering, and had made friends with hundreds of Honduran citizens.

1983 Totals

All told, the three main medical assistance initiatives of 1983 produced surprisingly large numbers of patients seen and aid given. The teams treated approximately 70,000 medical and dental patients, as well as 37,000 animals. They also administered more than 200,000 immunizations and gave \$30,000 in surplus medical supplies to Honduran hospitals.² During 1984, American medical MCA programs diminished significantly.

1984

MEDRETES

Because Congressional legislation restricted MCA primarily to JCS approved or coordinated training exercises,³ most medical MCA during 1984 was rendered during Medical Readiness Training Exercises (MEDRETES). The MEDRETES test and improve a medical unit's ability to rapidly deploy to an overseas location and perform its combat support mission--to care for the medical needs of US and Honduran military forces--as austere an environment as possible. The rugged environs of Honduras were ideal for such training. Two military training exercises produced significant MEDRETE activity in 1984.

Granadero I

A smaller exercise than Ahuas Tara I or Ahuas Tara II, Granadero I tested and improved combined operations by Honduras, Salvador, and the US. Conducted during March-June 1984, it reflected an emphasis shift in the exercise program. Some earlier exercises had been so large and out of synchronization with the Honduran military's training, promotion, and reassignment schedule, that many of the desired military training objectives had not been fully met. Granadero I's decreased size and improved timing demonstrated an increase in the organizational maturity of the exercise planning staffs.⁴

Bigger Focus

Exercise Bigger Focus 84, July-December 1984, also was not a large-scale combat simulation maneuver. Rather, it was a series of Deployment Training Exercises (DTEs) intended to improve the skills of the host and US forces to deploying and operating in realistic situations. Bigger Focus consisted of small modules planned to meet the specific training needs of the Air Force, Navy, Rangers, Special Forces, medical units, and others (US Southern Command, 1986).

Small Medical Deployments

The following are typical of the many small training deployments which resulted in medical MCA activity. From 23 through 30 September, a US Army Medical Equipment Maintenance Team deployed to Palmerola AB on a DTE. They were charged with training in a tropical environment,⁵ giving medical support to US troops, and engaging in incidental humanitarian assistance to promote the mission readiness of the medical unit. An Army Preventive Medicine Team, also assigned to Palmerola AB in September, remained a bit longer. Serving as part of the Joint Task Force Bravo (JTF-B) hospital staff at Palmerola AB from 28 September through 31 December, they undertook incidental MEDRETES and humanitarian assistance projects. Between 7 and 20 November, an Army Medical Clearing Team also joined the JTF-B hospital staff. Their purpose was to deploy on short notice for training and to give medical support to US troops on temporary duty in Honduras. From November 1984 through February 1985, Army aviation elements relocated temporarily from their home stations in Fort Riley, Kansas, and Fort Carson, Colorado, to Palmerola AB. When asked about the problems of working in hot, dusty, remote conditions like those at Palmerola, Sergeant Skip Surre, a medic from the 47th Field Hospital at Palmerola AB, said, "when you see the work we do here it makes it all worthwhile You see a kid who would have been crippled for the rest of his life, and they bring him in here, the doctors work on him, and you see that kid walk out" (Finegan: 10).

During 1984 (and 1985), MEDRETES departed Palmerola AB about three times each week, either by helicopter or in a convoy of vehicles. The trips to reach the remote villages in the Honduran mountains⁶ sometimes took several hours because of the absence of modern roads or even passable dirt trails.

Recalling a MEDRETE he accompanied, Jay Finegan wrote that doctors saw more than 400 patients, mostly children with malnutrition or worms in 1 day. A veterinarian and his crew gave deworming treatment to about 500 horses, burros, dogs, and pigs before time ran out and the soldiers had to begin the long trip back to their tents at Palmerola AB. Finegan was struck both by the needs of the local people⁷ and by the drive of the North Americans. The US soldiers engaged in MCA in Honduras embodied a range of fervent, sincere motivation, all with the desire to help Honduras and its people.

During the Granadero I and post-Granadero I period, March 1984-February 1985, medical assistance activities treated 22,943 medical and 4,580 dental patients, completed 11,957 veterinary consultations, and inoculated 35,000 pigs in conjunction with Honduras' Hog Cholera Program (US Government Pamphlet: 3-4). Medical MCA activities, which decreased in 1984 from 1983 levels, expanded dramatically in 1985.

United States Military Commitment Sustained

The perception of the Honduran and US Governments that there was mutual benefit in their continued close relationship resulted in two major exercises and myriad smaller training deployments in 1985. President Reagan favored the combined military activity as part of his regional foreign policy strategy. President Suazo Cordova expressed "his desire for continued exercise activity pending a long-term solution to regional political tensions" (US Government Pamphlet). A reexpansion of medical MCA, usually administered through MEDRETES,⁸ was a by-product of the sustained military training maneuvers.

MEDRETES Continued

Most MEDRETES consisted of small medical units of 10 to 20 individuals traveling to remote villages by ground vehicle or helicopter during the day and returning to Palmerola AB before dark. Most lasted 1 day; some as much as a week. Preparations normally began about 2 weeks in advance with a visit to the recipient village by a few team members who would examine the physical layout of the village and coordinate the visit with village leaders (Brown: 15-16).

San Isidro

Sergeant Michael Brown described a typical MEDRETE he accompanied to San Isidro, a village of 800 people in central Honduras (Brown: 15-18). With the rising of the sun, two vans and two sedans loaded with 25 soldiers began their dusty, bumpy 2 1/2 hours drive. Before dawn, hundreds of local Hondurans, along with scores of animals, awaited their arrival. The team NonCommissioned Officer-in-Charge, Bonifacio Rosales, said, "Our visits mean so much to them that they arrive hours early and stay all day just to see a doctor. For many, this marks the first and maybe the only time they see someone connected in any way with medicine" (Brown: 15).

Sergeant Brown said each team member played an important part in efficiently rendering assistance to as many people as possible. Honduran soldiers and US Military Police helped with equipment setup and aided in crowd control, allowing the doctors to spend their time with patients. Altogether, the four doctors treated about 600 patients, mostly for upper respiratory infections, malnutrition, skin infections and anemia. One villager, Jose Nolasco, reported, "This is the first time doctors have come to our village except for when the government sent some to spray for the plague 10 or 11 years ago. The Americans always have good intentions when they show up somewhere. We really appreciate the medicine and the efforts of the US Army." The

children appreciated them also because the soldiers played with the children and gave them candy.⁹ Staff Sergeant Juan Dominguez, a member of a US Army aviation detachment, volunteered to translate for the doctors during his day off saying, "I just wanted to do something to help these people. You see them in the villages and the terrible conditions they live in, and it just makes you want to do something" (Brown: 17). The dental team members also put in a full day's work.

United States Air Force Major Thomas Bierman commented that the dental treatment he gave the Hondurans was not American-style, but it filled a gap in their health care. "What we can do is look at their teeth, talk to them about dental hygiene, and then, as a last resort, pull the teeth if they are too far gone." That day he pulled 75 teeth from 30 of the patients he saw. He graphically described his task. "We set up the dental area outside, on a porch if possible . . . because we can't bring rinse gear with us, and there is a lot of spitting with this style of dental work" (Brown: 17). The dentist was not the only one who worked outside, so did the veterinary specialists.

Treating animals is important to the overall effort to help the villagers and to win their friendship. Specialist 4th Class Belinda Groves, a veterinary technician, reported, "These people rely on these animals as part of their everyday lives. That makes taking care of them even more important. These visits put your skills to the test. You find out quickly if you know the job because of the wide range of places and problems you face. It's not like the post clinic where you treat animals that have been to the vets before. Most of the animals have never been treated before, and some of them let you know they don't like it one bit" (Brown: 18). Caring for the Hondurans' animals was important, but the team members believed another aspect of their project was even more vital--teaching.

Lieutenant Colonel Arthur Wittich, team leader, reported the medication and treatment they gave only temporarily assuaged suffering. Classes in preventive medicine, basic health care, and hygiene, which every patient had to attend, were considered potentially the most lasting part of the event. Wittich said, "I feel that we do as much as we can with the resources we have. We would like to be able to do a lot more, like making repeat visits, or setting up teams in each of the 18 Honduran states. It's nice to be idealistic, but you have to be realistic. Then you can make the most of what you have" (Brown: 18). In order to make the most use of available resources, United States soldiers also administered medical help through forms other than MEDRETES.

Palmerola

Some Hondurans received medical attention at the US Army Field Medical Facility at Palmerola AB, near Comayagua. Military regulations did not normally permit such care on a routine basis, but authorized it during emergencies to prevent undue suffering or loss of life. In such cases, the patients did not have to be charged for care if the local commander determined they were indigent. Further, routine care could be offered for two exceptions to the general rule. First, United States medics could treat Hondurans injured as a result of US activities if the US was probably liable legally and such treatment would constitute mitigation of damages. Second, officials of high national prominence were allowed to receive care as needed¹⁰ (US Southern Command, 1985a: 4). Although the facility at Palmerola AB provided significant medical care to Hondurans, most treatment continued to be given by MEDRETE traveling teams.

United States Soldiers' Attitudes

In an article in El Gazette, the JTF Bravo newspaper, Staff Sergeant Greg Allen described typical United States feelings about the usefulness of caring for Hondurans in remote areas: "Many of the people of Honduras suffered from health problems that could affect soldiers, so what better way to train medical personnel than to have them help people who otherwise would not have medical services made available to them." He went on to say that the participants worked at a fever-pitch all day, ended up very tired, hot and sweaty, but thought the effort worthwhile because, "most sense the satisfaction of helping people who have never had help, of giving them something they desperately need, a little better life" (El Gazette, 1985a: 4). Sergeant Allen's comments described medical assistance aimed at relieving suffering and making friends, two tactical goals of MCA. Major Bob Pratt's article in Army Reserve Magazine described in somber terms a MEDRETE which fulfilled the same objectives.

Concepcion de Guasista

Major Pratt told of a MEDRETE to Concepcion de Guasista, a small town in the southeast part of the country. Because ground transportation was impossible because of the isolation of the community, a CH-47 Chinook helicopter was used. The conditions greeting their arrival shocked some soldiers. "Honduras," one said, "is a desperately poor country." Forty-eight percent of the population is under 15 years old, and 40 percent of the deaths occur among children under 5 years old, similar to the US mortality rate in 1890. Medics reported one of the reasons for the dismal statistics. "Most Hondurans never experience modern medical care" (Pratt: 22). Treatment from the MEDRETE could be the only care they ever receive at the hands of a qualified health care professional.

The team dealt with problems seldom or never seen in the US such as, worms, gastro-intestinal problems, upper respiratory and skin infection, anemia, and malnutrition. Captain Gilbert Handal, a US Army doctor and a native of Chile, lamented, "We're just scratching the surface here. Look at those bloated bellies on the kids. That's malnutrition and poverty is at the root. I've seen this before, and it breaks my heart" (Pratt: 23).

Fulfilling their requirement to improve social conditions in the near-term, the dentists pulled dozens of teeth and the veterinarians administered 600 doses of deworming medicine and 600 rabies shots. Again the soldiers required all village members who received medical care to attend preventive medicine classes in the hope that such instruction might lead to long-term social development. The following account of a MEDRETE to a small village shows how much can be done in a very short period of time.

San Nicholas

The medics had very little time to work once they reached San Nicholas. In only 3 1/2 hours, they examined 147 medical patients, wrote 256 prescriptions, referred seven patients to local hospitals, treated 141 children for intestinal parasites, examined 52 dental patients, pulled 126 teeth, gave 123 rabies and 37 hog cholera shots, and dewormed 123 animals. They also taught basic family hygiene and disease prevention to 188 Hondurans who attended the required preventive medicine class (El Gazette, 1985c: 8).

1985 Summary

Many other anecdotes could be recounted but would not add substantially to those above. Besides, these few stories have rendered possible some tentative answers to the opening questions. A great deal of medical MCA was completed in Honduras between 1982 and 1985, mostly by United States soldiers, commonly reservist or National Guard. An informal MCA program began in 1982, became formal in 1983, and was being institutionalized by 1985. More medical assistance activities were recorded in both 1983 and 1985 than in 1984, but accurate data are difficult to locate, reflecting the ad hoc birth and early development of the program. Many of the MCA projects occurred near training exercise deployment sites throughout Honduras. Many took place in the Palmerola AB/Comayagua Valley and the villages in the surrounding hills. Few took place in the villages located in sensitive western or southern border areas. Wherever it occurred, MCA was usually well received. Local Hondurans commonly expressed deep appreciation for the help given, and the troops seemed grateful to be involved in such immediately useful projects. In fact, the US soldiers seemed to want to become much more involved in civic actions but could not because of US government directives.

As 1985 closed, the US military was restricted to conducting civic action programs in two circumstances: When requested and paid for by an outside source and coordinated/approved through appropriate channels, and when incidental to approved training exercises. Why the US military should give aid and how they could justify it continued to be the subject of debate in the United States.

NOTES

1. Contrary to common, but inaccurate, media reports in the United States, Palmerola AB is by official agreement a Honduran facility used jointly by Honduras and the United States. The United States forces are not the landlords but the tenants.

2. Totals are not the official compilation of a government agency, but the author's estimates based on available sources, usually DOD reports. When a training exercise began in one calendar year and ended in the next, total medical assistance given during the exercise was included in figures for the year of origin. For example, Ahuas Tara II ran from August 1983 through February 1984. Therefore, all Ahuas Tara II medical MCA statistics are included in the 1983 figures, even those compiled under Ahuas Tara II during January-February 1984. This convention was necessary because US Southern Command figures usually were listed by exercise and were not broken down by month.

3. Military civic action in Honduras was legally justified in 1984 by an amendment to the Defense Authorization Act. The Stevens Amendment permitted the US military to perform civic actions when incidental to JCS approved or coordinated training exercises and to pay "humanitarian and civic assistance costs" from military Operations and Maintenance (O&M) funds (HQ USAF, 1986; and US Southern Command, 1985a: 1).

4. The medical statistics from Granadero I were combined with those of the post-Granadero I period, July 1984-February 1985.

5. Subtropical is a more accurate description of the climate in most of Honduras, but some exercise summaries use the term tropical.

6. Eighty percent of Honduras is mountainous, a veritable sea of undulating, wooded mountains that reach elevations of nearly 10,000 feet.

7. The Hondurans, with an average income of about \$700 per capita per year, mostly live without the material amenities to which North Americans are accustomed. Some US officers in Honduras thought that conditions were so bad that the area was ripe for Communist triumph (Finegan: 10 & 12).

8. A brief description of 11 small deployments involving MEDRETES is recorded in Appendix 3.

9. During World War II American soldiers the world over gave children snacks, such as candy and chewing gum, as a spontaneous demonstration of their affection. Ramon Magsaysay purposely introduced this in 1950 as part of his campaign to make the Philippine Army "the friend of the people."

10. Army Regulation 40-3 gives USCINCSO authority to allow treatment if it would advance US public interest, is concurred to by the Chief of the Diplomatic Mission, is approved on a case-by-case basis, and payment is received or waived by USCINCSO.

INTERPRETATIONS OF RATIONALE AND AUTHORITY

The best prospects for reducing the region's structural, political and geopolitical vulnerabilities lie in emergence of stable democratic states with populist commitments., [sic] capable of resisting subversion and that type of "predatory intervention" which aims to change the structure of political power In turn, such states must be shielded by US power. (Del Aguila: 80)

The White House and State Department

As Ronald Reagan was waging his Presidential campaign in 1979, events were taking shape in Central America that would alter the face of the Reagan Administration. The US became the primary economic supporter of a new regime in Nicaragua which many hoped would fulfill the dream of the bloody revolution against the Somoza regime. That was to bring to Nicaragua economic and social advancement, and a responsive, responsible political system. Unfortunately for the Nicaraguan people and the surrounding states, the Nicaraguan government began to consolidate a Marxist-Leninist style totalitarian system. Protesting that the Sandinista government was betraying its people and supporting the FMLN guerrillas in El Salvador, the US, in 1981, suspended aid to Nicaragua. The status quo in Central America was explosive.

The Government of Honduras believed itself in a most precarious position. Although Honduras and El Salvador had been unfriendly neighbors for many years (having fought a short but deadly war in 1969), the imminent demise of the Salvadoran government at the hands of a Communist-dominated guerrilla movement was not comforting. A glance to the north was not much more pleasant. Guatemala also was home to a bloody insurgency. The possibility that the Guatemalan government might be overthrown and replaced by one more belligerent toward Honduras was disturbing. When the Hondurans appraised their southern neighbors, they must have shaken their heads in wonder. The Honduran Government decided that a deeper, but cautious, union with the "colossus of the north" (the US) was in order under such historical circumstances. As they thought, the US was in no mood to see Central America fall, state-by-state, to Soviet-Cuban, Marxist-Leninist regimes.

Viron Vaky, Assistant Secretary of State, had already advised Congress in September 1979 that Honduras would be important to preventing the expansion of Nicaragua's new revolutionary regime beyond its own borders. By 1981, both the US and Honduras were convinced that serious mutual cooperation was in order. That cooperation took the form of two updates to the 1954 US-Honduras Bilateral Military Assistance Agreement, an

increase in US military presence inside Honduras, and increased foreign aid for Honduras.

The Reagan Administration advocated four basic policy objectives for the Central American region. They were to promote regional negotiations and dialogue to find a peaceful solution to area problems; support human rights and democracy; promote economic development; and, develop a security shield behind which democratic institutions, economies, and social reforms could be nurtured. Charged with formulating and implementing foreign policy, the State Department pursued President Reagan's policy objectives.

Officials at the State Department supported the Contadora peace process which advocated dialogue in the search for peaceful solutions to serious regional problems. They also strongly supported attempts by some Central American nations to improve their human rights records by making their internal political mechanisms more open and democratic. In addition, they pushed for increases in economic and military aid for the Central American states to allow them to protect their countries while attempting to improve economic and social conditions. But, economic aid dominated.

According to the US Information Agency, nearly 80 percent of US foreign aid to the Central American states was economic between 1982 and 1985. For Honduras, during the same period, approximately 69 percent was economic aid (US Information Agency, 1985: 44-45).¹ The economic assistance package was divided among the Economic Support Fund, Developmental Assistance, PL 480 (Food for Peace), and the Peace Corps.² The US Agency for International Development (AID) administered most of the economic assistance programs. In that role, AID planned and implemented programs "to bring about economic and social conditions that will help to eliminate causes of discontent" (DA, 1981: 110). The AID's charter was remarkably similar to the strategic purposes of military civic action. Not surprisingly, AID's purpose (as an arm of State) and the military's purpose (as an instrument of foreign policy) were directly linked.

Department of Defense

The US military in Honduras supported the four foreign policy objectives discussed above. To promote those ends, the US military embarked on a program of MCA. Expressed in their most essential form, United States sponsored MCA projects in Honduras were designed to prevent the development of popular discontent, the bedrock upon which antigovernment revolutions are built. Military civic action was designed to prevent insurgency.

According to a 1984 DOD Humanitarian Task Force study, the United States military, since its inception, has provided medical

assistance to indigenous people in its areas of operation. Sometimes the aid has been given spontaneously, at other times through a structured program, such as the Civilian War Casualty Program in Vietnam. Until the mid-1970s, DOD administered its humanitarian and civic action programs under provisions of the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961. In the wake of the Vietnam Conflict and the Watergate scandal, Congress prohibited most direct military funding of MCA projects.

After the mid-1970s, DOD accomplished humanitarian and civic action missions under limited authority. The DOD Directive 5100.46 allowed military resources to respond to State Department requests for help in disaster relief. The Economy Act (USC 686) permitted other federal agencies to pay DOD for medical aid or training given in support of the requesting agency's mission (DOD, 1984: 32). With the concurrence of State, DOD could respond to requests of foreign governments which wanted to use security assistance funds to purchase medical training and supplies. The Federal Property Act allowed DOD to give excess medical materials, but some charges had to be assessed the foreign government for packing, crating, handling, and transportation. The DOD Humanitarian Task Force reiterated that incidental assistance given in conjunction with approved military exercises overseas also was permitted in limited circumstances (DOD, 1984: 9). The Foreign Assistance Act of 1961, as amended, Section 502 (22 USC 2302/1973) stated that the intent of Congress was for MCA to support the host nation's social-economic development package.

The JCS and the individual services all specified that MCA was not primarily the responsibility of the United States military. Rather, US involvement should encourage the host military to participate and should prompt the host government to pursue its own national development plan. Army Field Manual 100-20 emphasized host government responsibility for civic action projects. The US forces should work through host government organizations to place the onus of productivity on the host country institutions and to avoid hindering development of indigenous capability to successfully conduct MCA. Without such a transfer of responsibility, MCA is doomed to produce only short-term benefits, i.e., tactical success, strategic failure (DA, 1981: 140).

If the center of responsibility for MCA shifted to the recipient government, then the effectiveness of MCA could increase. Since the strategic purpose of MCA, according to Air Force Regulation 55-7, was to improve "those conditions which would otherwise contribute to insurgency, distrust of government authority, and breakdown in law and order" (AF: 1), requiring the host government to be responsible for civic action programs was only reasonable.

Military guidance at the Pentagon level was clear. Military civic action was primarily the responsibility of the host military and government. The purpose was to increase the popularity of the indigenous military and, thereby, the popularity of the government with the people. United States troop involvement should promote, but be secondary to, participation of the host military forces.

During 1984-1985, US Southern Command was developing a civil assistance staff capable of sustaining properly-coordinated programs to promote a Honduran nation-building effort. In February 1984, SCJ5 established a permanent Civil Affairs staff office (SCJ5-CA). Manning came from the 361st Civil Affairs Brigade, US Army Reserve at Pensacola, Florida (US Southern Command, 1984: 3). In July 1984, the Civil Affairs Desk Officer³ became the coordinator of the Civil Affairs Operational Planning Group. This newly formed group managed data concerning civil affairs in the US Southern Command area of responsibility and coordinated that information with US Southern Command operational planners (US Southern Command, 1985b).

The 361st Civil Affairs Brigade continued to support US Southern Command during 1984-1985 with 29 officers and 29 enlisted members who rotated through Panama on 17-day tours. In addition to coordinating humanitarian and civic action activities for US Southern Command, 361st members sometimes participated in MEDRETES in Panama and Honduras (US Southern Command, 1985b).

The US Southern Command's humanitarian and civic action structure became even more formal in 1985. In March, the first full-time active duty Civil Affairs Desk Officer was assigned to Headquarters and incorporated into SCJ5. As a result, the 361st began to give staff augmentation to the active duty desk officer, rather than retaining primary responsibility themselves (US Southern Command, 1985b: 1). The US Southern Command was making a bureaucratic statement by so formalizing the Civil Affairs staff. Civil Affairs, and all its subordinate components, was important to the US Southern Command commander. But, how important was it to Honduras? Did Honduran officials have any desire to employ military civic action as a tool for helping their country?

Rationale for Honduras Permitting US Medical Civic Action

You must remember, Honduras belongs to the Hondurans; they will always, in the end, do what they want.
(Colonel Riley R. Moore, Deputy Director, SCJ5, 1986)

At the beginning of this decade, Honduras saw itself as a troubled country in an imperiled region. Desiring to develop as a representative democracy able to offer its people the advantages of a healthy social-economic-political system, the

government recognized that it was struggling with many serious problems. Honduras suffered from the worst economy in Central America. World recession, falling commodity prices, lack of credit, high debt, capital flight, inflation, declining GNP, falling investment income, and reduced export income all were symptoms of "severe economic deterioration" (Morris: 90). Economic recession struck hard in 1980, reducing the average annual rate of national economic growth to 0.8 percent between 1980 and 1984. As a result, the real economic purchasing power of the population deteriorated by at least 8 to 10 percent over those 4 years (Vinelli: 14). The economic boom of the late 1970s only made the economic decline more troublesome. Deterioration on the heels of rapid economic growth served to slap in the face the Hondurans' "rising expectations." Dashed hopes are more devastating than unawakened hopes. They can make a people ripe for excitation to political violence.

Officials in the Honduran government were aware of the plight of the people and the danger it posed to national stability. At this juncture, they chose an approach they hoped would stimulate long-range economic health. Along with some needed reforms, they adopted austerity programs which increased taxes and reduced public sector spending in hopes of reducing inflation and controlling the growing external debt. By the end of 1985, the program (along with a general recovery of the world economy) seemed to be paying off.⁴ But in 1982, Honduras' economic outlook remained bleak. Business failures increased as did employee layoffs. Approximately 56 percent of the workers were under-employed or not employed at all (Morris: 91-93). Bad in the cities, problems were even worse in the rural areas. The agricultural sector which employed some 60 percent of the economically active population was also a victim of the recession. Inevitably, reduced production, lower prices, and higher unemployment meant that rural Hondurans would go hungry, which they did (Vinelli: 17).

For Hondurans living outside the cities, land distribution also was a problem (Morris: 91-93). Although Honduras never experienced the widespread violence that land tenancy/ownership disputes can provoke, in the 1960s and 1970s a series of peasant movements advocated land reform programs. Several governments came in and went out of power largely because of their attitudes and policies toward campesino demands. The governments were either labeled "Communitistic" if they were too willing to alter the system, or "reactionary/elitist" if they changed the system too slowly. In such a struggle, there was no pleasing everyone.

The moderates who advocated change which would benefit the campesinos, but at such a pace or in such a way as to respect the rights of the upper classes, were distrusted by both ends of the socio-economic spectrum. Fortunately, the resultant disruption was low-key when compared with other Central American states.

The major reasons for restraint were the absence in Honduras of a "solid land owning aristocracy," the presence of a small but growing middle class, and the appeal of a labor movement which had a voice in the political system (Morris: 32-33).

Land tenancy, distribution, ownership, and usage were problems requiring technical expertise and a lot of money to solve. As was true of other economic problems, Honduras would need outside help to find solutions. Also, according to public opinion polls, most Hondurans believed they might need outside help to counter the threat of invasion and subversion.

The threat of invasion from either El Salvador or Nicaragua seemed to most Hondurans especially dangerous. With their traditional enemies, the Salvadorans, tied down in mortal combat with the FMLN guerrillas, Nicaragua constituted the more credible near-term danger.⁵ Many believed that growing Nicaraguan military power⁶ and threatening Nicaraguan rhetoric advertised the potential for a massive military invasion of Honduras. Honduran Foreign Minister Paz Barnica stated in late 1985, "If there is a crisis in Central America, the aggravating factor of that crisis is Nicaragua. In my opinion, I repeat, it constitutes a threat to peace, security, and democracy" (FBIS, 1985a: P14).

A Honduran Congressman emphasized that the Hondurans felt very threatened by Nicaragua and its resident Cuban and East German advisers. He recalled, "We thought we might be next after the final offensive [scheduled by the FMLN for 1981] in El Salvador. The whole country relaxed with the increase in American military presence." As a result, he claimed, 99% of his countrymen were happy the Americans were in Honduras (Honduran Congressman).⁷

There can be little doubt that the American military presence was generally accepted as useful and temporarily necessary (Downes: 3-4), but it was not universally welcomed. Some Hondurans opposed the American presence for nationalistic, social, and cultural reasons. Others, such as some members of the Honduran Communist Party, advocated a radical change in the nature of the Honduran political system and planned to use the foreign military presence to foster antigovernment sentiment.

According to a November 1985 Honduran Communist Party communique, conditions were so bad in 1985 that the country was ripe for them to "assume the people's power in the near future" (FBIS, 1985c: 8). During 1983 and 1984, two Communist-affiliated insurgent groups (never numbering more than 100 members) infiltrated from Nicaragua in attempts to lead the people into revolt. In both cases the insurgents were betrayed by members of their groups, hunted down by the Honduran military, and eliminated. Some of the insurgent members apparently did not

believe violence against the government was the appropriate course of action at that moment. Former United States Ambassador to Honduras John Negroponte seems to have been right when he argued that the Honduran Communist Party had been radicalized and prepared for revolution by Cuba but had little indigenous support in Honduras (Negroponte: 36).

There were many reasons why the Honduran Communist Party commanded so little native support. James Morris explained one. The Catholic Church had not been so active in Honduras as in El Salvador or Nicaragua, he explained, because "The Church has yet to be forced into making a final choice between radical reformism and strict adherence to the status quo" (Morris: 29). The same was true of the population in general.

Honduran society had not been forced to choose between accepting substandard living conditions or resorting to revolution. The political system was sufficiently responsive to the demands of the people to prevent their rising up en masse to violently overthrow the government. Popular opinion remained important because Honduras had not been afflicted with true one-man rulers. If anyone became too strong, the power sectors (usually spearheaded by the most powerful group, the military) removed him and replaced him with someone who at least talked about changing the system in some meaningful way.

Importantly, the government's willingness to accept increased US military activity in 1982 was a response to the people's need for socio-economic help. The United States military expansion not only assuaged public demand for protection against potential invasion but also addressed the growing need for improved socio-economic opportunity. Hence, the Honduran government perceived it could answer many public demands without violence, without coups, and without dramatically changing the power structure by carefully negotiating an increase in American troop presence and foreign aid.

Honduran government officials consciously, and with the acceptance of most sectors of society, negotiated an increased American military presence in the early 1980s. In the summer of 1985, a Honduran Air Force officer intimated that the US military presence somewhat reduced political independence of his homeland, but that Honduras had made its own choice. He felt that his country rightly chose a course of action which offered the preservation of "traditional Honduran [liberal] values" (Downes: 8-9).

Honduran negotiators proved tenacious in their determination to reap as many benefits as possible from their country's important geostrategic position. In 1984, senior Honduran officials in Washington complained that the 1954 Security Assistance Agreement was obsolete, and a bilateral treaty of

mutual assistance should replace it. They also argued that Honduras would have to receive economic and military aid comparable to that of El Salvador (New York Times: 5). By the end of 1985, the US had not agreed to a bilateral treaty but had signed new understandings and had requested increased levels of foreign assistance from Congress. The Honduran Armed Forces played an important role in the successful foreign aid discussions, a reflection of their preeminent position in the Honduran political system.

Since 1954, the Honduran military has commonly been at the forefront of liberal reformist movements, advocating land reform, political liberalization, and sweeping economic development. Based on his years in Honduras and his many friendships with Honduran military officers, an AID official in Tegucigalpa said, "the military is widely supportive of economic development programs, of infrastructure development programs, and strongly want to see democracy work in Honduras" (US AID Official). They proved this, he felt, during private discussions with him and through public actions.

As an example, for his intervention in the Honduran constitutional crisis of 1985, General Walter Lopez Reyes, then Chief of the Honduran Armed Forces, was credited with preserving democracy.⁸ Members of both major political parties, campesino labor organizations, journalists, and outside observers agreed that Lopez played an immensely important preservative role. During General Lopez' two-year tenure, the Honduran Armed Forces took the lead in developing a civic action Program.

The Honduran military staff began in 1985 to host a series of military civic action seminars, bringing together Honduran military and government officials in an attempt to create a national civic action plan (Spitzer). The first seminar, held during May 1985 at the Honduran Armed Forces Command and General Staff School in Comayaguela, near Tegucigalpa, was well attended by senior Honduran military officers, indicating interest at the highest levels. When the Chief of the Honduran Armed Forces Combined Staff, Colonel Efrain Lizandro Gonzalez Munoz, opened the seminar, he said the teachings at that and subsequent seminars would be used to satisfy the needs of the people, whose well being was the main concern of the armed forces. Colonel Ronnie Martinez, Chief of Operations and Administration for the Combined Staff, and Colonel Omar Antonio Zelaya Reyes, Director of the Command and General Staff School also attended the opening session (Estado, 1985a: 11). The presence of such well-positioned officers sent a signal to the bureaucracy that the civic action seminar program should receive serious support. The signal was clear enough to produce a second seminar in August.

A total of 21 civilians and military personnel attended the second military civic action seminar held under the sponsorship

of the Combined Armed Forces Staff in Comayaguela 7-9 August 1985. The nine civilians included a meteorologist from the Civil Aeronautics Directorate, a professor, two doctors from the Public Health Ministry, a geologist, three engineers, and a lawyer. The mix of nine civilians and 12 military members indicated an intent to establish a valid national civic action program. The seminar syllabus also might have demonstrated the beginnings of a serious program. Among the sessions were "How to organize a work group," "Civic Action doctrine," "Civic Action case studies," and a trip to a local hospital (Estado, 1985b: 1-3).

While the very young Honduran MCA plan may or may not alleviate the suffering of the majority of the citizens, it did demonstrate that the government was aware of their problems. The Honduran Government's visible attempt to respond positively to the legitimate needs of its people is likely to continue frustrating the insurgents' search for significant popular support. It also constituted a limited tactical success for the US military in motivating the Honduran military to become involved in MCA as part of a national development plan.

Other Commentators

It is important also to note the position of Honduras with respect to its neighbors. In this part of Central America the countries that developed around the larger and more distinctive clusters of people were Guatemala, El Salvador, and Nicaragua. These countries have developed a strong sense of nationalism and compete aggressively with each other. Again and again Honduras has been subject to pressures from outside to throw its support to one or another of these countries. Since the others were fairly evenly balanced, Honduras has often been in a position to play the decisive role. And on many occasions outside pressures have disturbed the internal affairs of Honduras. (James: 168-169)

The two basic interpretations of US military involvement in military civic action projects in Honduras agreed that MCA resulted from the US foreign policy requirement to maintain a US military presence in Honduras as a counter to regional instability. However, the first interpretation claimed that the US Government did not care what happened to Honduras in the long-run. The second school-of-thought argued that the US planned to help develop Honduras in fundamental and lasting ways in addition to wanting to meet temporary regional goals.

Members of the first school argued that the Reagan foreign policy objectives for Honduras were shortsighted and, perhaps, even nefarious. For example, Dr. Philip Shepherd of Florida International University (FIU) claimed that North American

foreign policy did not aim to build a stable, democratic, peaceful Honduras. Rather, its near-term goals were to overthrow the Sandinista Government in Nicaragua and to defend "privilege" in El Salvador and Guatemala. The long-range goal seemed to him to be the reestablishment of governments blindly loyal to United States desires, "regardless of internal equity and freedom." He went on to say that, "Reagan is willing to not only risk, but even encourage, a Honduran-Nicaraguan war, the collapse of civilian government, and the undermining of Honduran internal stability in pursuit of these counterrevolutionary objectives" (Shepherd: 43-44). A more balanced yet highly critical evaluation of US policies in Honduras came from Dr. Mark Rosenberg, Director of the Latin American and Caribbean Center at FIU.

Dr. Rosenberg was correct when he wrote that US foreign policy was inspired more by regional concerns, i.e., instability in El Salvador and Nicaragua, than by direct concern for Honduras. United States government officials almost universally agreed with that aspect of Rosenberg's analysis; Government representatives in Washington and Tegucigalpa have openly admitted that the instability and violence in Nicaragua and El Salvador drew attention to the dire need for increased assistance levels to the Central American countries.

The US Government, given its finite resources, has always struggled with making difficult decisions about where to expend those resources, which programs will be funded, which increased, which decreased. Recognizing that this is both a strength and a weakness of the US governmental system and that US foreign aid could be reduced or terminated with little notice, US Government officials have openly advised the Hondurans to make the most of the aid currently available to them. They urged changing economic and government systems, seeking technical advice, instituting reforms, and promoting infrastructure development to produce long and short-term benefits. Dr. Rosenberg's admonitions were useful reminders that large-scale foreign aid dollars cannot last indefinitely; reminders, but not revelations.

The second school-of-thought held that military civic action was conducted in Honduras in support of long-term and short-term US foreign policy goals. The primary strategic purpose of MCA in Honduras was to prevent an insurgent overthrow of the Honduran Government. Although unlikely, such an overthrow was possible for two reasons. First, Honduras suffered insurgent and terrorist violence because of its opposition to the guerrilla front operated in El Salvador and because of its opposition to totalitarian domination of Nicaragua. Also, Honduras had internal problems which, if unchecked, could fuel insurgency.

In 1982, because her national policies began to damage leftists in bordering states, Honduras was targeted for insurgent

invasion and acts of terrorism. In the words of James Morris, Honduras "became a focal point for externally supported subversion and terror. Bombings, airline hijackings, destruction of the Tegucigalpa electrical system, and the September 1982 hostage drama in San Pedro Sula were designed to warn Hondurans, to create internal divisions, and polarize the relationship between authorities and the population" (Morris: 116). If sustained, such tactics could have crippled Honduras.

Both the US military presence and the consequent MCA were instituted in part to help deter insurgent activity and prevent insurgent success. Importantly, both of the insurgent groups infiltrated into Honduras in 1983 and 1984 failed to win popular support and were quickly defeated. It is also important to note that they were trained in Cuba and shipped to Honduras through Nicaragua as part of the Cuban strategy for violent overthrow of non Cuban-aligned governments developed "after Cuba and Nicaragua failed in their efforts to obtain Honduran neutrality in the Central American crisis" (Denton: 45).⁹ These developments heightened the importance of MCA in the US-Honduran political strategy for the region.

As Senator Jeremiah Denton stated in 1984, the fight against guerrillas had "severely taxed the struggling democratic government of Honduras" by forcing expenditures on defense and security (Denton: 45). As a result, the Hondurans would need increased levels of economic and military aid if they were to continue plans to develop their economic infrastructure. Military civic action, a part of the security development plan implemented by US Southern Command in 1982, would also require enhancement. Its purposes of preventing insurgency and promoting internal stability and development became even more strategically compelling in the wake of the externally supported attacks against Honduras of 1983-1984 (US Southern Command, 1984: 1). Moreover, Honduras had other pressing internal problems.¹⁰

Most of Honduras' internal difficulties were not created by government opponents, but have been exploited by them. As former President of Peru, Fernando Belaunde-Terry argued "The enemies of democracy are very interested in making trouble in the American nations. They take advantage of the problems that these countries do have" (Belaunde-Terry). Among those problems were allegations of human rights abuses and the attractiveness of "quick-fixes" to long-standing problems.

Some commentators contended that there were increasing signs of Honduran Government-sponsored "physical coercion" and a growing sense of fear and mistrust in 1984 (Morris: 129). Others argued that abuses were real, but uncommon, and stro: resisted by the government.¹¹ In fact, Honduras had a human rights record far better than most Latin American states and the government seemed to openly and privately oppose the suppression

of citizens' rights. A more insidious and potentially more telling problem was the continued appeal of philosophies which offered a quick route to economic and social advancement, especially if the philosophies were home-grown or of non-United States origin.

The Latin American hierarchy, according to Dr. Anthony Maingot del Barco, Head of the Sociology and Anthropology Department at FIU, has had a natural affinity for centralized political authority, for state involvement in the social-economy and, as a consequence, for Marxism-Leninism. The advocates of democracy and free-enterprise have struggled to overcome this basic prejudice (Maingot). In general Latin American populations have tended to desire some form of centralized direction which would be at once firm, yet benign. Even though Marxist-Leninist ideology failed socially and economically wherever it was instituted, its promise to transform societies survived (Aguilar). The most effective counter to Marxism-Leninism is the economic-political-social success record of the ideology of free enterprise, individual initiative, and democracy.¹²

Military civic action projects can serve as a platform for carrying the transforming nature of that ideology to the Honduran people where they live and in their language. Military civic action can fulfill its strategic potential for preventing insurgency, maintaining government popularity, and facilitating economic and social development, if it is conducted mainly by Hondurans. The next section will examine how successful MCA, and especially medical MCA, was by the end of 1985.

NOTES

1. Projected figures for Honduras for FY 87 are similar. Economic aid will be nearly double military aid: economic aid, 65%--military aid, 35% (DOD, 1986: Volume II, 62-63).
2. Some US economic assistance is earmarked for International Narcotics Control but not in Honduras.
3. The officer specifically designated as the single point of contact for US Southern Command Civil Affairs, SCJ5-CA.
4. In 1983, the inflation rate had stopped growing and actually decreased slightly to 8.9% (Vinelli: 17). By 1985, it was approximately 8.7% (GAO: 4). During 1984-1985, the Gross Domestic Product (in constant 1966 dollars) grew 2.5%, and the national deficit decreased by 14.5% (US Information Service: 4).
5. A 1985 Gallup Survey found that 74% of Hondurans polled felt it was very or fairly likely they would be attacked in the next few years. When those who responded very or fairly likely to the previous question were asked to choose from a list of 14

countries "Which country is the one that could attack?", 89% said Nicaragua, 8% said El Salvador, and 1% said Cuba (Gallup: 11).

6. Nicaragua fields an Army of approximately 75,000 full-time soldiers, heavily equipped with Soviet weapons supplied through Cuba. Honduras has about 18,000 troops, including 5,500 national police forces.

7. According to public opinion polls, the Congressman's claim is only a slight exaggeration. A Spanish Information Network poll asked, "The United States has military bases and soldiers in Honduras. Do you think that the United States should continue its military presence in the country, or would it be better if they left?" 60% said "Should continue." 30% said "Should leave" (Spanish International Network: 5). A Gallup survey compiled the following: (1) from a list of 14 countries, 96% of those polled said the US was helping Honduras "be better prepared to defend" themselves (Gallup: 8); (2) when asked for their "general opinion" of the US, 78% said "Very favorable," 14% said "Somewhat favorable" (Gallup: 20); (3) "would you say US treatment of our country has been generally . . . Very fair[37%] . . . Somewhat fair[49%] . . . Somewhat unfair[8%] . . . Very unfair[5%]?" (Gallup: 53). A USIA poll found: (1) 93% said the US was "helping solve our economic problems" (USIA, 1984: 45); (2) 90% said the US "would come to our aid immediately if we were attacked" (USIA, 1984: 55).

8. Those who argue that the military should have no part in the political system would do well to review the Newburgh Address of General George Washington. When a group of soldiers threatened to require Congress by force to pay them back-wages, General Washington dissuaded them by saying such an action would invalidate all they had fought for. The soldiers obeyed his request for patience and General Washington was rightly credited with preserving a very tenuous, struggling, young democracy.

9. See also Morris: 116.

10. For highly critical comments on these conditions see: Anderson or Sheehan. For a more scholarly treatment, see: Department of the Army (1984) Honduras, A Country Study.

11. The February 1985 State report to Congress, "Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 1984," showed that Honduras' very good record through 1983 was improving during 1984.

12. Dr. Anthony Maingot contends that Castro and the Communists face a serious problem. In the face of the obvious bankruptcy (literally) of Marxist-Leninist ideology, the US is the repository of the most powerful, successful ideological model anywhere in existence.

INTERPRETATIONS OF RESULTS

Current field research is lacking on how US involvement, especially its scale, may affect US influence and the political and military behavior of US allies in Central America it is often assumed that the effects of US involvement are linear: e.g., the more US involvement the better, or the less the better. Yet, as a Rand report recently noted, relatively "moderate" levels of US political, military, and economic involvement may have more favorable and fewer adverse consequences for US security interests at the local level than do "low" or "high" levels of US involvement. (Ronfeldt: 2)

State Department¹

The views of State Department personnel are broken into two groups. Those made by individuals working in Honduras when they rendered their analyses, and those working in Washington with previous experience in Honduras or who were responsible for Honduran affairs at the time their comments were made. The former were more critical of US MCA, while the latter tended to be more supportive.

State Department officials in Honduras were either critical of military medical civic action projects or mute, at least in writing. The common attitude of State toward DOD conduct of civic actions in Honduras reflected their philosophy about long-term health care development. They tended to see military health care programs as short-term, temporary, and, at times, obstructive to State's charter for long-term development of Honduras' health care system. According to a General Accounting Office report, "AID medical officials in Honduras . . . have strongly criticized the Department's [DOD's] use of a rapid succession of short-term efforts to apply high-technology medical care, with little chance for follow-up. The AID's programs are required to emphasize self-sustaining community-based health programs" (Comptroller General: 30). The AID officials in Honduras reported that the results of DOD's short-term projects were difficult to predict, but that AID's careful efforts over the past two decades were producing slow but demonstrable, improvements in Honduran health statistics.

Although AID could not prove that their programs directly produced the improvements, the health indicators were nonetheless encouraging. For example, life expectancy in 1985 was 58 years, up from 47 years in 1962, 23 percent increase in as many years. The dreadful infant mortality rate of 118/1000 in 1975 also dramatically improved. By 1981, it had dropped to 88/1000. By 1985, it was down to 78/1000 (US AID Honduras: 1). The AID hoped that its methodical approach would continue to produce

improvements in the health sector. During 1982-1983, there were 20,000 fewer reported cases of malaria and officials were optimistic that the 100,000 person-weeks of basic health care training given to Hondurans would continue the trend (US AID Honduras: 21). The AID employees argued that the increased levels of funding for State health sector projects in Honduras would continue to produce positive results.

Statistics showed that State was committed to improving the health of Hondurans through heavy investments of time, money, and personnel. For example, between 1981 and 1985, State administered \$7.6 million in health grants (US AID Honduras: 5). In addition, the Peace Corps was in the midst of a significant health care development program. The commitment was so strong that the Peace Corps maintained a cadre of over 300 volunteers in Honduras, the largest Peace Corps contingent in the world. Most of their 23 projects in Honduras were "rural-based and working with the poorest of the poor, designed to educate them in simple nutrition and sanitation and health care" (Peace Corps: 1-2).²

While most State agencies were silent about MCA in Honduras, one senior AID official discussed the issue in private. Saying he was expressing a personal view, he indicated a basic approval for US military attempts to promote Honduran involvement in civic actions. The Honduran military, he felt, was very supportive of economic development programs and civic action and truly wanted democracy to work. He felt sure that they recognized the need to support the common Honduran people if democracy was to thrive. Therefore, seeing the attitudes of the Honduran military officers with whom he was acquainted, he expressed support for US MCA efforts, if they promoted Honduran military involvement (US AID Official). State Department employees in Washington voiced strong support for medical MCA.

Members of the State Department in the US advocated medical civic actions but issued cautions about the potential disruption of a continued US military presence. If the US military presence were to be sustained at 1985 levels, they felt that MCA was crucial.

For similar reasons, the State Department Desk Officer for Honduras strongly favored MCA. When asked to comment on its usefulness he emphasized, "It's really, really important. We shouldn't be hiding our candle under a basket." Because of the Hondurans' desire for civic assistance, he felt we should not just continue MCA, but become even more involved. "We're always unwilling to commit ourselves to civic action because of the subject's political sensitivity in the US. This is disturbing to the Hondurans who very much want civic action." In his view, based on his extensive involvement in daily Honduran-US affairs, he was convinced that medical and other forms of MCA were among the most beneficial activities in which the US was involved in Honduras (Wesche).³

Another State Department official, who had been stationed in Honduras prior to the increase in the US military contingent, offered unique historical insight. Because of the character of the Honduran military, which he held in high esteem, he saw their low-key involvement in MCA as both necessary and useful. He said their involvement held a potential for good results because the Honduran Armed Forces were well-respected and liked by most Hondurans. In a way, he explained, the Honduran military was like the US Army. It had never been a "Praetorian Guard" (loyal only to the ruling elite) but had maintained close ties with its people. Its population composition was representative of the nation as a whole. Like many others, the official recalled that the Honduran military had often been a leading advocate of land reform, economic and social development, and political reform. When the Guatemalan Army engaged in civic action projects in the early 1960s, they did so reluctantly, pro forma. Naturally, he argued, the results from their "eyewash" civic actions were shallow and fleeting. But in Honduras, the military has been associated in the minds of the people with good things. Therefore, their civic action projects could yield lasting benefits for the nation. On the negative side, the official said he was disturbed by the scale of the US military presence. The Americans, he reasoned, had to do something to lessen the negative impact of placing so many foreign military troops, even temporarily, within the borders of a sovereign nation (US State Department Official). He felt that MCA had become necessary because the American presence had become so large. Another State official was even more direct in his critique of MCA and the US military presence in Honduran territory.

Steve Johnson, a former Assistant Air Attache to Honduras during the early period of the US military buildup, complained that rapidly increasing the size of the US troop contingent was troublesome. He described cases of socially offensive behavior among US soldiers, lack of proper respect for Honduran military personnel, and coordination problems between State and DOD agencies in Honduras. He emphasized MCA was absolutely essential in limiting the damage done by US troops and government employees not sensitized to the Honduran culture (Johnson, 1986a).

While Mr. Johnson's views were not widely expressed by State personnel, they could not be lightly dismissed. His firm stance seemed to stem from his concern for the US national good and for the future of Honduras. Besides, his contentions were supported by external evidence.

During the early months of the increasing introduction of US soldiers into Honduras, planning results reflected the North Americans' limited experience in working with the Honduran military on a large scale. The US troops overwhelmed the Hondurans and exceeded their own capability to ensure the most effective deployment of troops. Fortunately, by 1985 both the

Joint Staff at the Pentagon and the US Southern Command staff had developed a clearer understanding of the Honduran military system. By then, most of the irritants and deficiencies about which Mr. Johnson complained had been addressed, and the remedies seemed to be working.

One of the effective answers to earlier problems seemed to be medical MCA. Eyewitnesses agreed that medical civic action helped improve the image of the American soldiers (and the others involved). Judging by media reports and the comments of medical MCA participants, it also made a big impact on the US servicemen themselves. United States soldiers expressed sympathy for the local people which could make the soldiers less likely to ignore social customs and cultural norms. Their involvement in constructive community aid activities also left less time for potentially offensive recreational pursuits.

State Department employees with Honduras experience saw US medical MCA as producing, for the most part, positive short-term results based on their personal observations and the reports of US and Honduran acquaintances. They felt that it improved local social conditions and the US military image and probably stimulated increased Honduran military involvement in civic action. They cautioned that MCA could impede State's ongoing development projects if not properly coordinated among US and Honduran government agencies.

So long as the US military presence was sustained, they agreed MCA would have to continue. However, they argued that it should be conducted within the framework of a State-directed, long-term development program if it was to produce the desired strategic results. DOD's analysis of MCA was remarkably similar to the State Department's.

Department of Defense

What is commonly called "military science" is not scientific in the same sense as law or medicine or engineering. It encompasses no agreed-upon body of knowledge, no prescribed curriculum, no universally recognized principles that one must master to qualify as a military professional. (The so-called "principles of war" are really a set of platitudes that can be twisted to suit almost any situation.)

The point is that military professionalism is largely in the conduct of military operations, not in the analysis and design of broad strategies.

(Enthoven and Smith, quoted in Summers: 29-30)

When Colonel Harry G. Summers cited the above quotation, he correctly pointed out that Enthoven's and Smith's opinion that military professionals are merely functionaries and not strategists was totally wrong, exceedingly dangerous, and helped lead the US into disaster in Vietnam. Strategy is in the realm of military professionalism and should have been considered such in Southeast Asia in the 1960s and 1970s, just as it must be integral to military operations in Central America today, even in medical MCA in Honduras.

In Honduras, 1982-1985, medical MCA fulfilled its tactical purposes. Whether it fulfilled its strategic purposes cannot yet be determined and will require further study. In fact, many questions remained to be answered about the potential tactical and strategic results of MCA, such as: How much is enough? Who should control it? Who should conduct MCA operations in the field? and, How can the results be evaluated? If the military is to be involved in MCA, then they should have some of the answers.

Strategy should not be relegated to civilian officials as if the military bear no responsibility for the conduct of their duties. This part will examine the tactical and strategic results of medical MCA in Honduras. The sources for the discussion were exclusively from the US military community: either former or current service members, service documents and publications, or civilian DOD members.

Tactical

Most DOD sources enthusiastically claimed that MCA in all its forms was very successful tactically. It effectively furthered its three main tactical goals and produced many ancillary short-term benefits for participating Honduran and US military units. Specifically, MCA helped improve some social conditions, improved the popularity of participating military units, and motivated the Honduran military to become more involved in their own civic action program as part of a Honduran national development plan. In addition, US and Honduran units improved their war-fighting capabilities and morale improved among individual soldiers.

Many sources concluded that the US military image was enhanced by involvement in medical and other civic actions.⁴ The US Army Attache in Tegucigalpa was convinced that "the Hondurans overwhelmingly support[ed] the US presence" and MCA projects, in part because they perceived they had serious problems and were in need of US financial, technical, and educational assistance to overcome them (Dunbar). They recognized that the US soldiers sincerely wanted to help them and had. In addition, they saw the US military as trying to be sensitive to Honduran sovereignty as evidenced by the Honduran and US militaries working together in medical and community assistance projects.

Of course, Honduran involvement in MCA, both to enhance the image of the Honduran Armed Forces and to promote a national development plan, was a tactical goal of the US Southern Command staff. During Ahuas Tara I, combined Honduran/US teams performed medical assistance and helped with refugee relocation (US Southern Command, 1983). During the Blazing Trails engineering exercise in which a one lane dirt road was built in 1985, a Memorandum of Understanding was signed by representatives of the US and Honduran militaries and the Honduran Ministry of the Interior (Coker). These were healthy signs for the future, as were the series of civic action seminars begun at the Combined Honduran Military Staff Headquarters in 1985. The seminars brought Honduran government officials together with Honduran military representatives to learn about civic action. The US Southern Command staff and many Hondurans hoped that the result would be a Honduran-directed national civic action plan featuring the combined authority and effort of the host government and military (Spitzer).

Colonel Reynaldo Garcia, Commander of the US Military Group in Tegucigalpa, summed up the positive near-term benefits derived by the Honduran military from their part in civic assistance projects. Training exercises became more meaningful for them when they knew that one result of the exercises would be to leave behind tangible benefit for the local population. For example, treating fellow soldiers who pretended to be injured was less rewarding and less demanding than treating Honduran civilians who were truly ill or injured. In a simulated medical emergency, the medic could afford to be lax. With a real patient, there was little room for error and no room for a casual approach to treatment. Whether the training exercise involved building a road or bringing medical treatment to an isolated village, the Honduran military gained satisfaction and improved effectiveness from "doing something for real, not just for training." Further, the local citizens got to see their military helping the common people, producing a closer identification between them. According to Colonel Garcia, when the Government of Honduras participated directly, the results were similar. The people, the military, and the government had opportunities to develop closer cooperation and increased mutual empathy. However slightly, the process of building a modern nation was advanced both by the increased unity and by the physical benefits of leaving behind new roads, new buildings, better water supplies, and healthier people. As Colonel Garcia stated, "It is a slow building process, but at least it is a beginning" (Garcia, R.).

The American military units and individual soldiers also benefited from their participation in MCA. War fighting capabilities improved, as did individual work skills, personal satisfaction, and cross cultural awareness. According to a US Southern Command historical report, MEDRETES were very beneficial.

During MEDRETES, individuals developed higher proficiency and practical knowledge, and the units increased their capacity to deploy quickly and begin providing medical aid to US soldiers in conditions similar to what might be encountered in potential combat zones around the world (US Southern Command, 1985b). Such training benefits could not be duplicated in the US. If a medical unit failed to deploy with all needed equipment on a training exercise in the US, the shortages could quickly be made up by substitution or local procurement. When deploying to Honduras the same mistake could have a severe impact based on availability of supplies. Therefore, the medical units were forced to plan and operate far more realistically. Their plans and capabilities were truly put to the test.

Individual soldiers also were put to the test and benefited from the experience. They grew in confidence, in knowledge, in maturity, and in job satisfaction. Many of them reported that duty in Honduras and involvement in MCA fulfilled the promises of their recruiters. Sergeant Johnnie L. Young, a veterinary specialist, typified the feelings of many. He said that, despite the difficult working conditions he faced in Honduras (the heat, the dust, the long hours), he would rather do his job in Honduras than back in the US because, "Here I'm doing more of what I wanted to do when I came in the Army" (El Gazette, 1985a: 4). The chance to help some really needy Hondurans seemed to provide a sense of accomplishment and self-worth to many soldiers. Importantly, there were signs that association with Honduran communities through MCA projects was developing among US soldiers a more sophisticated understanding of how to help the Hondurans.

Staff Sergeant Greg Allen's article, "Generosity Sometimes More Than Pocket Change," warned of the dangers of the casual rendering of kindnesses unaccompanied by planning and follow up. Giving a few coins to the Honduran children begging in the streets of Comayagua, while seemingly generous, could produce devastating consequences for the children and for Honduras according to Father Emile Cook, the local Catholic priest. The children could become parasites, hanging around villages waiting for a handout instead of going to school or being with their families. They might grow up to be criminals because they did not learn a useful skill. Besides, Sergeant Allen explained, there were other ways to help. Rather than giving money, the soldiers could buy them food. Better yet, the soldiers could become involved in community projects to teach the children to feed themselves. The results, said Sergeant Allen, could be really beneficial because, "a person then learns how to be self-sufficient and retain a sense of dignity. They learn discipline and self-reliance. And, they don't have to depend on the good will of others" (El Gazette, 1985a: 2). Sergeant Allen's article echoed the warnings of Lieutenant Colonel Richard Downes, former Director of Area Studies at the US Air Force Academy's Department of History.

Lieutenant Colonel Downes' report on Honduran attitudes toward the US military presence found that civic action projects helped the Hondurans, especially the poor and children; however, more Honduran involvement was needed. When the US took the lead, with inadequate Honduran military and civilian participation, the projects could seem like "paternalistic give-aways." The resultant indignation could be dangerous as could the limited community involvement. When the US military departed an area, Lieutenant Colonel Downes recorded, the projects tended not to continue. He suggested that "teaching Hondurans to wire a schoolhouse is obviously more effective . . . than having US personnel wire it on their own. The final project has a higher chance of standing as a monument to joint US-Honduran action and cooperation, rather than as an act of charity by a very rich nation" (Downes). Fortunately, US military authorities seemed aware of the seriousness of Lieutenant Colonel Downes' critique and by 1985 were developing procedures to address the problem.

Strategic

Humanitarian assistance is a mixed bag; it can do some good, but it can also do a lot of harm.
(Colonel Riley R. Moore, former Deputy Director, SCJ5)

Recognizing the existence of a problem is the first and most critical step in finding its solution. Not to consider the possibility of failure is to ensure the same. Fortunately, DOD officials were aware that humanitarian assistance and civic action had both a positive and negative strategic potential in Honduras. They knew that it could either succeed or fail in its strategic purposes. It could prevent or provoke insurgency. It could advance or retard social and economic development. And, it could enhance or degrade government popularity with the people. In addition, they knew that MCA had an amorphous character that had historically made it difficult to control, coordinate, and evaluate; thus exacerbating its negative potential.

Military civic action could fail by stifling economic and social progress and by reducing government popularity. Unearned support could make people dependent on give-aways, preventing the birth of self-help programs. Individual and community development programs can be stifled when outside programs, at no local cost, move in and take their place. The existence in the US of second and third generation welfare recipients lends credibility to the argument. An alternative argument says that the pump must be primed. With a little help to get started, people can reach the point where they will sustain their own development program. The delicate task in managing assistance activities was finding that illusive point where self-help takes over without going to the point where reliance on outside help becomes normalized. The problem, as some US Southern Command officers saw it, was that US MCA might prevent or overwhelm Honduran-initiated development programs.

Discussing the magnitude of early combined training exercises, Colonel Riley Moore recalled that the differences between the US and Honduran military forces in magnitude of logistics, operational intensity, and technological sophistication had simply overwhelmed the Honduran military. Without careful planning, he felt, the same could happen with military civic action (Moore). A US officer warned earlier. "The last thing we want to do is come in on top of the host government and do it obviously better and faster. This would undermine the intent of civic action, to improve the standing of the host government military with its people" (HQ Clark Air Base: 5). Done improperly, the US could demoralize the host government and prevent the development of their programs to help their own people. United States efforts could also overshadow and demoralize indigenous private attempts to create local self-help projects. The result could be to create a lethargy within the host nation and to slow economic and social progress, eventually making the people more susceptible to insurgents who could argue that their problems were attributable to the "imperialistic intrusions" of a great power.

Some Pentagon officials agreed with Dr. David S. Palmer, of the Foreign Service Institute, that the history of US involvement in MCA in Latin America required sober consideration. In the 1960s, Palmer argued, some Latin American military officers became so enamored with civic action programs that they decided their civil governments were superfluous. Since their experience showed that the military could administer civic action and nation-building programs, some military men came to believe that the military could promote long-term national development more effectively than the civil government. Dr. Palmer taught that some military regimes did in fact replace civil governments based on this precise rationale. Although Dr. Palmer's historical interpretation was open to debate (one historian described it as specious), it was not spurious. Some Latin American military officers introduced to civic action through the US military did end up in positions of power in civil governments or at the head of military regimes. The limitation of Dr. Palmer's argument is that one cannot prove a causal relationship between Latin American military involvement in MCA and Latin American military assumption of government control. Their militaries ran governments long before the US developed military civic action programs. A possibility of more immediate concern to DOD was that of "rising expectations."

Colonel Riley Moore gave an example of the classic problem when he said, it is dangerous to "go pull a few teeth, give a few shots, then disappear. People get a taste of modern things (such as medical care), want more and ask why their government isn't providing them" (Moore). Having loved and lost was, in this case, not better than having never loved at all. It could provoke dissatisfaction in previously placid people.

Another consequence of carelessly administered civic assistance can be provoking serious economic and power competition. Some Honduran sources (such as construction contractors) could complain that civic improvement projects conducted gratis by the military troops of Honduras or the US would constitute unfair competition with their trade. Surely they could not be expected to compete with the troops of a foreign superpower; nor could they compete with government troops financed through national tax revenues. Such projects could unfairly deprive civilian businesses of the opportunity to earn a living. But that is not the end of jealousy aroused by MCA. Private beneficent organizations could protest that government forces get in the way of other groups trying to help the people. By engaging in short-term aid packages, the military might interfere with long-term solutions to fundamental problems. Further, the civil government might resent military forces performing on a part-time basis what they are tasked to perform as full-time professionals. These potential complaints have been taken seriously because they can create friction serious enough to provoke violence, intransigence, and backlash against national stability. Department of Defense officials wanted to be careful not to interfere with the legitimate or perceived domain of Honduran power centers.

In Honduras

Through 1985, US troops were basically well-accepted. However, there existed a continual undercurrent of resistance to the US military presence. Military civic action helped mitigate some Honduran complaints and clearly made the US military more popular, but it did not eliminate all of the sources of resentment. Military staffs continued to address those areas of concern.

Public opinion polls in 1983, 1984, and 1985 consistently showed strong support among the more educated sectors of Honduran society for the US military in Honduras. The majority of those polled perceived a value in the US military coming to Honduras in sizable numbers and staying until the threat of invasion and externally supported violence subside.

Military civic action was credited with helping to win and maintain support for the US troops in many parts of the country. In Comayagua, medical MCA was considered especially important in gaining acceptance for the US soldiers. In Puerto Cortes, the Mayor praised crews of US ships for their civic action projects. As would be expected, the commercial sectors in Comayagua welcomed the military. Also, "middle sector representatives ... were adamant in expressing a need for a US military presence" (Downes: 4-6).

Although acceptance of the US military was wide-spread, it came with some reservations. In coastal areas where North American troops appeared only occasionally, such as San Lorenzo and Puerto Cortes, acceptance was almost unconditional. The citizens praised US soldiers and sailors for their willingness to help locals, for being well-behaved and well-controlled, and for being present to prevent aggression against Honduran territory. Episodic presence was clearly more acceptable to the Hondurans than continual presence (Downes: 4). By the end of 1985, it must be emphasized, most Hondurans favored continuation of the US military presence. Still, some were concerned that a continual US military presence would threaten Honduran sovereignty.

Senior Honduran and US officials were sensitive to this volatile issue. In their joint communique of May 1985, Presidents Suazo Cordova and Reagan, "expressed great satisfaction with . . . the Joint Commission on US-Honduran relations . . . formed in Washington in November 1984 to promote, on the basis of sovereign equality and mutual respect, sustained economic and social development and enhanced security" (Governments of the US and Honduras: 1). Sovereignty required more than lip-service for the Hondurans. It was a pervasive, recurrent national motto. An editorial in the San Pedro Sula, Honduras, La Prensa raised the issue in dramatic tones. It warned against a return to the "big stick" or "ugly American" stage of "counterproductive and suicidal methods" of trying to change internal Honduran policy. Honduran-US relations, La Prensa insisted, should be conducted respectfully at the highest levels and with concern for the sovereignty and dignity of a country which had clearly demonstrated its love for freedom and commitment to democracy as it joined the US in a common effort to support Western values and to oppose those in Central America who stood against freedom and democracy (FBIS, 1985e: P5).⁶

Despite the basic warm friendship between Honduras and the US, some resentment against the Americans was manifest in the Honduran military. In 1985, Honduran Army officers complained that the US presence had impacted on national sovereignty and had been personally insulting. Several junior officers felt that US officers thought of them as unprofessional, as Honduran Pancho Villas. Recognizing the US had been invited to perform a needed service, a senior captain in the Honduran Air Force said, "the US in effect had expanded its presence, from a 'guest invited to occupy a spare room in your house, to taking over the entire second floor with eyes on the rest'" (Downes: 7-9). Interference with sovereignty was not the sole complaint against the American military in Honduras. The generally warm welcome for MCA did not totally offset other negative impacts (real or imagined).

That the US presence near Comayagua had changed the town's social environment was of special concern. Citizens, and outside commentators, complained that "prostitution had increased

dramatically" and that a veritable army of 5 to 12 year old children was roaming the streets and begging from American soldiers (Downes: 6-7). During the traditional May Day celebration in Tegucigalpa in 1985, thousands protested the constitutional crisis, and some also complained about the "continuous US military maneuvers and the presence of foreign military bases" (Central America Report: 137). Whether these reports were based on valid complaints or were simply used to further personal causes was immaterial. Since a strategic purpose of MCA was to win the war for perceptions and attitudes, any charges leveled against the American military had to be taken seriously to ensure the continued tactical success of MCA and to promote its strategic success.

Other Commentators

The lesson we had learned in Korea was to orient US forces on the external rather than the internal threat.

As a sovereign nation the problem of internal security was the responsibility of the Government of the Republic of Korea, and the role of US forces was (and is) limited to protecting South Korea from external attack. (Summers: 47)

In 1985, Hondurans generally believed that they needed outside assistance (security and economic), that such help would probably come from the US, and that North American troops were needed in Honduras. However, some Hondurans felt that continued, large-scale American presence would produce unacceptable consequences. Although US medical and other civic actions eased suffering temporarily and in small ways aided economic and social development, they slowed but did not reverse a gradual decline in American military acceptability. Military civic action had met its short-term tactical goal of making the US troop presence more acceptable, but was not serving to increase the popularity of the Honduran government with its people in the long-run. It was even argued that MCA was distracting the US military from their primary areas of responsibility. Congress was skeptical of US MCA in Honduras.

A US Congressional report on the Continuing Appropriations Act reported in 1984 that the GAO had found DOD humanitarian and civic action expenditures during Ahuas Tara II (August 1983-February 1984) in violation of section 1301(c) of title 31 USC. Despite the spending violations, however, GAO found that DOD should be allowed to make reasonable expenditures, incidental to authorized operations, which "yield social, humanitarian, or civic benefits" (US Congress). More recently, GAO demonstrated basic support for DOD's MCA projects in Honduras by stating, "we agree with SOUTHCOM that no funding violation results from bona fide training activities that result in a concurrent civic or

humanitarian benefit," so long as activities of a "type and amount which fall within the scope of other appropriation categories" are paid for from those other sources. The GAO report of 1986 said that while Ahuas Tara II "exercises exceeded DOD's funding authority . . . post-Ahuas Tara II activities" appeared reasonable. (Comptroller General: 34-35).

Congress also was anxious that the "Activities of the Defense Department should in no way supplant, replace, or offset ongoing humanitarian relief programs of the appropriate Federal agencies with primary jurisdiction" (US Congress). To address this potential problem, GAO recommended that Congress clarify the types of MCA activities allowed, keep the requirement that DOD annually report its MCA activities to Congress, and consider requiring DOD to cooperate with AID. According to the Comptroller General's report (Comptroller General: 35), "The latter requirement would increase the likelihood that DOD's activities are consistent with the needs of both agencies." In fact, during 1985, US Southern Command was investigating increased formal cooperation with State, AID, and other government agencies to ensure the productivity of civic assistance activities.⁷ All parties seemed concerned that they might end up working at odds with each other if their cooperation were not increased and formalized. The results of failure to cooperate could be destructive to the best interests of Honduras and the US. Again, GAO's worries did not stop there.

The GAO was concerned that United States MCA might have led to a reversal in mission tasking which could prove especially dangerous in the long-run if not exposed and corrected. In April 1985, GAO warned that "the activities observed by GAO personnel during Ahuas Tara II went beyond a level of assistance that could be described as incidental, but were instead designed as major exercise activities in their own right" (Comptroller General: 30). Based on the military's after-action reports, the GAO argued that the medical activities were themselves a primary purpose for conducting portions of the Ahuas Tara II exercise. In those cases other training had become secondary.

Those reports indicate that training benefits were incidental to humanitarian activities, rather than the other way around The 41st Combat Support Hospital's after-action report describes the MEDCAP [Medical Civic Action Program] program as follows: "The AHUAS TARA II MEDCAP program was a truly unique and extremely successful humanitarian effort. It reached out to thousands of Hondurans in the remote and relatively inaccessible areas of the country and provided essential medical, dental and veterinary care. In addition it provided an opportunity for US military medical personnel to gain invaluable training in tropical medicine." (Emphasis added.) (Comptroller General: 31-32)

If GAO was correct in its analysis, the result could have been an unpredictable alteration in the planned impact of MCA activities. One of the original tactical purposes of MCA was to make the presence of US military troops temporarily more palatable. During Ahuas Tara II, according to GAO and military after-action reports, at least some troops were brought to Honduras specifically to accomplish MCA missions, i.e., MCA increased the American troop presence. Senior DOD authorities agreed with GAO that this had happened and that the error had to be corrected. Subsequent GAO findings indicated that the problem had indeed been properly addressed by authorities at US Southern Command. Still, Congress and GAO were not the only ones to critique DOD's MCA involvement. Several American academicians raised fundamentally important questions.

Jose Garcia of New Mexico State University said that MCA had its good and bad points. He felt it indicated a sensitivity within the US military for the needs of the Honduran people and for the potentially disruptive nature of the US military presence in Honduras. But he was concerned that it was difficult to project precisely what the outcome of civic actions would be. He recalled the case of a Salvadoran officer who organized his country's MCA program so effectively that he thought he could use its organizational base to force the military to promote him as a presidential candidate. His bid failed, but the point, according to Garcia, remained. Military civic action can produce serious, harmful "unintended consequences" (Garcia, J.).

Caesar Sereseres, also a noted Latin American, expressed mixed feelings about US military civic actions in Honduras. He listed several positive effects: increases in political and psychological leverage for the American military, increased cooperative efforts between the Honduran and American armed forces, and "freebies" for the Hondurans, such as roads, wells, and medical care which did not have to be paid for out of Foreign Assistance dollars or Honduran Government treasuries. Despite these benefits, questions remained.

Dr. Sereseres asked if there were limits to what you can do with civic action. General Fred C. Weyand, former US Army Chief of Staff and Commander of the Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, said in 1976, "The major military error [in Vietnam] was a failure to communicate to the civilian decisionmakers the capabilities and limitations of American military power. There are certain tasks the American military can accomplish on behalf of another nation. They can defeat enemy forces on the battlefield [and so on] But there are also fundamental limitations on American military power . . . the Congress and the American people will not permit their military to take total control of another nation's political, economic, and social institutions in order to completely orchestrate the war" (Summers: 49). Colonel Summers and General Weyand argued that as the American military could not take over Vietnam's internal

system to conduct the war as the US saw fit, neither could they take over its internal system to ensure that the Vietnamese government dealt with its people as we would have liked. In other words, the US military could not win the hearts and minds of the Vietnamese people for their government. Surely, General Weyand and Colonel Summers would have argued that the same limitation applied in Honduras. The US military could not win the hearts and minds of the Honduran people for their government. That was a job which only the Honduran government could do. To think otherwise would be a grave strategic mistake.

Dr. Sereseres also asked "the aspirin question." If two are good, are 12 better? Rephrased for medical MCA in Honduras, if two MEDRETES produced good will, might 12 MEDRETES produce more good will? Seeing that DOD had no statistics to quantify the positive or negative results of MCA, this question could not be answered numerically. However, it allows consideration of another question asked by Harry Summers. Might minor tactical successes in MCA lead to an overemphasis on the possibilities for civic action projects?

In Vietnam, the US military failed to correctly ascertain its strategic objective. The North Vietnamese won a conventional victory while the US military spent too much effort on counterinsurgency and its attendant MCA activities. Not that counterinsurgency and MCA had no role. As Colonel Summers was quick to argue, counterinsurgency had "much to offer a nation faced with internal insurgency" (Summers: 48). Much to his credit, President John Kennedy saw counterinsurgency "as first and last a political task to be carried out under civilian management" (Summers: 48).

If it had remained at that level it could have been a valuable adjunct to US military operations in Vietnam which should have been focused on protecting South Vietnam from outside aggression, leaving the internal problems to the South Vietnamese themselves.

But . . . we failed to distinguish between these two tasks. Counterinsurgency took on a life of its own. (Summers: 48)

The US ran the same risk in Honduras if they incorrectly analyzed the military objective and improperly focused their military efforts. Although the words are this author's, perhaps, if asked, Colonel Summers would have said in 1985,

As a sovereign nation the problem of internal security was the responsibility of the Government of the Republic of Honduras, and the role of US forces was (and is) limited to protecting Honduras from external attack.

NOTES

1. The first part will deal only with the State Department because the White House did not comment directly on MCA in Honduras.

2. The Peace Corps in Honduras expected to expand its involvement in primary health care in 1986 as part of State's focus on this concern.

3. The State Department official went on to explain that analysis of MCA is difficult because there are no extant studies to demonstrate the direct results of medical MCA, in part due to their nature as "incidental" to training exercises [and in Honduras due to the short time during which they have been conducted there].

4. For example, see US Department of Defense: Humanitarian Task Force Study.

5. While the potential for this to occur is real, I found no evidence that it was actually happening, perhaps due to my limited in-country research, or due to how little information the Honduran Armed Forces releases on the subject, or because the Hondurans were not yet noticeably overwhelmed. In any event, US Southern Command would be wise to continue watching this area of concern. David Ronfeldt's 1985 RAND study which was still in progress when this was written may well be illuminating.

6. Honduran publications were rife with concerns about infringements on sovereignty. During an interview in Miami, a Honduran official mentioned national sovereignty emphatically several times (Honduran Government Official).

7. A Memorandum of Understanding between AID's Caribbean Development Office and the US Forces Caribbean and US Southern Command's expressed determination to form other agreements of a similar nature indicate the military's apparent intent to comply with GAO's and Congress' directions.

CONCLUSION

We have chosen to characterize Honduras as an "apprentice democracy." Certainly, the period of apprenticeship has been perplexing, painful, and not without reverses. Clearly, the process of political development has not led to the establishment of operative constitutional norms of election, succession, and the lawful competition for power. Rather, Honduras has proceeded by makeshift expedients, from one constituent assembly to the next, interspersed with difficult constitutional crises and military interventions. Yet the Honduras of the present is not the Honduras of 1948. New political expectations have been established. A new generation of civilian leaders has emerged who seek to exercise the skills of democratic politics and have acquired some experience in the management of a perplexing and frustrating political order. Although the military coup of 1963 may represent a more or less long-lasting setback, it is perhaps unlikely that the aspirations established or the experience gained can be completely erased, or that Honduras need begin again quite from the beginning. (Anderson, C.: 106-107)

Summary

This paper discussed the advantages, disadvantages, and ambiguities of US military civic action in Honduras. It demonstrated MCA was a tactical success because it achieved the short-term objectives of aiding economic and social conditions, improving the popularity of the participating military forces, and motivating the Honduran military to begin engaging in MCA as part of a national development plan. However, whether MCA fulfilled its strategic goals (facilitating economic and social development, maintaining government popularity with the people, and, preventing insurgency) was uncertain. Because no government or private organization has yet evaluated the results of MCA by any numerical system other than total numbers of projects undertaken and completed, and numbers of patients treated, kilometers of road built, etc., subjective evaluation (such as public opinion polls, media articles, and personal interviews) was effectively the only method of evaluation available.

Medical civic actions served as a focus for the study of MCA because they seemed relatively innocuous, acceptable without question by all parties. Research proved that medical MCA was not without problems. In fact, all forms of military civic action had more than one face. In the short-term, the advantages of US involvement in MCA in Honduras outweighed the disadvantages. In the long-term, one could only present the possibilities based on historical example, logic, and imagination.

The US military must consider the possibility that Military civic action in Honduras could fail to achieve its strategic objectives. The Hondurans could become dependent on the US, stultifying economic and social development. Honduran society could be polarized through prolongation of the US troop presence, frustrated rising expectations, awakening nationalism and anti-Yankeeism, perceived insults to Honduran sovereignty, and exacerbation of jealousies among Honduran power sectors. The US troop presence could even be used by militant Honduran sub-sectors as a pretext to polarize the Honduran populace and to provoke anti-governmental violence. Fortunately, every negative potential is matched by a positive potential.

In the long-run, American MCA efforts could produce results beneficial to both Honduras and the US. If the two governments determine that American military activities should continue, then MCA has a role to play in promoting economic and social development and enhancing national unity. If the people perceive the resultant economic and social benefits as being derived from the benevolence and wisdom of their national government, they will support that government against external aggression and internal disorder.

This paper has demonstrated that the results of MCA have been mixed. It has, for the most part, succeeded tactically. Its strategic success or failure is uncertain as its outcome lies in the future, in the unknown. We know that the State Department and DOD and their subordinate agencies are aware of MCA's potentialities and are working to be successful for the good of Honduras and the US. Another potential is of special concern.

The potential strategic outcome of MCA is distinguished by its ambiguity and unpredictability, the unforeseen consequences of military civic actions. These should not prevent MCA programs from taking place but do provide rationale for increased efforts to study MCA as thoroughly as possible. Study can increase the realm of the known, decrease the disturbing realm of the unknown, and increase the likelihood that contemplated actions will produce the desired result. There are several ancillary results of MCA which require further study.

A Departure Point for Future Military Civic Action

A fundamental reason for the controversial nature of the superficially benign subject of military civic action has been its amorphousness. Military civic action has been difficult to classify with precision. As a result, it has historically lacked control, eluded effective coordination, and resisted quantitative evaluation. All those problems were present in Honduras in the 1980s, and they require further study.

When the US quickly increased its military contingent in Honduras in 1982, MCA spontaneously erupted, basically at the instigation of US Army personnel familiar with counterinsurgency theory and concerned for the well-being of Honduras and the effective accomplishment of their mission. When the military elected to increase MCA as part of a larger counterinsurgency program, the US troops in Honduras responded enthusiastically. The enthusiasm reached down to the lowest levels and somewhat outran the supervisory capacity of the small staff at US Southern Command Headquarters. Not surprisingly, MCA activities, following the dictates of emotion and sincere enthusiasm, exceeded existing guidelines in a few cases.

Also not surprisingly, the coordination between US military units, US government agencies, the Honduran military, and Honduran government agencies, as well as local Honduran organizations and private international organizations, was less than perfect. There have been many cooperative efforts but also some cases of noncooperation.

Control and coordination problems have been items of US government debate in recent years. The US Southern Command and the JCS staff have been improving control mechanisms. The DOD and State Department have been negotiating for and agreeing to better coordination. They have attempted to enhance the involvement of Honduran and private agencies. New regulations and new agreements have brought hope that humanitarian and civic assistance efforts will be more likely to produce lasting economic, social, and political development. However, prediction will continue to be tenuous until evaluation techniques are developed.

Evaluation has been difficult and faulty in the past. On occasion, the mere compiling of statistics has been mistaken for evaluation. For example, a 1984 US Southern Command message stated that the statistics of Ahuas Tara II "demonstrate the significant positive contribution [of humanitarian assistance]. US troops, in combination with the HO [Honduran] government, have been able to provide underprivileged families with a better life" (US Southern Command, 1984: 2). Of course, the idea that compiling numbers of actions completed proved positive benefits was a nonsequitur. Unfortunately, the same sophistry had been applied before to analyze MCA's contributions.

Charles Simpson was very proud of the "Civic Action" medal awarded in 1970 to the 5th US Special Forces Group by the Republic of Vietnam for its massive civic assistance activities. The 5th was credited with setting up, providing, building, repairing, or administering the following (Simpson: 173).

- 49,902 economic aid projects - 129 churches
- 34,334 education projects - 272 markets
- 35,468 welfare projects - 110 hospitals
- 10,959 medical projects - 398 dispensaries
- 6,436 wells - 1003 classrooms
- 1,949 kilometers of road - 670 bridges
- 14,934 transportation facilities

Colonel Simpson's pride in the 5th was justifiable, but his equating the quantity of projects completed with how well they fulfilled their purposes (to increase the popularity of the government, promote social and economic development, and prevent insurgency), was an unfortunate failure in logic. But the failure was understandable. Military civic action evades numerical evaluation. Even statistics which demonstrate an improvement in infant mortality rates do not prove there was any related improvement in government popularity. In the final analysis, what did the vast civic assistance statistics compiled in Vietnam mean? Southeast Asia was lost to the Communist forces. Was the civic action too little, too late? Or was there another answer? Was the US distracted by counterinsurgency activities from the real war, according to Harry Summers, a conventional war of aggression by an invading North Vietnamese Army? Were the Americans distracted from the real reason the RVN government lacked support (its basic ineptness, corruption, and unresponsiveness to the needs of its people, and its alliance with and dependence on a foreign military power within its sovereign borders)? Without a dependable method for evaluating MCA, we can not know the answers to those questions.

The basic tool of measure has been the public opinion poll. Opinion polls have been condemned for many deficiencies. They are too malleable. Their results (even if absolutely correct) become dated almost before they can be released. Opinions change on a daily basis. A village which expressed complete support for all government programs one day, might have turned against the government in burning rage the next. Despite their limitations, opinion polls can provide valid indications of current perceptions if properly administered and interpreted.

The DOD and State Department need to learn how to interpret and predict MCA results. To that end, they should commission a series of studies to reveal more about the nature of civic assistance. A series of opinion polls should test opinions before, during, after, and long after a variety of civic action projects. Such samples could provide insight into the myths and realities of MCA. Other studies could measure health, economic, or social conditions before, during, after, and long after MCA projects. These statistics could begin to allow more scientific prediction of likely outcomes of assistance activities.

With any decision to act, or not to act, one faces a degree of risk. The risk is acceptable if it is taken into account through as much planning, preparation, and coordination as feasible. The risk is unacceptable when it is simply ignored. When one fails to find and consider alternative choices of action through unwillingness to do so, rather than through the exigencies of limited time and resources, he risks disaster that could have been avoided. Military authorities have stated that such an event is willful negligence. It is unacceptable among those tasked to defend the best interests of the people of the US. For this reason, they continue to search out the potentialities of US military civic actions in Honduras through study and debate. Only through this continuing, difficult, vital process can US MCA in Honduras be expected to bear good fruit in both the near and long-term.

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APPENDIX 1

Military Civic Action Strategic and Tactical Objectives

STRATEGIC

1. Facilitate economic and social development (30).
2. Maintain government popularity with the people (29).
3. Prevent insurgency (29).

TACTICAL

1. Help economic and social conditions in the near-term (77, 275).
2. Improve popularity of military forces with population (275).
3. Motivate Host Nation military to engage in MCA as part of a national development plan (140).

Note: STRATEGIC objectives drawn from Departments of the Army, the Navy, and the Air Force, 1966; TACTICAL drawn from Department of the Army, 1981.

APPENDIX 2

Major Training Exercises in Honduras 1982-1985

Feb 1983: Ahuas Tara I (Big Pine I): Northern Mosquitia Region.

Aug 1983 - Feb 1984: Ahuas Tara II (Big Pine II).

Mar - Jun 1984: Granadero I: Combined Honduran/Salvadoran/US.

23 - 25 Mar 1984: Kilo Punch: Emergency deployment readiness exercise.

Jul - Dec 1984: Bigger Focus: A series of US/Honduran DTEs.

Jul 1984 - 1985: Post-Granadero I: A series of DFTs/DTEs.

13 Aug - 17 Dec 1984: King's Guard: Combined Honduran, Salvadoran, US naval surveillance exercises in Gulf of Fonseca.

11 Feb - 3 May 1985: Ahuas Tara III (Big Pine III): Joint/Combined antiarmor and counterinsurgency field exercise.

12 - 27 Apr 1985: Universal Trek 85: Atlantic Command exercise.

7 Jun - 27 Sep 85: Cabanas 85.

APPENDIX 3

US Training Exercise Activity in Honduras 1985

MEDRETES

21 Jan - 28 Feb: 261st Medical Element, an Army Medical Equipment Maintenance Team from Ft Benning, Georgia; on DTE and incidental MEDRETE.

18 - 31 Mar: 823rd Medical Detachment, North Carolina ARNG; on DFT; and incidental humanitarian assistance.

Mar - Jun: Army aviation elements from Company C, 24th Infantry Division, Combat Aviation Battalion, Hunter Army Airfield, Georgia, and from 193d Infantry Brigade, Ft Clayton, Panama, providing administrative airlift support and MEDIVACs as needed.

10 - 24 Jun: Medical Equipment Maintenance Team, Ft Benning, Georgia.

14 - 26 Jul: 924th Medical Detachment (Dispensary), Arizona ARNG.

14 - 28 Jul: 94th General Hospital, 807th Medical Brigade, provided a Medical Clearing Platoon, Mesquite, Texas.

18 - 31 Aug: 44th EVAC Hospital, Oklahoma ARNG.

7 - 21 Sep: 92nd Medical Detachment (Dispensary), New Hampshire ARNG.

8 - 22 Sep: 325th General Hospital, Missouri ARNG.

14 - 25 Oct: Medical detachment, Ft Sam Houston, Texas; to give entomology services, survey pests and diseases, as well as incidental MEDRETES.

27 Oct - 9 Nov: 675th Medical Detachment, Ft Benning, Georgia; training and incidental MEDRETES.

MAJOR EXERCISES

11 Feb - 3 May: Ahuas Tara III; Joint/combined antiarmor and counterinsurgency field exercise.

7 Jun - 27 Sep: Cabanas 85.

Note: MEDRETES excerpted from US Southern Command, 1985b; MAJOR EXERCISES excerpted from US Government Pamphlet, 1985.

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