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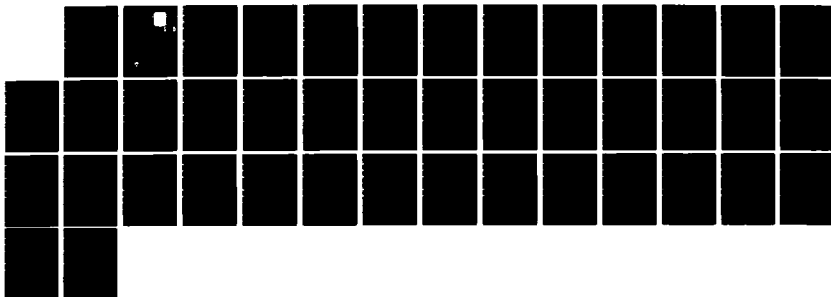
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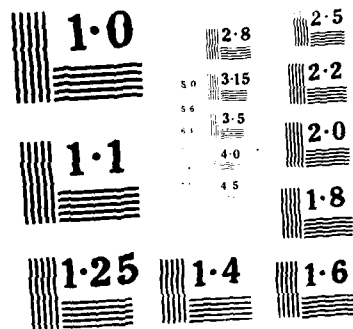
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## STUDY PROJECT

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HONDURAS DEFENSE POLICY

BY

LIEUTENANT COLONEL JOSE L. NUNEZ-BENNETT

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REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE		READ INSTRUCTIONS BEFORE COMPLETING FORM
1. REPORT NUMBER	2. GOVT ACCESSION NO.	3. RECIPIENT'S CATALOG NUMBER
	-12.4170	872
4. TITLE (and Subtitle)		5. TYPE OF REPORT & PERIOD COVERED
Honduras Defense Policy		STUDENT PAPER
		6. PERFORMING ORG. REPORT NUMBER
7. AUTHOR(s)		8. CONTRACT OR GRANT NUMBER(s)
LTC Jose L. Nunez-Bennett		
9. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME AND ADDRESS		10. PROGRAM ELEMENT, PROJECT, TASK AREA & WORK UNIT NUMBERS
U.S. Army War College Carlisle Barracks, PA 17013-5050		
11. CONTROLLING OFFICE NAME AND ADDRESS		12. REPORT DATE
SAME		22 April 1986
		13. NUMBER OF PAGES
		39
14. MONITORING AGENCY NAME & ADDRESS (if different from Controlling Office)		15. SECURITY CLASS. (of this report)
		UNCLASSIFIED
		15a. DECLASSIFICATION/DOWNGRADING SCHEDULE
16. DISTRIBUTION STATEMENT (of this Report)		
DISTRIBUTION STATEMENT A: Approved for public release; distribution is unlimited.		
17. DISTRIBUTION STATEMENT (of the abstract entered in Block 20, if different from Report)		
18. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES		
19. KEY WORDS (Continue on reverse side if necessary and identify by block number)		
20. ABSTRACT (Continue on reverse side if necessary and identify by block number)		
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USAWC MILITARY STUDIES PROGRAM PAPER

HONDURAS DEFENSE POLICY

AN INDIVIDUAL STUDY PROJECT

by

Lieutenant Colonel Jose L. Nunez-Bennett  
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22 April 1986

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# ABSTRACT

AUTHOR: Jose L. Nunez-Bennett, LTC, FA

TITLE: Honduras Defense Policy

FORMAT: Individual Study Project

Date: 22 April 1986 PAGES: 36 CLASSIFICATION: Unclassified

This paper examines the historical background of the Honduran history, its society, the military institution, its political institutions and its impact on the relation between politicians and the military. Furthermore, it analysis the existing geopolitical conditions of Honduras in the Central American region and US support. It's intended to formulate Honduras Defense Policy giving conclusions that can be considered as possible strategy for the political military, economic and social sectors.

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## INTRODUCTION

During its 164 years since independence, the Republic of Honduras has been subjected to foreign influences. Due to its strategic location in Central America, bordered by Nicaragua in the Southeast, Guatemala in the Northwest, El Salvador in the south, and both the Atlantic and Pacific Ocean in the north and south, Honduras is the link that divides the Central American Isthmus in half. Any political, social or military event taking place east and west or north and south will have an unavoidable effect on the country, even when its society may or may not be willing to participate in it.

For most of the Americans Honduras was, until the early 1980's, just another typical undeveloped country. However the events that followed the negotiations for a new treaty on the sovereignty and administration of the Panama Canal in the late 1970's, the overthrow of Somoza's regime by the Sandinistas in Nicaragua in 1979, the open communist insurgency in El Salvador in 1980, and the prevalent social unrest in Guatemala, brought Honduras to the American stage, and once again the country has been involved in the regional turmoil.

This time the violent conflict in Central America shakes the American continent from Terranova to Cape Horn. Honduras' geostrategical position suddenly is key to containing the spread of Marxism-Leninism in the area and the turning point in the fight against communism in order to promote the Western values of democracy in Central America.



## CHAPTER I

### HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Discovered by Columbus in his last voyage in August 1502, Honduras was part of the Mayan Empire that flourished throughout Southern Mexico, Guatemala, Belize, and the Northwestern area of El Salvador. The period of colonization began in the early 1520's after the arrival of Hernan Cortez to Mexico, when he sent some of his deputies on expeditions to conquer in his name. Shortly after, personal ambitions among Spaniards led to conflicts and revolts that prevailed until 1538 when deposits of gold and silver were discovered and an Indian rebellion was suppressed, in 1570 the Honduran Territory was subordinated to the Captaincy General of Guatemala and this status, with a short transition, was maintained until independence from Spain in 1821.

#### THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE STATE AND THE MILITARY

The independence movement of the Central American colonies in 1821 was in part inspired by the independence of Mexico and other colonies in South America. It was a peaceful action that took place in the city of Guatemala with representatives from all the colonies of the Captaincy General gathered to discuss the issues. Several of the representatives opposed the movement thus revealing the contradictions and rivalries among the colonies. These rivalries would continue through the countries independent life.

Two centers of power were identified in Honduras during the 1820's, one in Comayagua the political capital and the other in Tegucigalpa.

This led to a bitter rivalry that prevailed up to the end of the 19th century. At the time of independence, the new nations of Central America looked forward to a union with the Mexican Empire, Comayagua pledged for the union and Tegucigalpa supported the establishment of a new republic, and finally the Provinces declared their allegiance to Mexico. This union lasted until 1824 when a Central American congress voted for a federated nation.

The differences within Hondurans were the reflection of two political lines, the Liberals and the Conservatives. The former wanted centralization of power at the federal government based on Spanish traditional values. The latter favored more local autonomy, restricted role of the church and government resembling one like the United States.

During the period of the federation, Honduras gave its greatest contribution to Central America through two of the most prominent leaders of the region: Jose C. Del Valle, an economist, and Francisco Morazan, a self-made military genius who became President of the Federation and fought through Central America for the Union of the Republic until his death in 1842.

The Constitution of the Province of Honduras in 1824, called for the organization of a militia to support the federation, and the organization of a council of state (with one representative from every Department of the Province) presided over by the Vice-Chief of State. The council of state would deal with matters of state interest, and federal issues affecting the state and certain diplomatic and economic issues. Interestingly, one of its duties was to submit a list of candidates to occupy the position of military commander of the state

militia, who would be appointed by the Chief of State. This gave supremacy to the civilian leaders over the military.

Until 1838 Honduras was relatively calm in political issues. At the time of its separation from the federation at the end of 1838, a new constitution was adopted and a president was elected--Francisco Ferrera. Unfortunately the new head of state was against any liberal reform or ideology, that strongly persisted in the nation during those years. President Ferrera became a strong political man and appointed himself as a minister of war and Chief of the Military forces. He brought peace to the nation according to his own terms. At the end of his presidential period he retained his military positions and was in fact the ruler until 1848.

Until the early 1870's when a liberal reformist named Marco A. Soto was brought to power with the support of President Barrios from Guatemala, the military was not considered an essential part of the state. The leader in power organized his own forces in order to obtain favors and perpetuate himself in office no matter the cost, rivalries for political ideologies went even outside the borders of the republic leading to wars. These conflicts were never perceived by the population as a real threat against the nation. Normally their final objective was to overthrow the Head of the State and install a new political leader into power. It was not until 1865, when a new constitution was adopted that the issue of defense against foreign threat or invasion was addressed as a primary mission for the military over the role of controlling internal insurrections. In 1873 was promulgated the first military code but the role of the military would not change until the

early 1930's. Civil wars, armed revolts and political struggle for power was the common denominator during those years.

THE POLITICAL INSTABILITY AND ITS IMPACT ON THE EVOLUTION  
OF THE MILITARY INSTITUTION

When historians and politicians refer to Honduras they emphasize the fact that after 164 years of independence there have been more than 160 armed rebellions, and coups d'etat. It is noteworthy that in 1986 for the first time in more than 50 years a civilian president transferred power to another civilian freely elected by the Hondurans. Through its modern history the struggle for power has been a matter of reds and blues--colors representing the two most powerful political parties in the nation, the liberals and conservatives. Dependent upon the situation when the interests of the party in power were threatened, the military forces were used to suppress any political opposition or uprising. Of course the so called "military forces" were armed political cadres loyal to the party or faction in power and rather as an instrument of power or the nation were used as a tool to maintain the hegemony of the political party in the country. Whenever an armed revolt succeeded, the military forces were replaced by others loyal to the new leader in power. The caudillo (strong political man with ample influences) normally identified himself as a military leader with self appointed rank obtained during a short civil war or several armed revolts. His rank was later to be ratified by his political followers once legalized in power.

It is important to mention that even though the military forces had been present in the nation, they never were identified with any given social class or elite group in the country. This fact had a positive

impact when in the 1950's the Armed Forces were established as a permanent and professional institution of the state. It was not until the inauguration of President Tiburcio Carias in 1932 that there was a change in the political turmoil of Honduras. Carias, a caudillo, established peace by foregoing the use of arms. He paid special attention to developing the Air Corps established in 1922, reinforcing the Army General Staff created by the constitution of 1924, and organizing the military aviation school in 1934. The role of the military was to control any insurrection and defend the capital city against any political opponent uprising. With the Air Corps he could extend his control all over the country. Carias managed to stay in power until 1949.

World War II had a significant impact on the evolution of the armed forces of Honduras, when the United States encouraged Latin American nations to take a more active role on the hemispheric defense. This led to the establishment of a more professional military institution replacing the traditional militia. By 1946 a basic School of Arms was organized in order to train the enlisted and officers corps. This provided the new officers, who came from urban areas and with more education than its predecessors. Additionally, the traditional "comandantes de plaza (local commanders) were substituted by military zone commanders. In 1954 the first large troop concentration force was organized when the US Military Mission established the first infantry battalion; and in 1956 the Military Academy was organized with its first class graduating in 1960.

Although radical changes were taking place in the military institution, the political organizations did not recognize this reform movement and continued in their struggle for controlling power. Along with the military there were several new institutions and organizations born in the 1950's that would ask for participation in the decision making at the government level and the sharing of political power: the labor unions, peasants organizations, entrepreneurs, and new political parties. In October 1956 the military forces seized power for the first time in history overthrowing Julio Lozano who declared himself as dictator. One defacto government had been replaced by another, but this time it was not a political party, it was a new and refurbished military institution, influenced by other emerging factions, making a sudden and impressive appearance in the political life of the Honduran society and challenging the power of the traditional parties. Air Force officers were primarily in control and they made the arrangement and negotiation for transition to a new civilian elected government after several secret agreements (with the liberals) obtaining many benefits for the military institution.

The constitution of 1957 contained dramatic and revolutionary changes regarding the Armed Forces. It established the Armed Forces as a permanent state institution, giving them the role of safe guarding the constitution, ensuring alternability in the exercise of the presidency, internal security, external defense, and the right to intervene in order to preserve the spirit of the constitution. The Armed Forces were to be commanded by the Chief of the Armed Forces elected by Congress from a list of three candidates presented before them by the Superior Council of Defense, a new collegiate organization within the military,

integrated by top military commanders. The Armed Forces were no longer the instrument of a political leader or party. The president was to give orders through the Chief of the Armed Forces and any disagreement between them was to be resolved by the Congress.

In October 1963, the Armed Forces overthrew the government of president Ramon Villeda after the alleged communist spread in the country and the threat to cut the military budget, and even the abolition of the Armed Forces (to be replaced by the national police). An Air Force Colonel, Oswaldo Lopez, led the coup and established himself as a Chief of State, and later with the help of the National Party (Conservatives), was installed as a constitutional President. The Armed Forces would continue to exercise power for the next 18 years until 1980, when under advice from the US government they relinquished power to an elected civilian. After almost 30 years of military influence in government issues, the population was tired of military rule and, according to several distinguished writers\*, the open general corruption that affected the officers Corps. They welcomed the return of a civilian head of state with a massive participation in presidential elections in 1980 and 1981.

\* SEE: 1. Millet, Richard. "Central America Paralysis," from Foreign Policy on Latin American 1970-1980, Washington D.C., Westview Press 1983, p. 169.

2. Department of the Army and American University. "Honduras A Country Study", DA Pam 550-151, Washington D.C., Second Edition, First Printing 1984, pp. 179 and 232.

3. Lafeber, Walter. "The Burdens of the Past," Carlisle Barracks, US Army War College selected readings, Course 5, (Regional Appraisals: The Americas Volume II.), February 1986, p. 133.

The war with El Salvador in 1969 had a significant political, military, and psychological effect on Honduras. First, the Armed Forces were seen as an institution needed to preserve the nation. Hondurans fed the Army and fought together with the military to counter the Salvadoran aggression. The war gave the military strong political power and national appeal, for the first time Honduran society was united around an organization different from political parties. Second, expansion and growth of the military followed for the next decade from 8,000 men in 1970 to 16,000 in 1980. And third, the center of power from now on was to be identified around the military, and the politicians would accept compromise and give political favors and broaden the sphere of influence of the Armed Forces. The nation identified them as guarantors of the constitution and as the providers of checks and balances in exercising government.

From 1957 to 1975 the internal control within the military was exercised by one man (General O. Lopez). In 1975 after the government was accused of receiving bribes from the United Brands Co. (in order to obtain favorable tax exemption for banana exports), Lopez lost his position as a Chief of the Armed Forces, and later replaced in the government by another military officer (Col. Juan Melgar). Henceforth power was to reside in the Superior Council of Defense, renamed later in 1982, as the Superior Council of the Armed Forces (CONSUFFAA). The internal control of CONSUFFAA is a delicate issue that has promoted internal division and struggle within the military in the past leading to sudden purges and forced retirements. Between 1975 and 1986 there have been six different Commanders in Chief in a post that is supposed



according to the constitution to last 5 years. At the same time several generations of officers have been forced to retire.

The constitution of 1982 eliminated the checks and balances in issues of disagreements between the President (Supreme Chief) and the Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces (contrary to the constitution of 1957). At the same time it gave the military the legal right to participate in the development of national security policies with their participation in the National Security Council, which consists of the President of the Republic, the Minister of the Presidency, the Minister of Government and Justice, the Minister of Foreign Relations and an overwhelming military presence represented by the Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces, the Chief of the Joint Staff, the Minister of National Defense and Public Security and the Services Commanders, (Army, Air Force, Navy and Public Security).

Today the Armed Forces control all the military and public securities forces (adopted in the constitution of 1965). The CONSUFFAA serves as a forum for developing national policy and making key decisions affecting the Armed Forces in addition to this the Armed Forces participate in a broad range of political, educational, internal development and economic activities of the nation.

#### THE UNITED STATES INVOLVEMENT AND SUPPORT

The United States established formal relations with Honduras in 1838, which is when the country left the federation. Immediately relations began to improve primarily to counter the British influence in the area. With the help of the United States, under the influence of the Monroe Doctrine, Great Britain agreed in 1860 to recognize Honduran

sovereignty on the Bay Islands (Caribbean Sea) and the Mosquito territory (eastern region) ending the British imperial role in the area, although their economic influence would continue up to the beginning of the 20th century.

By 1855 American adventurers made their way to Central America, most of the time with tacit support from the US Government. The most famous of them was a Tennessean named William Walker, who after a short war, made himself President\* and Minister of Defense of Nicaragua, established slavery and planned to conquer Central America. In 1856, Honduras, in union with the other Central American armies defeated Walker's troops and he escaped to the United States. He returned to the Bay Islands in 1860, was captured by the British and was turned over the Honduran authorities who executed him.

Between 1860 and 1898 the United States was more interested in developing and recovering from its own Civil War. Central America was left alone and things hardly changed. At the outset of the 20th century Honduras was still immersed in civil wars, rebellions, and coups etc. After the US war with Spain in 1898, a victorious United States emerged as the only power in the region, and the Caribbean Sea became "America's Mediterranean." The Naval strategy of Alfred T. Mahan was undertaken in order to consolidate United States as a world power.

Direct US military intervention in Honduras occurred in the 1910's, in 1911 the warship USS Tacoma was sent to Honduran waters to settle a dispute among political rivals regarding the control of the government.

\* Surprising was the fact that the US immediately recognized his government. Great Britain saw the opportunity to counter US increasingly influence, and provided weapons and supplies to fight Walker.

In fact the role of the United States significantly increased only after 1907 following the establishment of US companies in the production and cultivation of bananas plantations in the north coast. During the 1912-1921 period US warships were frequently in Honduran waters, "Both to protect Americans interests and to exert a dampening effect on the revolutionaries."<sup>1</sup> In February 1924 a contingent of US Marines landed on the north coast, some of them were sent to Tegucigalpa, the capital city, in order to protect Americans citizens and establish a government that would be accepted by United States and please the neighboring countries.

It was not until the 1930's that US military support began to play a significant role, oriented mostly to the development of the Air Corps. The first commandant of the Air Academy was a US Air Corps colonel and US personnel ran the school until the late 1940's. Military economic support was increased after Honduras signed the Rio de Janeiro Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance of 1947. From 1950 to 1962, the United States provided US \$2.324 million.<sup>2</sup>

The US response to counter threats to Honduras has always been decisive and timely. In 1962, when threat of Cuban supported insurgency spread in the countryside, United States increased the military aid, from \$300,000 (US) in 1961 to US \$1.3 million in 1962. In 1970 after the war with El Salvador US support increased to US \$12.0 million and in the 1980's to counter the threat of open insurgency supported by Nicaragua and Cuba Honduras has received a total of US \$233.968 million

1. Department of the Army and the American University. Honduras, A Country Study, DA PAM 550-151, Washington DC, US Government Printing Office, 2nd Edition, 1st Printing 1984, p. 22.

2. US Department of Defense, "Military Assistance Facts," Washington DC, 1 March 1962, p. 16.

in military aid (1980: \$3.968 million; 1981: \$8.933 million; 1982: \$31.271 million; 1983: \$37.296 million; 1984: \$84.0 million; and 1985: \$68.5 million).<sup>1</sup>

Besides military aid, the mutual support agreement signed in 1954 was revised in 1982. The new agreement provides for the use of Honduran bases and air fields on a temporary basis for US troops, warships and airplanes. The United States provided funds to improve Honduran installations in order to accommodate modern US equipment.

Another important area in which the United States has provided important support has been in the area of training. From 1950 through 1985 Honduras has received US \$13.449 million<sup>2</sup> for training programs and education. Additionally mobile training teams (MTT) are often sent to train Honduran soldiers and units. Since 1950 a total of 5,177<sup>3</sup> Hondurans have received training at US bases, installations and service schools. Most of them trained at the US Army School of the Americas (USARSA) now located in Fort Benning, Georgia.

1. Data from: Embassy of Honduras, Washington D.C., Office of the Defense Attache, March 1986.

2 and 3. Department of the Army. Military Assistance Facts, Washington DC, September 1985, pp. 81 and 89.

## CHAPTER II

### THE MILITARY INSTITUTION

#### How the System Works and its Organization

The Armed Forces of Honduras are composed of about 22,000 men including 3,000 officers. It is organized into four services: Army, Air Force, Navy and Public Security Forces. The Army with about 16,000 men is the largest, followed by the Public Security Force with 4,000, the Air Force with 1,400, and the Navy with 600. There is a joint staff to control the operational - strategic employment of the services. Each service has its own staff. There are several independent administrative offices, all of them under the direct command of the Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces (see figure No. 1: table of organization). The Superior Council of the Armed Forces is the highest collegiate body of the Armed Forces. Integrated from about 50 top ranking officers, normally battalion commander and above, their primary duty is to analyze and take decisions on broad matters regarding national security, and strategic and operational planning. By law they present before Congress the three candidates to occupy the position of Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces. Although congress makes the final choice normally negotiations to favor the most likely candidate are made with the majority controlling the Senate. In case of death or resignation the Chief of the Joint Staff will assume the position of Commander in Chief for a period of 15 days while a new chief is elected. The Secretary of Defense is an active military officer. Technically he is not

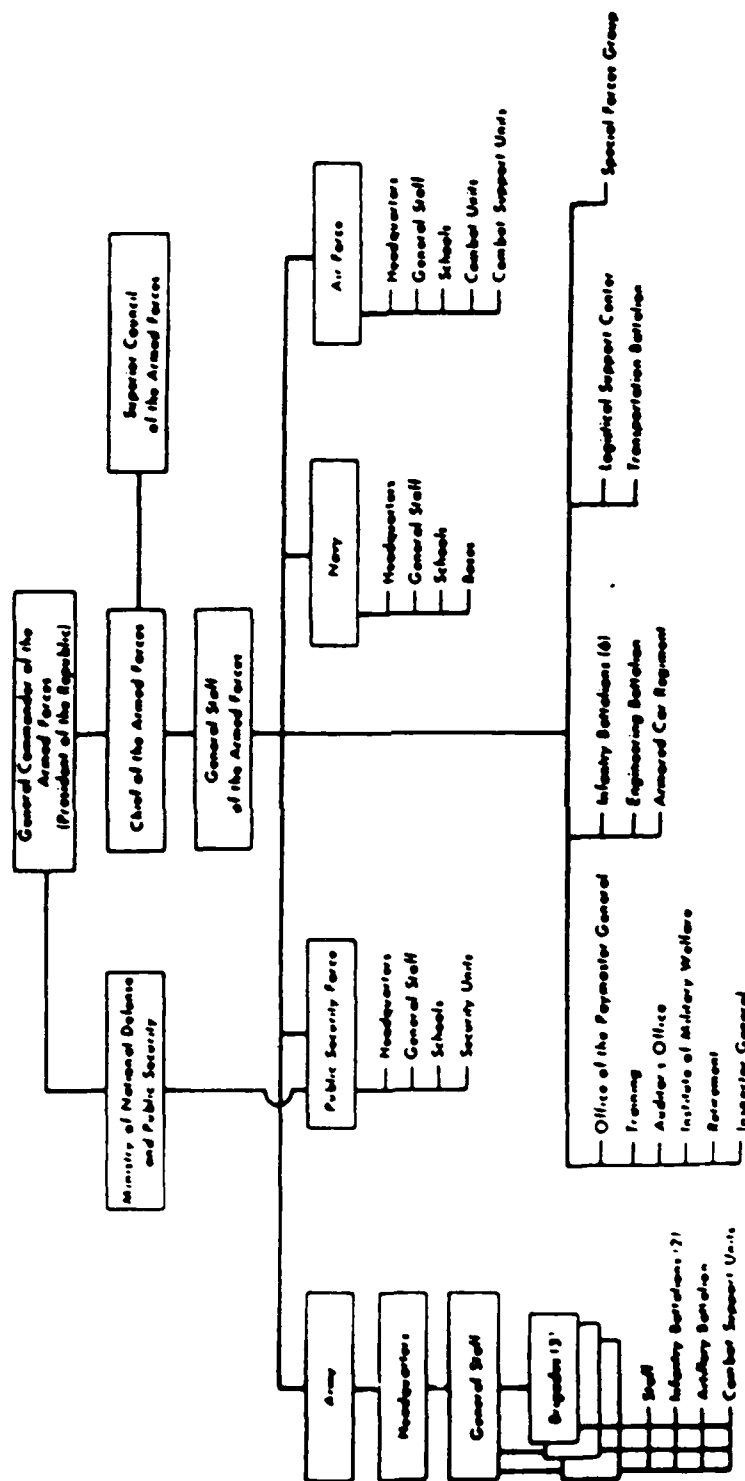


Figure No.1: *Organization of the Armed Forces, 1983* \*

\*Source: HONDURAS: A COUNTRY STUDY, DA Pam 550-151

subordinated to the Chief of the Armed Forces but to the President. He is an important link between the President and the Armed Forces since he has to countersign all administrative and legal proposed changes dealing with the Armed Forces.

The National Security Council, with overwhelming military presence, is organized to deal with issues of national policy, security issues and others related to the national power. The final decision resides with the President of the Republic but the military opinion must be taken into account before any decision is reached. The Security Council gathers at the Presidential House once a week or during crisis.

Command tours within the Army are looked upon as a deserved right for seniority, rather than the reward for a career of outstanding military achievement. Once command is obtained rarely will a commander be relieved, and many of them expect to command several units through the years. Having troop command is considered in higher hierarchy than administrative, joint staff or school command tours.

Traditionally the administration and fiscalization of the budget of the Armed forces have been solely the responsibility of military officials. The military laws were established in 1906, so the exercise of military justice is deficient and normally there has been no chance to appeal.

Today the Armed Forces of Honduras are under the control of a new generation of officers. It is truly identified with the nation's needs and committed to develop a more professional institution with a new kind of leadership which emphasizes excellence and operational performance. This new leadership has established new moral standards laying the

foundations for organizations that will preserve and enhance the military institution strengthening the credibility of its goals within Honduran society.

#### Civil--Military Relations

As stated before, the military organization during most of the 1800's until the 1940's was used only as political instrument to consolidated party power in the country. In 1956 an independent military institution appeared in the political life of Honduras and the time had come for sharing power by means of negotiations. A special agreement with the liberals in 1957 gave autonomy to the Armed Forces and limited the control of the civilians over the military. In 1965, this time with the conservatives, the sphere of influence was broadened but consolidation did not come until 1970, when the first Constituent Law of the Armed Forces was issued forming the legal framework within which the military would operate. Until 1975, Civil--Military relations were strongly influenced by General Oswaldo Lopez. His personality overshadowed the role-of CONSUFFAA. After he was deposed, a more dynamic and combative organization emerged, suddenly, realizing that the real power resided in its hands.

Alliances with other social organizations like workers had been common when the interest of both coincided. In 1972 the workers, small farmers, and peasants supported the government of Lopez Arellano when he adopted radical social changes favoring the majority poor. Again in 1985, union workers, peasants and several popular organizations joined the Armed Forces to overcome a disagreement between the president of the republic and the National Congress.



Traditionally the Armed Forces were linked to the Conservative Party. It was a relationship of mutual benefit, the former to consolidate its position and the latter to obtain power. In 1982 after the Liberals won the elections the military decided to negotiate with them, thus confirming the prominent role and political dominance of the Armed Forces in the country. The vacuum of power left by the stagnation of political elites and the growth of new sociopolitical sectors was finally filled by the military. This time the Armed Forces would ask participation in the development of domestic, political, economical, psychological and foreign policies as a matter of national security.

The integrity and unity of the military has been insured through explicit and tacit understandings among military and civilian leaders. The resignation of two commanders-in-chief in less than 2 years and the passive reaction of the President and Congress confirm this fact.

The events in Central America and the perceived threat from Nicaragua and Cuba allow the military to maintain an equal sharing of power with the civilian leader mainly because of the greater need for a new and stronger national security policy and the increased assistance from United States in order to upgrade the readiness and proficiency of the Honduras military.

#### Impact of the Military in the Government

The exercise of government is a party responsibility in the country. Allowing participation to other political factions normally is negotiated according to party interest. The Armed Forces normally are allowed to participate by law in governing as several state institutions are put directly under military control. Examples are the Honduran Telecommunications Company, the National Aeronautic Directorate, and the

Geodesic and Map Service. Also the Minister of Defense is a member of the Administrative Board of the National Energy company and other Boards of capital importance to the military and the nation.

Informal participation in government affairs is enhanced by the fact that military commanders in any region are normally prominent personalities with easy access to the upper channels in the capital. This allows many politicians to willingly share power and accept suggestions.

Actually the Armed Forces constitute the center of balance. Since they are given by law the role of guarantors of the constitution, any unilateral movement by a political party in order to obtain a favorable outcome by fraudulent elections or by disrupting the functioning of the Congress will lead to a direct intervention, maybe not to seize power, but to ensure political stability.

## CHAPTER III

### DEFENSE POLICIES

#### Decision Making Process

The President of the Republic by law has absolute freedom to manage the general policies of the nation; maintain internal peace and repel any attack or foreign aggression, and protect the sovereignty and integrity of its territories. He is solely responsible for foreign and diplomatic affairs; may declare martial law after notifying Congress who has the final word on modifying or approving the law; may declare war and peace when Congress is in recess; and may sign military treaties with the approval of the Congress.

Normally the President of the Republic will dominate the Congress and through it will influence the composition of the Supreme Court of Justice in order to govern with little or no opposition. Power is centralized normally at the President and his personality will influence the outcome of his decisions. Personal advisors play a prominent role in their daily relationship with the President.

In national security issues the President will rely on the position of the Armed Forces and his Cabinet. Integrated into the National Security Council, the military members of the Council, by law, represent the Superior Council of the Armed Forces and any decision taken by this organization will be profoundly considered at the Security Council. Other organizations that provide feedback to the Security Council are the joint staff and the Minister's Cabinet (see Figure No. 2 and 3: Policy-Making Component, and National Command Authority Diagram).

Any decision taken at the NSC will be solely the responsibility of the President who will have to obtain congressional ratification or support whenever it is required.

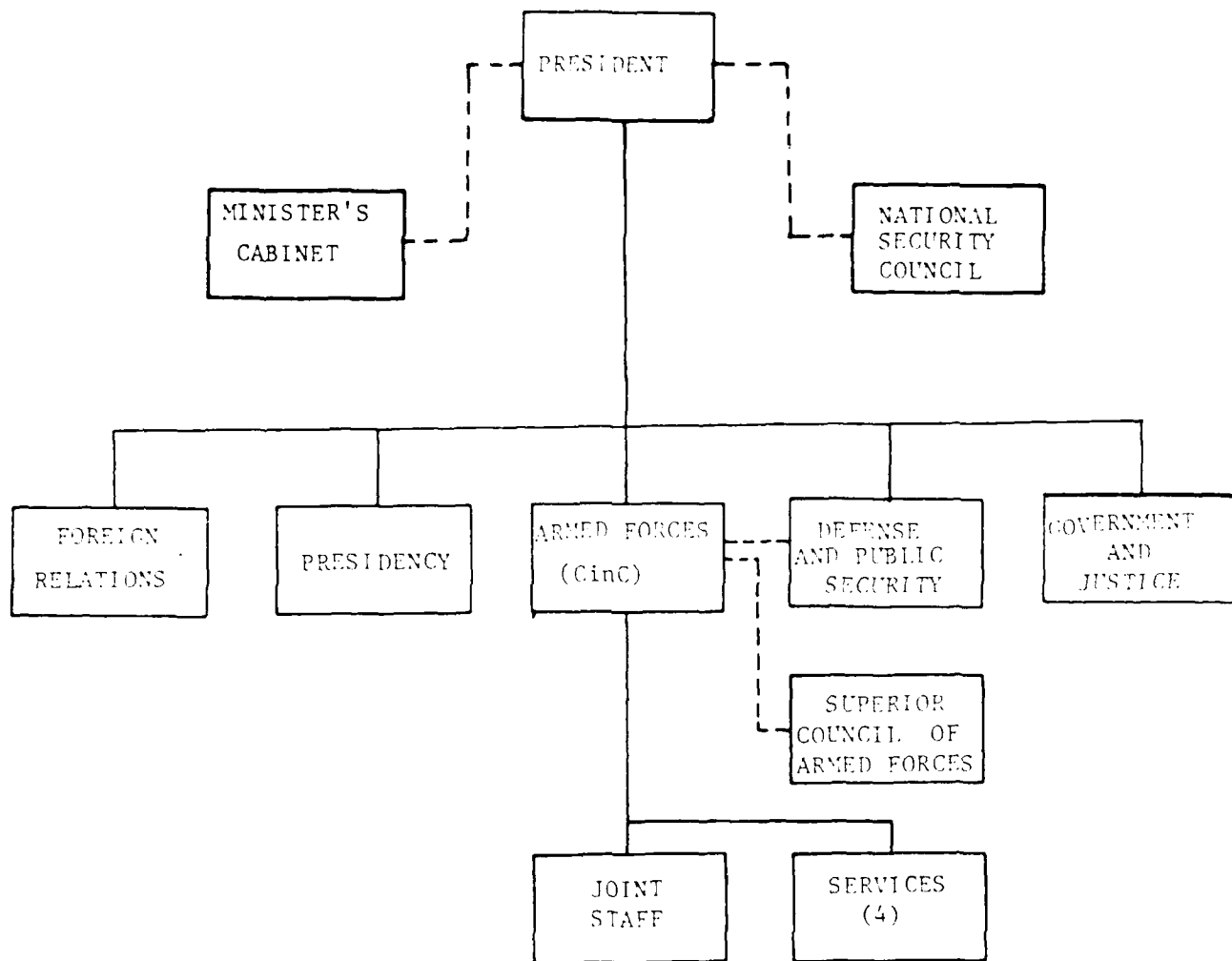


FIGURE No.2: POLICY-MAKING COMPONENT.

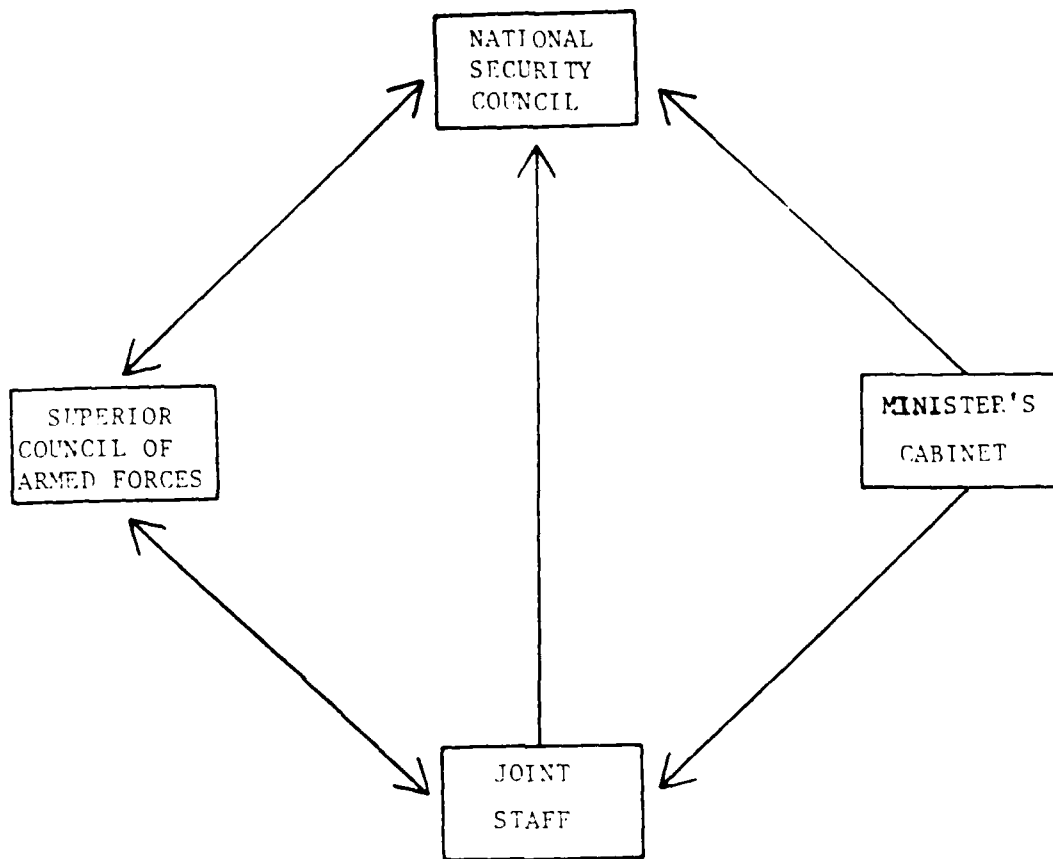


FIGURE No.3:NATIONAL COMMAND AUTHORITY:DECISION MAKING PROCESS.

## National Strategy and National Objectives

### 1. Geopolitical Implications

Trapped because of its geographical location, Honduran national strategy has always been affected by the fact that any conflict or political instability in the region represents a threat to the security of the nation.

A small country of 112,088 square kilometers, about the size of Pennsylvania, Honduras shares a 717 kilometer border of mostly jungle, with Nicaragua, about 300 kilometers partially defined border with El Salvador; 340 kilometers with the republic of Guatemala; and a coast line of about 880 kilometers with the Caribbean Sea and 153 kilometers with the Pacific Ocean (Gulf of Fonseca). Eighty percent of the territory is mountainous with a few lowlands on both coasts. The population is concentrated in the north west, central and south regions, with the eastern part (about 45 percent of the territory) sparsely populated. Seventy percent of the population lives in rural areas, mostly isolated because of the lack of good roads.

The geostrategic location of the country, dividing Central America in the north and south makes the contributions of Honduras key to the regionalization of any conflict and the turning point for containment. International as well as regional, politics have always been a source of turbulence in the region. Honduras enjoys the most cordial relations with Guatemala. With the Republic of El Salvador relations have improved since both countries signed a treaty in 1980 putting an end to the war like situation. After the conflict of 1969, border delimitation

is still a source of instability but negotiations are well underway to a final settlement. Despite Honduran efforts to normalize the situation, relations with Nicaragua leave much to be desired. The consolidation of the Sandinistas led to the development of a Nicaraguan backed insurgency in the Honduran countryside. The territory of Honduras has been used as a bridge by the Nicaraguans in order to support the guerrillas in El Salvador. The Sandinista armed forces expanded from a few thousands in 1980 to an unprecedented 130,00 men including militia. Today the radicalization of the Sandinista government to the extreme left and their ties with Cuba and Soviet Union represents a threat to the democracy prevailing in Honduras, and even to the nation itself.

Although Honduran - US relations have been rather unsteady and unpredictable in the past, lately renewal of US interest in the region, motivated by the need for a democratic government and strengthening the position of Honduras, has brought qualitative changes in the relations between the two countries. This relationship is "one based in mutual interests and with the fact that in no way will imply submission, renouncement or lessening of Honduran sovereignty."<sup>1</sup>

#### National Strategy

Taking into consideration the fact that through history Honduras has received immense international pressures upon its political life and security, the Honduran national strategy comprises these basic goals:<sup>2</sup>

- o To improve the quality and raise the level of living conditions of its population.

1. Honduran Foreign Minister, "Honduran Foreign Policy," speech before the Organization of American States. Washington DC, March 1986.
2. "Preamble of the Constitution of Honduras," Decree No. 131, 20 January 1982.

- o To strengthen its democracy to insure the perpetuation of a state of law and the democratic representation of its citizens in the government.

- o To provide the conditions for the total realization of its citizens, propitiating an environment of security to insure freedom, the strengthening of the Honduran nationality, social equality and justice, peace, and the common welfare.

For the accomplishment of these goals Honduras is committed to:

- o Reliance on the legal order governing international relations and the resolutions of conflicts among states.

- o The preservation of regional and internal peace with whatever means available and alliances.

- o The support of the establishment and strengthening of democratic governments in Central America.

#### Defense Policies

##### a. Perceived threats to National Security.

A number of historical considerations have affected the nation's perception of national security threats. On several occasions the country has been involved in regional conflicts because its territory has been the staging area for neighboring political dissidents to spread and prosecute war in their own countries. The involvement of Honduras in these actual conflict is nothing new, what has changed is the fact that now the nation has developed military institutions allowing the central government the employment of this instrument of power to contain foreign intrusions inside its borders.

The primary role of the armed forces is to guarantee the territorial integrity of the nation (preservation of its sovereignty and defense of its territories), taking precedence over the maintenance of internal peace and public order. This fact was reinforced by the conflict with El Salvador and the actual situation with Nicaragua.



### Internal Threats

The appearance of a Nicaraguan supported insurgency in Honduras led to an internal orientation of the Honduran military previously oriented to deter and defeat any external attack. Several revolutionary leftist groups are active in Honduras. Three of them are the most radical: the Morazan Front for the Liberation of Honduras (Castroite Line); the Popular Liberation Movement (similar in general outlook to the Salvadorean Popular Forces of Liberation, FPL), and the Popular Revolutionary Forces (pro-Chinese). Other groups include the Communist Party of Honduras, the Revolutionary Party of Central American workers, and the Unified Revolutionary Group, these groups are small in size and have had little success.

Terrorism have struck the economic foundation of the country several times. In the last few years, Salvadorean guerrillas in cooperation with local groups occasionally used the territory in order to obtain economic patronage and/or to promote instability.

The refugee issue became a problem when, after the situation worsened in Nicaragua and the conflict spread in El Salvador and Guatemala, several thousands fled to Honduras. At the present time the number has reached a total of 40,699 registered refugees. It is believed that an equal or greater number have entered without registering. The issue of refugees has had strong repercussions internally and externally. Internal consequences have been economic disruption, the increase of crimes, diversion of national resources to the refugees and the depletion of natural resources in areas where camps are located. The primary external consequence has been the unauthorized use of the Honduran territory by rebels groups fighting their own

governments which has affected relations with neighboring countries and other foreign countries abroad.

#### External Threats

As long as the delimitation of the border with El Salvador is still unresolved the issue will continue to endanger the relations between Honduras and El Salvador. The Hondurans will see the Salvadorean demographic problem with fear and mistrust as long as El Salvador views Honduran territory as an avenue of escape to solve their internal problems.

The support of Nicaragua, backed by Cuba and Soviet Union, to the insurgency and the intention to spread communism in the region will continue to be a paramount source of friction between the two countries. Nicaraguan militarization is a matter of great concern to the security of Honduras. This includes the introduction of sophisticated weapons and electronic equipment that are altering the balance of power in the region with significant disadvantage against Honduras.

#### Basic Assumptions

The defense policies of Honduras are based on the following basic assumptions:

- o Nicaragua will continue to provide support to insurgency groups in the area and Honduras in order to "take the revolution beyond their borders."

- oo The Sandinistas will not accept a negotiated global regional solution to the conflict in the area.

- oo The Sandinista government will consolidate and continue to oppress the Nicaraguan society.

- o Nicaragua will continue to enlarge and modernize their armed forces beyond their needs.

- o Relations between the Central American countries and Nicaragua will continue to stagnate.

- o Cuba and Soviet Union will continue to be the closest allies to Nicaragua.

- o Honduran - Nicaraguan relations are not likely to improve qualitatively in the near future unless Nicaragua agrees to a global solution of the conflict under the auspices of the Contadora Group.

- o The activities of rebels opposing the Nicaraguan government will continue to increase. Honduras will provide moral support to the rebels.

- o Relations with El Salvador will continue to strengthen as long as the border delimitation is settled according to the international procedures established by the Hague convention.

- o Honduras and Costa Rica will remain very close and dependable friends.

- o Belize will be integrated into the Central American context.

- o The issue of Belize and the claim of Guatemala will have a favorable solution for both countries, Belize and Guatemala.

- o Panama will continue to play the role of moderator in the area.

- o Honduras and Guatemala will continue to share friendship and democracy.

- o The Gulf of Fonseca will continue to be an issue of friction as long as its territorial waters are not delimited. Honduran access to the Pacific Ocean waters is vital.

- o The United States will continue to strengthen its position in the area by cooperation and bilateral agreements with democratic governments.

- o The United States will provide support in the event of attack on Honduran territory by Nicaraguan forces and/or insurgency

- o The hemispheric collective security system (Rio treaty) will continue to provide the best alternative for defense against aggression on the continent.

#### National Objectives

Honduras firmly believes in the rule of law and peace.

International law is the established system designed to avoid armed solutions to conflicts between states. Peace is an indispensable condition to seek and obtain economic, social and internal political development, it is also essential for achieving development through the effective functioning of international cooperation.

Honduras, a country seeking consolidation of its own democracy, will try to keep herself in the fight against tyranny and dictatorship, but strongly believes in noninterference in others' internal affair and the right of people to choose a government that will provide for their needs and will enhance the human value of their society in a pluralistic state.

Mutual respect for each others' sovereignty and territorial integrity is the basic condition for a peaceful coexistence among neighbors. As a nation where democracy is gaining strength, Honduras will not get into alliances with any other nation with the sole aim of aggressive designs toward any other state.

The defense of the homeland is a matter of extremely high concern to every Honduran, and national sovereignty and national independence take precedence over any other task. As a country with economic problems and limited resources hardly enough to provide for the well being of its citizens, Honduras has been forced, because of its geostrategic position to divert its own resources to develop a defense system to deter aggression and maintain internal peace.

In the light of the prevailing situation in Central America Honduras' national objectives are:

- o Consolidation of its democratic institutions and prosperity and well being of the Hondurans.
- o Prevention of war against Honduras.
- o Defense of the territorial integrity of Honduras and termination of conflict, if it occurs, in the shortest time possible.
- o Settlement of the border line with El Salvador.
- o Insure its rights in the Pacific Ocean.
- o Strengthen the Contadora peace initiative in order to seek a global solution to the conflict in Central America.
- o Revitalization of the Inter-American Defense System as a mean of collective security.
- o Maintaining a defensive alliance with the United States in accordance with reciprocal obligations and rights relative to legitimate individuals and collective defense and to the use of armed force.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE CENTRAL AMERICAN CONFLICT AND THE HONDURAN RESPONSE

Following the Sandinistas takeover in Nicaragua in July 1979, the situation began to deteriorate in Central America. Although a moderate government was installed in Nicaragua the radicalization of the revolution was underway and the Sandinista directorate was in the process of taking control of the country and molding it according to Cuban standards. By the end of 1979 the insurgency began to increase its activity in Honduras and El Salvador. Following the end of its civil war, Nicaragua began to receive huge shipments of light and heavy weapons in order to transfer them to guerrilla movements in El Salvador and Honduras. Between 1980 and 1985 the size of the Sandinista army grew to an unprecedented 130,000 soldiers including more than 300 tanks and armored cars (T-54, T-55, PT-76, BMP's and BTR's), 150 heavy mortars and guns (D-20, D-30, BM21, and 120 mm mortars), more than 36 helicopters including a dozen Mi-24, more than 300 antiaircraft guns, about 2000 trucks, surface to air missiles (SAM-7) and a sophisticated air defense radar net. The balance of power was heavily altered favoring Nicaragua.

In January 1980 the Salvadorean guerrilla launched an open offensive in order to overthrow the government in that country. For the next 5 years Honduran authorities captured and interdicted dozens of Nicaraguan supported couriers transporting logistic and supplies to the insurgency in El Salvador and Honduras.

Honduras took strong actions with a full determination in order to save its newly inaugurated democracy and to contain the spread of Marxism-Leninism through the region. The Honduran response to the Nicaraguan threat has been fully supported by other Central American Nations and the United States who would like to have a Central American region in peace and living under the rule of democratic governments.

The following are some of the Honduran direct actions to find a solution in the region:

- o In October 1980 Honduras and El Salvador signed the Lima Peace Treaty putting an end to the warlike relations between the two countries since 1969, and the agreement to define by any legal means, at last, the common border line.
- o In March 1981 Honduras and El Salvador signed an agreement regulating the reestablishment of trade relations.
- o In cooperation with the United States Honduras has agreed to cooperate with the United States toward the attainment of its interest in the region by stabilizing and correcting the serious economic deterioration and to stimulate multilateral cooperation among democratic states and assistance, including military support. An agreement signed in May 1982 with United States, was incorporated as an annex to the 1954 military assistance agreement. Following these actions, binational military maneuvers immediately began to take place in Honduras. With strong internal controversies, a regional military training center was opened (1983) in the north east coast of Honduras primarily to train Salvadorean regular troops. Additionally, a radar site facility was constructed south of the capital to control air traffic.
- o The Honduran government designed a policy of neutrality in order to "internationalize the peace" seeking a global and regional solution in central America oriented to limit the presence of foreign military advisors in the area and the control of armamentism.
- o The establishment of the Central American Democratic Community (Comunidad Democratica Centroamericana--CDC) in order to promote democracy by free elections, total respect for human rights, mutual solidarity in the event of aggression by an outside force, and economic development by stimulating private domestic and foreign investments.
- o Total support to the establishment of the Contadon Group and its efforts to find a negotiated solution to the conflict in Central America.
- o Although rejecting interference in other's state affairs, Honduras sympathizes with forces fighting inside Nicaragua to bring democracy to Nicaraguans, providing moral support in the achievement of their final goals.

## CONCLUSION

o Honduran leaders--both military and civilian--are truly committed to the preservation and the strengthening of democracy in Honduras and Central America. Of high concern is the fact that Honduran neutrality in the conflict taking place in El Salvador and Nicaragua is endangered by the threat of an open conflict disrupting its internal peace.

o The fact that the core of US strategy is centered around the threat that the Soviet Union represents for the free world and mostly for Western Europe. This causes US interest to vary in other areas of the world and makes Honduran officials cautious in their close relations with United States.

o The conflict in the Central American region not only must be addressed in the ideological struggle between East and West but also as a result of the abysmal differences between North and South (developed and undeveloped nations) and any attempt to resolve the roots of discontent and rebellion must address the need to improve the economic well being of the Central Americans, their judicial systems and the protection of democratic institutions.

o The Honduran military plays a prominent role in the development of national policies and any intention to diminish this role will lead to extensive and dangerous frictions.

o Honduran security is based on three elements: First, the disposition of its own means and the right to protect the country's sovereignty and the states's independence under a democratic government. Second, Honduras believes in international law to find peaceful

solutions to conflicts among states, relying on the United Nations Charter and the hemispheric collective defense treaty. Third, the security cooperation with the United States under a bilateral agreement allows Honduras to maintain a special security relationship sharing the same interests and concerns to bring peace to the area. Honduras will continue to honor this relationship and consider it of paramount importance as long as United States executes its policy with dignifying conditions for Honduras.

- o Under the present circumstances, Honduras should keep pursuing a peaceful solution of the Nicaraguan conflict looking forward to long and standing normal relations, but Honduras should never give up in the fight against totalitarianism.

- o The Armed Forces will continue to grow as long as there is a perceived threat from the East or South.

- o The United States must appreciate the value Honduras constitutes to US interests in the region, and the negative impact of a weak (economic and militarily speaking) Honduras now and in the future in the fight against communism. The United States can best contribute to this goal by making the commitment that Honduras' integrity is vital to her own interests in the region, and by providing economic and military support on a basis of equality with other countries in the region in order to maintain the military balance, discourage any military adventurism and ease the sensitivity of Hondurans.



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