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## Honduran Military Culture

Orlando J. Pérez

Randy Pestana

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# HONDURAN MILITARY CULTURE

By Orlando J. Pérez and Randy Pestana

April 2016



**FIU**

Steven J. Green  
School of International  
& Public Affairs



## The FIU-USSOUTHCOM Academic Partnership Military Culture Series

Florida International University's Jack D. Gordon Institute for Public Policy (FIU-JGI) and FIU's Kimberly Green Latin American and Caribbean Center (FIU-LACC), in collaboration with the United States Southern Command (USSOUTHCOM), formed the FIU-SOUTHCOM Academic Partnership. The partnership entails FIU providing research-based knowledge to further USSOUTHCOM's understanding of the political, strategic, and cultural dimensions that shape military behavior in Latin America and the Caribbean. This goal is accomplished by employing a military culture approach. This initial phase of military culture consisted of a year-long research program that focused on developing a standard analytical framework to identify and assess the military culture of three countries. FIU facilitated professional presentations of two countries (Cuba and Venezuela) and conducted field research for one country (Honduras).

The overarching purpose of the project is two-fold: to generate a rich and dynamic base of knowledge pertaining to political, social, and strategic factors that influence military behavior; and to contribute to USSOUTHCOM's Socio-Cultural Analysis (SCA) Program. Utilizing the notion of military culture, USSOUTHCOM has commissioned FIU-JGI to conduct country-studies in order to explain how Latin American militaries will behave in the context of U.S. military engagement.

The FIU research team defines military culture as "the internal and external factors—historical, cultural, social, political, economic—that shape the dominant values, attitudes, and behaviors of the military institution, that inform how the military views itself and its place and society, and shapes how the military may interact with other institutions, entities, and governments." FIU identifies and expounds upon the cultural factors that inform the rationale behind the perceptions and behavior of select militaries by analyzing its historical evolution, its sources of identity and sources of pride, and its role in society.

To meet the stated goals, FIU's JGI and LACC hosted academic workshops in Miami and brought subject matter experts together from throughout the U.S. and Latin America and the Caribbean, to explore and discuss militaries in Latin America and the Caribbean. When possible, FIU-JGI researchers conduct field research in select countries to examine these factors through in-depth interviews, focus groups, and/or surveys. At the conclusion of each workshop and research trip, FIU publishes a findings report, which is presented at USSOUTHCOM.

The following Honduran Military Culture Findings Report, authored by Orlando J. Pérez and Randy Pestana, is the product of a research trip to Honduras in February 2016 and months of empirical research. Field research included interviews at the Universidad de Defensa de Honduras, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Honduras (UNAH), Asociación para una Sociedad más Justa (ASJ), and the U.S. Embassy in Tegucigalpa. Additionally, the authors wish to thank Dr. Richard L. Millett for providing a historical analysis of the Honduran Armed Forces.

The views expressed in this findings report are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of the U.S. government, U.S. Department of Defense, U.S. Southern Command, FIU-JGI, Florida International University, or the institutional affiliations of the participants.

On behalf of FIU-JGI and FIU-LACC, we wish to acknowledge and thank all who assisted in the production of this piece including all those interviewed in Honduras.

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Honduran Armed Forces have been closely linked to the political system since the state's independence in 1838.

- The first remanences of professional fighting forces in Honduras were departmental militia groups closely linked to local politicians. In this period, successful assertion to military power required relations with victorious political factions.
- The transition to a professional military institution led to increased ties between the military and more conservative political blocs; notably the National Party. Evidence of this relationship remains today.
- The 1956 coup of Julio Lozano Díaz served as the military's entrance into the political arena. The subsequent 1957 Constitution provided that the Honduran Armed Forces would be an autonomous state institution and would serve as such for the next three decades.
- The transition to democracy did little to release the military's hold on the political system in Honduras. It would not be until the post-Cold War period that the military would "return to the barracks." This did not, however, dissuade military leadership from forming close alliances with the executive.
- Personal and political relationships between the president and the military leadership continue to shape civil-military relations in Honduras. President Hernández has promoted military officers considered loyal to his political project, and has appointed many military officers to government positions.

The United States is responsible for the professionalization of the Honduran Armed Forces in the post-WWII period.

- No other military institution—or country for that matter—has had as close relations with the Honduran military than the United States. Increased military aid and training both professionalized and institutionalized the military.
- The threat of communism combined with U.S. interests in the Honduran banana industry saw increased political, security, and economic support from the United States. Honduras served as the geostrategic headquarters for U.S. foreign policy in Central America and in the fight against communism.

The role of the Honduran Armed Forces has shifted since its professionalization.

- Communist threats in neighboring Central American states justified the existence and expansion of the Honduran military. In turn, the military developed an outward facing security perspective where military leadership was more conscious of external threats than of internal conflict.
- The 1969 Soccer War with El Salvador confirmed the military leadership's contention that the greatest threat to state sovereignty was external. The war would lead to an arms race between the two militaries, and a rivalry that remains prevalent today.
- The 1980s contra war against the Sandinistas in Nicaragua sustained the external focus of the Honduran military. This period also strengthened ties between Honduras and the United States; this partnership remains the strongest in the region.
- The post-Cold War period forced the Honduran Armed Forces to justify their existence without true external threats. The military pointed to border conflicts with El Salvador as a threat to state sovereignty, but would eventually reduce the size of its forces.
- The ineptitude of the National Police has forced the military to take on non-traditional roles that the military feels is beneath them. Nevertheless, the military remains ready to handle these duties until the police are reformed.

Sources of identity of the Honduran Armed Forces are based on sovereignty and pride.

- Honduran military beliefs are conditioned by historical relations with its neighbors and the United States. Its weariness of intentions of neighbors—primarily El Salvador—still influence the attitudes of the military.
- The Honduran Armed Forces are proud of their constitutionally defined role as protector of the state and constitution. This elevates its perceived importance where the military would do whatever is necessary to protect Honduras against internal and external threats.
- Military officers are wary of performing police functions but dutiful in their loyalty to the civilian elected executive and the constitution which provides for the military's role in assisting the police.

The military is the second highest trusted institution in Honduras behind the Evangelical Church.

- This level of trust speaks to citizens' respect of the military as a professionalized state institution unlike other "political" institutions susceptible to corruption.
- There is a significant gap between trust in the military and trust in the police. Over 64 percent trust the military as compared to 46 percent for the police.
- Over 80 percent of Hondurans support the military's involvement in domestic security roles. This could be related to both the ineptitude of the police forces and the perceived integrity of the military.

## **THE HONDURAN MILITARY IN PERSPECTIVE**

The Honduran Armed Forces are the most trusted state institution in Honduras. In many ways, the Honduran military sees itself as the vanguard of the state, protecting Honduras from external actors that seek to disrespect its dignity and challenge its sovereignty. Honduras was never faced with the levels of internal conflict seen in neighboring Central American states; instead it maintained an outward facing perspective of security responsibilities. The United States is largely responsible for the professionalization of the Honduran Armed Forces from politicized militias seeking to acquire power to the only institution trusted to handle the emerging security threats facing the state.

Since Honduras' transition to democracy, the armed forces have diminished in size, but not in responsibility. Today, this outward security perspective remains, but the challenges facing the state have shifted. The ineptitude of the Honduran National Police combined with the perceived strength of the Honduran Armed Forces has led the military to take on police duties, albeit a responsibility the military feels is beneath them. Nevertheless, the Honduran Armed Forces are ready and willing to protect the state against all threats as directed by its leadership.

Over the next several years, the Honduran Armed Forces will continue to be thrust into non-traditional roles until the National Police is successfully reformed; a transformation unlikely to occur in the next decade despite optimism by the Juan Orlando Hernández administration (2014-present). Questions remain, however, as to whether the military will fall prey to the corruption and human rights abuses that plagued the police. Nevertheless, the Honduran Armed Forces are prepared to assist the state in confronting the threats facing the nation.

## **HISTORICAL EVOLUTION OF THE HONDURAN ARMED FORCES**

History has shaped the way in which the Honduran Armed Forces behave today in three ways. First, the foundations and evolution of the Honduran military politicized the institution. The years following Honduran independence saw a lack of professional forces. Instead, the only remnants of a military establishment were departmental militias linked to *caudillo* politicians seeking to gain power. This politicization increased following the professionalization of the armed forces after WWII, and its growth into an autonomous state institution thereafter.

Second, the relationship with the United States served to professionalize and institutionalize the Honduran Armed Forces. The opening of the *Escuela Militar Francisco Morazán* in 1952 gave the military legitimacy and the needed training to be recognized and respected as a true military institution. With time, however, this relationship changed from one of cooperation to more of a transactional



relationship; one in which cooperation seemed contingent on the ability of the U.S. to provide resources to the state.

Finally, the Honduran Armed Forces are proud of their mission, namely the protection of the nation's territorial integrity and adherence to the constitution. The Honduran military's duties are explicitly outlined within the constitution they are sworn to protect, but experiences with external actors (i.e., communism, El Salvador, and Nicaragua), and lack of internal conflicts as seen in neighboring countries, led the military to look outward for threats rather than inward. Further, the failure of the police to handle domestic security has forced the military to take on non-traditional roles.

### *Politicization of the Honduran Armed Forces*

During the period of state formation, Honduras had a limited military apparatus and lacked the resources and capabilities to develop one. Following independence in 1838, Honduras became the poorest of the five new republics with limited exports and a weak oligarchy. In turn, the Honduran military as an "institution" was merely departmental militia lists used during episodes of conflict.<sup>1</sup> Military mobilizations coincided with political elections, with young political leaders declaring themselves commander-in-chief and confirmed by winning factions.<sup>2</sup> Consequently, military and political structures paralleled each other with the armed forces more symbolic than real.

The late 1800s and early 1900s saw the establishment of the two major political parties in Honduras and the opening of the second Honduran military academy.<sup>3</sup> The Liberal Party (1891) and the National Party (1916) consolidated forces within their factions in efforts to gain state control behind vaguely defined political principles.<sup>4</sup> The first "military President" General Terencio Sierra sought to professionalize the splintered militia factions in 1899, but failed to stop the frequent turnover within the officer corps. From 1903-1906, 90 of the Military Academy's 195 cadets had deserted, or were released for illness or bad conduct.<sup>5</sup> The lack of resources and ultimate lack of commitment by the state limited the military's ability to professionalize and further linked individual forces to controlling political factions.

Political stability during the Tiburcio Carías Andino administration (1933-1949) initiated the first modernization and professionalization of the Honduran Armed Forces. However, this did not de-politicize the military; instead it became increasingly linked to the National Party. Carías, whose primary foreign

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<sup>1</sup> See: William Stokes, *Honduras: An Area Study in Government* (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1950), 226-227.

<sup>2</sup> See: Steve Ropp, "The Honduran Army in the Sociopolitical Evolution of the Honduran State," *The Americas* 30, no. 4 (April 1974): 505-506.

<sup>3</sup> The first Colegio Militar del Ejército was established in 1826. The Academia Militar was created in 1881.

<sup>4</sup> See: Stokes, *Honduras: An Area Study in Government*, 226.

<sup>5</sup> Ropp, "The Honduran Army in the Sociopolitical Evolution of the Honduran State," 508.

policy goal was to develop and maintain ties to the United States, provided favorable conditions to U.S. controlled banana companies while supporting U.S. ventures into Nicaragua, Costa Rica, and Guatemala.<sup>6</sup> Increased U.S. military aid both strengthened ties between the two countries and provided the financial and political stability necessary to develop a dependable military institution.

Weaker than its regional neighbors, the country, and by extension its military, found itself defined by its struggle to assert physical and political control over its territory. Honduras' neighbors constantly intervened or supported Honduran exile invasions to establish governments favorable to them. Defense of territorial integrity thus became a key defining element of military identity.

In the post-WWII period the Honduran military became an important political actor. The U.S. pressured Carías against running for president in 1948 with the expectation that Carías' handpicked successor from the National Party would succeed him. Nevertheless, the Honduran military continued to professionalize under U.S. training and sustained U.S. military aid. The relative weakness of political parties following the Carías era limited the civilian leadership's ability to counter internal conflict leaving the now professional and highly trained armed forces as the main political power in Honduran society.<sup>7</sup>

During the twentieth century, two images of Honduras dominated popular press accounts: the banana republic and the militarized state. Throughout the first half of the twentieth century, the popular press regularly referred to Honduras as the quintessential "banana-republic." During the second half the narrative most often focused on military governments, human rights abuses by the security forces, and the U.S.-Honduran alliance against communism.

The alliance with the United States to fight communist expansion was a defining characteristic of the Honduran military ethos. The Armed Forces of Honduras emerged as a professional institution and political power at the height of the Cold War in the 1950s. The process was institutionalized in 1954 through a new law that led to the professionalization of the military, the signing of bilateral aid agreements with the United States, and the creation of the first infantry battalion.

The October 1956 coup by Julio Lozano Díaz marked the military's first direct venture into Honduran politics, but it would not be the last. The military junta lasted nearly a year before negotiating a constitutional guarantee of institutional autonomy and overseeing the election of Liberal President Ramón Villeda Morales.<sup>8</sup> The constitutional changes deprived Villeda of the authority to choose or

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<sup>6</sup> See: Thomas Dodd, *Tiburcio Carías: Portrait of a Honduran Political Leader* (Baton Rouge, Louisiana: LSU Press, 2005), 153.

<sup>7</sup> See: James Morris, "Honduras: Caudillo Politics and Military Rulers," *The Americas* 42, no. 1 (July 1985).

<sup>8</sup> J. Mark Ruhl, "Honduras: Militarism and Democratization in Troubled Waters," in *Repression, Resistance, and Democratic Transition in Central America*, eds. Thomas Walker and Ariel Armony (Wilmington, Delaware: Scholarly Resources Incorporated, 2000), 49-50.

remove the chief of the armed forces.<sup>9</sup> Villeda faced conservative opposition by large landowners as well as fruit companies countering agrarian reform and increasing social programs. Colonel Armando Velásquez Cerrato, who lost the 1956 elections, organized a series of revolts with the National Police to counter Villeda's policies. In turn, Villeda dissolved the National Police and developed a Civil Guard under the control of the Ministry of Government and Justice.<sup>10</sup>

The 1957 Constitution gave direct command over the troops to the Chief of the Armed Forces not to the President of the Republic. It was in the 1957 Constitution that the armed forces obtained institutional autonomy. For the next 30 years the military maintained a hegemonic control over the political system and a monopoly in the control of the defense and security apparatus.

The dissolution of the National Police in favor of a Civil Guard combined with reform minded Liberal factions threatened the military's autonomy. The 1963 elections represented a threat to the military as it appeared likely the Liberal candidate, Modesto Rodas Alvarado, would be elected. Rodas was more radical than Villeda, having organized rallies in small villages against the "National Party's military."<sup>11</sup> Anticipating conflict under a Rodas administration, Air Force Colonel Oswaldo López Arellano led a military coup ten days prior to the election, seizing control of the state and consolidating the armed forces' alliance with the National Party.<sup>12</sup>

Arellano remained in power through 1971 further politicizing the armed forces and strengthening ties with the National Party. He had a twofold approach: modernize and strengthen the armed forces and suppress domestic dissent.<sup>13</sup> For the former, Arellano positioned the armed forces closely to National Party leadership strengthening the institution's autonomy. For the latter, the administration would use El Salvador as a scapegoat for the economic problems facing Hondurans, and subsequently expelling thousands of Salvadorans living along the border.<sup>14</sup> This expulsion culminated in the Soccer War in 1969 with El Salvador invading Honduras. While brief, the war highlighted the strength of the Honduran Air Force, and revealed critical weaknesses within the Army.<sup>15</sup> The war has marked Honduran military culture since the late 1960s. Honduras lost nearly 250 combat troops and over 2,000 civilians. Salvadorian troops came within a few kilometers of Tegucigalpa before the Honduran Air Force slowed their advance.

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Morris, "Honduras: Caudillo Politics and Military Rulers."

<sup>11</sup> Lucas Paredes, "Liberalismo y nacionalismo: (Transfuguismo político)" (Tegucigalpa, Honduras: Imprenta Honduras, 1963).

<sup>12</sup> Ruhl, "Honduras: Militarism and Democratization in Troubled Waters."

<sup>13</sup> Richard Millett, "The Honduran Military: History of a Conflicted Institution," (Miami, Florida: Florida International University, 2016).

<sup>14</sup> Thomas P. Anderson, "The war of the dispossessed: Honduras and El Salvador, 1969," (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1981).

<sup>15</sup> Millett, "The Honduran Military: History of a Conflicted Institution."

Historical hostilities between El Salvador and Honduras were reinforced and the power of the military was strengthened in both countries. Immigration and control of the border became a central concern for the Honduran military. Institutional divisions were reinforced between the Army and Air Force with the latter receiving greater technical resources and the former using its larger numbers and control of the military hierarchy to establish further dominance over the state.

Following a brief civilian interlude, the military seized power again under General Arellano (1972-1975) and governed for the next decade. Arellano monopolized power, ruled as a populist, and disregarded political parties.<sup>16</sup> This consolidation isolated factions within the military leadership ultimately leading to his removal and replacement. Army Colonel Juan Alberto Melgar Castro (1975-1978) reconstituted the relationship between the National Party and the armed forces, while further institutionalizing the military within the state. Melgar's personal ambitions of becoming President of Honduras came to light and led to his subsequent removal.<sup>17</sup> General Policarpo Paz Garcia (1978-1982), who served as commander and chief of the armed forces, became president until Civil Wars in neighboring states and insistence from the United States would pressure the military regime to transition to democracy and civilian leadership.

The military reduced its role in the political arena during the 1990s but has kept its close proximity to civilian leadership until today. Ultimately, the geopolitical environment shifted to one where Honduras no longer faced external threats and the military was unable to justify its traditional role within the state. Nevertheless, military leaders held close ties to the political leadership in the country (i.e., Arellano, Melgar, Alvarez, and Vásquez Velásquez). The only constant, however, was the consensus among military personnel that senior military officers should not pursue political ambitions; this led to the removal of Generals Arellano (1975), Melgar (1978), Alvarez (1985), and Arnuldo (1990).<sup>18</sup>

The transition to democracy began with a process that culminated in the 1980 elections of a Constituent Assembly which wrote a new constitution and approved it on January 11, 1982. The armed forces played a significant role in this process. The constitution has an important role in defining and codifying military identity. Military officers routinely refer to the text of the constitution to justify their actions. While nominally subordinate to the civilian branches, the military's status as a constitutionally prescribed institution gives it significant authority vis-à-vis other institutions of the state. Having constitutional rank makes it difficult to revise the mission, role, and corporate status of the armed forces.

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<sup>16</sup> Ruhl, "Honduras: Militarism and Democratization in Troubled Waters."

<sup>17</sup> Mark Rosenberg and J. Mark Ruhl, "Honduras: Democratization and the Role of the Armed Forces" in *Constructing Democratic Governance: Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean in the 1990's*, eds. Jorge Dominguez and Abraham Lowenthal (Baltimore, Maryland: John Hopkins University Press, 1996).

<sup>18</sup> Rosenberg and Ruhl, "Honduras: Democratization and the Role of the Armed Forces," 67.

Unlike other Central American countries where military and police reforms were the product of peace accords, in Honduras, reform resulted from presidential initiatives, institutional circumstances and changes in the national and international context. As such, the changes are subject to setbacks as political will and personalities change.

The return to democracy ensured the military's departure from public life, but the armed forces still maintained their political autonomy. Liberal President Roberto Suazo Córdova (1982-1986) remained conscious of the military's political power and hesitated to alienate military leadership during his administration. Suazo allowed the military to control national security policy and maintain regional policymaking, but preserved veto power on cabinet level appointments.<sup>19</sup> As noted by Honduran Colonel Efrain Gonzales, military operations continued without the permission of the Congress or president.<sup>20</sup> Additionally, the military maintained its immunity from the National Congress for any human rights violations that occurred during the military regime.<sup>21</sup> Further, Suazo developed strong relations with new Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces, General Gustavo Álvarez Martínez, allowing for the military to conserve its privileges.

The 1982 Constitution guaranteed the military institutional and political autonomy. At the time, presidential orders were issued only through the Chief of the Armed Forces, a position held by a uniformed military officer. In addition, the president did not have the power to appoint (or remove) the Chief of the Armed Forces; this corresponded to the Congress and the occupant was selected from a list drawn up by the Superior Council of the Armed Forces.

In December 1996, the Congress unanimously ratified constitutional reforms whereby the functions of maintaining internal security and public order were transferred from the Armed Forces to civilian authorities, establishing a National Civil Police. Another important step was the drafting and approval by Congress, on May 20, 1998, of the new organic law of the National Civil Police. On May 28 of the same year the National Congress approved reforms to Articles 28 and 29 of the General Public Administration Act, which created the new Ministry of Security under which the National Civil Police would be housed.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Mark Rosenberg and Philip Shepherd, *Two Approaches to an Understanding of US-Honduran Relations* (Miami: Latin American and Caribbean Center, Florida International University, 1983), 13-14.

<sup>20</sup> David Ronfeldt, *U.S. Involvement in Central America: Three Views from Honduras* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 1989).

<sup>21</sup> Rosenberg and Shepherd, *Two Approaches to an Understanding of US-Honduran Relations*, 13-14.

<sup>22</sup> The failure of the National Civil Police to adequately deal with increasing violence and international criminal networks has led repeated Honduran governments to increasingly rely on the armed forces to assist in domestic security functions. In 2014, the current government of Juan Orlando Hernández developed the *Policía Militar de Orden Publica* (military police) as a fourth branch of the armed forces with duties that straddle police and military functions.

On September 18, 1998, Congress passed constitutional reforms that made the president Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces with the power to appoint a civilian to the Ministry of Defense. Constitutional changes introduced on January 1999 made substantial reforms in the provisions related to the armed forces. The amendments primarily consisted of suppressing the office of the Chief of the Armed Forces from the Constitution. Under the reforms, the President of the Republic exercises direct command of the armed forces. The orders given by the president must be carried out in adherence with the principles of legality, discipline and military professionalism. Reforms established that the Secretary of State in the Office of National Defense (Minister of Defense) would be appointed and removed by the president; the same applies with the Chief of the Joint Staff of the Armed Forces, who was selected by the Board of Commanders according to what was established by the Organic Law of the Armed Forces. The duties of the Joint Staff, which now constituted the operational unit of the armed forces, were reflected in the new Article 283. The reform established that the Board of Commanders, which replaced the Superior Council (COSUFFAA), was the key consultative institution in all matters relating to the institution and behaves as a decision-making body and superior military court in matters brought to its attention. The Board of Commanders consisted of the Chief of the Joint Staff, who chaired it, the Deputy Chief of the Joint Staff, the inspector general, and the force commanders. The constitutional reforms also envisaged the allocation of new roles to the armed forces, such as: the participation in international peace keeping, logistical support, technical advisory missions, and communications and transportation in the fight against drug trafficking; the armed forces would assist with natural disasters and emergency situations affecting people and property; and they should cooperate with other institutions to combat terrorism, arms trafficking, and organized crime.

The constitutional provisions raise questions about the nature of military subordination to civilian authorities through contradictory and vague provisions. This situation made the political crisis of 2009 far more difficult to resolve and placed the military in the untenable position of becoming the arbiters between conflicting civilian institutions. Since no constitutional changes have been approved since 2009, the same legal ambiguity remains today.

Article 272 establishes the armed forces as a permanent, professional, apolitical, obedient and non-deliberative entity; under the command of the Commander-in-Chief, the President of the Republic.<sup>23</sup> Article 272 also defines the military's role to "...defend the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the Republic, keep the peace, public order and the rule of the Constitution, the principles of free suffrage and

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<sup>23</sup> Art 272: "The Honduran Armed Forces are characterized as a permanent, national, essentially professional, apolitical, obedient and non-deliberative institution."

the alternation in the exercise of the Presidency of the Republic.” In addition to these functions, the same article mandates the Army to help in “the custody, transportation and monitoring of electoral materials and other aspects of the security of the election process” under the leadership of the National Electoral Tribunal. Operationally, this provision is manifested in the executive transferring authority of the military to the Tribunal seven days before any election contest and until official results are announced. Article 279 states in part that “the Chief of the Joint Staff may not be a relative of the President of the Republic or his legal designees up to the fourth degree of consanguinity and second of affinity, and will serve for three (3) years.” However, Article 280 says that the Chief of the Joint Staff will be “appointed or removed freely” by the president.

The constitution generates legal contradictions in the relationship between civilian authorities and the military. These contradictions are partly responsible for the political crisis that led to the removal of President Manuel Zelaya in 2009. In an interview published by the digital newspaper *El Faro*, Colonel Herbeth Bayardo Inestroza argued that from April 2009 the military was concerned because “[t]he President [Manuel Zelaya] was using the Armed Forces as a political tool; and the fact that he was popularly elected does not entitle him to commit a crime.” Colonel Bayardo said that “the problem occurs when he [Zelaya] gives this *illegal* order of employing the Armed Forces to support the process for holding the referendum.”<sup>24</sup> On the afternoon of the 26 of April I [Colonel Bayardo] provided the Chief of the Joint Staff an opinion that concluded that “legally, ethically and morally it was not possible to provide support [to the President] because Article 272 gave us [the military] a role of guarantor of the Constitution, and the alternation in the exercise of the presidency. And we as soldiers are not subordinate to a person, but to our mandate, to the law.” Questioned about the unconstitutionality of extraditing Zelaya, Colonel Bayardo asked: “What would be more beneficial, removing the president from Honduras or presenting him to the public prosecutor’s office and risk a mob burning and looting forcing the military to intervene against the people?”<sup>25</sup> Therefore, the armed forces justified their actions during the 2009 political crisis under the concept of defending the national interests, the rule of law, and the lives of the Honduran people. A retired General, who served during the 1980s, was “very proud” of the military actions against President Zelaya because he argued “Zelaya was violating the constitution and was handing the country to communists.” The removal of President Zelaya was justified by Honduran officers interviewed as a “defense of democracy” rather than a violation of it.

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<sup>24</sup> A referendum to the National Electoral Tribunal and the Supreme Court has been declared unconstitutional.

<sup>25</sup> Carlos Dada y Jose Luis Sanz, “Cometimos un delito al sacar a Zelaya, pero había que hacerlo,” *El Faro*, last modified 2 de Julio de 2009, [http://www.elfaro.net/secciones/Noticias/20090629/noticias16\\_20090629.asp](http://www.elfaro.net/secciones/Noticias/20090629/noticias16_20090629.asp).

Officers see the military as a mediating force defending the constitution and the nation-state against external and internal threats. Those “threats” can be in the form of corrupt politicians or those who abuse their authority. The military is clearly subordinate to civilians in operational matters but vigilant of circumstances in which conflict among civilian leaders might undermine—in their minds—the integrity of the nation-state. The Honduran Constitution reinforces this view and gives the military the authority to act accordingly.

### *U.S.–Honduran Military Relations*

No other military institution in Central America has had closer relations with the United States than the Honduran Armed Forces. During the first decades of the twentieth century, Hondurans turned to the United States for protection from its neighbors. In 1909, a U.S. facilitated revolution overthrew the dictator of Nicaragua, José Santos Zelaya, in part because of concerns that he wanted to control Honduras. Another U.S. involvement during political strife in 1911 was motivated both to protect banana company interests and to prevent Guatemalan interference in the conflict. By the beginning of WWII, the U.S. became directly involved in efforts to modernize the Honduran military, providing equipment, sending advisors, and giving training to Honduran officers and enlisted men. This assistance led to the development of the Honduran Air Force, whose officers were better trained than those of the Army and whose equipment was generally superior. The difference between the Army and Air Force with regard to training and equipment continues to define the attitudes and behavior of its respective members. By the 1950s, cooperation between the United States and the Honduran military became institutionalized as the U.S. sought to fight communism in the sub-region. Increasing investments in Honduras by the U.S. would organize and train Honduran forces, and provide the institutional support needed to be recognized and respected as a military institution. The *Escuela Militar Francisco Morazán* was established as the first professional Honduran military academy in 1952. Further military agreements between the U.S. and Honduras provided continued training and military assistance. From 1950-1969, the U.S. or School of the Americas in Panama trained over 1,000 officers and enlisted men.<sup>26</sup> Honduran military cooperation was instrumental in U.S. policy toward Guatemala in 1954. Honduras served as a launching pad for numerous U.S. operations in Central America. Most notable was the 1954 CIA led “Operation PBSuccess” where Guatemalan President Jacobo Arbenz was removed from power. Assistance, both military and development, increased significantly throughout the ensuing decades with aid reaching its peak in the 1980s.

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<sup>26</sup> Ruhl, “Honduras: Militarism and Democratization in Troubled Waters.”



The investment by the U.S. was reciprocated in the form of Honduran subordination to U.S. and military interests. Honduran national interests instead were shaped by supranational international interests from the U.S., and submissive of Honduran “rational interests.”<sup>27</sup> In a sense, Honduran foreign policy complied on two fronts. According to Honduran military expert Victor Meza, Honduras implemented its foreign policy that complemented U.S. policy towards Central America, while domestic policy was being dictated by the Honduran Armed Forces.<sup>28</sup> This dual subordination would continue through the state’s return to democracy.

In the early 1980s, Honduras became a staging area for Contra<sup>29</sup> excursions into Nicaragua. The Honduran government and military shared U.S. concerns over the Sandinistas’ military buildup, and both the United States and Honduran governments viewed U.S. assistance as vital to deterring Nicaragua. In 1982, Honduras signed an annex to its 1954 bilateral military assistance agreement with the United States that provided for the stationing of a temporary United States military presence in the country. Beginning in 1983, the Pamerola Air Base (renamed the Enrique Soto Cano Air Base in 1988) housed a U.S. military force of about 1,100 troops known as Joint Task Force Bravo (JTFB). Total U.S. assistance to Honduras in the 1980s amounted to almost U.S.\$1.6 billion, making the country the largest U.S. aid recipient in Latin America after El Salvador.

The end of the Cold War and the winding down of the civil wars in Nicaragua and El Salvador led to a shift in U.S. assistance. Assistance peaked in 1986 at \$81.1 million, but declined to \$41.1 million in 1989 and to just \$2.7 million in 1993. While U.S. military assistance declined, the United States maintained its presence at the Soto Cano/Palmerola Air Force Base. This acquired even greater importance with the loss of Howard Air Force Base in Panama as a result of the Canal Treaties.

The presence and training by the U.S. professionalized the Honduran Armed Forces, but the dependence on U.S. economic aid forged the relationship between the U.S. and Honduran militaries. The Honduran military grew accustomed to U.S. economic support and acted in conjunction with U.S. aid. In the minds of the Honduran Armed Forces, the relationship became transactional where the military could stop trusting its own security efforts, and instead relied on prompt and timely aid from the U.S. in the name of fighting communism.<sup>30</sup>

The transition from military regime to democracy in Honduras was largely a byproduct of U.S. pressures. Honduras received assurances by U.S. leadership that military and economic aid would increase

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<sup>27</sup> Ronfeldt, “U.S. Involvement in Central America: Three Views from Honduras,” 19.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, 20.

<sup>29</sup> Nicaraguan counter-revolutionary groups opposed to the country’s Sandinista government.

<sup>30</sup> Ronfeldt, “U.S. Involvement in Central America: Three Views from Honduras,” 29.

if the armed forces agreed to return to the barracks.<sup>31</sup> The U.S. feared a potential threat of Civil War in Honduras which would result in the loss of a geostrategic stronghold. For Honduras, however, the promise of increased aid provided the greatest motivation to transition to democracy.<sup>32</sup> Further, frequent funding and training continued to raise the Honduran military's professional capabilities.

The end of the Cold War diminished the military's leverage to seek additional military aid. No longer could the Honduran Armed Forces point to communism as an external enemy to maneuver for increased aid. Instead, the armed forces faced pressure by the U.S. and international organizations (IMF and the World Bank) to reduce military forces. Further, the U.S. sharply cut military aid to Honduras throughout the 1990s, with U.S. Ambassador Cresencio Arcos questioning the role of the Honduran military.<sup>33</sup> The Honduran military responded by arguing that Arcos' comments represented another example of the U.S. attempting to interfere in Honduran domestic affairs and "should be ignored as such."<sup>34</sup> Nevertheless, the Honduran military in the 1990s reduced forces and continued to rely on the U.S. for economic support for the state's development, and later, in the fight against transnational organized crime.

Relations between the two countries were strained during the 2009 political crisis. The U.S. initially condemned the removal of President Zelaya, and then sought to work with regional partners to return the president to power. Furthermore, the U.S. limited contact with the new Honduran government, suspended \$30 million of foreign assistance, and minimized cooperation with the Honduran military. By November 2009, the Obama administration shifted the emphasis of U.S. policy from reversing Zelaya's removal to ensuring the legitimacy of previously scheduled presidential elections. Once the new president was inaugurated in January 2010, the U.S. restored foreign assistance and resumed cooperation.

The *AmericasBarometer*<sup>35</sup> 2014 survey asked two questions related to trust and cooperation with the U.S. military: *Cambiando un poco de tema, ¿hasta qué punto confía en las Fuerzas Armadas de los Estados Unidos de América?* (To what extent do you trust the Armed Forces of the United States?). *¿Hasta qué punto cree que las Fuerzas Armadas de los Estados Unidos de América deberían trabajar junto con las Fuerzas Armadas de (country) para mejorar la seguridad nacional?* To what extent do you believe

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<sup>31</sup> Ruhl, "Honduras: Militarism and Democratization in Troubled Waters."

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Rosenberg and Ruhl, "Honduras: Democratization and the Role of the Armed Forces," 68.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> The data used in this study come from the *AmericasBarometer* series, involving face-to-face interviews conducted in nations of North, Central and South America and the Caribbean in 2004-2012. Analysis in this paper focuses on the 2014 surveys and the 16 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean that possess traditional uniformed military. The surveys were all carried out with uniform sample and questionnaire designs under the auspices of the Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP) at Vanderbilt University. The samples were all national and stratified by region and sub-stratified by urban/rural.

that the Armed Forces of the United States should work together with the Armed Forces of (country) to improve national security? The questions are originally measured on a 1-7 scale and then transformed into a 0-100 scale where 0-represents the lowest level of support and 100-the highest.

The results of both questions are presented in Figure 1. First, trust in the U.S. military is significantly less than support for cooperation with the United States. Second, countries in Central America, with the exception of Nicaragua, tend to express the highest levels of trust in the U.S. military. The data show that citizens in Honduras express the highest levels of trust and cooperation with U.S. Armed Forces of any country in Latin America. Significant majorities of Hondurans express trust in the U.S. military and support greater cooperation with local forces to tackle security challenges. These responses provide a good base upon which to expand cooperation between the two countries. While there are sectors of Honduran society—the political left and some NGOs—who oppose greater links with the United States military, most Hondurans believe such links to be essential and positive for the country. The reservoir of popular support provides a valuable asset to the United States as it moves to strengthen cooperation and assistance to the Honduran security forces.

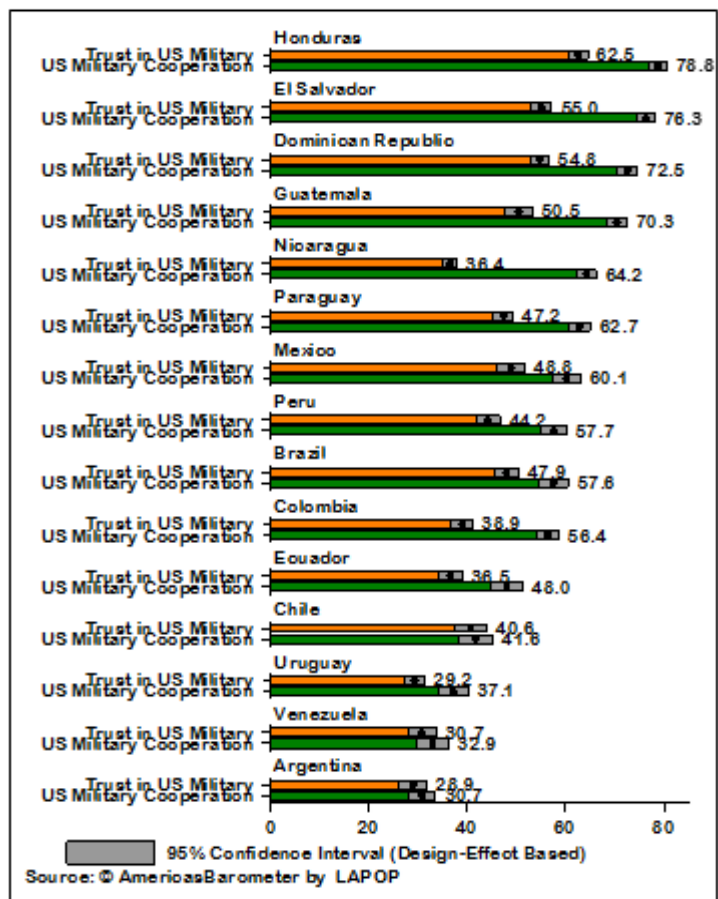


Figure 1: Trust in and Cooperation with U.S. Military

### *The Role of the Honduran Armed Forces*

The role of the Honduran Armed Forces has shifted since independence in 1838. As previously mentioned, internal political conflict remained the premier threat to state stability throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth century. It would not be until the post-WWII period where external threats superseded internal conflict. This coincided with the professionalization, institutionalization, and increased politicization of the Honduran Armed Forces.

Honduras served as the geostrategic capital for the fights against communism in Central America. In conjunction with the United States, the Honduran military supported efforts to combat communist

threats in nearby Costa Rica (1948), Guatemala (1954), El Salvador (1980s), and Nicaragua (1980s).<sup>36</sup> These communist threats justified both the existence and expansion of the Honduran Armed Forces. Additionally, such threats created an “outward security vision” for the Honduran military that remains today.

While the Soviet Union—and communism broadly speaking—remained the United States’ greatest adversary during this period, El Salvador posed the greatest threat to Honduras. The migration of Salvadoran *Campesinos* onto scantily marked border territory between the states created conflict among civilians.<sup>37</sup> When economic downturn created pressures on the Honduran government to adequately provide for its citizens, the government instead blamed El Salvador and the state’s inability to control its population. Subsequent immigration laws would send thousands of Salvadoran *Campesinos* back to El Salvador increasing tensions between San Salvador and Tegucigalpa. Finally, in 1969, El Salvador launched an attack on Honduras in what became known as the Soccer War.

The death toll of the conflict did not compare to the rivalry that followed. Civilian factions in both countries recognized the other as a true threat to their livelihood, and demanded that their respective military institutions prevent future attacks from occurring. For the Honduran Armed Forces, the war brought stability and a sense of nationalism within the state, and served to diffuse mounting internal pressures on the military. Furthermore, the war justified the military’s role in protecting against external threats and an ensuing arms race followed with its neighbor to the west.<sup>38</sup>

During the Salvadoran Civil War (1980-1992), U.S.-Honduran relations became somewhat strained as the Reagan administration provided weapons and military aid to the Salvadoran government to counter the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (*Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional*—FMLN) guerilla forces. In the minds of Honduran military leadership, the strengthening of their enemy by the U.S. threatened Honduras’ long-term security. Nevertheless, Honduras continued to support U.S. efforts to counter guerilla forces in El Salvador and the newly empowered Sandinista government in Nicaragua. However, Honduran military leadership did not feel that the conflict with Nicaragua was necessary or useful; it was the United States’ war and Honduras would be best served protecting its border from Salvadoran invasion.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Rosenberg and Shepherd, *Two Approaches to an Understanding of US-Honduran Relations*.

<sup>37</sup> Anderson, “The war of the dispossessed: Honduras and El Salvador, 1969.”

<sup>38</sup> Ernesto Paz, “The Foreign Policy and National Security of Honduras,” in *Honduras Confronts its Future: Contending Perspectives on Critical Issues*, eds. Mark Rosenberg and Philip Shepherd (Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1986), 181-210.

<sup>39</sup> Ronfeldt, “U.S. Involvement in Central America: Three Views from Honduras,” 12-13.

Honduran-Salvadoran relations today remain contentious as the Honduran military still considers El Salvador a potential threat. The delimitation of the common border is said to threaten the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Honduras. This proved evident in recent years when Honduras and El Salvador nearly went to war over perceived control of Conejo Island in the Gulf of Fonseca. Ultimately, the rivalry with El Salvador remains the preeminent threat in the minds of Honduran military leadership.

The end of the Cold War left the Honduran military without external threats—outside of the perceived threat of El Salvador. The downsizing of the Nicaraguan and Salvadoran militaries along with the collapse of communism globally made it difficult for Honduran military leaders to rationalize their large budget and Army.<sup>40</sup> The deterioration of public order and pressures on the military to reduce the size of its budget and forces, fueled internal threats not seen since WWII. The National Police remained largely under the control of the Honduran Armed Forces, but continued human rights violations finally led to concessions by the military in 1993.<sup>41</sup> The police force was then placed under civilian control in 1996.

As of 2016, the transition to combating internal threats has placed the Honduran Armed Forces in an uncomfortable position. Communism has been replaced by drug trafficking organizations and gangs as the preeminent threat to national security. Nevertheless, military leadership remains fearful of external actors, especially with regard to territorial threats and perceives police duties as beneath them. However, they remain willing participants in these police-like activities in order to ensure the protection of the state and the constitution.

According to *The Military Balance 2016*,<sup>42</sup> the Honduran military number 10,700 active personnel (Army 7,300; Navy 1,100; and Air Force 2,300) and 8,000 paramilitary forces under the Ministries of Public Security and Defense and organized into 11 regional commands. The largest of the paramilitary forces, the *Policía Militar del Orden Público* (Military Police of Public Order—PMOP), has increased from 1,000 in late 2013 to 3,228 in 2015, and is slated to reach 5,000 by the end of 2016. Military expenditures increased by 186 percent between 2006 and 2015, the largest rise in Central America. The increase funding has been possible because of a special “population-security tax” imposed in 2012 to provide additional funds to the military, police, and intelligence agencies. A significant portion of expenditures have gone to support military participation in law enforcement activities primarily through the PMOP.

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<sup>40</sup> Ruhl, “Honduras: Militarism and Democratization in Troubled Waters,” 53-54.

<sup>41</sup> Rosenberg and Ruhl, “Honduras: Democratization and the Role of the Armed Forces,” 70.

<sup>42</sup> The International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), *The Military Balance 2016* (Washington, DC: IISS, 2016).

## SOURCES OF IDENTITY OF THE HONDURAN ARMED FORCES

An important element in understanding the sources of identity for a military institution is the role beliefs of military officers. Military role beliefs refer to how the military sees itself as an institution, both in relation to society and the other institutions of the state. Normally, role beliefs are a product of historical and cultural factors, as well as institutional structures. In the case of Honduras, role beliefs are conditioned by the country's historical relations with its neighbors and the United States, and the military's constitutional status vis-à-vis the state and other institutions. Sovereignty and pride are the two concepts that form the bases of the Honduran military's ethos.

In examining the beliefs of military officers in Central America, notably Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Guatemala, we find that views can be clustered into three broad perspectives: (1) officers who believe that the military should focus almost exclusively on traditional constitutionally prescribed missions of national defense; (2) officers who argue for expansive roles in accord with national development objectives and the notion of human security; and (3) those who see additional missions beyond the traditional national defense as exceptional, temporary and mostly focused on public security or "non-traditional" threats.<sup>43</sup> Most Honduran military officers expressed views consistent with the third group. They believe the military has a duty to provide assistance to the state to confront security challenges, including policing functions. That assistance, however, should be temporary and not interfere with the fundamental defense of territorial integrity. Honduran military officers believe in the missions and roles ascribed to them by the constitution, and are keen to uphold their role as guarantors of constitutional authority.

The weakness of the national police is the key factor for officers that supported a limited expansion of roles focused on public security. Repeatedly, and almost unanimously, officers cited "weak and corrupt" police forces as the main reason why the armed forces must assist in providing public security.

A Honduran Colonel argued:

Our police lack all the basic training and resources to confront the enormous gang problem in this country...unfortunately, because of ineffective training they are susceptible to being corrupted by drug traffickers or international criminal cartels. The police personnel normally come to the [police] academy with very poor education and are not of the best quality students. Many do not see police work as a noble career and they do not dedicate themselves to adequate discipline and self-sacrifice. They simply want access to a job. These people then are very corruptible. On the other hand, most military men are dedicated to a career...their [soldiers] training regimen is strict, long and comprehensive....<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> It is difficult to define a percentage to each category since the number and type of officers interviewed were often not representative of all branches or ranks, plus several officers' opinions straddled different perspectives.

<sup>44</sup> Interview with Honduran Army Colonel, Tegicugalpa, Honduras.

When asked to name the most important mission for the military institution, the Honduran Colonel said, “we are entrusted by the national constitution for defending the territory [of Honduras]....” When asked to define what he meant by “defending” and the nature of the threat, the colonel clearly indicated that tensions between Honduras and its neighbors, particularly El Salvador was a major concern. The colonel was not the first or last military officer that mentioned territorial integrity in the conventional sense as a major, or most important, challenge facing the nation. Weariness of the intentions of their neighbors, born out of historical conflicts, still influence the attitudes of military officers—particularly those who started their careers in the 1980s. Younger officers might have a different outlook—in that their attitudes might be more amenable to cooperation with regional partners—but the educational systems and doctrines taught at military academies continue to emphasize territorial integrity, “sovereignty and pride,” and historical analogies are rooted in the experience of confrontation with the country’s neighbors.

The group that sees an expansive role for the military focused on duty to country, but interpreted it very differently. A Honduran Lieutenant argued that the armed forces’ mission was to “do whatever we have to do to protect our country...development, environment, drug trafficking, climate change, gangs, helping the people in need...anything, anything our motherland requires....” His tone of voice emphasized the word “anything” and he repeated it twice. These officers did not reject traditional roles but expressed a perspective that saw the military as more than defenders of territorial integrity. In the case of Honduras, expansive roles are tied to adherence to the constitutionally prescribed missions. Honduran military officers are very aware—it is part of their training and education—that the nation’s constitution grants them roles that go far beyond defense of territory, and while some officers are not anxious to go beyond their basic mission they accept the constitutional mandates as a duty.

Officers who focused almost exclusively on traditional defense of territorial integrity tend to come from older cadres and from the Army. These officers saw public security diverting the military from their “historical” mission. Officers in this group argued that the principal function of the armed forces was to defend the nation from her enemies. While acknowledging that “enemies” can emerge from a variety of fronts, these officers emphasized that the military’s preparation, training, and commitment should be focused on the “core mission.” When prompted to define the enemy, one mid-level officer argued “deterrence demands that we be prepared to defend our borders and our territory.” When asked if that meant against a neighboring country the officer shook his head affirmatively, said “yes” (raising his tone), mentioned the country by name, and reiterated the uncertain nature of the geopolitical conditions facing the country.

While support for the idea of democracy was nearly universal, the critique of democracy was also virtually unanimous and centered on too much freedom, corruption, and political manipulation. Repeatedly, military officers cited corruption and politicization as major problems with democratic regimes. The theme about corrupt, inept, and politically motivated civilians came up repeatedly and under various conditions. Many officers displayed a significant level of disdain for politicians, particularly legislators. One officer compared legislators to “leeches” (*sanguijuelas*) arguing that “they suck the lifeblood from the nation and its people....” These attitudes fed into opinions about democracy in general.

### *Military-Police Cooperation*

In Honduras, cooperation between the military and the police is extensive and has been common since the early 2000s. Usually, the work is carried out by specific requests made through the Secretary of Security. Article 272 of the Constitution of Honduras, establishes that the armed forces shall cooperate with the National Police in the preservation of public order, while Article 274 determines that cooperation is established through requests from the Secretary of State for Security in order to combat terrorism, arms trafficking, and organized crime, as well as to protect the state and the Electoral Tribunal.

The organic law of the armed forces also provides for collaboration with the police. Article 3 (Decree 39-2001), which identifies military functions, says that one of them is to “cooperate with the institutions of public safety, at the request of the Secretary of State in the Office of Security, to combat terrorism, arms trafficking and organized crime, as well as in the protection of the powers of the State and the National Electoral Tribunal.” This feature is also referred to in Article 34 of the Organic Law of the National Police (Decree 67-2008) by determining that:

When the National Police cannot deal alone with special situations such as emergencies or cases of force *majeure* or an offense against the internal security of the State, the Secretary in the Department of Security may request support from the Municipal Police or the military, who must provide such support with diligence and urgency, defining as well the situation for which assistance is provided, the duration of such assistance and the material and human resources, technical, financial and logistics that will participate in the deployment of the joint efforts. The actions taken shall be carried out under the technical control of the police authority. The support referred to in this Article shall be temporary, limited to technical cooperation, logistics and personnel necessary, and shall conform to the guidelines established by the President of the Republic through the Secretary of State for Security, through the respective regulations.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> La Gaceta, Diario Oficial de la Republica de Honduras, Decreto No. 67-2008, *Ley Orgánica de la Policía Nacional de Honduras*, Artículo 34, Pagina 10, 31 de octubre de 2008, <http://www.tsc.gob.hn/leyes/ley%20de%20policia%20seccion%20A.pdf>.



Normally, joint patrols in cities consist of one police officer and two soldiers, with the police technically in command. The fact is that military officers often take the lead because they are more disciplined and better equipped. However, arrests are usually made by the police.

In order to strengthen police efforts, the government issued Military Police of Public Order Law (DL 168, August 24, 2013). The law creates a militarized police force that straddles the two institutions and authorizes the armed forces to increase their force by 5,000 personnel. The new militarized police undergo the same tests—polygraphs and drug screening—that are being administered to the National Police. The government envisions this new force as a rapid response unit capable of handling emergency situations when the police and regular joint units are overwhelmed, particular attention is given to recovering areas of the cities overrun by criminal gangs.

In 2012, the government established the Intelligence Troops and Special Security Response Teams (*Tropa de Inteligencia y Grupos de Respuesta Especial de Seguridad*—TIGRES), under the Ministry of Security (which is also responsible for the civilian police) and is being trained in both police and military tactics to combat organized crime, and bring security to the most dangerous parts of the country. In June 2014, the first class of TIGRES graduated from a special training by the U.S. Special Forces Group 7 and Colombia's Jungle School. In March 2015, Green Berets, from the 7th Special Forces Group (Airborne), hosted members of the TIGRES at Eglin Air Force Base in Florida.

A third institution is FUSINA (*Fuerza Nacional de Seguridad Interinstitucional*), which is a task force made up of representatives from the country's various security units led by a senior-level military officer. FUSINA operates under the oversight of the National Defense & Security Council (NSC), which includes the president, the Speaker of the National Congress, and the Ministers of Defense and Public Security. FUSINA manages bodies such as an anti-extortion unit that controls phone intercepts and so far has proven to be a good model of inter-agency cooperation.

For the military these missions have become routine and a means of gaining visibility and resources in an era when internal security and non-traditional threats have replaced traditional defense roles. However, military officers generally do not engage in these missions with great enthusiasm. As one military officer said, "I did not train to be a police officer. If I had wanted to do that I would have joined the police academy. I am a soldier trained to defend my country against her enemies. I am disciplined and obedient and so I do what I am told." The sense of duty was echoed by other officers who nearly unanimously said they perform their duties with "obedience" but who described collaboration with the police as a burden and a degradation of their mission.

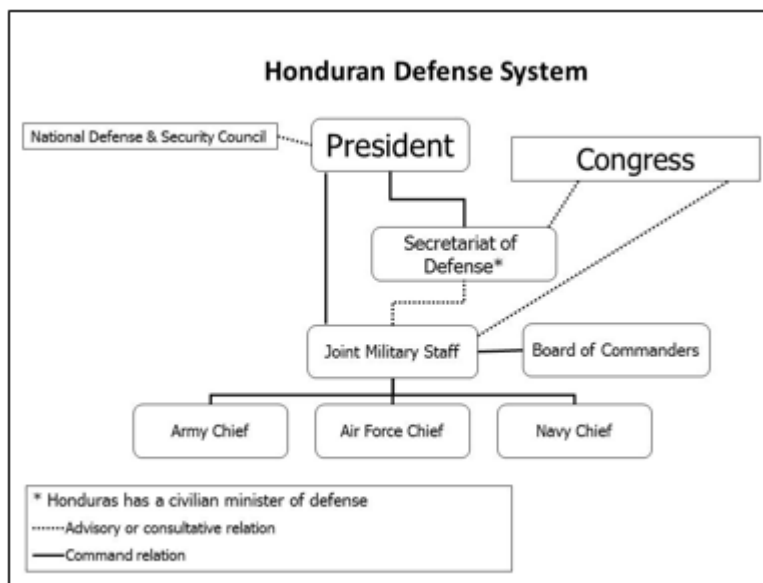
Most military officers view the PMOP as a temporary institution until the National Civil Police can be strengthened. However, the reality on the ground is that: (1) PMOP is credited for reducing

homicide rates from a high of 90 per 100,000 people in 2011 to 66 by the end of 2014; (2) Most of the new resources from the “security tax” are going to the PMOP; and (3) Corruption continues to plague the police<sup>46</sup> making sustained investment politically difficult. In fact, there is speculation that President Juan Orlando Hernández is using corruption in the police to divert additional resources to the PMOP with the desire to eventually replace the National Civil Police with the Military Police of Public Order.<sup>47</sup>

### *The Defense System*

Another source of identity is the nature and structure of the defense system. Particularly important is the relationship of the elected civilian president and the military command. That relationship tends to be personal and reciprocal. The formal structure of the system is shown in Figure 2.<sup>48</sup>

Formally, the president receives advice from the National Security Council and is the Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces. The president



**Figure 2: Honduran Defense System**

exercises authority over the military directly and can bypass the ministry. The Board of Commanders is the consultative body, composed of the Chairman and the Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Inspector General of the Armed Forces and the General Commanders of the Armed Forces. Article 205 of the Constitution says that the National Congress has the authority to “set the number of permanent members of the Armed Forces;” however, in practice, the legislature has never exercised that power. The armed forces in consultation with the president establish the number, depending on their perceived needs.

It is important to understand that informal norms of behavior tend to take precedence over the formal structures. Presidents are keen to promote officers who share their political agenda—if not their political party affiliation. Lines of communication between the Chief of the Joint Staff and the president

<sup>46</sup> A recent report provided evidence that high-level police officials were involved in the 2009 assassination of the country’s drug czar.

<sup>47</sup> David Gagne, “Honduras Police Under Fire Following Drug Czar Murder Scandal,” *InSight Crime*, last modified April 7, 2016, <http://www.insightcrime.org/news-briefs/honduras-police-under-fire-following-drug-czar-murder-scandal>.

<sup>48</sup> Adapted from: Donadio Marcela, *A Comparative Atlas of Defense in Latin American and the Caribbean: 2014 Edition* (Buenos Aires, Argentina: Resdal, 2014).

are essential for the system to operate smoothly, and they often bypass the Minister of Defense. The ministry's weakness not only stems from their lack of operational control over the uniformed officers but because of the dearth of civilian expertise in defense issues, plus the tendency of the president to exercise direct control of the military rather than rely on the minister. The civilian minister plays a purely political role as the "advocate" for the military with the public and Congress. The ministry relies almost entirely on the military for defense information, budget analysis, threat assessments, and personnel matters. Within the defense system, the armed forces are the lead agency in advising on defense policy and do so directly to the president. Since the Chief of the Joint Military Staff serves on the National Defense and Security Council, they have a direct role in formulating policy.

The system of promotions based on age requirements to enter and exit different ranks and the practice of promoting politically compatible officers, tends to create bottlenecks at various levels of the military hierarchy. These bottlenecks often lead to too many officers within specific ranks, particularly just below the highest levels. Mandatory retirement ages result in a certain level of urgency among staff officers to reach important positions before they are forced to leave the institution. As such, perceived political loyalty to the president is important in order to guarantee promotion. Loyalty, rather than thinking outside the box or taking risks, is the means to leadership advancement.

President Hernández has relied on military officers to staff a number of important government positions, even those outside of the defense area. While President Hernández did not serve in the military, he attended a military high school, served in the reserves, and prides himself in understanding the military mindset. Government officials with military backgrounds include: Amilcar Hernández, the president's brother and an Army colonel, who is a presidential advisor on security and defense. An important advisor is former Special Forces officer, Oscar Álvarez, who served as security minister under President Lobo. Álvarez is a Congressman and leader of the National Party faction in the National Congress. General Julian Pacheco Tinoco was appointed head of the security ministry. Pressure from the U.S. government led Pacheco to retire from the armed forces.<sup>49</sup> Prior to his new assignment, General Pacheco headed the Directorate for Intelligence and Investigation (DNII). General Nelson Willys Mejía Mejía became the national director of the merchant Navy. General Manuel Enrique Cáceres Díaz was appointed national director of the Civil Aviation Authority (DGAG). General Mario Hung Pacheco, former chief of the armed forces, was named coordinator of an inter-agency team on prisons. General René Osorio Canales, former chief of the armed forces, as presidential commissioner for the special economic zones (Model Cities).

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<sup>49</sup> Sarah Kinoshian, "Honduras' Military: On the Streets and in the Government," *Latin American Working Group*, February 10, 2015, <http://www.lawg.org/action-center/lawg-blog/69-general/1417-honduras-military-on-the-streets-and-in-the-government>. Accessed April 20, 2016.

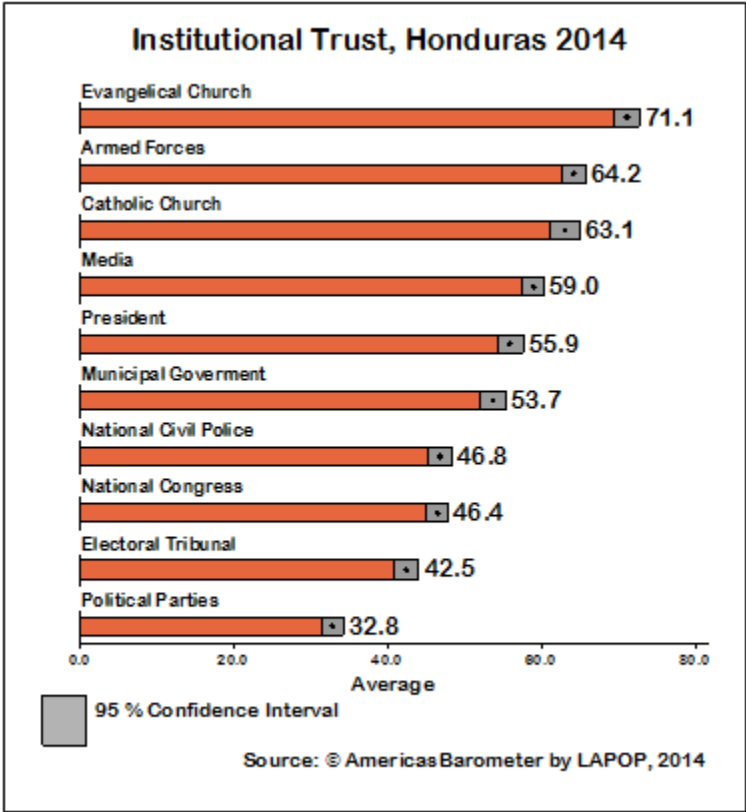
Rear Admiral Girodano Bruno Fontana Hedman, former chief of the Navy, as superintendent of the National Port Authority (ENP). Colonel Carlos Girón Ayala as national director of the Honduran Agricultural Marketing Institute (IHMA). Colonel José Francisco Bustillo Murcía named as director of the Social Fund for Housing (FOSOVI).

**THE HONDURAN ARMED FORCES AND SOCIETY**

To what extent does the mass public trust the armed forces? This is a basic question that reflects the nature and level of legitimacy afforded to the institution. Trust reflects a basic attitude that a particular institution is performing its functions effectively and meeting the public’s expectations. Without trust institutions

lack the ability to withstand scandals or to successfully promote their mission in intra-bureaucratic conflicts over policy or budget. The connection between lack of trust and resources creates a vicious cycle which can affect the effectiveness of an institution in the long-term. Weak institutions that engender low levels of trust might get less funding which in turn weakens them further.<sup>50</sup>

The Evangelical Church has the highest level of trust. The armed forces are second, making them the most trusted state institution. The National Police receive levels of trust significantly below that of the military, and below the mid-point of the scale.



**Figure 3: Institutional Trust, Honduras 2014**

Of course, aggregate levels of trust do not reflect the actual level of authority and legitimacy that the armed forces have in relation to other institutions since this is mostly based on the national context.

<sup>50</sup> The *AmericasBarometer* uses a variety of questions (B-series) that asks respondents to evaluate the extent to which they “trust” various institutions using a 7-point scale. The questions are of the following form: “To what extent do you trust (name of institution, e.g. armed forces)?” The scale goes from 1, which means no trust to 7, which is a lot of trust. The questions are recoded for better illustration and analysis into a 0-100 scale where 0 means no trust and 100 maximum trust. Values above the 50-point mark on the scale reflect positive opinions and those below 50 negative ones. Thus, institutions whose mean level of trust is above 50 points are those for whom the public expresses generally positive levels of trust. Conversely, institutions whose mean level of trust is below 50 are those for whom the public expresses generally negative levels of trust.

An important element to measure the level of legitimacy and to gauge the context within which the armed forces operate is to compare the military with other security organizations. Increasing levels of crime and insecurity in Latin America, and other parts of the developing world, have prompted governments to employ the armed forces in assisting police with law enforcement. Police-military cooperation is ubiquitous in Central America.<sup>51</sup>

With the exceptions of Chile and Uruguay, the military receives significantly higher levels of trust than the police. The armed forces in Ecuador and Guatemala receive the highest levels of trust, followed closely by El Salvador, Nicaragua, Mexico, and Honduras. In Honduras the gap in trust is significant and more than 17 points.

The gap in trust levels between the armed forces and the police affects the context within which resource battles between security agencies are fought. In

countries where the police are viewed as deficient, either because of corruption, ineffectiveness or both, the distribution of resources tends to follow public opinion as political leaders will want to support those institutions that are “popular.” This phenomenon creates a dynamic in which the police are starved for resources and thus are less able to develop institutional competencies. High levels of trust relative to other state institutions promotes the armed forces as an all-purpose institution used to fill the capacity gaps within the state apparatus, not just in terms of security but potentially in other areas as well. Increasing rates of crime and violence, low levels of trust in the police and high levels of confidence in the military tend to promote the use of the armed forces in domestic security missions. While national constitutions often provide for the use of the military in *exceptional circumstances* to assist law enforcement agencies,

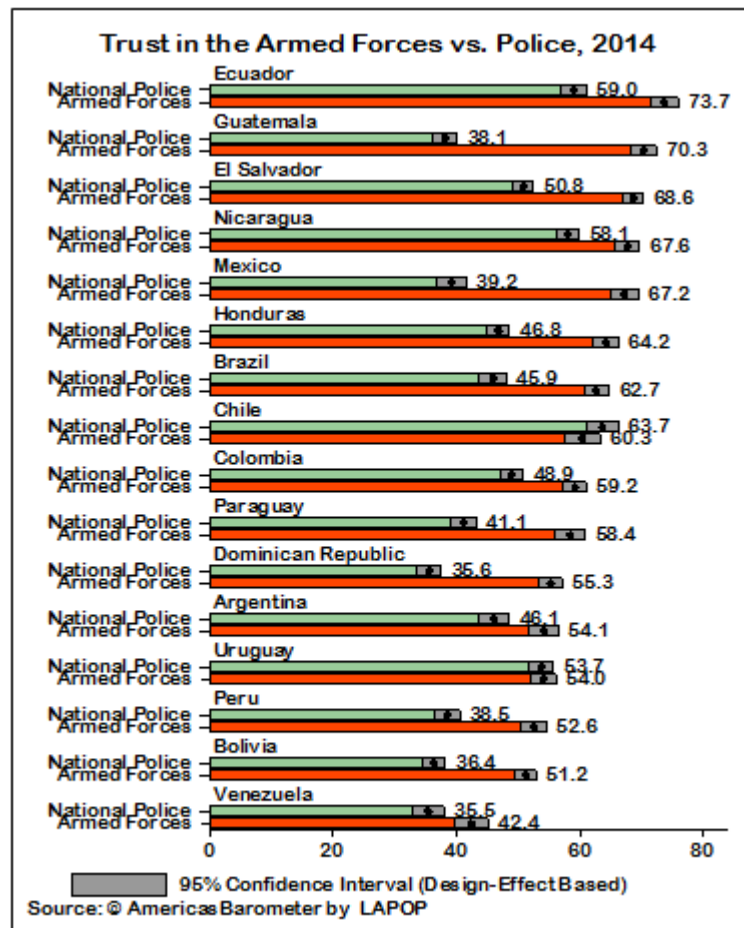


Figure 4: Trust in the Armed Forces vs National Police, 2014

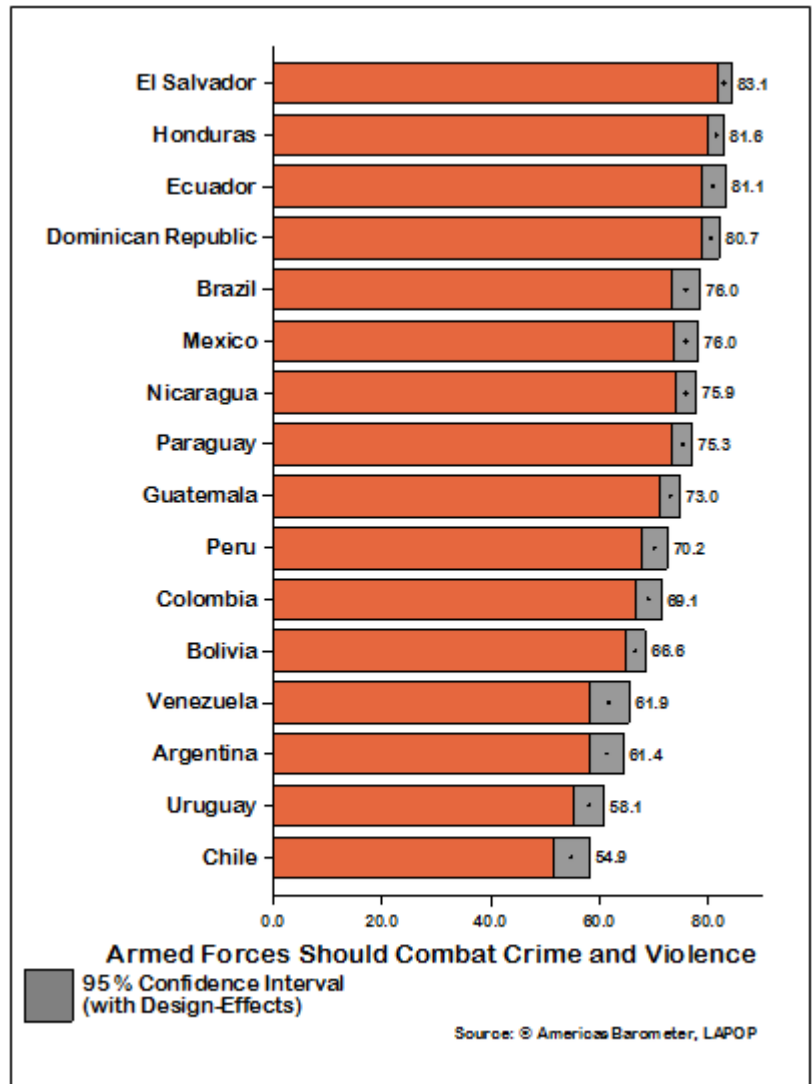
<sup>51</sup> For an in-depth analysis of police-military cooperation in Central America, see: Orlando Pérez, *Civil Military Relations in Post-Conflict Societies: Transforming the Role of the Military in Central America* (New York, New York: Routledge, 2015).

the fact is that in many Latin American countries domestic security missions have become routine and integral to the implementation of “*mano dura*” policies.<sup>52</sup>

*Public Support for Using the Military to Combat Crime and Violence*

The *AmericasBarometer* asked the following question: *¿Hasta qué punto está de acuerdo o en desacuerdo que las Fuerzas armadas deben participar en el combate del crimen y de la violencia en (país)?* [To what extent do you support the involvement of the Armed Forces to combat crime and violence in (country)?]. The question is measured originally with a 1-7 scale, where 1 represents “strongly disagree” and 7 “strongly agree.” The question is then recoded for better illustration and analysis into a 0-100 scale where 0 means no support for the military combating crime and 100 represents strong support.

Figure 5 shows the average score on the 0-100 scale for each country in the analysis. We can observe that there is positive support for the armed forces to participate in public security missions in all the countries.



**Figure 5: Should the Armed Forces Help Combat Crime?**

Over 80 percent of Hondurans express support for military involvement in crime prevention. As seen

<sup>52</sup> Orlando J. Perez, “Gang Violence and Insecurity in Contemporary Central America,” in *Murder and Violence in Modern Latin America*, eds. Eric A. Johnson, Ricardo Salvatore, and Pieter Spierenburg (Hoboken, New Jersey: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013).; José M. Cruz, “Pandillas y capital social en Centroamérica,” en *Maras y pandillas en Centroamérica. Pandillas y capital social* (San Salvador: UCA Editores, 2004).; Caroline Moser, Ailsa Winton, and Annalise Moser, “Violence, Fear, and Insecurity among the Urban Poor in Latin America,” in *The Urban Poor in Latin America*, ed. Marianne Fay (Washington, D.C.: The World Bank, 2005); Joseph S. Tulchin and Meg Ruthenburg, “Toward a Society Under Law,” in *Toward a Society Under Law: Citizens and Their Police in Latin America*, eds. Joseph Tulchin and Meg Ruthenburg (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson International Center, 2006).

earlier, a significant number of military troops routinely perform domestic security functions and Honduras has developed a number of paramilitary structures that combine police and military capabilities. It is clear these efforts are very popular among the public.

## CONCLUSION

Given the historical links between the U.S. and the Honduran military, most Honduran officers are inclined to support closer ties with the U.S. military, particularly if such cooperation will assist in carrying out their mission. The problem arises with the operationalization of those missions. As seen earlier, the Constitution of Honduras provides a plethora of roles to the armed forces. Most Honduran military officers see conventional military defense of territory as their primary mission. In most cases they define such defense in terms of dissuading their regional neighbors from challenging Honduran sovereignty understood in conventional territorial terms. As one senior military officer told the authors, “as a sovereign nation Honduras needs to be prepared to defend its territory and while our neighbors are mostly at peace today, Honduras cannot let its guard down.” Furthermore, the officer alluded to the “threat of force” which a military provides as key to “mediating *inevitable* [emphasis added] conflicts between our neighbors.” The idea put forth by this officer and others—including some civilians—is that differences among nations are inevitable and that negotiations must always be backed by the availability of force. Since the future is unknown the essence of deterrence is having the ability to enforce a country’s position militarily if necessary. Similar attitudes can be found among military officers in neighboring countries. Therefore, U.S. assistance to and collaboration with Honduras—and by extension her neighbors—needs to be sensitive to these regional dynamics.

Another consideration relates to the nature of the actual missions performed by the Honduran military. A substantial portion of the armed forces’ mission today relates to domestic security, particularly paramilitary activity linked to police functions. Therefore, closer cooperation might involve U.S. assistance to units that currently do not receive it such as the PMOP. Working with the institutions the Honduran government has created to deal with the problem of crime and violence might be useful. However, many military officers are wary of police functions and might be skeptical of deepening such roles through U.S. assistance or might view such assistance as diverting aid from defense missions.

Honduran military officers are often skeptical of U.S. motivations. They generally do not understand the complex policy-making system in the United States, where separation of powers demands consultation with Congress and often requires U.S. military assistance to adhere to clear and significant legal limitations. They are embedded in a system in which personal rather than institutional relationships

are the most important; a structure in which the president's personal relationship with the chief military officer is the key to civil-military relations; a system in which informal rather than formal rules structure behavior. They have a hard time understanding a system in which institutional and legal barriers place rigid limits on the military; a system in which personalities are subsumed to institutional structures and legal parameters. Maneuvering through these sets of attitudes, while cumbersome, time consuming and often annoying, is essential if cooperation is to be successful. Additionally, Honduran officers are sometimes suspicious of the United States and are prone to ascribe Machiavellian motives to U.S. assistance. They understand that U.S. policy is inevitably driven by U.S. national interests but they are often doubtful that such interests are compatible with those of Honduras; particularly with regard to regional cooperation and working with Honduras' neighbors. It is important for U.S. personnel who interact with Honduran military officers not to dismiss such attitudes as merely ignorance or paranoia. For Hondurans these beliefs are real and they shape their interactions with their U.S. counterparts, after all "perception is reality."

History is very important to Honduran military officers. Historical memory, for good or ill, informs their attitude toward neighbors and the United States. For some military officers the United States is too driven by present circumstances. The U.S. is seen as too eager to dismiss the past. First, historical personalities and events shape their mentality and behavior. The history of wars, heroic leaders, famous battles, and political conflicts all define how the Honduran military sees itself. These incidents, and the myths surrounding them, are taught throughout the military education system, and serve as the basis of military doctrine and values. Second, Honduran officers often believe U.S. policymakers are "ungrateful" or focused on "what have you done for me lately." They are very keen on receiving validation for what they did to assist the U.S. to fight communism in the region, their participation in Iraq, and their recent efforts to fight drug trafficking and criminal networks. Therefore, exhibiting at least a basic understanding of the history of the Honduran military and acknowledging their "vital" contribution to advancing U.S. interests in the region is an essential first step to better cooperation.

Finally, it is often a cliché that people in Latin America and the United States have a different conception of time. This difference can sometimes be overstated. After all, many Latin Americans are now embedded in a global economy that demands strict adherence to standards of work much closer to the West. However, it is still the case that personal relationships are far more important than quick decisions. Building those relationships take time and are essential to working effectively in Honduras. Those personal relationships need to be nurtured through a process of continuous contact as well as by validating the professionalism and institutional worth of the Honduran military. Honduran officers are



proud of their profession, role and history, and acknowledging this on a personal and institutional level is necessary in order to promote mutual respect.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. **Build Mutual Respect and Confidence:** In order to improve cooperation, United States interaction with the Honduran military must be based on mutual respect and confidence. Taking time to understand the historical and cultural bases of military ethos is an important first step. Understanding and respecting cultural differences is essential for building an environment in which the Honduran military becomes a willing partner.
2. **Promote Partnership Capacity:** The relationship should focus on long-term goals and strategy rather than on resolution of short-term crises. Cooperation should be based on building capacity through dual operations and training, and on mutual interests and respect. Holding the Honduran military accountable for their actions or lack thereof is important in developing a positive accountable and transparent partnership.
3. **Promote Regional Cooperation:** The problems of transnational criminal networks linked to drug trafficking and terrorism go beyond national borders and require a regional response. The U.S. could promote greater security cooperation by pursuing strategies that increase interoperability among the region's militaries, strengthening regional integration institutions and leveraging assistance, training and cooperation from Latin American partners such as Colombia and Chile.
4. **Support Security Strategies of the Government of Honduras:** To the extent possible the United States should assist the Government of Honduras in pursuing a whole of government approach to security challenges. Modern security threats increasingly require multidimensional solutions. The United States can assist to professionalize, equip, and train security forces that are flexible, interoperable and capable of multi-tasking. U.S. security assistance can be valuable not only in improving the technical capacity of the Honduran security forces, but also their ability to work collaboratively and positively with the Honduran population.

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

### **Orlando J. Pérez, Ph.D., Associate Dean, Millersville University**

Dr. Orlando J. Pérez is currently the Associate Dean of the College of Arts, Humanities & Social Sciences at Millersville University. He has worked as a consultant on various topics, such as public opinion surveys, democratization, civil-military relations, and anti-corruption issues for the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the UN Development Program (UNDP). He is a member of the Scientific Support Group for the Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP) at Vanderbilt University and directs the Americas Barometer survey in Panama and Honduras. His teaching and research interests include comparative politics, Latin American politics, U.S.-Latin American relations, civil-military relations, public opinion and empirical democratic theory. His publications include: *Civil-Military Relations in Post-Conflict Societies: Transforming the Role of the Military in Central America* (Routledge 2015); *Latin American Democracy: Emerging Reality or Endangered Species?* 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (with Richard Millett and Jennifer Holmes) (Routledge 2015); and *Political Culture in Panama: Democracy after Invasion* (Palgrave-Macmillan 2011). He holds a B.A. in Political Science from Florida International University, and a M.A. and Ph.D. in Political Science from the University of Pittsburgh.

### **Randy Pestana, Policy Analyst, Jack D. Gordon Institute for Public Policy**

Randy Pestana serves as a Policy Analyst at FIU's Jack D. Gordon Institute for Public Policy. Mr. Pestana specializes in international relations with major focuses on U.S. foreign policy, security studies, and electoral politics. The majority of his work has been linked to governance and security, with a particular focus on democratic institutions, national security strategies, civil-military relations, and rule of law. Mr. Pestana has published on drug trafficking, organized crime, democratic institutions, and strategic culture and has assisted on numerous publications for both academic and defense purposes related to U.S. foreign policy and national security strategy. Mr. Pestana holds a M.A. in Latin American and Caribbean Studies with a Graduate Certificate in National Security Studies from Florida International University.

**FIU** FLORIDA  
INTERNATIONAL  
UNIVERSITY

**Steven J. Green**  
School of International  
& Public Affairs

**Jack D. Gordon Institute**  
for Public Policy

**Kimberly Green**  
Latin American and  
Caribbean Center