



Demilitarization and Security in El Salvador and Guatemala: Convergences of Success and Crisis

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Democratization Through Peace: The Difficult Case of Guatemala

The Guatemalan peace process provides an excellent opportunity to revisit a number of discussions about political democratization and social justice in Latin America. It is the premise of this article that fulfillment of the peace accords, particularly on demilitarization, is the necessary precondition for full development of political democracy in Guatemala. The article first summarizes how, beyond ending the war, the peace process has contributed to Guatemala's democratization, and then analyzes the Guatemalan experience since the early 1980s as a means to address some of the broad theoretical debates.

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The Salvadoran and Guatemalan cases correspond to a new model of public security that is widely shared across Latin America. The more localized processes of demilitarization in the two countries, moreover, appear to share a similar dynamic. In the midst of real reforms, however, the deterioration of public security as directly experienced by much of the population is cause for worry. An examination of the reforms established in the peace accords leads to an interpretation of these experiences in a comparative regional framework.

Global Forces and Regime Change: Guatemala in the Central American Context

Drawing on theories of regime change, revolution, and democratization, this paper proposes a process theory to account for the 12 major regime transformations that have occurred in Central America since 1970. Political regimes, coherent systems of rule established among a coalition of dominant political actors, change when their prevailing political rules and their ruling coalitions undergo transformation. External forces are important to this process. The focal case is Guatemala and its prospects for democratic consolidation.

Demilitarization and Security in El Salvador and Guatemala: Convergences of Success and Crisis

A. Douglas Kincaid

For most of the past quarter-century, social scientists endeavoring to analyze the prolonged crises afflicting the Central American region shared a common problematic: how to explain the extraordinary range of variation in political processes within a confined and relatively homogeneous geographic space. For the majority of scholars, independent of their political outlooks, the analytical task was to identify the mix of variables that might simultaneously explain Costa Rica's democratic stability, Nicaragua's revolution, civil war in El Salvador that was not quite a revolution, Guatemala's insurgency and repression that was not quite a civil war, and none of the above in Honduras (see, inter alia, Brockett 1998; Vilas 1995; Torres Rivas 1993; Williams 1986).

Among the many dramatic changes of the last decade of the twentieth century, therefore, the political panorama of Central America provides another: the challenge of accounting for convergence and similarity rather than divergence and variation. The two exemplary processes in this regard (and for Latin America in general, not just Central America) are democratic transitions and market-oriented economic policies (Korzeniewicz and Smith 1996; Smith et al. 1994). Not that national and local differences in culture and social structure have dissolved or ceased to matter, of course; but in many ways, the Central American countries today are as noteworthy for what unites them as for what divides them.

The themes of this essay, demilitarization and security, fit well in the new context of convergence. Contemporary security challenges are similar from one end of Central America to the other; this essay will argue that the Salvadoran and Guatemalan cases correspond to a new model of public security that is widely shared across Latin America. The more localized processes of demilitarization in the two countries, moreover, appear to share a similar dynamic, once allowances are made for a five-year offset in the signing of the respective peace accords.

Any effort to examine the reasons for these wider processes of convergence would go well beyond the scope of this work, but they are worth noting as a means of locating a discussion of security issues in close relationship to other aspects of contemporary Central American development. Too often, discussions of security issues such as demilitarization or civil-military relations proceed as if they were self-contained

dynamics driven solely by the conflicting interests of the immediate actors, rather than as part of more general and complex processes of social change.

The first section of this work presents some theoretical considerations and a brief historical summation in order to anchor a comparative analysis of security and demilitarization. The following two sections focus on El Salvador and Guatemala, respectively, in both cases beginning with reforms established in peace accords and then proceeding to a very preliminary evaluation of results. The fourth section proposes an interpretation of these experiences, specifically concerning problems of public security, within a comparative regional framework. The concluding section offers a few observations aimed at promoting debate over possible responses to an emergent security crisis.

CONCEPTS AND ANTECEDENTS

Both *security* and *demilitarization* are widely used terms with multiple meanings and connotations, and therefore they require some specification before they can be applied to a comparative analysis of specific countries. To begin with, three dimensions of security can be usefully distinguished for the purposes of this article: national, public, and citizen. National security, or, more precisely, the security of the national state, refers to the safeguarding of the state's sovereignty over the territory and population within its borders, and implies policies to confront any threat to that sovereignty. Public security is here understood as the maintenance of civil order necessary for the execution of basic societal functions (for example, commercial transactions, transportation, or communication), along with the upholding of the rule of law. Citizen security refers to the capacity of individuals and groups to enjoy or exercise the political, economic, and civil rights that correspond to the status of citizen in a society.

Obviously, these dimensions of security are interrelated in complex ways. For example, citizens may reasonably expect states to maintain public order (public security) as a prerequisite to the full exercise of their individual rights (citizen security), while governments routinely confront the dilemma of determining when a given exercise of citizen rights turns into an unacceptable alteration of public order. At another moment, the dilemma may arise over whether the deterioration of public security has become so severe that it threatens the effective sovereignty of the state—a perceived crisis of national security. In response, governments then commonly suspend or reduce certain rights of citizens, thereby creating a threat to citizen security.

To uphold security in its various dimensions, the state typically counts on a group of specialized bureaucracies and forces; among them, the armed forces or military, the police, and the organizations responsi-

ble for the administration of justice. In modern nation-states, military forces are normally dedicated to the defense of national security, while police forces and the justice system are assigned to guarantee public and citizen security. To carry out these distinct functions, military and police forces, although sharing the legitimate use of coercive force or violence, are typically differentiated in terms of organization, doctrine, training, and tactics, among other factors.

Nevertheless, inasmuch as the dimensions of security are intertwined, the functions of security forces also may cross these boundaries. Virtually all countries, for instance, have constitutional or legal provisions that allow for the deployment of military forces to support or substitute for police forces when police capacity is insufficient to prevent a collapse of public order, or to restore order where it has collapsed. Natural disasters and mass riots are two obvious examples of such situations. On the other hand, it is also common that in situations of large-scale insurrection or civil war, police forces are likely to be subordinated to military authority in contested locales.

If the above set of characteristics can be said to apply to most contemporary nation-states, there is also great cross-national variation with respect to constitutional bases, political systems, bureaucratic capacities, cultural practices, and other factors that influence the configuration of a particular state's security apparatus. In this respect, it can be observed that the majority of Latin American countries are characterized by close structural and functional relations between police and military forces (Bayley 1993).

Within this regional tendency, it is possible to distinguish certain subregional patterns (Kincaid and Gamarra 1994; Kincaid and Juhn 1994). One such pattern can be observed in the northern portion of Central America (Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras), where the establishment of national police forces occurred before the institutional consolidation of the armed forces. During the early phase of national state formation, toward the end of the nineteenth century, police forces were established to maintain the domination of large landowners associated with agroexport economies. Those police subsequently served to uphold dictatorial regimes during the first half of the twentieth century. In this context, after military forces achieved institutional stability, beginning around 1930, the military leadership sought formal authority over police institutions as part of their efforts to establish autonomy from partisan civilian political forces. National police forces were transferred to military-controlled defense ministries in El Salvador in 1945 and Honduras in 1963. In both countries, and in Guatemala after 1954, military officers occupied the senior positions of command in the police force. Thus, at the outset of the period of authoritarian military regimes, Central America was already characterized by policies that prioritized the

security of the national state over public security, or, more accurately, that identified public security with the security of the state (Aguilera 1989; Stanley 1996; Williams and Walter 1997). Concerns with citizen security, meanwhile, were minimal. The subsequent rise of Cold War doctrines, above all that of the “national security state,” only served to strengthen a set of prejudices and practices already in place in the region (see Huggins 1998).

The civil wars, other internal conflicts in Central America during the 1970s and 1980s, and the dramatic changes in the world political context after the 1980s had the result of wholly discrediting that national security doctrine. The processes of democratization and structural reform of security institutions in El Salvador and Guatemala, along with those of numerous other countries, have involved efforts to detach public security from its subordination to national security and to valorize and substantiate concepts of citizen security.

One controversial component of these reforms is demilitarization. The multiple meanings of this term range from the simple exit of the military from the presidential palace to the complete abolition of the armed forces as an institution, along the lines of the Costa Rican model of 1948. If we conceive of demilitarization as broadly signifying a transition from the military dictatorships of the past toward a more democratic model of civil-military relations, we can identify several categories of changes applicable to El Salvador and Guatemala.

- Peace. The implementation of the peace accords that put an end to civil war; the disarming of guerrilla forces and the demobilization of military combat forces, giving way to the “normal” size and deployment of the armed forces in consonance with their mission.
- Government. The subordination of the armed forces to civilian control, with adequate oversight mechanisms in such areas as doctrine, budget, troop deployment, and so on.
- Public administration. Eliminating military control of institutions and enterprises outside the bounds of military operations and, at the same time, ending the practice of naming active military officers to head those enterprises.
- Public security. Establishing a clear distinction between the structures and functions of national defense and public security, and specifying the emergency circumstances and limits under which military forces may be committed to public security tasks.
- Justice. The need to do away with the mechanisms and practices of impunity for the armed forces. Military justice systems will be confined strictly to matters of internal military conduct, again with adequate means of oversight, while crimes and abuses committed by military and police personnel will be prosecuted to the full extent of the law.

With the above concepts and theoretical and historical considerations, we may now evaluate the recent experiences of El Salvador and Guatemala.

THE CASE OF EL SALVADOR

The peace agreement signed in Chapultepec in January 1992 by representatives of the Salvadoran government and the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN) established the basis for drastic changes in the Salvadoran security forces. The Salvadoran armed forces' mission and doctrine were redefined: their primary responsibility would be national defense; their intervention in matters of public security would be restricted to situations of national emergency, and then only under presidential authorization with prior approval of the legislature (Williams and Walter 1997). Military doctrine henceforth was to reflect democratic values, respect for human rights, and subordination to civilian authority. Among other provisions, the accord set forth the following:

- Dissolution of a number of security forces, including the National Guard, the Treasury Police, and the National Police, and creation of the National Civilian Police (PNC) under the authority of the Ministry of the Interior.
- Disbanding of various components of the armed forces, specifically the Immediate Reaction Battalions and the civil defense patrols.
- Dismantling the military intelligence apparatus and creating a new intelligence agency under civilian authority.
- A 50 percent reduction in the size of the armed forces, from 63,000 to just over 31,000 persons.
- Establishment of a new system of military education that would incorporate programs and mechanisms to promote the revised military doctrine.
- Creation of an ad hoc commission to evaluate the military officer corps and recommend the discharge of those individuals guilty of criminal acts, human rights abuses, and other misconduct in the course of the war.

A calendar was established for the implementation of these measures, with the majority to be carried out within a two-year period.

During 1992–93, the balance sheet of demilitarization showed both successes and failures. On the positive side, peace was maintained, the FMLN disarmed, and the armed forces demobilized their combat battalions and civil defense patrols—no small accomplishments after more than ten years of war. The army was reduced from 40,000 troops in 1992 to 28,000 in 1994, a diminution which, when combined with the separation of the public security forces from military control, achieved the numeric goal established in the peace accords. It may be noted, how-

ever, that even at the reduced level of troop strength, Salvadoran military forces remained at the highest per capita level in Central America: 5.1 per 1,000 inhabitants, compared with 3.4 in Nicaragua and 3.2 in Guatemala and Honduras (Williams and Walter 1997).

On the negative side, there were delays in the dissolution of the old security forces, as well as in the formation and deployment of the new police force (WOLA 1995; Stanley and Holiday 1996). The government also postponed implementing the recommendations of the ad hoc commission, which had completed its work in September 1992. Various factors explained these delays: military resistance to the loss of control over the institutions and resources of public security, the left's distrust of efforts to incorporate ex-soldiers and members of the old security forces into the PNC, and the government's difficulty in amassing sufficient internal funds and external assistance to deploy the PNC nationwide. In this context, feeling pressured by a rise in criminal activity on the country, President Alfredo Cristiani authorized the army to participate in patrolling national highways in July 1993.

Almost all the obstacles to the implementation of the peace accords were resolved over an 18-month period from mid-1993, when the military high command was restructured in conformity with the recommendations of the Ad Hoc Commission, to the end of 1994, when the dissolution of the old National Police was completed. As a complement to these achievements, analysts of the peace process pointed to improved communication between military officials and civilian leaders, as evidenced in numerous seminars and conferences on security issues.

With respect to other indicators of demilitarization, however, a number of military prerogatives (see Stepan 1988) remained little affected by the peace accords. The accords made no mention, for instance, of the question of active-duty military officers' heading state enterprises or agencies. Services such as telecommunications, water, ports, customs, and the post office therefore continued to operate as they had under military leadership. The peace accords also did little to concretize the principle of civilian control over the military. They contained no measures specifying that the defense minister be a civilian, giving the legislature effective control over military budgets, or giving the executive control over the internal promotions of senior military officers. In all these areas, the Salvadoran armed forces could conserve a considerable degree of autonomy, even as the scope of their effective power was much reduced in the immediate postwar period.

Debate persists over what activities constitute appropriate military responsibilities in the new democratic context. One issue is how the core military mission of national defense intersects with the development challenges the country faces after years of internal strife. Does the concept of national defense permit or imply an active military role in

tasks associated with development programs? Spurred by their U.S. counterparts, the armed forces began civic action programs in the 1960s and significantly increased such efforts during the civil war. In the 1990s, still with the support and participation of U.S. military forces, the Salvadoran armed forces carried out health, education, and infrastructural repair programs in rural areas of the country and explored possible new initiatives in environmental protection. Opposition to such policies, particularly on the left, was quite vocal in the period after the signing of the peace accords, but appears to have diminished in the late 1990s, perhaps because of a growing confidence in the stability of the peace process and democratic reforms.

The principal problem affecting security in El Salvador in recent years undoubtedly has been the increase in criminal activity and non-political violence. Although reliable statistics on crime are scarce, especially for comparing current levels with those of wartime or prewar years, a generalized sense of crisis has emerged. According to a 1997 report in the *Miami Herald*, the country's homicide rate (140 per 100,000 inhabitants) was the highest in the world and more than five times greater than the Central American average (Garvin 1997). A year later, official government statistics indicated that the number of homicides was 8,019 in 1996 and 8,281 in 1997, while the number of injuries incurred from reported crimes rose from 14,352 to 15,697 over the same 12-month period (Guggenheim 1998).

Various reasons have been offered to account for the deterioration of public security (Garvin 1997; Guggenheim 1998; *Proceso* 1998b, c). They include

- Lack of adequate employment opportunities and concomitant rising poverty.
- Rapid demobilization after the war of combatants from both sides without adequate provisions for productively reintegrating them into society.
- Commercial circulation, legally and illegally, of large quantities of arms, including high-powered weapons.
- Growth of criminal gangs in the country's principal cities, spurred by the return to the country, either voluntarily or by deportation, of young Salvadorans who had joined gangs in U.S. cities, particularly Los Angeles.

Another likely influence has been the importance of El Salvador (and Central America more generally) as a transshipment site in international drug trafficking, for which criminal networks offer an obvious base of support.

By the late 1990s, the PNC was active throughout the country, with slightly more than 16,000 police personnel deployed in 219 sites as of

1998 (Secretaría de Comunicaciones 1998). The army, nevertheless, has continued to participate periodically to support the PNC. In 1997 this support included small-scale joint police-military deployments to deter crime in coffee-producing regions. In 1998 the legislature began to debate whether or not to authorize the urban deployment of military forces, too (*Inforpress Centroamericana* 1998e).

Salvadoran citizens' insecurity and disaffection with government security policies are reflected in the results of a series of polls conducted by the University Institute of Public Opinion at the Universidad Centroamericana. In one survey, a majority of respondents (52 percent) agreed with the statement that individuals have the right to administer justice with their own hands (*Proceso* 1998b). In another survey, nearly three-fourths of the respondents (72 percent) thought that the government was not resolving the problem of crime; of these, nearly half (49 percent) thought this was because the government was doing nothing, while another 18 percent opined that the government actually could do nothing. In the same poll, only 29 percent of the 315 people who reported having suffered an assault during the first four months of 1998 said they had filed a complaint with the police (*Proceso* 1998a).

The postwar evolution of the Salvadoran justice system has been complex. The peace accords had relatively little to say about the institutional aspects of the administration of justice. The simultaneous implementation in 1993 of the Ad Hoc Commission's recommendations (retiring military officers involved in serious abusive conduct during the war) and a general amnesty (precluding individuals on both sides from being prosecuted for wartime offenses) made the question of military and police impunity for previous acts largely moot. In the ensuing years, denunciations of the abuse of authority have largely concerned the police, which, since 1994, has meant the civilian police. The 1998 conviction of five PNC agents for the 1995 beating and murder of a medical student in a suburb of San Salvador may be regarded as an important precedent in the effort to end impunity, although it followed a very controversial and drawn-out investigation that included unsubstantiated allegations of the criminal involvement of senior officials, including the minister of public security (*Inforpress Centroamericana* 1998b).

During the same period, a long-delayed overhaul of the country's penal code was worked out and finally approved by the legislature in April 1998. The reform was noteworthy for measures that sought to strengthen the rights of the accused and protect individual citizen rights, such as the sanctity of private homes, from abusive public security practices, such as searches without judicial warrants (*Inforpress Centroamericana* 1998d). Taking effect in the midst of a perceived crime wave, however, the new code was immediately subject to a barrage of criticism from police authorities, private sector organizations, political

parties, and other actors, which set in motion new legislative efforts to reform the reform and toughen its anticrime provisions.

The end of the 1990s found El Salvador clearly in a remarkably changed and, in many respects, better situation regarding demilitarization and security than that of a decade earlier. With respect to negotiated conflict settlements and police-military reforms, the Salvadoran case was regarded by the United Nations and other international actors as a major success story (Stanley and Holiday 1996). Yet new challenges had arisen to undermine citizen and public security.

GUATEMALA

In April 1991, as the Salvadoran peace negotiations neared their end, a similar process began to unfold in Guatemala. Like the Guatemalan civil war, however, which had raged with greater or lesser intensity for 36 years, the Guatemalan peace process was considerably more difficult and protracted than the Salvadoran case. The final agreement between the government of Guatemala and the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity, signed in December 1996, followed a series of partial accords on specific sets of issues. Perhaps the most difficult of these concerned the restructuring of the missions, doctrines, and organization of security forces; the signing of this partial accord in September 1996 paved the way for the concluding document three months later. As in El Salvador, the result was a plan of far-reaching reforms across all three dimensions—national, public, and citizen—of security (Byrne 1997).

In defining the peacetime mission of the armed forces, as well as other significant structural changes, a major obstacle was the country's 1985 constitution, promulgated under the last military regime before the reestablishment of civilian rule. Among other measures, it assigned responsibility to the armed forces for both external and internal security. Thus the peace agreement called for the government to initiate a series of constitutional reforms that would include redefining the military mission as the defense of the sovereignty and integrity of the national territory. A complementary objective would be to assign to the president, in times of emergency, the authority to utilize the armed forces to restore public order.

Other significant measures of the peace agreement affecting the military were a 33 percent reduction in military personnel within one year; the same reduction in the military budget by the end of three years; the closing of military bases and redeployment of troops in conformity with the revised military mission; and the conversion of various military institutions and units to civilian control and use (Byrne 1997; Garst 1997). Another provision called for the formation of a civilian Security Advisory Council to help the president set security policies.

Similarly, the accords provided for a series of major reforms in the

institutions and practices of public security. These included

- Disbanding of rural forces under military control (specifically, the Mobile Military Police and the Voluntary Civil Defense Committees).
- Creation of a new police force, the National Civilian Police (PNC), under authority of the Public Ministry, to replace the existing National Police and other specialized forces.
- Increasing the number of police from 12,000 to 20,000 within three years, along with significant salary increases.
- Participation of local communities in the recruitment and selection of personnel, such that the PNC would reflect the diversity of Guatemalan society.
- Establishment of laws to regulate private security firms and place control of arms possession under police authority.
- Establishment of a civilian intelligence department in the Ministry of the Interior, and creation of congressional oversight mechanisms for all intelligence agencies.
- Creation of commissions to study the country's system for the administration of justice and make recommendations for its modernization.

Another important component of the peace accords was the stipulation that a Historical Clarification Commission be formed to investigate denunciations of crimes and rights abuses committed during the years of conflict. Unlike its Salvadoran counterpart, however, the Guatemalan commission was not given the right to determine individual responsibilities for any wrongdoing.

As in El Salvador, the first two years following the accords left a mixed record. Most notably, the constitutional reforms were delayed by numerous disagreements over specific provisions, and were not approved by the legislature until October 1998. Thus in the interim the armed forces continued to operate under their previous broad mandate, a condition enhanced by the government's reliance on military units for major policing responsibilities, as described below. Military officers interviewed in 1997 revealed divided opinions over both the prospect of reduced roles and the nature of their public security assignments, leading one analyst to express strong skepticism that demilitarization was effectively advancing (Schirmer 1998).

Reports from the United Nations Verification Mission in Guatemala (MINUGUA 1998a, b) demonstrated a cautious optimism in this area, noting that a number of mandated changes, such as the reduction of military forces, the disbanding of the Mobile Military Police and the local civilian defense committees, and the establishment of programs for the reintegration of former troops and agents in civil society, had fulfilled the requirements of the accords. But they also noted areas in which little

had been accomplished, including the closure of military bases established for counterinsurgency purposes, the redeployment of troops in accordance with the new military mission, and the transfer of intelligence functions from military to civilian hands.

Apart from the delay in amending the constitution, the principal explanation for the slowness of reform was a sense of crisis in the area of public security. Reliable data are again scarce, but the volume and violence of crime has become a matter of constant public debate. The prevalence of organized criminal activity in the areas of drug trafficking, kidnapping, extortion, bank robberies, and car theft, often carried out with the use of high-powered arms, has been especially visible (*Prensa Libre* 1998a). Youth gangs have proliferated in urban areas. According to police reports, some 60 gangs were operating in Guatemala City in mid-1998; among them were several chapters of the largest Salvadoran gang, Salvatruchas, allegedly organized by Salvadoran immigrants (*Prensa Libre* 1998b).

Whatever their true dimensions, crime and violence undoubtedly have placed severe strains on the process of police reform mandated by the peace accords. Critics have noted a number of weaknesses in the accords with regard to the formation of the new PNC, most notably the absence of the oversight mechanisms and screening procedures for agent recruits that were one of the hallmarks of the Salvadoran police reform. Pressed by the need to respond rapidly to public security problems, the government made its priority the rapid expansion of police numbers. More than half of the PNC cadres were to be drawn from the old National Police, a force generally acknowledged as corrupt, inefficient, and prone to abusive practices (see Aguilera 1993). By the end of 1998, the PNC numbered about 8,400 agents, of which 75 percent were so-called *reciclados* (personnel previously with the National or Treasury Police) and 25 percent were new recruits (*Inforpress Centroamericano* 1998a). At that point, the new force had been deployed in only 9 of Guatemala's 22 departments.

Elsewhere, the old police force remained in place, and throughout Guatemala the government assigned a prominent supporting role to the army. Thus, not only did the military retain significant policing responsibilities in rural areas, but it also acquired the task of participating in joint military-police patrols in the cities, in which soldiers often greatly outnumbered police agents (Garst 1997; Schirmer 1998). The Ministry of Defense reported in March 1998 that 11,000 troops were acting in support of the police (*Siglo Veintiuno* 1998). To support this deployment, several military bases scheduled to be closed were allowed to remain open. Military intelligence also continued to participate in anticrime efforts, particularly through a specialized antikidnapping force.

A notable accomplishment during 1998 was the first step toward a

more multiethnic police force. A group of agents of Ixil descent, newly graduated from the police academy, were deployed in the largely Mayan department of El Quiché (MINUGUA 1998a). Though small in proportion to ultimate goals in this area, it was an important symbolic accomplishment in the effort to establish closer police-community relations.

According to MINUGUA's evaluations (MINUGUA 1998a, b), the process of reforming the administration of justice advanced during 1997–98, albeit slowly. The Commission to Strengthen Justice completed its work and presented its report and recommendations for judicial reform in April 1998. An interagency Coordinating Unit for the Modernization of the Judicial Sector was convened in 1997 and began work during 1998 to develop plans for instituting reforms in the justice-related components of the judicial branch, the Public Ministry, and the Ministry of Government. Implementation and substantive results, however, awaited the approval of the constitutional reform package.

With respect to the issue of impunity, the recent record is less promising. As in El Salvador, the combination of the amnesty agreement that accompanied the peace accords and the restrictions placed on the Historical Clarification Commission precluded major prosecutions for wartime military offenses, although the vagueness of the enumeration of crimes covered by the amnesty left open some avenues of legal action. This was demonstrated most convincingly in the December 1998 conviction of three ex-Civil Defense Patrol agents for having participated in the massacre of some two hundred peasants in two separate military actions in 1982, during the height of repressive violence (*Inforpress Centroamericana* 1998c). The three, who received the death penalty from the court, were apparently the only clearly identifiable participants in a combined military and civil defense force unit estimated at three hundred individuals. Their conviction thus simultaneously signifies an important precedent in ending impunity and the severe constraints impeding efforts to redress historical injustices.

A more immediate test would apply to police and military accountability during the contemporary period. Despite the abolition in 1996 of the armed forces' *fuero* (immunity from prosecution in civilian courts), prosecutions of senior military or police officials remained unknown, although numerous dismissals for suspected involvement in drug trafficking and other criminal activities were reported during 1997 (Garst 1997). More than any other incident, however, the murder of Bishop Juan Gerardi in May 1998 questioned the presumption that the era of impunity had passed. His death, two days after a church-appointed commission he headed released an independent report on wartime human rights abuses, raised widespread suspicion of military involvement, a view subsequently reinforced by the government's inept handling of the investigation (Rohter 1998). Whatever the true circum-

stances of the crime, the chain of events clearly demonstrated that the reform of Guatemala's security and justice systems remained elusive.

The reform process also had to cope with citizens' efforts to administer justice outside the law. Most notably, the practice of group lynching of suspected criminals became commonplace, especially in rural communities. During 1997, reported deaths by lynching, often for relatively minor offenses, occurred at a rate of one per week (*Inforpress Centroamericana* 1997). During the same period, a new, clandestine organization announced its intention to execute kidnappers, thereby resuscitating the specter of the death squads that operated in Guatemala during the decades of conflict.

THE CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGE OF PUBLIC SECURITY

A comparison of demilitarization and security reforms in El Salvador and Guatemala in the period following their respective peace agreements shows some interesting differences. In the mechanisms for establishing a new police force, the Salvadoran accords paid much closer attention to the composition, screening, and training of the PNC, attempting to make sure that the new force would be qualitatively different from the old. The Guatemalan accords, on the other hand, went farther in specifying processes of judicial and intelligence reforms that would be important complements of police reform. These specific areas of emphasis are likely to influence the directions and rates of change in each case.

The variation is not surprising. Although the Guatemalan reform process sought to model itself partly on the Salvadoran experience, each is the product of complex compromises among distinct political, economic, and social actors, both internal and external. In neither case should one expect the outcome to be a purely rational choice of ends and means.

Important similarities are also evident. In each country, one may observe a successful redefinition of military and police missions and a significant diminution of military prerogatives, in conformity with a much more democratic model of civil-military relations. It may also be argued that the dynamic of the Salvadoran case offers a more optimistic view of the Guatemalan case than might otherwise be warranted by the events and problems of 1997–98. Two years after the Salvadoran peace accords, numerous obstacles to demilitarization and security reform remained; five years afterward, most of these obstacles had been overcome.

Thus some of the seemingly intractable difficulties observable in Guatemala at the end of 1998 are very likely to fade in the near future. As opposed to an interpretation emphasizing the resourcefulness of the

Guatemalan armed forces in defending their longstanding dominance of society (compare Schirmer 1998), the argument here is that a variety of factors, such as external pressures, generational transitions of leadership, and growing assertiveness among new social actors, will make further demilitarization irresistible.

Nevertheless, a major caveat (and additional point of commonality between the two countries) concerns the contemporary crisis of public security. Quite evidently, the demilitarization of politics has brought with it no guarantee of improved public security; instead, the perceived rise of crime and violence in the 1990s has resulted in increased citizen insecurity and, as evident in both cases, a tendency toward "remilitarization."

It is important to place this phenomenon in a wider context, however, because it is not limited to El Salvador and Guatemala. If the same range of problems and the same pattern of responses can be discerned in Brazil, Bolivia, Mexico, and even Costa Rica, then to argue that one or another additional clause in a Central American peace accord might have made a major difference is not convincing. Instead, the Salvadoran and Guatemalan experiences conform to what elsewhere has been described as a new Latin American model of public security (Kincaid and Gamarra 1996). It is better thought of as a modal pattern than a universal reality in the region, but the examples have been more and more frequent in the late 1990s.

The argument is fairly simple. Faced with the incapacity of the police and the justice sector to cope with existing levels of crime and violence, public security systems will fragment. Alongside the institutions formally responsible for public security, three alternative forms of action arise: militarization, informalization, and privatization.

Militarization here signifies the use of military forces in support of or in place of the police. This practice began in the early 1990s in both El Salvador and Guatemala and, as we have seen, greatly expanded in recent years. Although it might be argued that this is a provisional measure while the new PNCs acquire full functionality, the frequency with which other countries have implemented the same policy raises considerable doubt that it is temporary in the cases at hand (see McSherry 1998).

In the same way that the informal sectors of an economy have been defined, the informalization of public security is here taken to mean the emergence of a set of public security services and activities that are unauthorized or unregulated by the state and may well be explicitly illegal. This category encompasses such diverse phenomena as the formation of neighborhood watch committees, the spontaneous lynching of suspected criminals, the operation of death squads with or without clandestine military or police participation, and even the provi-

sion of public security by criminal organizations in urban neighborhoods or rural communities where they may exercise more authority than the state.

The third alternative, privatization, refers to the growth of a security "market," where individuals or organizations with the necessary resources can purchase the degree of security they desire. Obviously this option is not accessible to the majority of the population in countries like Guatemala or El Salvador.

A variety of factors account for the weakened condition of formal public security institutions in Latin America. On the institutional side, the explanation must include ubiquitous deficiencies of police forces (training, organization, equipment, salaries, and so on) and also the institutional deformation of public security enacted by military regimes under the national security state doctrine (Chevigny 1995; Huggins 1998). In Central America, particularly in El Salvador and Guatemala, additional weight must be given to the consequences of bitter civil conflicts: social dislocations, the demobilization of combatants with few good employment prospects, and widespread black market circulation of military arms.

The roots of the problem run wider than political and institutional legacies, however. Emergent structural factors are also at work. The market-oriented economic policies adopted throughout the region to cope with the economic downturn of the 1980s provided few means of addressing the deterioration of the material welfare of major sectors of the population and a concomitant increase in social inequality. At the same time, the limitations imposed on redirecting (much less increasing) public expenditures and improving the state's bureaucratic capacity constitute a major brake on a thoroughgoing reform and expansion of its public security institutions. In the view of O'Donnell (1994, 1998), the result is that the rule of law does not extend uniformly across national territories or populations in Latin America, democracy is restricted to polyarchy (that is, its formal political dimension), and citizenship remains incomplete (see also Robinson 1996).

Another factor impinging on public security is the product of the globalization of crime, manifested in the growth of transnational criminal organizations or cross-border linkages among groups. Strange (1996) argues that in the four structures of power in the international system—production, finance, information, and security—the once-dominant position of national states has been steadily eroding, with the seemingly privileged domain of security just as affected by transnational forces as the others. This is reflected, as we have seen, in the rise of Latin American drug trafficking cartels, the Central American countries' role as transshipment points (see Robinson 1994), and the operation of youth gangs in Guatemala City, San Salvador, and Los Angeles.

CONCLUSIONS

There can be little doubt that, no matter how gradual, real progress in demilitarization and democratization has been achieved in the two countries under consideration here. In place of a dominant discourse of national security, which absorbed issues of public security and minimized matters of citizen security, the current discourse of security in Central America focuses on strengthening the structures and practices of citizen security and, at the same time, promoting new concepts of public security and national defense that reinforce those rights.

A new crisis has loomed nevertheless, in juxtaposition to these successes. In the midst of real reforms, the deterioration of public security as directly experienced by much of the population is cause for worry. The dangers are not simply a matter of public insecurity, with observable economic and social consequences, but also the risks implied for the other dimensions of security. That is to say, if current tendencies persist or worsen, then the intermediate consequences are likely to be a reduction in the rights of individual citizens and the perception of a serious threat to the national state.

It seems appropriate to conclude, therefore, with a brief consideration of alternative strategies and policies for confronting the new crisis. Some, particularly state policies, are obvious. There is a widespread consensus, for instance, on the necessity of strengthening the police, including expanding the size of the force, salary incentives, and the quality and duration of training. Accelerating the reforms in the administration of justice and increasing the state's capacity to control the circulation and use of arms are other important goals. By contrast, however, the generalized use of military forces to fight crime is a highly questionable long-term strategy, however attractive it may seem to governments facing immediate challenges. Military training is geared neither to investigative techniques nor to the correct forms of interaction with citizens in the course of police duties, so it seems unlikely that the presence of soldiers in the street will deter or reduce criminality or violence except in their immediate vicinity.

Below the state level, decentralizing the administration and exercise of public security functions—through the promotion of organizations in urban neighborhoods, rural communities, and other collectivities—may offer a double payoff. It might result in patterns of local participation that could work to prevent some forms of criminal activity, thereby producing long-term savings in public budgets in addition to enhanced security. It may also serve to shore up citizen security by inhibiting the temptation to engage in unauthorized “popular justice” at the expense of the rule of law. In one sense, a decentralization strategy would be the equivalent of “formalizing” the informal sector.

Above the state level, a possible strategy might be to create new forms of cooperation and integration among security forces across national boundaries. This type of collaboration is already well established in the military ambit; examples are the Central American Armed Forces Conference, set up in 1997 to replace the old Cold War-oriented Central America Defense Council, and the coordination of counternarcotics operations under U.S. tutelage. At the level of police forces, however, such joint efforts are rare. In the present context of economic globalization, when criminal enterprises can avail themselves of the same innovative organizational structures and technologies as transnational corporations, a police response at the same level would seem logical.

In the long run, however, a development-centered strategy is needed. The design and implementation of new initiatives for equitable and sustainable economic development will be fundamentally important to lower the incentives for illegal activities and to alter the conditions that promote violent behavior. At the same time, the promising but incomplete reforms of military, police, and justice institutions will have to be deepened. Without such progress, the hard-won gains of peace and democratic citizenship in El Salvador and Guatemala remain at risk.

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