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Reading the Tea Leaves: Proto-Insurgency in Honduras

John D. Waghelstein

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CENTER ON IRREGULAR WARFARE AND ARMED GROUPS

Reading the Tea Leaves: Proto-Insurgency in Honduras

COL John Waghelstein

United States Naval War College
Newport, Rhode Island

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Col. John D. Waghelstein

Center on Irregular Warfare & Armed Groups (CIWAG)
US Naval War College, Newport, RI
CIWAG@usnwc.edu

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Message from the Editors

In 2008, the Naval War College established the Center on Irregular Warfare & Armed Groups (CIWAG). CIWAG's primary mission is twofold: first, to bring cutting edge research on Irregular Warfare into the Joint Professional Military Educational (JPME) curricula; and second, to bring operators, practitioners, and scholars together to share their knowledge and experiences about a vast array of violent and non-violent irregular challenges. This case study is part of an ongoing effort at CIWAG that includes symposia, lectures by world-renowned academics, case studies, research papers, articles and books. Our aim is to make these case studies part of an evolving and adaptive curriculum that fulfills the needs of students preparing to meet the challenges of the post-9/11 world.

Col. John D. Waghelstein (Ret.) is the author of this case study, which examines ways of recognizing an insurgency while it is still in its early stages. This case looks at the strategic and operational effects of interagency friction, intelligence assessments, and how to recognize the nature of the conflict. It includes a framework for analyzing insurgencies at their earliest stages; it also provides a set of benchmarks that have helped operators to better understand their environment. The framework is not meant to be conclusive; rather, it is a set of questions to help current operators consider when and whether an organized rebellion is forming. The case also raises the issue of what other indicators we should be aware of in a 21st century, social media world.

It is also important to note four critical caveats to this case study. First, the opinions found in this case study are solely those of the author and do not represent the views of the Department of Defense, the Naval War College or CIWAG. Second, while every effort has been made to correct any factual errors in this work, the author is ultimately responsible for the content of this case study. Third, this is a methodology for

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recognizing an insurgency and is just one approach. There are others and it is up to the student—the practitioners and operators—to adapt this framework and others to suit their environment and conditions. And fourth, the study questions presented in all CIWAG case studies are written to provoke discussion on a wide variety of topics including strategic, operational, and tactical matters as well as ethical and moral questions confronted by operators in the battlefield. The point is to make these case studies part of an evolving and adaptive curriculum that fulfills the needs of students preparing to meet the challenges of the post-9/11 world and to show them the dilemmas that real people faced in high-pressure situations.

Finally, in addition to a range of teaching questions that are intended to serve as the foundation for classroom discussion, students conducting research on Honduras and Latin America will probably find the extensive bibliography at the end of the case helpful. Compiled by the case study author and by CIWAG researchers at the Naval War College, the bibliography is a selection of the best books and articles on a range of related topics. We hope you find it useful and look forward to hearing your feedback on the cases and suggestions for how you can contribute to the Center on Irregular Warfare & Armed Group's mission here at the Naval War College.

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Acknowledgments

Thanks to the following contributors to this case:

Acronyms and Terms

AOH: Honduran Army

CBI: Caribbean Basin Initiative

CONUS: Contiguous United States

CREM: Regional Training Center (Centro Regional de Entrenamiento Militar)

DR: Dominican Republic

ESAF: Armed Forces of El Salvador (Fuerza Armada de El Salvador)

ESF: Economic Support Funds

FAST: Forward Area Support Team

FDR: Franklin Delano Roosevelt

FMLN: Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (Frente Farabundo Martí de Liberación Nacional)

FOB: Forward Operating Base

FSLN: Sandinista National Liberation Front (Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional)

GOH: Government of Honduras

Good Neighbor Policy: The Good Neighbor Policy was first introduced by President Franklin Roosevelt and dealt with U.S.-Latin American relations. The policy pledged non-interference in the domestic affairs by the U.S. and looked to increase mutual trade relationships.

JTF: Joint Task Force

JTF-B: Joint Task Force Bravo

Monroe Doctrine: A policy outlined in President James Monroe's 7th State of the Union Address in 1823. In his speech, Monroe declared that the Americas should be free of all influence from Europe—any further efforts on the part of Europe at colonizing the Americas would be seen as a provocation and would see retaliation from the United States.

MPLC: Cinchonero Popular Liberation Movement, aka Cinchoneros

MTT: Mobile Training Team

ODA: Operation Detachment Alpha

PCH: Communist Party of Honduras

PRTCH: Revolutionary Party of Central American Workers of Honduras

Roosevelt Corollary: Enacted in 1904 by President Theodore Roosevelt, this policy was a continuation of the Monroe Doctrine. It put forth the idea that the United States should assume responsibility for enforcing good behavior in South America, and thus prevent any intrusion by outside powers.

RSOI: Reception, Staging, and Onward Integration

SAF: Special Action Force (8th Special Forces Group [Airborne], Special Action Force, Latin America)

SCIF: Secure/Sensitive Compartmented Information Facility

SFG: Special Forces Group

SFGA: Special Forces Group Airborne

SFOD A/B: Special Forces Operational Detachment Alpha/Bravo

SOT-A: Special Operations Team—Alpha

USAID: United States Agency for International Development

USEMB: United States Embassy

USMILGP: United States Military Group

I. Introduction

In the early hours of July 4, 1982, buildings in the Honduran capital of Tegucigalpa shook with a bomb blast that rattled the windows and turned off the lights. Such acts were not uncommon over the border in El Salvador, but were shocking in Honduras. The newly elected government of Suazo Cordova, the first civilian leader after a decade of military rule, had just been served notice that the civil war in El Salvador between the ruling military government and the leftist insurgents (the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front, or FMLN) had spread to Honduras. According to the communiqué the bombers issued that night, the act had been carried out by Salvadoran guerrillas in retaliation for Honduran army counterguerrilla operations against them in the disputed, demilitarized, border region between the two countries. This region, the *bolsones,* resulted from the so-called Soccer War of 1969 and had become safe havens for the El Salvadoran insurgents.

The guerrillas escalated their activities in the Honduran city of San Pedro Sula on September 17, 1982 by seizing the Chamber of Commerce and holding 80 members hostage for eight days. Their demands included the immediate release of a Salvadoran insurgent held by the Hondurans and the expulsion of all foreign advisors.

The hostages were eventually released and the guerrillas' demands ignored. The hostage takers were flown to Cuba via Panama. Taking hostages had been the hallmark of the Nicaraguan Sandinistas in their successful 12-year war against the Somoza regime (1967–1979), and now Honduras was getting a taste. The ugly war in El Salvador had spilled over to Honduras. Or had it? The questions that were raised in response to these incidents varied widely between different officials. Was Honduras really next, or was this merely spillover from the chaos of the region?

In 1980, a Honduran Committee for Solidarity with the Struggle for Central American Peoples had been organized, which enlisted support

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for the El Salvadoran FMLN and established liaison for aid from communist Nicaragua. The Revolutionary Party of Central American Workers of Honduras (PRTCH) and several other small revolutionary groups joined the PCH coalition in 1982. One such group that would be heard from was the Cinchonero Popular Liberation Movement (MPLC) or "Cinchoneros."

For nearly 18 months there was silence from the guerillas and then it began. Reports of attacks on the Honduran Supreme Court building, police stations, a military school, and the Salvadoran consulate filtered in. What was really going on? Why weren't these reports taken seriously and acted upon? What were we missing? For nearly three years a budding insurgency had been incubating in plain view, but various factors precluded a formal recognition of it or an effective response. Lacking a means of identifying trigger points of insurgency, the powers that be were mostly oblivious to impending threats. The situation required a fresh and experienced observer to assess what was happening, and a matrix by which to evaluate those threats.

Honduras was my last insurgency.

In the preceding 26 years, I had participated in operations in Vietnam and South East Asia, the Cuban missile crisis, Panama, the Dominican Republic, Bolivia, and El Salvador. Pretty much anywhere there was an insurgency, I had seen some aspect of it.

My involvement in Honduras came with assuming command of the 7th Special Forces Group (SFG) in the spring of 1985. The group's beat was all of Latin America and the Caribbean. At that time, the situation in Honduras did not look like much of an insurgency and 7th SFG's focus was elsewhere: El Salvador and Nicaragua. The ongoing war in El Salvador got a sizable amount of the 7th's attention, and all those Russian-made tanks and other stuff that had been provided to the new Marxist

government in Managua, Nicaragua got the rest. Honduras was an afterthought. The 7th SFG's mandate did include backstopping the army of Honduras (AOH) with training and advice and implementing war plans should the Nicaraguans decide to invade their neighbor. But our focus was Honduras's neighbors, and this was essentially a conventional role, with little concern for our rear.

My initial assessment was that an internal threat by some sort of insurgents or at least rebels seemed to be active in Honduras. The question was who, how, and why?

All this changed, however, over the several months I visited Honduras in spring 1985. As I read the reports—cable traffic, mostly—I became suspicious that something more sinister might be brewing. An attack here, an incident there, a person targeted, and propaganda targeting the government and later targeting us. It all seemed more than random acts of violence; it looked organized. An old framework from my Vietnam counterinsurgency days helped pose the right assessment questions. Some of those questions were: Was there evidence of subversive (and/or Communist) groups operating within the country or receiving external assistance? Was there increasing provocation to force governmental response? Were local officials being kidnapped or killed?

Complicating matters, my concerns were dismissed by the U.S. Embassy, Southern Command, and the Honduran Army. At this point, almost three years after the initial attacks, the almost universal response was "we killed all the guerrillas in '82 and '83." The Honduran police entity (FUSEP) was much less dismissive, but they were thin on the ground and 7th SFG was proscribed from dealing directly with them because of post-Vietnam legislation.

So the question became: Was there really an insurgency festering in Honduras? If so, what evidence did we have, and how could we persuade others to our point of view?

Having (mis?)spent most of my career in the counterinsurgency arena, I knew that the typical "gringo" way of direct confrontation was not going to get anywhere, so I opted for a more subtle approach: I altered 7th SFG deployments to Honduras from one massive annual surge operation to a series of deployments involving fewer teams but having a constant presence.

Instead of sending the Group HQ and two battalions for a few weeks, we put four to six operational detachments alpha (ODAs) and a B detachment on a continuous rotation. I directed these teams to report whatever they saw, paying particular attention to what was going on in Honduras on the ground. Their job was to read the tea leaves and figure out whether there was any merit to our suspicions.

Over the next year, we had full-time Special Forces assets observing and reporting while training with the AOH. Because a SF Group had its own Intelligence unit, we were also able to report our observations directly into the intelligence stream. You will see the reaction that generated.

It took a while and a lot of reporting, in-fighting, and rethinking, but eventually Southern Command changed its position and came to the conclusion there *was* something occurring on the north coast of Honduras. If it had not been for Gen. John Galvin, this might have ended differently. Of all the Southern Command Commander in Chiefs (CINCs) I worked for over three decades, he was the most effective. Eventually the AOH also became believers and, with a little help from us, took the lead in dealing with the threat. Ultimately, the guerrillas were destroyed.

This case is about an insurgency that apparently had all the essentials for success but never transitioned beyond Phase One, the proto-insurgency phase. According to Daniel Byman,[1] the success or failure of a

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1 For an excellent report on how insurgencies move from ragtag bands of fighters or terrorists to "full-blown insurgencies," see Daniel Byman, *Understanding Proto-Insurgencies* (Rand, 2007).

proto-insurgency depends in large part on the reaction of the state. This case examines a wide range of issues that worked against the Honduran government's success at extirpating the insurgency, including institutional indifference and preoccupation with external threats on the part of the Honduran Army, bureaucratic inertia on the part of the American in-country entities, and turf sensitivity by U.S. intelligence. In spite of these obstacles, the Government of Honduras (GOH) eventually neutralized the insurgent threat. The prevailing question is: How was this threat recognized?

Case study users are encouraged to use both the Vietnam-era checklist in Part IV and *Analyzing Insurgency* (Annex A) as tools for getting at the guts of this case. Those of us who were on the ground then did not have the benefit of much more than the checklist.

Discussion Questions

1. What role does institutional friction play in the slow acknowledgement of the existence of an insurgency in this case?
2. What institutional adaptation does the 7th Group implement to improve their ability to assess the situation on the ground?
3. What friction does this create with other institutions, and why?
4. How could you overcome that friction?

II. Phase One and Two Insurgencies

Phase One insurgencies are usually more about propaganda or public affairs than a serious threat to the government. Scattered acts of terrorism may be all the insurgency is capable of conducting but, as we know from the Middle East, they can still be effective. Sometimes there is a series of well-publicized attacks on the infrastructure, which would include electrical, transportation, and communications targets. Assassinations have also served the same purpose and are particularly effective if the target is a well-known official (e.g., Archduke Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo, June 1914; President Anwar Sadat in Cairo, October 1981). These types of attacks are relatively easy to conduct, are cheaply resourced, serve as confidence builders, and most importantly get the public's attention. In El Salvador during this same period, for example, the highly vulnerable power grid was targeted almost nightly by a much more developed and aggressive FMLN insurgency. The first actions in Honduras were small in scope and relatively timid.

When an insurgency has solidified a portion of the population as a base, has well-established logistics, has developed the necessary infrastructure, and has built enough internal confidence and uncertainty in the targeted regime, it may be time to ratchet up the volume and go to Phase Two. This phase can include all the activity of Phase One as well as armed group attacks on public security forces, visible international entities, or even well-guarded military bases. It should be noted that determining this "inflection point" is an art and not a science.[2] There have

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[2] This transitional stage is expounded upon in the report by Daniel Byman, *Understanding Proto-Insurgencies*, op.cit. The report focuses on "measures that indicate when proto-insurgencies may grow into full-blown insurgent movements." Byman cites the following indicators to consider: (1) the strength of the proffered identity; (2) group composition; (3) relations with other community

been insurgencies that have overthrown the targeted government in short order (two years for Cuba) and others that have not (20 years for China). No formulas, no scripts, and no precedents exist that offer a sure-fire roadmap to victory for either side. There had been some low-level insurgent activity in Honduras. The question was, how serious was it?

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members; (4) use of and response to violence; (5) existence of sanctuary; (6) external support; and (7) state response (p. 51).

III. Background

The Cold War in the 1950s witnessed Soviet support of leftist movements in Central America, but distance and logistics made these threats ineffective. When the leftist Jacobo Arbenz regime took power in Guatemala (1953–1954) and began threatening U.S. economic and political interests, for example, CIA support helped to overthrow Arbenz.[3] Indeed, throughout the region, the United States supported those threatened friendly governments with military aid. With Fidel Castro's 1959 triumph in Cuba, however, there now existed a base for exporting revolution into the Southern hemisphere, and Castro wasted little time in spreading his brand of revolution (see Venezuela 1960). In response to this new threat, President Kennedy's policy initiatives included the Alliance for Progress and counterinsurgency efforts to support U.S. allies besieged by Marxist-Leninist revolutionary movements. The primary counterinsurgency effort was carried out by the 7th Special Forces Group (SFG) (1961-1962); the 8th Special Action Force (SAF) (1963–1973) and the 7th SFG (1973–present).

From 1960 to 1979, U.S.-backed Latin American militaries put these insurgencies out of business with painful regularity. From Argentina to Guatemala, Castro-inspired guerrillas suffered defeat after defeat, the most spectacular being the disastrous end to Che Guevara's Bolivian adventure in 1967. The Bolivian operation was in large part the result of the training efforts of an 8th SAF Mobile Training Team (MTT) that

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[3]Kate Doyle and Peter Kornbluh, "CIA and Assassinations: The Guatemala 1954 Documents," George Washington University National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book No. 4. Accessed Aug 11, 2011. http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB4/

deployed from Panama.[4] Moscow, having consistently advised accommodation and long-term subversion, watched with an "I told you so" attitude. This slower "peaceful revolution" approach seemed to have worked in Chile with the 1970 election of Marxist Salvador Allende. This success was short-lived, however, as the Chilean military overthrew the regime in 1973.[5] By the mid-1970s, after repeated failures, the Moscow-line advocates and the pro-Havana players reached a synthesis and began a combination of armed revolution and temporary alliances with dissatisfied non-communist elements. This synthesis eventually achieved a near success in El Salvador and victory in Nicaragua in 1979.[6] The Soviets and Castro had finally achieved what had eluded revolutionaries for two decades.

Despite this apparent synthesis of Havana- and Moscow-based insurgencies, there were fissures in the façade. "Castroites" were known for impatience and Moscow adherents for caution, which sometimes led to

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[4] Jeffrey F. Taffet, *Foreign Aid as Foreign Policy: The Alliance for Progress in Latin America* (New York: Routledge, 2007); Stephen G. Rabe, *The Most Dangerous Area in the World: John F. Kennedy Confronts Communist Revolution in Latin America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999); Michel Gobat, "Review of 'Foreign Aid as Foreign Policy: The Alliance for Progress in Latin America'," *The American Historical Review* 113, no. 3 (2008): 872-873; Stephen M. Streeter, "Nation-Building in the Land of Eternal Counter-Insurgency: Guatemala and the Contradictions of the Alliance for Progress," *Third World Quarterly* 27, no. 1 (2006): 57-68; Ernest R. May, "The Alliance for Progress in Historical Perspective," *Foreign Affairs* 41, no. 4 (1963).
[5] Paul E. Sigmund "The 'Invisible Blockade' and the Overthrow of Allende," *Foreign Affairs* 52, no. 2 (1974).
[6] For a brief synopsis of events in El Salvador and Nicaragua, see "El Salvador Civil War," GlobalSecuirty.org, http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/war/elsalvador2.htm (accessed July 12, 2011); William M. LeoGrande and Carla Anne Robbins, "Oligarchs and Officers: The Crisis in El Salvador," *Foreign Affairs* 58, no. 5 (1980): 1084-1103; William M. LeoGrande, "The Revolution in Nicaragua: Another Cuba?" *Foreign Affairs* 58, no. 1 (1979): 28-50.

rash acts or lost opportunities. Their differences sometimes were violent. At the end of the El Salvadoran insurgency, one group recognized the futility of continuing the struggle and pulled the rest to a negotiated end to the war.[7] Honduran leftist organizations had a similar experience but ended without a seat at the bargaining table.

The Honduras case here may be considered the last in a series of Soviet-backed attempts to destabilize the region.

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[7] Charles T. Call, "Democratisation, War and State-Building: Constructing the Rule of Law in El Salvador," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 35, no. 4 (2003): 827-862; Tricia Juhn, *Negotiating Peace in El Salvador: Civil-Military Relations and the Conspiracy to End the War* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998); "War's End in El Salvador," *The Economist*, 1 February 1992. http://www.economist.com/node/13311602.

Map 1: Central America and the Caribbean

Map 2: Honduras, Overview

Map 3: Honduras and the *Bolsones*

IV. The Checklist

The indicators in this checklist[8] were designed to help clarify the general level of insurgent activity but may only point toward cumulative effect. Remember that the typical first phase is primarily focused on infrastructure development and in sensitizing the population. Each act, even the non-violent ones, are part of that theatre that educates and informs the population and points out the government's weaknesses.

Insurgency Checklist

1.   Have communist-trained leaders been found in the country?
2.   Is there evidence of clandestine subversive organizations in the country?
3.   Is there evidence or indication of a subversive organization that is receiving external assistance?
4.   Are there detectable efforts to create or increase unrest and dissension among the people?
5.   Is there propaganda against actual or proposed government programs?
6.   Are there active disinformation campaigns?
7.   Is there agitation or resistance against efforts of the government to resolve problems causing dissatisfaction?
8.   Are there attempts to provoke restrictive measures from the government?
9.   Are local officials being kidnapped or killed?
10.   Is there evidence of small guerilla groups or guerilla action on a small scale?

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[8] Source: Special Text ST 31-176 *Counterinsurgency Planning Guide*, EEI p. 53. Pub date-1963/1964

A. Discussion

1.   Have communist-trained leaders been found in the country?

Creating "wiring diagrams" of insurgent organizations is difficult and time-consuming, but vital to success. Those organizational charts with names, biographies, contacts, and photographs are a must in putting insurgencies out of business and in many ways are similar to the effort needed to dismantle organized criminal organizations such as the Mafia. There were communists in Honduras, but due to the operation of General Alvarez Martinez, chief of the AOH, there was little activity, and few prominent players' names even made the papers.

2.   Is there evidence of clandestine subversive organizations in the country?

Getting inside these organizations is dangerous business that requires deep-cover agents or turned members. Answering this indicator's question, as with the previous one, relies partly on electronic intercepts (SIGINT) and other forms of technical intelligence (e.g., PHOTINT)[9] for information, but the critical route is via human sources. Human intelligence (HUMINT) trumps all. The satellite photos may tell you where the bad guys are and SIGINT what they are saying at the moment, but they do not tell you where they will be and what they have planned for tomorrow. During the "quiet time," the leftist organizations, for the most part, were exhibiting a low profile.

3.   Is there evidence or indication of a subversive organization that is receiving external assistance?

This type of support is the easiest to quantify. Consider how much effort went in to interdicting the Ho Chi Minh Trail

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[9] PHOTINT: Photographic Intelligence

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during the Vietnam War.[10] The unending flow of troops and supplies kept the war in southeast Asia going and was almost impervious to our interdiction efforts. But outside assistance isn't the only way to keep an insurgency going. Other means of support come from the opposing military through capture; from the general population, either freely given or coerced; and from manufacture within the organization. In the early stages, an insurgency often relies heavily on outside support. As it becomes more developed, internal support picks up some, but not all, of the slack. For example, when it came to the leftists' 1984 destruction of the Pan-American Highway Bridge over the Rio Lempa in El Salvador, outside demolition specialists from Eastern Europe were called in to drop the bridge.

The Sandinistas were making no secret of their support of whatever action was being taken against the governments of El Salvador and Honduras. Periodically there would be a successful interception of supplies, such as the 1982 intercept of a weapons-laden truck on the El Salvador-Guatemala border. U.S. intelligence services are particularly attuned to outside logistical movement and its quantification. Once the existence of this support is known, however, the real job is assessing how much are you interdicting.

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[10] "The Ho Chi Minh Trail was a network of routes by which men and munitions were sent from North Vietnam to the battlefields of South Vietnam and eventually also to Cambodia during the Vietnam War. These routes ran through the Truong Son Mountains, on both sides of the border between Vietnam and southeastern Laos." Edwin E. Moise, "Review of 'The Road to Freedom: A History of the Ho Chi Minh Trail'," *Pacific Affairs* 79, no. 3 (2006): 558; Andrew Mack, "Why Big Nations Lose Small Wars: The Politics of Asymmetric Conflict," *World Politics* 27, no. 2 (1975): 175-200; Gregory T. Banner, *The War for the Ho Chi Minh Trail* (Army Command and General Staff College, 1993); John Prados, *The Blood Road: The Ho Chi Minh Trail and the Vietnam War* (New York: Wiley, 1999).

As in Vietnam, the difficulty in quantification is how much of what are you stopping. We knew how many trucks were destroyed, but were never certain as to many trucks were involved to begin with.

4. Are there detectable efforts to create or increase unrest and dissension among the people?

All insurgencies draw propaganda points from an existent set of issues or grievances that concern all or parts of the population. These issues can be exploited for their propaganda value. In Vietnam, for instance, the U.S./South Vietnamese Strategic Hamlet program attempted to separate the guerrillas from the population.[11] It also separated the population from their villages and from the tombs of their ancestors, however, with serious repercussions and loss of popular support for the government. As we shall see below, the Honduran left used the presence of large numbers of "gringos," the road-building operations, and the presence of El Salvadoran troops in the Honduran Regional Military Training Center (Centro Regional Entranimiento Militar, or CREM) as issues.

5. Is there propaganda against actual or proposed government programs?

Even the best-intentioned program designed to alleviate discontent can be used as grist for the propagandist's mill. A twist here, a little spin there, and the program becomes ineffective, dangerous, or sinister. In El Salvador, the three-phase land reform program achieved considerable success in undermining the

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[11] John C. Donnell and Gerald Cannon Hickey, *The Vietnamese "Strategic Hamlets": A Preliminary Report* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 1962); Peter F. Leahy, "Why Did the Strategic Hamlet Program Fail?" (Thesis/dissertation (M.S.): National government publication, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, 1990); Philip E. Catton, "Counter-Insurgency and Nation Building: The Strategic Hamlet Programme in South Vietnam," *The International History Review* 21, no. 4 (1999): 918-940.

FMLN's appeal. The FMLN responded by refashioning and focusing on the least effective segment, thereby diminishing the whole reform program. Through the propagandist's lens, the much-needed farm-to-market road building became twisted into "disruption of Honduran tranquility," "unfairly benefitting special interests or privileged families," or "roads are for U.S. invasion of Nicaragua."

6.   Are there active disinformation campaigns?

False, partially false, or marginally false disinformation campaigns can generate dissatisfaction with the government and, as noted above, with government programs. Rumors seem to travel faster than radio waves in rural Third World cultures, and once repeated they are often held as gospel, particularly when there is no dissenting view. The war in the arena of public opinion is as important as combat in the jungle, if not more so.

7.   Is there agitation or resistance against efforts of the government to resolve problems causing dissatisfaction?

Closely related to the previous indicator, this action takes disinformation a step up, and we might witness a peaceful demonstration against the government's programs. A peaceful demonstration can be changed to a violent one in a wink and lead overzealous law enforcement to bloody reprisal. Each such incident can provide the agitator with a new propaganda opportunity.

8.   Are there attempts to provoke restrictive measures from the government?

The next step on the escalator for the insurgent is government prohibition against all demonstrations. The real goal is to create an environment where all means of expression are denied. The unavailability of outlets for debate adds to the frustration of the population, which in turns improves the movement's recruiting

opportunities. One of the objectives in the Venezuelan FLN insurgency (1960–1966) was to incite the military to overthrow the democratically elected government of Romulo Betancourt. Once that had been achieved, the army would then be able to be more easily dealt with. The army stayed loyal in this case, and the guerrillas eventually were defeated.

9.   Are local officials being kidnapped or killed?

As with other acts of violence, attacks such as assassination or kidnapping get press coverage for the insurgents. Hostage taking requires a bit more sophistication and nerve, as the hostage and hostage takers are in the same target area until there is a break in the standoff. A relatively simple but effective tool, assassination has been used for centuries. Michael Collins's use of assassination in Ireland (1920–1921) eventually helped bring the British Empire to the negotiating table, and assassination eventually helped drive the British out of Palestine (1947–1948). Assassination is theatre, demonstrates government weakness and vulnerability, and, when the victim is unpopular, helps the insurgent gain legitimacy. In Vietnam, for example, the targets of VC assassination were often tax collectors and unpopular village officials.

10.   Is there evidence of small guerilla groups or guerilla action on a small scale?

When guerrilla groups begin combat operations such as raids and ambushes, it is a sign that things are about to escalate. This is the critical moment in a Phase One insurgency. The operations in this stage are small confidence-building exercises that demonstrate that the regime is vulnerable. If successful and the government is slow or ineffective, the tempo and lethality will increase. If begun prematurely and the government reacts with vigor and competence, the guerrillas may be vulnerable to

government counterattack, as in the case of Che Guevara's death in Bolivia (1967).

The following series of messages and news reports are the heart of this story of the evolution from indifference and near-total disregard to recognition, engagement, and commitment. They are a sampling of the more noteworthy intelligence reports and indicate the scope and direction of both the Honduran insurgent and Honduran counterinsurgency operations. It was these documents and others that led this writer to conclude that although the Honduran left was not particularly effective, it still was out there and needed careful watching. The FSLN success in Nicaragua and the near-success of the FMLN in El Salvador warned against dismissing a Honduran insurgency out of hand.

Each message references the Insurgency Indicator Checklist above and Annex A, Analyzing Insurgency. As you read each message and apply the indicators, think about the following questions.

Discussion Questions

1. What are the limitations of this framework in the 21st century?
2. Does social media (Twitter, YouTube, blogs, etc.) change the way you analyze a proto-insurgency?
3. Where else would you look for signs of a proto-insurgency in 21st-century social media?
4. Does social media activism equate to a proto-insurgency?
5. Should it be added to the list of warning signs?
6. What lessons does the Arab Spring, especially the Egyptian experience, add to this insurgency framework?

V. Messages and Reports (M&R)

A. M&R 1-6: July 1982 to July 1984

Over a period of two years, a slow but steady insurgency was fomenting. These six messages track how, if you have the right questions and can ascertain the correct answers to these questions, an insurgency can be identified. Episodes of bombing, assassination, kidnapping, and development of safe havens are indications that an insurgency is brewing.

Message 1

DATE: 4 JUL 82
LOCATION: TEGUCIGALPA
CENTRAL POWER STATION WAS BOMBED BY MEMBERS OF THE FROYLAN TURCIOS COMMAND, A HONDURAN-BASE CELL OF THE FMLN [El Salvadoran insurgency]. SEEN AS AN ACT OF RETALIATION AGAINST THE GOVERNMENT OF HONDURAS FOR ITS INVOLVEMENT IN ANTI-GUERRILLA OPERATIONS.

Commentary
Insurgency Indicators #5, #10
Analyzing Insurgency Sec. 6, Force and Coercion
This act achieved several of the insurgents' goals. It served notice on the Honduran government that solidarity existed among all of the leftist organizations and that an attack on one element was an attack on all. In addition to the inconvenience of power outages, attacking the power station gained everyone's attention in the capital city and demonstrated the government's vulnerability.

Message 2

DATE: 17 SEP 82

LOCATION: SAN PEDRO SULA

CINCHONEROS SEIZED CHAMBER OF COMMERCE AND HELD 80 HOSTAGES FOR EIGHT DAYS. DEMANDED THE RELEASE OF HONDURAN, SALVADORAN [Alejandro Montenegro: FMLN] AND OTHER LATIN AMERICAN LEFTIST ACTIVITISTS, THE EXPULSION OF U.S. ADVISORS AND WITHDRAWL OF HONDURAS FROM THE NEWLY-FORMED CENTRAL AMERICAN DEMOCRATIC COMMUNITY.

Commentary

Insurgency Indicators #9 and #10

Analyzing Insurgency Sec. 1, Underlying Issues; Sec. 3, Catalyst; and Sec. 6, Force and Coercion

There is probably no more effective event than a hostage situation. Whether the release of political prisoners was achieved or not, the fact that the government was forced into negotiations with the Chinchoneros is significant. After a week the hostages were released and the guerrillas were flown to Panama, en route to Cuba. Not only did such an action demonstrate the government's weakness in performing its key role of protecting itself, but it had tremendous domestic and international propaganda value. In August 1978, a similarly spectacular operation led by Sandinista Comandante Eden Pastora marked the beginning of the end of the Somoza regime in Nicaragua.

Message 3

DATE: 19 JUL 83

LOCATION: OLANCHO DEPARTMENT

91 HONDURAN INSURGENTS WITH LOGISTICAL SUPPORT FROM NICARAGUA HAD THE OBJECTIVE OF RALLYING UP TO 3,000 COMBATANTS. BY SEP 83, ALMOST ALL HAD EITHER BEEN KILLED, CAPTURED OR SURRENDERED.

Commentary

Insurgency Indicator #3

Analyzing Insurgency Sec. 5, Support

Once again, intervention in a Central American country was conducted from a neighboring safe haven/launchpad. It was also an indication of the insurgency's anticipated recruitment. That the threat was eliminated so quickly and thoroughly had a telling effect on the Honduran government and generated a false sense of security. It left untouched the potential of Nicaragua as a logistical base for future endeavors. It also assumed that the other side wouldn't learn from the experience.

Message 4

DATE: NOV 83

LOCATION: SAN PEDRO SULA

HONDURAN INTELLIGENCE UNCOVERED A PLOT BY THE PRTC-H TO ASSASSINATE GENERAL ALVAREZ MARTINEZ, COMMANDER OF THE HONDURAN ARMED FORCES. PRTC-H MEMBERS WERE RECEIVING TRAINING IN SAN PEDRO SULA WITH SPECIFIC EMPHASIS ON HOW TO NEUTRALIZE VIP BODYGUARDS AND THE USE OF EXPLOSIVES.

Commentary

Insurgency Indicator #3 and #9

Analyzing Insurgency Sec. 6, Force and Coercion

This plot, unlike July's Olancho debacle launched from outside Honduras (Message #3), was home-grown and more sophisticated. The Honduran Revolutionary Party of Central American Workers (Partido

Revolucionario de los Trabajadores Centroamericanos de Honduras, or PRTC-H) training took place in the San Pedro Sula, an area with a history of radical politics. An assassination of such a key officer as Gen. Martinez would have had considerable propaganda value and demonstrated the strength of the insurgents as well as the potential for generating an AOH overreaction. One aspect of an urban operation is the high-visibility aspect with lots of witnesses and lots of media. Keep in mind that an act such as an assassination is theater and the target is not the audience. A crackdown, whether it works or not, is still grist for the propaganda mill.

Message 5

DATE: 26 MAR 84
LOCATION: SAN PEDRO SULA
FIVE SEPARATE BUT COORDINATED TARGETS STRUCK BY THE CINCHONEROS INCLUDED THE HONDURAN SUPREME COURT BUILDING AND A MILITARY SCHOOL IN TEGUCIGALPA, TWO POLICE STATIONS AND THE SALVADORAN CONSULATE IN SAN PEDRO SULA

Commentary

Insurgency Indicator #10
Analyzing Insurgency Sec. 6, Force and Coercion
    This spectacular operation demonstrated the growing sophistication of the insurgency. Multifaceted and well-timed, it not only achieved the wounding of the government but also got the region's attention. Once again, the urban setting is instructive re: the population and the media. The capital (Tegucigalpa) and the San Pedro Sula were "target-rich" environments and pointed out the government's weaknesses in protecting its own.

Message 6

DATE: JUL 84

LOCATION: EL PARAISO

INFILTRATION INTO EL PARAISO DEPARTMENT OF AT LEAST 19 GUERRILLAS TRAINED IN CUBA; MOST DESERTED OR WERE CAPTURED

Commentary

Insurgency Indicators #3 and #10

Analyzing Insurgency Sec. 5, Support; and Sec. 6, Force and Coercion

Except for number of guerrillas, this was a repeat of July 1983. This insurgent setback marked the beginning of a quiet time. For the next 17 months, there was little guerrilla activity to report and an internal threat almost disappeared. For the Honduran authorities, this was further indication that all was under control.

B. Reaction

Consistent with our centuries-old policy regarding the Americas and as part of the Reagan doctrine of aggressively opposing Communism, the United States was working not only to expel the Soviets and their Cuban surrogates from Central America but also to upend their clients, the Sandinistas. In light of this, it is not surprising the Honduran authorities were focused on the externals and had been since 1979, when the Sandinistas came to power in Nicaragua. When this writer took command of the 7th SFG in 1985, the unit's primary role was to support the Hondurans against the Sandinistas' external invasion threat.

SF deployments were designed to back-stop and encourage the Hondurans in repelling that invasion. Annual exercises saw the group headquarters and several SF detachments attached to the Honduran army

units for a period of two to three weeks, during which war plans were exercised.

When queried about their views as to the threats, a large majority (roughly 7 in 10) of the AOH officers told this writer that the Sandinistas with their Soviet-made T-55 tanks were the main danger, while the minority (3 in 10) still viewed El Salvador and her 40,000 combat veterans as such. When asked if there was an internal threat, these officers invariably dismissed that idea as having been destroyed in the Olancho department in 1983 and 1984.

There was one notable exception to this conventional wisdom.

The comments of the Public Security Force (FUSEP) commander in the La Ceiba region were of a different cast than the military's. He believed that he was faced with a budding insurgency on the north coast and had too little with which to respond. He stated he had talked to his AOH counterparts and was told if there was a problem it was a "police matter, not an army job" and he should deal with it. He said with only four officers and two vehicles he was unable to do much. It could be argued that FUSEP, heretofore barred from U.S. security assistance, was simply trying to get a place at the feeding trough. (In 1985, there existed a Vietnam-era prohibition against supporting police forces. An exemption would eventually be granted to both Honduras and El Salvador.)

However, the police, being closer to the population and its issues, usually have a better handle on what was happening in the countryside.

My discussions with U.S. in-country assets mirrored the AOH position regarding insurgency. They were unanimous that there was no insurgency and little to be concerned about. This writer had been reading the Honduras traffic while an analyst at Carlisle's Strategic Studies Institute and thought there might be more going on there than was commonly believed. As a result of these conversations and the traffic, I modified the focus of our deployments. Each deploying detachment would continue to co-locate and exercise with those AOH battalions as per the

war plans. Individual team training objectives were also to continue as before, but another requirement was included: Each team member was provided with the Vietnam-era Insurgency Indicator Checklist. They were instructed to remain objective, to observe, and to report *any* activity that might have an effect on their mission to support the AOH in case of a Sandinista attack. This included looking inward.

The following are a sample of the message traffic between March and October of 1986, as well as various news reports. By no means does this cover all the reporting. Because the 7th SF Group had a Military Intelligence Company as part of its TO&E, it could and did report directly into the intelligence stream. As we shall see below (23 April 1986), bureaucratic reaction was not long in coming.

The question is, if you had been in place in Honduras at the time, what would you have made of these messages? Do you see the same insurgency indicators as we did? If not, why not? Moreover, if you had been in SOUTHCOM or SOCOM at this time, what would you have thought of these messages? Are they persuasive evidence of an insurgency? What would it have taken to change your mind? Why did it take us so long to change perceptions on the nature of the threat?

C. M&R 7 March–30 November 1986

After 18 months of inactivity, and complacency on the part of the Honduran army, the Honduran government, and the United States, the insurgency again erupted. In eight short months, from May to October 1986, the official reaction shifted from an assessment that there was "not an insurgency, nor is one likely to develop" (Message #14, 27 May), to the realization that the insurgent situation in Northern Honduras was a "great threat to the internal stability of Honduras" (Message #21, 28 October). Again, these insurgents' activities follow the checklist referred to earlier.

Message 7
DATE: 7 MAR 86
SOURCE: 7th SFG
LOCATION: LA CUMBRE.
FUSEP SGT KILLED BY LEFTISTS AT AN INSURGENT SAFE SITE/TRAINING AREA.

Commentary
Insurgency Indicator #9 and #10
Analyzing Insurgency Sec. 6, Force and Coercion
The first indication of instability often is an attack on the police, the first line of governmental defense. This incident arose when a FUSEP officer went to investigate reports of strange activity in the hills above La Cumbre. When he arrived, he was shot and killed. The site was being used by insurgents for training and indoctrination.

Message 8
DATE: 14 MAR 86
SOURCE 7th SFG
LOCATION: TEGUCIGALPA
ANTI-U.S. DEMOSTRATIONS ORCHESTRATED BY PCH. AND SUPPLEMENTED BY SOPHISTICATED PROPAGANDA IN LA PRENSA, TARGETING U.S. MILITARY PRESENCE.

Commentary
Insurgency Indicators #4, 5, and 6
Analyzing Insurgency Sec. 1, Underlying Issues
In this incident we can see the age-old hot button issue of foreign presence. Probably no other concern could generate such a wide agreement among Hondurans as this. Coincidentally, little comment was

made over the low footprint of the nearly invisible Special Forces detachments deployed down at the battalion level.

News Report 1

DOI 18 March 1986

The Armed Forces will present to national and foreign reporters today a bus seized in Colomoncague, Itibuca Departmentt, where ammunition and weapons, supposedly for Salvadoran guerillas, were carried. Preliminary reports indicate that the vehicle was seized over the weekend. After a thorough search, lethal weapons were discovered hidden inside.

The national authorities, in addition to this action, have carried out several seizures of weapons destined for the FMLN, a guerrilla organization that has been our territory to subvert order in El Salvador.

The number of people detained has not yet been disclosed. Colomoncague, in the country's west, is located 2 km from the Salvadoran border. There are about 15,000 Salvadoran refugees in this sector.

Commentary

Insurgency Indicator #3

Analyzing Insurgency Sec. 1, Underlying Issues; and Sec. 5, Support

It was quite common to use commercial carriers in support of insurgent logistics. In El Salvador, for example, a truck bound for the FMLN was intercepted on the Guatemalan border with several hundred weapons traced to the Vietnamese army and the Vietnam War.

Message 9

DATE: MAR 86
SOURCE 7th SFG

LOCATION: JOCON.

JESUITS CONTINUE ANTI-U.S. PROPAGANDA CAMPAIGN.
REPORTS INDICATE CONGREGATIONS ARE BEING TOLD THAT
TF 135 IS BUILDING A ROAD TO INVADE NICARAGUA

Commentary

Insurgency Indicators #4, #5, and #6

Analyzing Insurgency Sec. 1, Underlying Issues

The underlying purpose of the Yoro Road was to improve the
quality of life in the Yoro valley so that the people of the region would be
less likely to fall for Marxist-Leninist propaganda. Opposition came from
the political left in Honduras and worldwide. One of the more outrageous
claims was from some Jesuit priests who told congregations along the path
of the road—specifically in Jocon—that its purpose was an invasion of
Nicaragua. A brief look at a map would show just how ludicrous the
charge was. It is over 100 miles from Jocon in northern Honduras to the
Nicaraguan border, through even more inhospitable terrain than in Yoro
province.[12]

News Report 2

DATE: 31 March 1986

This weekend special Honduran Army troops are looking for a
group of armed men who have reportedly been sighted by peasants near
the community of Esparta. The search is being conducted by troops of the
4th Infantry Battallion headquartered in the port city of La Ceiba, in
northern Hondruras, with help from light planes of the Honduan Air
Force. … An officer of the 4th Infantry Battallion, who asked to remain
anonymous, said that soldiers from his battalion are combing all the

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[12] Information in commentary provided by LTC John T. Fishel, SOUTHCOM J-5.

mountain area and do not rule out the possibility that "guerrilla cells" have gone into the jungle.

Commentary
Insurgency Indicator #10

News Report 3
DATE: 2 April 1986

A Tegucigalpa radio station reported Salvadoran guerillas crossed into Honduras through Mapulaca, Lempira. The guerillas took over the town of Los Planes but were expelled by the Honduran Army Special Forces.

Commentary
Insurgency Indicator #10
Analyzing Insurgency Sec. 4, Organization

Message 10
DTG: 23 APR 86
FM:USDAO TEGUCIGALPA HO
TO: CDR 7TH SFGA
 REQUEST THAT YOU FIRST SEND YOUR IIR'S TO THE USDAO/JCIOE, HONDURAS SO THEY CAN EFFECT COUNTRY TEAM COORDINATION PRIOR TO PUBLICATION

Commentary
The bureaucratic in-fighting began with this relatively innocuous request. What was really at stake was whose story was going to be told.

Even without analysis, 7th SFG reports on insurgent activities were viewed as a threat. Both of the embassy's intelligence entities (DIA and CIA) had consistently reported "all's quiet on the Southern Front." Once that position was taken, anything that contradicted it was dismissed

or viewed as a threat. As each detachment returned from its deployment to Honduras, it was debriefed by the 7th SFG's S-2 and MI company personnel. Additionally, each detachment had at least one and usually two or three operations and intelligence-trained personnel who could assist in assessing the information gathered while in-country. What was being injected into the intelligence flow was raw information, not distilled intelligence. And while no one was making any sweeping judgments as yet, it was obvious that something was afoot.

The issue was in part one of turf or rice bowls and, as General Galvin so aptly put it, stovepipes were a major problem faced by our embassies. SouthCom was dependent on several intelligence sources, but the major contributors—CIA, Defense Intelligence Agency, and TF-B— were in Honduras, and they all had the same story. Inertia prevented them from thinking beyond their assessments. Gen Galvin recognized that his best source of intelligence was the all-source CAJITF in Washington, and not the embassy (see Annex B).

Message 11

DTG: 29 APR 86
FM: CDR 1ST SOCOM FT BRAGG NC
TO: USCINSCO QUARRY HEIGHTS PM
SUBJ: INSURGENT ANALYSIS
IN SHORT THERE SHOULD BE LITTLE DOUBT WE ARE CONFRONTING SOPHISTICATED ORCHESTRATION OF A MARXIST-LENINIST INSURGENCY IN HONDURAS WHICH WILL BE FUELED BY THE GROWING ALLIANCE WITH NARCOTRAFICANTES, CUBA, LIBYA AND PERIPHERALLY THE SOVIET UNION, WHICH VIEW VIOLENCE AND INSTABILITY IN THE REGION AS A STRATEGIC INVESTMENT

Commentary

This most welcome message came at a time when the theater intelligence entities were up in arms over the 7th's reporting. Remember, the 7th was not doing the analysis but simply reporting directly into the intelligence stream. SOCOM J-2, however, did analyze the traffic and took the position reflected above. This did nothing to reduce the angst and noise levels within the theater intelligence community. It would take divine intervention or the CinC to turn that around.

Message 12

DOI: 05 MAY 86
SOURCE 7th SFG
REPORTED STUDENTS FROM THE NATIONAL UNIVERSITY WERE USING AN ECOLOGY ORGANIZATION, AS A FRONT TO SUPPORT A 12-MAN HONDURAN TERRORIST GROUP, TRAINED IN CUBA BY LIBYANS WHOSE MISSION WAS TO CAUSE DAMAGE TO PALMEROLA AFB IN HONDURAS

Commentary

Insurgency Indicators #1, #2, and# 6

Analyzing Insurgency Sec. 1, Underlying Issues; Sec. 3, Catalyst; and Sec. 5, Support

It has long been understood that there is a connection between some ecology groups and insurgency and that an ecology organization might be used as a front. The Honduran Palmerola Air Base had become the focus of leftist propaganda efforts because of the base's central and visible role in support of all U.S. military and civic action activities.

Cooperation between some regimes (e.g., Cuba, Libya) and various terrorist groups had become sophisticated to the point that there was a terrorist or nationalist group with access to just about every type of expertise or training facility.

Message 13

DOI: 21 MAY 86

SOURCE: 7th SFG

A COMMUNICATIONS SCHOOL (ESCUELA RADIO FONICA) OPERATED BY CATHOLIC PRIEST ON THE NORTH COAST OF HONDURAS IS REVEALED TO BE A FRONT FOR SUBVERSIVE ACTIVITIES AND SUPPORTED BY FUNDS SENT THROUGH SWITZERLAND

Commentary

Insurgency Indicators #4, #5, #6, and #7

Analyzing Insurgency Sec. 3, Catalyst; Sec. 5, Support; and Sec. 9, Other Questions

Described by its proponents as the interpretation of Christian faith through the consciousness of the poor and by its critics as a "Christianized Marxism," liberation theology grew in the Latin American church during the 1950s and 1960s and provided a framework for analysis and interpretation of class and wealth distribution. Among the initiatives associated with this theology among the Catholic clergy were the "base communities" advocated as the preferred path for social activism by the 1968 Medellin Conference of the Roman Catholic bishops. Created in rural and urban areas, these Christian base communities organized illiterate but faithful farmers into autonomous economic and religious associations under the guidance of the local priest or laity. The community members found that their association within these groups supported the idea that Jesus had come to save them and to care for them here and in the afterlife. The active pursuit of social justice appealed to the community members and the local priesthood alike. The Marxist portion of liberation theology encouraged the alliance with Cuban-backed activists that emerged in the later 1970s in Honduras, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Chile,

and elsewhere. For the insurgents, this alliance gave them the legitimacy they had been denied. For the counterinsurgents, it added a whole new dimension to the struggle for the hearts and minds of the population.[13]

Message 14

DTG: 27 MAY 86
FM: USCINCSO QUARRY HEIGHTS PM
TO: ALL
SUBJECT: SUBVERSIVE SITUATION IN HONDURAS
SUBVERSIVE ACTIVITY CONTINUES IN HONDURAS, BUT THERE IS CURRENTLY NOT AN INSURGENCY, NOR IS ONE LIKELY TO DEVELOP IN THE NEXT 6 TO 12 MONTHS. THE EXISTING SUBVERSIVE INFRASTRUCTURE IS NOT ADEQUATE TO SUPPORT ACTIVITY OTHER THAN LIMITED URBAN TERRORISM FOR A SHORT PERIOD

Commentary

Here we see SOUTHCOM still not yet convinced of a serious threat. This view can be attributed to a number of causes, including the near-total focus on the border as reflected in the assessment of the U.S. in-country intelligence community I had noted a year earlier. There was still the same near-total focus of the AOH and its dismissal of the north coast activity as "a police [FUSEP] matter." There was the near-total focus of the Central American Joint Intelligence Task Force (CAJITF) on the war in El Salvador and the CIA's Contra operations against Nicaragua. The lesson here is that all bureaucracies suffer from inertia or momentum and are not easily diverted. Group think affects analysis. A fresh set of eyes and ears may not always be welcomed.

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[13] Information in this commentary provided by LtC Robert Watson USA Ret and the author.

Five days after the CINC's 27 May message, I sent him the following letter:

2 June 1986
Dear General Galvin:

By now you should have received the two promised messages on the Phase I Insurgency and the evaluation of the Honduran Battalions. I hope these prove useful to you.

There appears to be a difference of opinion regarding just what a Phase I Insurgency looks like and our willingness to admit it exists. In a recent message (SOUTHCOME SCJ-I, subject: SUBVERSIVE SITUATION IN HONDURAS, 272100ZMAY86), the point was stressed that there is no insurgency in Honduras. The message describes what is taking place in Honduras and then denies an insurgency exists. It is not my intention to debate over this point. Since 1979, I've been personally involved in the ongoing definitional dispute over what Low Intensity Conflict is or is not. The rhetoric produced during that debate and now with the insurgency in Honduras appear to me as distinctions without differences.

What gives me more concern regarding the message is we may be headed toward the oft-repeated error of waiting until it is a recognizable insurgency before taking preemptive steps to deal with it. If we deny the existence of a threat because it is not serious or denigrate the guerillas' capacity to obuild infrastructures or generate propaganda, we will I believe make a serious mistake. The Hondurans are focusing where we focus, to date that has been largely on the conventional threat from Nicaragua. They will, as were the Salvadorans, be slow to relook the internal causes of popular discontent. In El Salvador before October 1979,

there was a preoccupation with outside support of the guerillas. This worked to the detriment of an internal analysis – nation-building answer to the root causes of the insurgency. Later, during my tour, I asked the Salvadoran officers why this was so. Their response was their leadership knew only how to fight one way—conventionally. It was a most difficult task to redirect that Army inward even after their insurgency had almost (or had?) reached Phase III. What I'm concerned with is the inertia we may encourage if we fail to press the Hondurans to look inward and prepare for the struggle that will inevitably escalate. While it is my fondest hope Danny Ortega will have an attack of terminal stupidity and cross the border for real, I doubt if it will happen. I have no doubts that we could handle such an eventuality.

I've given much thought to what our opponents seem to have learned of late. I believe the key lessons they've learned from Grenada et al. are:

"Don't permit the noise level to penetrate the U.S. consciousness again."

"Don't give the gringos an opportunity to do what they do best—conventional war."

"Keep it low on the spectrum."

"If the insurgency in Honduras can be kept alive and growing and at the same time be kept below the U.S. attention level, then the chances of success will be greater."

To counter our enemy's new-found wisdom, I propose we continue to work quietly with our Honduran counterparts to develop their counterinsurgency capability. We should develop not only their military capacity to conduct counter-guerilla operations but also develop the requisite sensitivity and capacity to deal with the non-lethal aspects of an insurgency threat, e.g., nation-building (PSYOPS and Civil Affairs). It costs less in comparison with a conventional buildup and will make the

Honduran Army even more respected by the people it is pledged to defend.

The 7th Special Forces Group (Airborne) stands ready to assist you to that and any other end.

Message 15
DOI: 10 JUN 86
SOURCE: 7th SFG
REPORTED THREATS FROM LEFTIST/AUTHENTIC FACTION OF THE HONDURAN PROFESSIONAL TEACHERS ASSOCIATION TO INITIATE STRIKES THROUGHOUT THE EDUCATIONAL COMMUNITY AND AMONG LEFTIST LABOR MOVEMENTS IF THEIR DEMANDS FOR GOVERNMENT RECOGNITION WERE NOT MET.

Commentary
Insurgency Indicator # 4, #5, and #7
Analyzing Insurgency Sec. 1, Underlying Issues; Sec. 3, Catalyst; Sec. 7, Legitimacy; and Sec. 9, Other Issues

Message 16
DOI: 19 JUN 86
SOURCE: 7th SFG
REPORTED THE ESTABLISHMENT OF AN INTERNAL SECURITY GROUP (ETAS- AUXILLARY TECHNICAL SCHOOL OF SECURITY) BY THE PCH [Honduran Communist Party], FUTH [Unitary Federation of Honduran Workers] AND SITRATERCO [Labor Union of the Tela Railroad Company] LEFTIST ORGANIZATIONS TO MONITOR SECURITY AND INTELLIGENCE IN THE EL PROGRESSO AREA.

Commentary

Insurgency Indicator #2

Analyzing Insurgency Sec. 4, Organization; and Sec. 5, Support

By now, the frequency of reports from El Progresso indicted that this area was a focal point of subversive goings-on. The El Progresso area and the nearby university campus at San Pedro Sula had a long history of anti-government activity.

News Report 4

DATE: 22 July 1986

Six Salvadoran guerrillas were killed in a clash with the Honduran Army, it was reported officially today in Tegucigalpa. The military clash occurred last Friday in the sector of Los Filos in the western department of Lempira on the Salvadoran border. The report by the Honduran Army states that the Honduran troops did not sustain any casualties, despite the fact that they were ambushed by the guerillas while patrolling the border. It also states that the slain rebels were buried in the place where they were killed to prevent their being preyed upon by buzzards or jungle animals.

The Honduran soldiers who fought the Salvadoran guerrillas belonged to the Special Forces and the 12th Infantry Batallion. The report adds that the fighting occurred in the same region where a soldier was killed last week when he stepped on a mine made and placed by the rebels.

Commentary

Insurgency Indicator #10

Analyzing Insurgency Sec. 6, Force and Coercion

News Report 5

DATE: 28 July 1986

"Terrorism Alert"

Today the Pentagon ordered all U.S. diplomatic offices and civilian and military installations in Honduras to establish a maximun security alert due to the fear of terrorist attacks. [These orders prohibit visit to urban areas unless on specific missions.]

Commentary

Insurgency Indicators #2 and #4

Analyzing Insurgency Sec. 6, Force and Coercion

News Report 6

DATE: 9 August 1986

"Army and FUESP Conduct Anti-Terrorist Operation"

Upon orders from General Humberto Regalado Hernandez, the Armed Forces General Command has proceeded to carry out an operation throughout the nation to control and prevent any act of terrorism which affects the citizenry. This operation is being carried out jointly by members of the Public Security Forces (FUSEP) and soldiers of various Armed Forces Units, who are being deployed to various areas night and day and are asking citizens to show their identification papers. … Military authorities hereby urge the citizens, particularly those who have to travel at night due to their studies or work, to carry their identification papers and thus avoid problems concerning their identity.

Commentary

Insurgency Indicators #2, #4, and #8

Message 17

DOI: 11 AUG 86

SOURCE: 7th SFG

EDITORIALS IN "LA TRIBUNA" COMPLAINING OF HONDURAN GOVERNMENTS INABILITY TO IMPOSE ORDER AND

GUARANTEEING SECURITY OF ITS CITIZENS. SUGGEST ARMED FORCES COULD TAKE A MORE ACTIVE ROLE IF GOVERNMENT IS INCAPABLE OF IMPOSING "ORDER"

Commentary

Insurgency Indicators #4 and #7

Analyzing Insurgency Sec. 7, Legitimacy

A time-tested technique for insurgents has been to portray the government as unable to maintain order or to protect the population. A weak government invites another government, or a coup. Alternatively, a government goaded into overreaction plays into the insurgents' hands when in the process of restoring order it creates unacceptable levels of collateral damage.

Message 18

DOI: 15 AUG 86

SOURCE: Southern Command J2

REPRESENTATIVES OF THE SANDINISTA GOVERNMENT HAVE CONTACTED VARIOUS HONDURAN RADICAL LEFTIST GROUPS AND REQUESTED THAT THEY HELP TO DESTABILIZE THE HONDURAN GOVERNMENT AND DISTRUPT DEMOCRATIC REVOLUTIONARY FRONT THROUGH THE USE OF VIOLENCE

Commentary

Insurgency Indicator #3

Analyzing Insurgency Sec. 5, Support

The linkage between the Sandinistas and radical groups in Honduras is evident in this intercept.

Message 19

DOI: 29 AUG 86

SOURCE: 7th SFG

SOURCE PROVIDED THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION PERTAINING TO VARIOUS SUBVERSIVE ORGANIZATIONS AND THEIR COMMAND STRUCTURE: PROGRESSIVE STUDENT MOVEMENT (MEP) TWO LEADERS, TWO ADVISORS, TWO COURIERS, ONE FINANCIAL SUPPORTER DAGOBERTA PADILLA STUDENT FRONT (FREDAP) LEADER, VICE-PRESIDENT, LEGAL ADVISOR, FOUR ASSISTANTS OMAR RIVERA, MARIO MENDOZA, AND SAUL "SOCRATES" CUELLO ARDON HAVE BEEN NAMED AS LEADERS OF THE "FIFTH COLUMN" IN EL PROGRESSO, YORO. THIS GROUP IS REPORTEDLY CONTROLLED BY HONDURAN COMMUNISTS (NFI) AND NICARAGUAN INTELLIGENCE AGENCIES. [Note: This level of detail was typical of 7th SFG's reporting.]

> *Commentary*
> *Insurgency Indicators* #1, #2, and #3
> *Analyzing Insurgency* Sec. 4, Organization; and Sec. 5, Support

At this point, things began to change. On September 28, 1986, the 7th SF Group Commander and one of the 7th's recently returned B Detachment Commanders briefed USCINCSO with latest set of IIRs. The briefing highlighted the escalation and cumulative effects of insurgent activities. At the end of the briefing, General Galvin let it be known that he had sufficient information to believe that a Phase One insurgency existed on the north coast. His exact words were, "I now have the smoking gun I need. …"

With the CinC on board, it did not take long for a major climate change to be reflected in the message traffic.

Message 20

DTG: 08 OCT 86
FM: DA WASH DC
TO: CDR 1ST SOCOM FT BRAGG NC
SUBJ: SOCOM REPORTING IN USSOUTHCOM AOR
THE COOPERATIVE SPIRIT OF 7TH SFG PERSONNEL IN
PROVIDING INTELLIGENCE INFO TO 470TH MIGP* PERSONNEL
IS TO BE COMMENDED….THE TRIAL PERIOD OF 60 DAYS HAS
EXPIRED, AND HAS RESULTED IN THE PUBLISHING OF 20
BIOGRAPHIC IIR'S AND 7 ORDER OF BATTLE IIR'S.
2. IT IS IMPORTANT TO NOTE THE FOLLOWING SIGNIFICANT
ITEMS:
  A. SFG SOLDIERS HAVE INFO VALUABLE TO
SOUTHCOM….
  [Note: The 470th MI Group was SouthCom's MI unit based in the
Canal Zone.]

Commentary

The 7th SFG's contribution to the understanding of the insurgents'
organization was the result of paying close attention to the detachments'
surroundings and of establishing contacts with a wide-ranging segment of
Honduran society.

Message 21

DOI: 28 OCT 86
SOURCE: 7th SFG
LTC ROMERO, 4TH BN [La Ceiba], STATES THE INSURGENT
SITUATION IN NORTHERN HONDURAS TO BE A "GREAT
THREAT TO THE INTERNAL STABILITY OF HONDURAS."
RECENT CLASHES WITH ARMED AND ORGANIZED
SUBVERSIVE ELEMENTS, DISCOVERY OF WEAPONS AND FOOD

CACHES, AND INFORMATION ON INSURGENT CELLS AND SUPORTERS, HE SAID, WERE ONLY THE BEGINNING OF AN UNRAVELING SUBVERSIVE INFRASTRUCTURE STORY. ROMERO INDICATED A LINK BETWEEN INSURGENTS AND "NARCO-INSURGENTS". LARGE AMOUNTS OF MARIJUANA FIELDS DISCOVERED NEAR TOCOA IN EARLY OCTOBER WORTH 7 MILLION U.S. DOLLARS LINKED TO SUBVERSIVES. THE ONBOARD COMPUTER OF AN AIRPLANE CARRYING 1,000 KILOS OF COCAINE DOWNED IN LA CEIBA 8 OCT 86 CONTAINED COORDINATES FOR A CLANDESTINE AIRFIELD NEAR ARENAL, YORO. ARENAL IS A CENTER FOR LEFTIST SUBVERSIVE ACTIVITIES.

Commentary

Insurgency Indicators # 1, #2, #3, and #10

Analyzing Insurgency Sec. 5, Support; Sec. 6, Force and Coercion; and Sec. 9, Other Questions

Beginning in 1985, an expert from Ft Bragg's 9th Psychological Operations Battalion was attached to each deploying A Detachment. He was charged with playing the role of "commissar" (political/public affairs/psy ops adviser) and was to participate in detachment seminar discussions on the insurgency indicators (see above Indicator Checklist) and what, if anything, was going on in their area. He also functioned as another set of eyes in assessing the AOH unit the team was training. After a suitable period, the teams invited their Honduran counterparts to sit in and participate. In time, Honduran LtC Romero became a devoted participant in these "seminar" discussions. It is obvious from these messages that he became a convert. While it is possible that this conversion may have been in part the result of wanting a piece of the pie, there is little doubt there was something going on, and he and others soon began to focus on the potential of an insurgency in his area of operations.

The same day, the U.S. Defense Attaché reported the following:

Message 22

DTG: 28 OCT 86
FM: USDAO TEGUCIGALPA HO
TO: DIA WASHDC
SUBJ: HO MILITARY SHIFT RESOURCES TO
COUNTERINSURGENCY OPERATIONS
COMMENTS: LTC ROMERO IS TAKING THE INSURGENT
SITUATION IN NORTHERN HONDURAS QUITE SERIOUSLY.
APPARENTLY, THE CINC AND JOINT STAFF ALSO CONSIDER
THE PROBLEM THERE TO BE EXTENSIVE AND THREATENING.

Commentary

Insurgency Indicators #2 and #3

Analyzing Insurgency Sec. 4, Organization; Sec. 5, Support

Not only had the U.S. point of view been altered but at least one major Honduran commander, LtC Romero, now saw the insurgency as a real threat. How was it possible that the Honduran military changed its point of view? There is a case to be made that the Hondurans saw the threat as one that could be used to increase U.S. aid. The AOH viewed U.S. aid to the Contras and to the ESAF as a zero-sum game and were not happy with how little they were getting. As far as the drug issue, one has to look no further than Colombia to see the advantages of linking the guerrillas with drugs. Insurgents historically have derived their support from the locals, the opposition, their own manufacturing, and from a sponsor. The evolution of drugs as a source of finance began with guerrillas availing themselves of the drug wealth in a symbiotic relation with producers. Later, they cut out the drug producers and began producing it themselves. By the 1980s, insurgents were no longer as dependent on clandestine resupply. The logistics of insurgency had

changed to the point where insurgent movements that had the drug advantage were almost financially independent.

The joke in El Salvador was the FMLN could afford state-of-the-art communications equipment that was better than what the U.S. was providing the ESAF. It could be ordered by cell phone from the best manufacturers, paid by credit card, drawn from a secure foreign account, and FedExed to the users.

Message 23
DOI: 04 NOV 86
SOURCE: 7th SFG
A FUSEP AGENT WAS KILLED ON 2 NOV 86 BY SUSPECTED SUBVERSIVES IN THE NOMBRE DE DIOS MOUNTAINS.

Commentary

Insurgency Indicator #10

Analyzing Insurgency Sec. 6, Force and Coercion

D. The End of the Case, the End of an Era

By the beginning of 1987 SouthCom J-2, Col John Stewart, had published an extensive study entitled "Honduras: The Phase One Insurgency on the North Coast." This publication made it official although, as noted above, General Galvin's position had already had a salutary effect on the intelligence community.

In Honduras, combined AOH/FUSEP units with U.S. intelligence and logistics support took the offensive. These combat operations triggered a number of contacts with the guerrillas, particularly in the Nombre de Dios Mountains. By the year's end, armed field elements of the insurgency were out of business. Contra and Sandinista units still kept things stirred up on the border, however, and the war in El Salvador built in intensity. AOH units throughout the country became more effective in their dealings with the Honduran population. (See Annex C.) In November 1989 the Berlin Wall came down, and the El Salvadoran FMLN's "Final Offensive" failed. The Soviets ceased supporting the Sandinista regime and, by extension, the FMLN.

In April 1990, Nicaraguan president and Sandinista Daniel Ortega had an attack of terminal stupidity and allowed himself to be un-elected. Violeta Chamorra's surprise victory ended both Sandinista and Contra border incursions into Honduras. Peace came to El Salvador a year later with the signing of the peace treaty. In September of 1992 the *bolsone*s territorial issues were resolved, with Honduras getting two-thirds of the disputed territory. By 1993, a Central American Free Trade Agreement was in place.

VI. Annexes

Annex A: Analyzing Insurgency

by Colonel John D. Waghelstein, USA (Ret.) and Dr. Donald Chisholm[14]

February 2006

> Conventional War is to Irregular War as intercollegiate lacrosse is to Indian lacrosse. The former is played on a clearly defined field by a prescribed and equal number of players, under defined rules for a set time period. The Indian brand was played by any, and usually unequal, number on each side, with neither rules nor time constraints over an undefined area. Those who would play the Indian brand of the game should not expect to be governed by NCAA rules.

> — James Trinniman, late Professor, U.S. Army War College

Planning and executing effective conventional combat operations begins with practical analysis of the enemy, that is, imposing a structure on the problem, devising several plausible courses of action, and ascertaining which course of action is likely to achieve the strategic objective. Established planning tools such as the Commander's Estimate of the Situation (CES) or the Military Decision Making Process (MDMP) were developed as problem-solving tools for understanding and defeating

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[14] Dr. Donald Chisholm is Professor and Head, Contemporary Operations and Environments Division, in the Joint Military Operations Department of the U.S. Naval War College. He earned his A.B., M.A., and Ph.D. in political science from the University of California, Berkeley. His published research addresses operational planning; military personnel systems; cognitive and organizational limits on rationality; organizational adaptation; organizational failure and reliability; and privatization of public activities. *Waiting for Dead Men's Shoes: Origins and Development of the U.S. Navy's Officer Personnel System, 1793-1941* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001) received the 2001 RADM Samuel Eliot Morison Award for Distinguished Contribution to Naval Literature.

largely symmetrical opponents in conventional combat operations between the armed forces of states. They have been wonderfully effective in this context.[15]

Devising and executing successful counterinsurgency campaigns also demands effective problem solving.[16] Getting the analysis right is critical. Although it might seem appropriate to employ proven CES/MDMP planning tools to problems of insurgency, these tools have shown themselves less well-adapted to this context than they are to conventional combat operations. The CES and MDMP represent formalized expressions of problem solving as developed and adapted for the military context during a historical period in which most military tactical and operational thought was directed toward the successful conduct of major conventional combat operations between states (mostly Western) with similarly organized and equipped militaries. They represent

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[15] John Dewey pointed out long ago that the human decision maker is first and foremost a problem solver, following, more or less, several steps to make non-trivial decisions: recognizing and identifying a problem (an occasion for a decision), imposing a cause-and-effect structure on that problem, generating alternative solutions, evaluating those alternatives comparatively, and choosing an alternative. Dewey's insights provided the foundation for the work of Herbert A. Simon and others in the field of modern cognitive science. See John Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems* (Athens, OH: Swallow Press, 1985) (originally published 1927).

[16] Although we focus here on the analysis of insurgency as an essential precursor to devising an effective counterinsurgency campaign (whether in support of a host nation or as an occupying power), there are also implications for those occasions on which the U.S. may find itself as a matter of policy providing support to insurgency, as it did not so long ago in places such as Nicaragua and Afghanistan. Tools for analyzing insurgency do exist. The CIA developed its "Guide to Analysis of Insurgency." There are also Bard O'Neill, *Insurgency and Terrorism* (London: Brassey's, 2005), which has been used at National Defense University, and David Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice* (New York: Praeger, 1964) used at the U.S. Army's Command and General Staff School.

one useful method of problem solving but do not exhaust the range of possible practical methods.[17]

Insurgencies represent what Simon has called "ill-structured" problems, and others have referred to as "ill-defined" or "wicked" problems.[18] It is not that insurgencies are without structure; rather, the decision maker does not know very much about that structure, in part because it may be entirely novel, in part because such problems typically involve a large number of variables that interact in important, non-simple ways; that is, they are problems of "organized complexity."[19] The decision maker's *primary* challenge is to ascertain what those variables are and how they interact, allowing him *to move the problem of insurgency from one that is ill-structured to one that is well-structured, and become more susceptible of manipulation and amelioration if not solution*. That is, the bulk of the energy expended will typically be devoted to structuring the problem followed by generating alternative courses of action.[20] Absent reasonable accuracy in assessing the problem's structure, no courses of action developed will solve that problem.

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[17] We hasten to point out that the analytic instrument outlined in this paper is not inconsistent with the CES/MDMP, and with analysis to come we should be able to outline how they complement each other and may be meshed together. We do not here consider Operational Net Assessment.

[18] See Herbert A. Simon, "The Structure of Ill Structured Problems," *Artificial Intelligence* 4(1973): 181-201. In like manner, "wicked" problems are to be distinguished from "tame" problems.

[19] See Warren Weaver, "Science and Complexity," *American Scientist* 36(1948): 536-544. Weaver argued that the problems facing the physical sciences comprised three general types: simple problems with few variables and simple interactions; problems of disorganized complexity, with many variables, but whose interactions are essentially random and susceptible of effective summarizing by measures of central tendency and dispersion; and problems of organized complexity. The last type of problem is that most likely to present itself to the decision maker as ill-structured.

[20] See Donald Chisholm, "Problem Solving and Institutional Design," *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* X(1996).

Several specific reasons fall out from this general foundation as to why the CES/MDMP planning tools are relatively less effective in converting insurgencies from ill-structured to well-structured status than for addressing more conventional conflicts.

I. Assumptions

Because the CES/MDMP planning tools were not intended for comprehending insurgencies, their embedded assumptions about what matters in the analysis do not match the essential elements of the structure of insurgencies: key factors are excluded, while others are overemphasized. Insurgencies are not primarily military problems (although they inevitably involve security issues and may include military operations). Concomitantly, the structures of insurgency are considerably more complex: their constituent parts are at root social, economic, and political. However, the oft-repeated truism that the "center of gravity is the people" does not take one very far in devising a counterinsurgency campaign to defeat a specific insurgency. The truism that countering insurgency is first and foremost a political, not a military, problem and that effectively countering insurgency therefore requires application of all elements of national power, not just the military, also does not provide much practical guidance for campaign planning, especially when military factors are more readily analyzed and measured. Using such conventional planning tools, therefore, can and has resulted in an undue emphasis on military force in counterinsurgency campaigns, undercutting the effectiveness of such campaigns.[21]

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[21] We are encouraged by recent trends in planning military operations toward more comprehensive analysis that incorporates and accounts for key non-military variables.

II. Variation

Insurgencies differ far more from one another in pertinent ways than do conventional combat operations. Such differences are typically relatively subtle and nuanced. Notwithstanding their surface similarities, this obtained even during the Cold War heyday of communist-backed insurgencies.[22] Given the high probability that the U.S. will, for the foreseeable future, find itself engaging in support to counterinsurgency across a wide range of states, many of them non-Western, variation in the structures of insurgency seems only likely to increase. Distinguishing two basic types of insurgency—doctrinal or revolutionary insurgency, and insurgency as part of a war of liberation—proved an important step forward four decades ago, but does not provide sufficient analytic leverage for dealing with contemporary insurgencies.[23]

The rise of what some have called a "global Islamist insurgency" that may target individual states but maintains pretensions to an end to Western power and the creation of a sort of supra-national "caliphate" suggests strongly that the range of types of insurgency is being significantly expanded, as do alliances between insurgents and criminal gangs.[24] That is to say, today we do not have an adequate taxonomy for categorizing the varieties of insurgencies we will encounter. We cannot simply assign a specific insurgency to a particular category and proceed

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[22] Although the communists generally tried to present a common face to the West, profound differences of opinion characterized the various communist theorists and practitioners of insurgency, from Lenin to Mao to Castro and Guevara, quite apart from differences across the cultures in which they were attempting to foment and support insurgencies. The variation across communist insurgencies confronted during the Cold War, however, pales in comparison with the insurgent variation we confront today.

[23] See Galula (1964).

[24] See Lieutenant Colonel David Kilcullen, Australian Army, "Countering Global Insurgency, A Strategy for the War on Terrorism," Canberra & Washington, D.C., September-November 2004.

from there to select from a pre-existing menu of responses associated with that category.

III. Evolution

In contrast with the requirements for planning and executing conventional combat operations, the origins and etiology of any given insurgency matter. Consequently, understanding insurgency, generally, and a given insurgency in particular, depends on clear, practical, historically grounded social, economic, and political analysis, combined with sound understanding of the cultural context in which the insurgency takes place. The practical lesson of these convergent factors is that no single analytic template will work across all insurgencies, even for countering insurgency manifested in a particular time and relatively confined place.[25]

At the same time, the historical record plainly shows that insurgency, both generally and in the specific case, has been remarkably adaptive in response to counterinsurgency campaigns and new circumstances, and often in very short order. During the present period, characterized by fast-paced technological innovation, new tools are daily becoming available to insurgents and potential insurgents, who have demonstrated remarkable speed in adaptation and adoption.[26] Oddly,

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[25] Linn's analysis of the post-Spanish American War insurgency in the Philippines revealed, for example, that, even restricting focus to Northern Luzon, variation across small regions was substantial enough to render ineffective any approach that sought to treat the insurgency as a unitary actor with a common structure. See Brian M. Linn, "Provincial Pacification in the Philippines, 1900-1901: The First District Department of Northern Luzon," *Military Affairs* 51(1987): 62-66.

[26] See, for example, International Crisis Group, *In Their Own Words: Reading the Iraqi Insurgency*, Middle East Report N°50 – 15 February 2006, for an analysis of the insurgents' execution of a sophisticated information operations campaign against the U.S.-led coalition and the Iraqi government.

insurgents read, and they know about emerging theories of warfare, and they study their opponents' ways of doing business as assiduously as we study theirs—if not more so. The implication is that even as we attempt to discern the structure of any given insurgency, its structure is likely to be changing in ways relevant to how we attempt to counter it. Given the empirical record of the requirement to counter insurgencies for a decade or longer, we may be confident that the structure of the insurgency will change profoundly. The challenge will be to comprehend the insurgency faster than the pace at which it adapts or otherwise changes, while simultaneously assessing secular trends in the structure of the insurgency.[27]

IV. Actors

The alpha and omega of analyses of insurgency are not our own forces and those of our foe. Rather, understanding insurgency requires that we consider the focal population, its government, the insurgents' rank and file, and the insurgents' leadership, along with institutions both secular and religious, other actors external to the focal nation, both state and non-state, along with, at times, the U.S. population. Central to this part of the analysis is to understand the complex relationships among these actors. As we note below, key to success in countering insurgency is discerning, understanding, and exploiting (reinforcing or disaggregating) the seams among these central actors.

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[27] International Crisis Group (2006), for example, argues that the present insurgency in Iraq has evolved through three distinct stages, as analyzed through the public statements of its various components: competition, consolidation, and confidence. Additionally, we would be wise to anticipate an initial period of ineffective groping in the dark in any counterinsurgency campaign.

V. Sequential versus Cumulative

Although U.S. thinking about conventional combat now tends toward simultaneity and non-linearity in operations and campaigns combined with near-continuous analysis and adjustment, sequence and phasing remain the underlying architecture of our operational concepts and planning processes. And while counterinsurgency campaigns are susceptible of conceptualization in terms of broad phases, by force of circumstance those phases overlap in important ways, leaving their boundaries indefinite —largely because of the myriad actions they necessarily contain and the importance of the incremental, *cumulative* effects, vice sequential execution and completion, of those actions.[28]

VI. Doctrine

Notwithstanding encouraging recent efforts (not yet secular trends), doctrine for counterinsurgency has been and remains much less robust than for conventional combat operations, in part because the problem is less amenable to distillation in formal doctrine, but also because insurgency has historically been treated as an aberration distracting from the military's real business of major conventional combat operations against similarly disposed armed forces of other states.[29] Doctrine has usually lagged the evolution of insurgency and in any case has remained so non-specific as to constitute an inadequate guide to

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[28] The empirical record plainly shows, for example, that counterinsurgency campaigns based on the assumption that development (i.e., schools, health facilities, utilities infrastructure, and the like) can only follow in train of the establishment of internal security are not destined to be successful.

[29] This phenomenon is not new. It was as significant in the 19th century as it has been during the past several decades. See John D. Waghelstein, "Preparing the US Army for the Wrong War: Educational and Doctrinal Failure 1865-1891," *Small Wars and Insurgencies* 10(1999): 1-33. In the present setting the Army's draft field manual for counterinsurgency and the Marine Corps' revision and update of its classic *Small Wars Manual* are two very positive developments.

understanding and action. Consequently, effective counterinsurgency planning and execution to date has in practice relied upon the intuitive or implicit knowledge of the experienced professional, often an iconoclast operating at the margins of the mainstream military.[30] Indeed, counterinsurgency campaigns have more probability of success when devised by professionals with broad personal experience of insurgency.

VII. Systems Perspective

The complexity of insurgency, in combination with its adaptive and evolutionary character and the typically long time frame for countering it, suggests strongly the practical value of treating it from a systems perspective. We do not here consider the relative utility of the various systems models as a basis for an informed perspective on insurgency. However, our approach is more consistent with a systems approach drawn from a biological rather than from a physical metaphor.[31]

VIII. Comparative Analysis

To the extent that systematic analysis of insurgency can be codified and formalized, it requires explicit comparison across historical

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[30] Bernard Fall and Edward Lansdale personify those military officers residing at the margin of their military establishments who nonetheless prove highly effective in counterinsurgency. Fall was a member of the French resistance during World War II, also serving in a Moroccan infantry division. See Bernard Fall, "The Theory and Practice of Insurgency and Counterinsurgency," *Naval War College Review* (Winter 1998): 46-57. As an Army intelligence officer, Lansdale served in the OSS during World War II, in 1947 transferring to the Air Force from which he ultimately retired as a brigadier general. See Edward Lansdale, *In the Midst of Wars: An American's Mission to Southeast Asia* (New York: Harper and Row, 1972), and Cecil B. Currey, *Edward Lansdale: The Unquiet American* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1988).

[31] For an excellent practical example of a systems approach to understanding insurgency, see Kilcullen (2004), Appendix C, in which he analyzes the present insurgency in Iraq.

insurgencies. This allows highlighting characteristics common to all or most of them. Demarcating those factors peculiar to specific insurgencies becomes possible only with an appropriate analytical framework. In turn, such comparison and analysis must rest upon a solid foundation of the appropriate practical questions about insurgencies; absent such a common metric, no comparisons can be effected. Such analysis, we believe, will never submit to the same degree of formality as the CES/MDMP achieves for conventional operations. It will inevitably require an extraordinarily high degree of art on the part of the analyst.

IX. Questions

We do not suggest that insurgencies are so obscure and opaque that they remain fundamentally resistant to effective analysis, or that insurgents are inevitably invincible. To the contrary, like all mortals they have feet of clay and sometimes they can be downright stupid: Che Guevara comes to mind. We cannot, however, count on such inadequacy as a matter of course. Rather, defeating them requires asking the right questions and answering them with reasonable clarity and accuracy.

Thus, offered here is a set of questions founded in practical experience, a systems perspective, and key concepts of operational art: strategic objective; center of gravity; critical strengths, weaknesses, and vulnerabilities; operational factors; and decisive points.[32] These questions focus our attention on the beliefs and attitudes of the key players in insurgencies, their capabilities for action, and the relationships among these players. Posing and answering these questions, it is believed, will

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[32] The Principles of MOOTW (Security, Legitimacy, Unity of Effort, Restraint, Perseverance, and Objective; often remembered as SLURPO) aid the military planner in distinguishing the implications for devising operations and campaigns addressing problems of insurgency from those of conventional combat operations. Thus, they offer general guidelines for thinking about problems of *counter*insurgency.

allow the officer confronted with understanding a real-world insurgency to assess and comprehend its fundamental characteristics in order to develop a plan for an effective counterinsurgency campaign, with emphasis on exploitation of critical vulnerabilities.

Although of necessity listed in linear order, we do not thereby suggest a priority for the questions nor a sequence in which they should be asked and answered. The several categories of question are also interrelated, though shown discretely below: answers to one will have important implications for the others. Finally, we note that not every question provided here will be relevant to every insurgency, but its relevance should at least be considered; and that we do not suppose that these questions exhaust the relevant questions for insurgencies of the contemporary period or for those that will arise in the future.

1. Underlying Issues

Insurgencies do not find fertile ground in a population in which most sectors are generally contented with their lot in life. Underlying conditions of real grievance are necessary, usually described by a mismatch between sentiment of a significant portion of the population and government policies, especially the provision of public goods and services. One implication for counterinsurgency is for the government to make significant substantive changes in its policies in order to strengthen its ties to and legitimacy in the eyes of its population. Some grievances may result from factors well beyond the ability of the government to redress.

- What issues have the insurgents articulated as their sources of grievance (e.g., land distribution; ethnic, religious, or other discrimination and allied human rights concerns; control of natural resources by multinational corporations or a central government; access to government offices; access to scarce resources such as health, education, or other basic services, etc.)?

- What are the grievances of the *population*? Would a reasonable person consider them to be valid? Validity of grievance is not effectively assessed by objective condition.[33]
- Are the articulated grievances of the *population* and those of the insurgency the same?
- What does the *government* believe to be the grievances of the *population*? Does it consider those grievances to be valid?
- Are the articulated grievances of the *population* the same as those perceived by the *government*?
- Has the *government* made genuine efforts to address these grievances? (For example, the Sultan of Oman improved health services, expanded education, and built roads to outdo the insurgents in the Dhofar rebellion [1962–1976].) Are these grievances practically addressable, or are they beyond the immediate capacity of the *government* (e.g., major social and economic dislocations caused by globalization)?

2. Underlying Characteristics

Grasping the basic characteristics of the population is essential to analyzing the nature and structure of conflict in the focal state. These characteristics set the historical frame of reference for the conflict under consideration and define the parameters for possible courses of action. They are also likely to be suggestive of courses of action aimed at reinforcing or widening seams among insurgents or between insurgents and the population.

- What are the primary characteristics (political/social/economic/religious) of the *population*? What are

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[33] What matters is gap between expectations and experience. On this essential point, see Ted Robert Gurr, *Why Men Rebel* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1970); and David O. Sears, *The Politics of Violence: The New Urban Blacks and the Watts Riot* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1973).

the basic cleavages in the *population* (e.g., Tutsi and Hutu in Rwanda)? Do these cleavages reinforce each other or are they cross-cutting (e.g., religious alignments cut across ethnic differences in Sri Lanka)?

- What are the primary characteristics (political/social/economic/religious) of the *insurgent leadership*? Of the *insurgency's rank and file*?
- What are the differences between the characteristics of the *population* and the *insurgency*? Do these differences matter?
- What are the primary characteristics (political/social/economic/religious) of the *government* leadership?
- What are the differences between the characteristics of the *population* and the *government*? Do these differences matter?

3. Catalyst

Notwithstanding genuine grievances among a population, some sort of catalytic agent is usually necessary to mobilize and translate unhappiness into insurgency. Defeating the insurgent hinges in good measure on understanding the aims of the leadership, and devising a means for separating that leadership from its rank and file and from the larger population.

- Has the *insurgency* articulated a desired end-state (e.g., overthrow and replacement of the existing government, establishing a new state from a portion of the existing state's territory, limited self-rule, control of natural resources, or other lesser changes)? If not, can an implicit desired end-state be derived? What is the *insurgency*'s desired end-state? In short, does the *insurgency* have a well-developed alternative to the *government* that it is able to articulate?

- What political/social/economic/religious objectives has the *insurgency* articulated? How closely are these objectives connected to the grievances of the *population*?
- Are there other unarticulated but implicit objectives for the *insurgency* that can be derived? How closely are these objectives connected to the grievances of the *population*?

4. Organization

Organization matters. Although state-based militaries tend to exhibit very similar organizational forms, insurgencies may take very different organizational forms (highly centralized or cellular or highly decentralized) and the organization of any given insurgency may change significantly over the duration of a counterinsurgency campaign (e.g., an insurgency is likely to improve and consolidate its organizational arrangements the longer it is in existence). Courses of action appropriate against centrally controlled insurgencies may have little effect on those only loosely organized. Compound or complex insurgencies may become more common and, while more difficult to comprehend, may also present more seams for practical exploitation. Similarly, as both history (Peru) and recent experience (Iraq) demonstrate, insurgencies in a given place and time may very well not be unitary entities; they may be more aptly described as compound or complex insurgencies.

- Is there more than one *insurgency*? If so, do they co-exist in the same space, or do they operate in different areas (as in western and southern Sudan)? Are they coordinated, or do they compete with each other for support of the population? Are there seams that can be exploited?
- How long has the *insurgency* been underway (e.g., is it in an early, organizing phase or is it in a more mature phase with a well-developed infrastructure)? See also Section 8, History, below.

- How is the *insurgency* organized (e.g., centralized or decentralized)? Does it follow an identifiable philosophy (e.g., Maoist)? What is the content of that philosophy? What are the strengths of the insurgent organization? Are the *insurgency*'s political/leadership elements distinct from its coercive elements (e.g., Sinn Fein and the Irish Republican Army)? Are there seams between the political and coercive elements that can be exploited?
- Does the *insurgency* control any territory? If so, what are its dimensions and boundaries? Does that territory include resources vital to the government (e.g., the Panguna copper mine on Bougainville in Papua New Guinea)?

5. Support

State-based militaries do not typically live off the land; they bring their own stuff with them. Nor during conventional combat operations do they worry much about the legitimacy of their actions among a given population. The contrary obtains on both counts during problems of insurgency. Counterinsurgency campaigns must grasp the type, strength, and distribution of support for insurgency in order to develop effective courses of action.

- To what extent does the *insurgency* depend upon local *popular* support? What type of support does the *population* provide (e.g., food, shelter, intelligence, cadre)?
- Is there an identifiable ethnic, religious, racial or other component to the *insurgency* (e.g., ethnic Chinese in 1950s British Malaya)? Is the support of such identifiable components critical to the *insurgency*? Are there exploitable seams?
- Is support freely provided or is it coerced? Is domestic *popular* support vulnerable to interdiction?
- How do geography and demographics affect the distribution of support (e.g., does support vary significantly

between city and countryside)? Do ethnic differences fall out with geography (e.g., Muslims in Thailand's four southernmost provinces vs. overwhelmingly Buddhist population in the rest of the country)? Do some regions offer more support and others less? Do these differences constitute vulnerabilities that can be exploited?

• Has the insurgency moved from the countryside, unpopulated areas, or safe havens to an urban environment? If the insurgents are able to hide within the general population, what does that suggest about the movement's popularity, or about the government's control over the population?

• Does the *insurgency* enjoy external support? What is the nature of that support (finances, arms, cadres, expert advice, political, etc.)? What are the sources of that support (related insurgencies in other states, other states, religious institutions, e.g., the Roman Catholic church and liberation theology in Latin America)? Is outside support critical to the maintenance or success of the *insurgency* (PRC support through Yemen to 1970s insurgents in Dhofar, Oman)? Is that support susceptible of interdiction?

• In sum, is the insurgency's support primarily internal or external?

6. Force and Coercion

The coercive tactics employed and the level of coercion exercised varies by insurgency. Accurately understanding the coercive strategy increases the probability that it can be defeated and (remembering that insurgent violence is theater) that the counterinsurgent agent will find a way to exploit that strategy to separate the insurgent from the focal population.

- What is the *insurgency*'s coercive strategy? What are the strengths and weaknesses of that strategy?
- What types of force/coercion does the *insurgency* employ (conventional operations, guerrilla warfare, raids, assassinations, terrorism, etc.)?
- How well-armed (types and numbers) is the *insurgency*?
- What is the net effect to date of the force/coercion used by the *government* forces?

7. Legitimacy

The empirical record shows that insurgencies do not require positive support from their focal population, but that suppressing active opposition from that population may be sufficient for their purposes. Nonetheless, over the long run, the insurgent will need to build legitimacy for its program among that population even as it seeks to delegitimize the government or occupying authority. Effectively countering the insurgency therefore requires close attention to problems of legitimacy, particularly with respect to the development of integrated information operations in support of counterinsurgent efforts.

- What efforts has the *insurgency* made to establish and maintain its legitimacy? How has the *population* responded to these efforts? How has the international community responded to those efforts?
- What efforts, if any, has the *insurgency* made to internationalize the conflict? How has the international community responded to those efforts?
- Generally, what is the information climate? Who is doing what in this arena? What mechanisms are in play? Who is winning the information campaign?

8. History

Apart from the immediate origins of the specific grievances motivating the focal population, and the insurgency's near-term development and evolution, every insurgency has a history that bears on the counterinsurgent campaign.

- How did the *insurgency* originate (e.g., a nationalist movement against a colonial power; in the wake of conventional combat operations between states; with the breakup of a state; as a result of long-festering grievances of some portion of the population of a given state; etc.)?
- Is there a historical experience/legacy of *previous* insurgencies in the area of operations/country/region? What are the implications of that legacy? Is insurgency perceived by the focal population to be an accepted mechanism to redress grievances?
- Has the state ever had an effective, legitimate, central *government* that provides internal security and services to the *population* and controls its borders (e.g., neither Somalia nor Afghanistan have ever had such a government)?

9. Other Questions

Inevitably, given the wide variation in the structure of insurgencies, other questions will also be useful to address in any analysis. We provide several such questions here that none of the categories above appropriately subsume. Effective counterinsurgency will also hinge on carefully and creatively developing other questions to be asked and answered about any given insurgency.

- Are there other legitimate political/social/religious institutions (political parties, organized religion, labor unions, women's groups, environmental groups, etc.) that provide other venues for mobilizing the population or articulation of grievances?

Are these groups closer to the *insurgency* or to the *government*? Can they be co-opted?

- Has the *insurgency* formed alliances of convenience with other illegitimate or illegal groups (warlords, urban gangs, drug cartels, etc.)? What are the bases for these alliances (what goods or services does each provide for the other, e.g., finances, physical protection, base of operations, etc.)? Are there seams vulnerable to exploitation?

- What are the relevant spatial factors (i.e., geography, topography, climate)? Is the state or other area of concern an island, a peninsula, landlocked? Are its neighboring governments friendly to it, or do they support the insurgency overtly or covertly (e.g., Yemen and Oman or Iran and Iraq)? Can its borders be sealed? Are there areas within the state that the insurgency can exploit as havens or bases of operation (e.g., terrain relatively inaccessible to the government such as rainforests or mountains or densely populated urban terrain)? What is the character of that terrain?

- What other factors/variables/issues should be included in this analysis?

We began by observing that operational-level planning and execution of military operations comprises one type of problem-solving behavior. Effective problem solving commences with developing a practical understanding of the structure of the problem confronted. Insurgencies, we contended, represent problems of organized complexity, which are most likely to be initially encountered as ill-structured problems. For such problems, which are not readily assigned to predeveloped categories, discovering or imposing a structure on the problem not only is the first step but is likely to constitute the preponderance of effort in problem solving. It forms the foundation for the

development of practical courses of action to solve or mitigate the problem at hand.

Based on practical experience and analysis of historical insurgencies, we developed and provided a set of questions that we believe will assist materially in comprehending the structure of any given insurgency. These questions address the characteristics of the key actors in any insurgency and the interrelationships among them, and, implicitly, provide a basis for developing courses of action intended to exploit the seams, either by reinforcing those interrelationships or driving wedges between the actors, while simultaneously working toward weakening the insurgent actors and strengthening the counterinsurgent agents. We leave for another discussion the specific practical issues associated with using the CES/MDMP processes to develop and evaluate courses of action based upon the analyses developed through these questions.

Annex B: Memorandum of Phone Conversation with General John Galvin (U.S. Army, Ret.)

20 December 2010

General Galvin accompanied the outgoing CinC, General Paul Gorman, to what he described as a highly contentious meeting with General Walter Lopez, Commander, Honduran Armed Forces, in April 1985, during which Gen. Lopez expressed his extreme dissatisfaction with the status of military aid to the AOH. The current aid package of $100 million was tied up in congressional debate. Additionally, most assistance that did get through went to the El Salvadorans or to the CIA's Contra training operation in Yamales, Honduras. Lopez felt that Honduras itself, which was in real danger from the Nicaraguans and their Soviet-supplied T-55 tanks, deserved more. Honduran concerns focused on external threats, while the El Salvador war was an internal insurgency and the CIA's focus was on destabilizing the Sandinista regime in Nicaragua.

In their conversation about the insurgency, General Galvin remembered the AOH forces on the north coast region (San Pedro Sula to La Ceiba) as weak. [Note: It was not surprising that these units so far away from the main effort would be described as weak. This area was the one where the insurgency would develop.]

The *bolsones* were a major problem in that they had become sanctuaries for the guerrillas. [Note: Per OAS-brokered ceasefire provisions, these border areas were forbidden to troops from both El Salvador and Honduras. This made them ideal for guerrillas to set up camps without interference.] SF deployments were a "two-fers" benefit, as the Hondurans got U.S. support without having to pay for it via Security Assistance and the United States. SF units improved readiness for war plans. The same held for Reserves and National Guard road building, airfields, and training at Palmerola.

Regarding the embassy: Gen. Galvin called Ambassador Negroponte first-rate. [Note: The ambassador departed the year Gen Galvin arrived]. The General was less complimentary re U.S. embassy intelligence entities. What was really "first-rate," he said, was the Central American Joint Intelligence Task Force (CAJITF) operating in the Pentagon. This all-source fusion operation had the best of the community, who were all-stars in their own organizations and were therefore of real assistance ("both protected and did not have to leave D.C.") . They produced "good quality stuff."

Regarding the threat of insurgency, the CinC felt that Tegucigalpa [USEMB] believed the Honduran Armed Forces had any internal threat "under control." The embassy, MilGp, TF-B, attaché, and station believed "nothing was happening."

"Any time you deal with an Embassy you are dealing with so many 'pipelines' such as USAID, the Agency, the Country Team, etc., and the ambassador has a tough job." The General believed the only way to fix this problem was that all traffic "must have [the Ambassador's] signature on it"—in other words, "one god." [Note: Dean Hinton, U.S. Ambassador in El Salvador 1981–1983, enforced this rule with outstanding results.]

Gen. Galvin further noted that "jealousies in the Intelligence field in embassies has weakened our position."

Annex C: Recollection
by Captain Joe Carrerra, 7th SFG

During a trip I made to Nicaragua back in May 2003 … I was interviewing a former council man in the port city of Corinto along the Pacific coast. During my discussion he mentioned that he was at one time the equivalent of a "Batallion Commander" during the war in the mid-1980s. He was giving his version of his war stories in Honduras and their cross-border operations. After a few cold beers he reflected for a moment on one of the biggest obstacles they encountered. He stated that an important part of their mission was *"consentizacion del pueblo"* and the hardest parts of his mission was to go in after *"los hijos de' puta americanos"* had provided the townspeople or villagers with medical treatment while taking care of the sick babies and elders. I knew exactly what he was referring to and I took this as a back-handed compliment. They had little else to offer other than their ideology and at the end of the day the Hondurans were not too very impressed. As he added, I guess the *"Catrachos"* didn't get their fill with words, as they still went to bed hungry. Perhaps on one level the effectiveness of what we were doing in Honduras could be measured on the social side by the Civic Action Programs and the apparent success these projects had, in addition to the other critical missions we were carrying out. This, coupled with the obvious success of the military training of the Honduran Armed Forces, served to keep—in concert with several other factors—an insurgency from really taking hold in Honduras. As my council man friend summed it up, *"Los gringos no ganaron en Honduras sin tener que pegarnos un tiro"*—it had the same effect as if they had shot us, without actually having to fire a bullet.

What he meant was the following: The impact of Civic Action Programs were quite significant in that they actually did quite a lot to help

win the hearts and minds of many of the Honduran *campesinos* that were basically sitting on the proverbial ideological fence between a Marxist ideology or something else that provided another option, even if it was wrapped around the mantle of liberation theology. In the case of this particular unit, liberation theology was not their strength. The truth being told, absent having a priest or member of the clergy present it would have been difficult for to make a strong case for liberation theology . This is quite different from the Jesuits that were operating in the UCA [Central American University] in both Nicaragua and El Salvador. In other words, the Civic Action Programs were extremely effective and had a lasting effect long after the Civic Action activity actually occurred.

Annex D: Reflections on Contributing Factors
by Major General John Stewart, J-2 SOUTHCOM

7 January 2011

I arrived in SOUTHCOM in July of '86. The previous J-2 had departed before my arrival. At that time, the big issues were the insurgency in El Salvador and secondarily the Sandinistas and support for the Contras, though the later was limited by official U.S. policy. Why was the elevation of the threat in Honduras so long in coming? I suspect there were several factors that supported the move by SOUTHCOM: the Gorman/Galvin meeting with the Honduran command in April 1985, the increasing need by the U.S. of Honduran cooperation, and the improvement of SOUTHCOM's intelligence operations under General Galvin. JTF Bravo had grown to include logistics, training, and considerable intelligence collection capabilities. We did not want Hondurans fighting their own insurgency nor their thinking the U.S. did not take them seriously. Moreover, General Galvin promulgated a broad policy in the Americas to improve relations with Latin American military institutions. While the main hot spots were in Central America, he wanted to improve relationships throughout the AOR. So when senior Latin American military leaders presented him with issues, he responded with dispatch. In the case of Honduras, he would have put a microscope on the budding insurgency. … Was it the focus on [Panama leader Daniel] Ortega that delayed SOUTHCOM's response to the issue of the Honduras insurgency on the north coast? I suspect it was. First, I am not sure that General Gorman and his staff believed the insurgency to be anything more that low level criminal or tribal activity. As you point out, the in-country American intelligence folks were not reporting a serious insurgency. Furthermore, during the period '83–'85, the U.S. Congress was debating our policies toward El Salvador and Nicaragua, and one of the results was

the Bollin Amendment, which proscribed U.S. support for the Contras. Additionally, Congress also limited U.S. military presence in El Salvador [the 55-man limit]. Thus, in light of the very serious nature of the threat in Central America and to U.S. national security interests there as well as the restriction placed on U.S. policy makers and promulgators, including CINCSOUTH, SOUTHCOM had its hands full.

When I arrived at SOUTHCOM, General Galvin was very dissatisfied with his intelligence organization and their entire operation. To that end, I reviewed our entire J-2 operation and our relationships with other intelligence organizations, both within SOUTHCOM and nationally. We worked with defense and national agencies as well as the in-country teams. We set up SOUTHCOM liaisons in our embassy in El Salvador and at JTF Bravo. I visited the latter frequently and traveled to DC to establish close relationships with appropriate intelligence organization in all of the National Intel Agencies. We worked hand in glove with CIA reps in Panama and SOUTHCOM and seconded a small military team under the station chief in El Salvador.

As we reviewed the situation in the late summer and fall of 1986 for every area of importance to the CINC, we identified several major gaps and misunderstanding. We then focused on filling in the intelligence as completely as we could. Our work to reach out to the broader intelligence community paid off. We treated others as team members, and since we were closer to what was happening "on-the-ground," they respected our work and helped us to improve collection and reporting. I believe that two key elements helped us come to describe that threat more accurately: General Galvin's direction to support Honduras as a key ally, and his priority on improving every aspect on SOUTHCOM's intelligence operations and reporting.

Annex E: Early Special Operations Force—What Came Before

by Colonel Tom Kuster

The key intervention was begun under Gen Paul Gorman, who initiated the "persistent presence" concept with a series of rolling exercises in Honduras—the overarching *AHAUS TARA* series and other smaller exercises of shorter duration. Though billed as efforts to enhance the interoperability between U.S. and Honduran forces, they were unequivocal efforts to demonstrate U.S. resolve to the Sandinistas and provide tripwires for U.S. engagement if any Sandinista conventional retaliation occurred against FDN safe havens in Honduras. [Note: These deployments were designed not to focus on the potential insurgency but were in support of the major War Plan. The advantages accrued from these deployments were the repeated contact SF detachments made with Honduran units and with the country as a whole.[34]]

The FOB 73 section in the attached is noteworthy. On the one hand, the FOB was a participant in an overt combined exercise framework to achieve interoperability and heightened proficiency with a key Honduran battalion on a strategic LOC; on the other hand, it had distinct missions emanating from SOUTHCOM, outside the context of the exercise, that actually drove its mission profile and task organization. The latter, however, were directly tasked by the CINC and unknown to the exercise JTF Commander, an example of how Gorman truly understood how to employ his Special Forces, strategically and operationally to achieve multiple objectives. … [Note: These missions were discontinued when Gen Gorman left the command]

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[34] From comments by Kevin M. Brew, Student, NWC

I. 1983-84: Central America

The inauguration of President Reagan brought about a significant shift in U.S. foreign policy—things were going to get significantly more proactive as national security attention turned increasingly to those arenas where the Soviet Union and its allies were challenging U.S. interests indirectly, fostering instability through insurgency and terrorism. The Sandinistas had recently toppled the regime of Somoza in Nicaragua, installing a virtual Cuban satellite on the mainland. For the 7th SFGA, that meant that Latin America and the Caribbean were back on the radar.

The Sandinista regime in Nicaragua, besides having the largest and best-equipped military force in Central America (supported from Cuba and the Soviet Union), was fostering the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN) in El Salvador. Cuba, of course, had ramped up its efforts to gain influence within the hemisphere and its hands were all over the situations in Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Colombia, to name the most obvious. The Mariel boatlift in October 1980 had soured U.S.-Cuban relations even further. All of these confronted the Reagan Administration as it took the controls of the ship of state.

In 1983, General Paul F. Gorman assumed command of the U.S. Southern Command in Panama. Gorman had recently been the J5 of the Joint Staff in Washington. He knew the "big picture" of national security and military strategic objectives from the Washington perspective; moreover, he knew how to influence the Pentagon and Services to support him. His Executive Assistant on the Joint Staff, Colonel Stuart Perkins,[35] assumed command of the 7th SFGA almost simultaneously. That personal relationship between the Theater Commander and "his" supporting Special Forces Group Commander would prove invaluable, on the one hand, while

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[35] Perkins had a long history of Special Forces assignments, both enlisted and as an officer, including MACVSOG, 8th Special Forces Group in Panama, 10th Special Forces Group and Special Operations Task Force Europe (SOTFE) in Europe. He was a Spanish and German linguist.

on the other, it caused all kinds of consternation for others on Smoke Bomb Hill and within the Army. The Group now had insights as to what exactly the CINC envisioned and what his expectations were for the Group to aid him in achieving his objectives. It also gave the CINC greater insights into what the obstacles were that were being faced by the Group, particularly those beyond the Group Commander's sphere of control in which the CINC's influence needed to be brought to bear to remedy them, i.e., manning, equipment, parts resupply priorities, funding for increased language training, etc.

Gorman recognized that a single SF battalion (3rd Bn, 7th SFGA), as allocated to SOUTHCOM in the Joint Strategic Capabilities Plan's Force Apportionment Annex, was not going to be able to provide SOUTHCOM the capacity that would be needed to take a more proactive posture throughout the region. The strategic intent would be to engage in a full-blown, low-intensity conflict across the theater (not simply a localized effort to buttress the government in El Salvador, albeit efforts there would also intensify). Foreign internal defense and counterinsurgency were to be the priority missions. Persistent presence, particularly in Central America, was going to be the routine, not simply a one-time, short-lived surge. Gorman intended to challenge any Sandinista or Cuban illusion of a lack of resolve on the part of the U.S.

The 7th Special Forces Group, as a result of the contraction of Special Forces units in the mid-1970s, found itself apportioned to three distinct Regional CINCs—all, obviously, with widely disparate mission requirements: (1) Pacific Command, with responsibility for all of Asia and the Pacific; (2) Southern Command, with responsibility for all of Latin America (less Mexico); and (3) Atlantic Command, principally for its Caribbean responsibilities. The threats ranged from potential conventional conflict on the Korean peninsula, contingency follow-on actions in Southeast Asia, communist-inspired insurgencies in Central and South America, instability in the Caribbean to include any contingencies

regarding Cuba, even including defense of Alaska in the event of conflict with the former Soviet Union. The breadth of the 7th Group's Mission Essential Task Lists and requisite language, area, and cultural orientation was staggering.

The efforts began immediately to reprioritize and reorganize the focus of the entire Group. Area orientation and theater alignment were shifted to apportion the entire Group to the CINC in SOUTHCOM, with LANTCOM relegated to a secondary priority and the Asia/Pacific responsibilities shifted to the 12th SFGA (USAR). Planning for involvement in the Korea exercise FOAL EAGLE was terminated.[36] 7th SFGA's long association with Asia/Pacific was now over. Latin America and the Caribbean were to be the sole focus, Job #1.

The area and language reorientation (away from Asia/Pacific focus to a Latin American focus) brought an immediate need to stock the Group with as many Spanish linguists, hopefully with regional experience, as possible and to do it fast. For some inexplicable reason, language orientation had not been an overriding factor in how the personnel management system determined where individuals were assigned. Guys who had been assigned to 3/7 SFGA in Panama (the majority of whom were Spanish linguists) were being parceled out to other units on Smoke Bomb Hill when they rotated back to the States; some had even been assigned to the European-focused 10th Special Forces Group at Fort Devens, Massachusetts. Some assignments made sense; guys with special skill sets being assigned as key instructors in the SF Schools system or if they held a senior grade (e.g., Sergeant Major) that had lower vacancies than the more junior enlisted grades. Some were amazingly nonsensical; one case was an African-American Weapons Sergeant (E-7, Sergeant First

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[36] 7th SFGA provided a small liaison element, under the control of the Group DCO, to facilitate the transition of the 12th SFGA into a primary role in FOAL EAGLE and continue with the 12th during the exercise (November 1983). After that the 7th SFGA essentially disengaged from involvement with USPACOM.

Class), fluent in both Spanish and Portuguese, who had been assigned from 3/7 SFGA to a SFOD-A in the 10th SFGA with an area orientation to Poland—not much chance that he'd survive behind Soviet lines in Poland trying to blend into the local population! BG Joe Lutz, then Commander of the USA JFK Center, perhaps recognizing that pressure was surely coming from Gorman or others, changed the rules, giving the Group carte blanche to screen all the other units for Spanish linguists so they could be identified for consideration for reassignment to the 7th SFGA. This was the first infusion and, as they came in, others with Pacific orientations who may even have had long linkages with the 7th SFGA were moved out to make room … a painful but necessary step.[37] New officers and NCOs who were coming out of the SF Qualification Course, and were destined for assignment to 7th SFGA, were cycled through Spanish language training (at Fort Bragg) before joining the Group. Those who failed to achieve basic proficiency (at the lowest level, i.e., 1-1) were diverted to other assignments whenever possible. Funding was identified to increase local Spanish language training at Fort Bragg facilities, to include the Army Education Centers. The command mantra was simple: "If you can't speak Spanish, you won't deploy. If you're non-deployable, we need to replace you." There was a swell of resistance, especially from those who feared being on the outside, looking in. The undertone was that the "Panama Mafia" was taking over the Group … and casting all others aside. The actual truth, however, was that mantra was right on target—we couldn't afford to carry anyone who wasn't going to contribute to the mission. If you weren't a linguist, able to operate with indigenous folks downrange, than you better have some unique skill that we really needed to justify your retention within the Group while you developed some degree of language proficiency. The intent from the SOUTHCOM Commander was

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[37] Many of the old Asia-Pacific hands who were moved out of the 7th SFGA were designated to form the core of the 1st SFGA Headquarters and the 1st SF battalion (Okinawa) that were in the very early stages of re-activation.

clear—he intended to employ the Group extensively within Honduras (and wherever else needed) to create persistent presence to counterbalance Cuban-Nicaraguan efforts to destabilize the area.

As this was occurring, significant command and control arrangements were also placed into effect. At that time (spring 1983), the SOUTHCOM special operations staff (J3 Special Operations Division) was a small staff component; Theater Special Operations Commands (TSOCs) had not been established and wouldn't be for several years. It was clear that funneling the relationship of the Group to the wider SOUTHCOM staff and CINC through that small J3-SOD component was not going to be either effective or efficient. The Group's relationship would become more of one like any other major component of the joint force, with a direct relationship to the J3 and Theater Operations Center for reporting, e.g., operations reporting, quarterly training briefings, readiness reporting, etc., and the Commander receiving command guidance and intent from the CINC (often directly). Neither the Army Component Commander (193d Infantry Brigade Panama) nor the Commander of the soon-to-be activated 1st US Army Special Operations Command (Provisional)[38] were in the operational chain of command for the conduct of activities directed by the SOUTHCOM CINC through his staff. The Group HQs at Fort Bragg converted from a peacetime construct to that of a Special Forces Operational Base as called for doctrinally, with an Operations Center and Support Center to manage all activities. The second floor of the Group HQ's building on Ardennes was secured with

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[38] As a result of a year-long Special Forces Mission Area Analysis that had been pushed by Army Chief of Staff GEN Shy Meyers, the Commander JFK Center (MG Joe Lutz) had been directed to reorganize and establish the 1st SOCOM (Provisional) in 1983. Meyer was well aware of growing pressure in the Congress for a major consolidation of all Special Operations Forces within a new functional Combatant Command and proactively postured Army Special Forces for the change he saw as inevitable. In 1986, Congress mandated the establishment of U.S. Special Operations Command.

access control, RATT rig communications were established 24/7 with forward deployed elements, Area Specialist Teams were staffed within the Operations Center to support deployed elements within an AST's assigned Area of Responsibility, Red Switch communications were emplaced to allow the CINC direct communications connectivity with the Commander and the Theater TOC with the SFOB Operations Center. Even small things began to change; rather than referring to "companies," the lexicon shifted to terms like B detachments, Forward Operating Bases (FOBs), Area Command Bases (ACBs), etc. While the administrative and sustainment relationship for the Group and the CONUS-based battalions remained through the 1st SOCOM (Provisional), the operational chain of command shifted to a direct support (DS) relationship between the Theater Command and the Group. Initially, the rank-imbalanced power struggle over who would ultimately control the operational employment of the 3rd SF Battalion in Panama played out between the Group Commander (a colonel) and the Commander of the 193rd Infantry Brigade (a major general), but in the end the SOUTHCOM CINC made it clear that all Special Forces assets would be managed and employed through the Group and its SFOB.[39]

The Regional Military Training Center (Centro Regional de Entrenamiento Militar, or CREM), on the northern coast of Honduras, serves as a case in point to demonstrate how quickly things did indeed change.

By 1982, it was clear that the Salvadoran Army needed a system that would enable refit, reconstitution, and retraining of its forces to

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[39] Ironically, the Army Component Commander in SOUTHCOM (MG Fred Woerner) would later become the CINC SOUTHCOM, but by that time, not only had the Goldwater-Nichols Defense Reorganization Act been placed into effect but his view from the Joint perspective outweighed his previous parochial Service view. Additionally, SOUTHCOM by that time had a Theater Special Operations Command (SOCSOUTH) to command and control theater special operations.

succeed in what was becoming a protracted counterinsurgency campaign against the FMLN. The existing facility in eastern El Salvador, the Centro de Entrenamiento Militar de las Fuerzas Armadas (CEMFA), handling basic and advanced individual training[40] and turning conscripts into soldiers, couldn't handle the expected demand, nor was the operational environment conducive to the objectives of focused collective training. Moreover, once the U.S. Congress put a ceiling on the number of U.S. military advisors in El Salvador at 55,[41] conduct of this mission inside El Salvador was essentially out of the question. The first choice for a training site outside the continental U.S. was at the U.S. Army School of the Americas, collocated at Fort Gulick, Panama with the 3rd SF Battalion 7th SFGA, but the Panamanian government denied the request to bring the Salvadoran units into Panama. Seeking an alternative that would neither stir any repercussions within the U.S. Congress nor incite internal opposition[42] within the host country, the decision to use Puerto Castilla,[43]

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[40] There was a continuous presence of Special Forces trainers at the CEMFA to guide the effort; formed as a Mobile Training Team, under the supervision of the USMILGP in San Salvador, the mission was primarily resourced from the 3d SF Bn 7th SFGA from Panama.

[41] There has always been a debate as to the genesis of the magic number "55" as the cap on U.S. advisors. The tale that resonates the most is that when questioned by the Congress as to how many advisory personnel he thought he would need authorized, General Gorman responded, "55." He had recently been briefed at Fort Gulick, Panama by the Commander of the 3rd SF Battalion, who had estimated that 55 SF personnel (as OPATTs, MTTs, etc.) would probably be needed to enhance the ESAF operational capability (a planning figure). That estimate did not include the multitude of non-SF requirements (logistics, communications, medical, aviation maintenance, etc.) that would also be needed to accomplish objectives outside the SF purview. In reaching for a number, he recalled the brief, and responded "55"—a cap that often became difficult to live within.

[42] There were conflicts in the Honduran Congress and opposition from various factions in Honduran society that the introduction of Salvadoran soldiers on Honduran soil was a violation of Honduras' declared neutrality. On 20 June

Honduras as the site for CREM was finalized in May 1982 when Honduras signed an amendment to a 1954 military collaboration agreement with the U.S.

The mission of establishing the training facility and actually conducting the training was a security assistance activity—funded via military aid packages, approved by the U.S. Congress, for El Salvador (and to a lesser degree, Honduras). Previously, security assistance projects (MTTs, TATs, etc.) had been managed on Smoke Bomb Hill by an office known as the Security Assistance and Training Management Office (SATMO) under the direction of the Commandant, U.S. Army Institute for Military Assistance. This endeavor was too big, too complex, and had too much at stake to have what was essentially an administrative staff element in charge. In the eyes of the CINC, the mission was one for the 7th SFGA. Though any and all requirements that may be called for to remain consistent with security assistance parameters would be observed, the command and control of the mission would be executed through normal operational command and control of Theater CINC (through the Theater TOC) to the Group Commander (through the SFOB Operations Center) to the U.S. Mission Commander (at the CREM).

The Commander C-71 (1st SF Battalion 7th SFGA) was given the CREM mission, organizing a multidisciplinary task force of trainers,

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1983, the National Congress held a closed-door session to vote on the existence of the base. A compromise to quiet the opposition stated that the Salvadorans would not be called soldiers but rather "students" and the U.S. military personnel would not be called advisors, but rather "instructors." Ironically, the personnel of the 7th SFGA had already arrived in-country the week before with all their equipment, and preparations were underway to begin the mission.

[43] Although two locations (Puerto Castilla and Trujillo, the capital of Colon department) were commonly referred to as the site of the CREM, it was actually about 20 minutes away from Puerto Castilla near the small town of Silin on about 140 hectares. A legal battle over the actual ownership of the land persisted in the Honduran courts for years.

logisticians, and communications personnel, to deploy to Honduras for the first increment of 179-day rotations that was to last through 1985 when the CREM closed. This first element had to start from scratch: No existing facility to begin with, no viable airfield to sustain and resupply the mission, no training infrastructure (ranges, training areas, etc.) … they had to start there before they could even begin accepting Salvadoran units for training. Task Force C-71 had to deploy to Honduras by sea—arrival by air wasn't an option. The landing strip at Trujillo couldn't accept the gross cargo weight of USAF aircraft, and ground movement by road from the major commercial airfields at San Pedro Sula or Tegucigalpa also wasn't possible. The coastal road network was primitive to say the best; they were virtually impassable during the rainy season. Sustainment was by sea until infrastructure could be developed.[44]

The mission was to convert units of the Salvadoran Army into special counterinsurgency battalions called "hunter" battalions or *cazadores* of about 350 men. Their mission was to complement the ESAF Infantry Brigades assigned a regional presence mission by conducting search and clear operations in areas occupied by the FMLN guerrillas, which the Salvadoran government would follow-up with reconstruction projects of social or economic development within a security framework to be provided by the regional brigade.[45] As a first step, however, the

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[44] Eventually the infrastructure around Trujillo and Puerto Castilla was significantly improved to sustain the CREM's operations. Existing docks were extended; a new dock was added. Warehouses were built. A petroleum storage facility was installed. The landing strip at Trujillo was extended. Roads to San Pedro Sula and La Cieba were repaired and asphalted, finally linking Puerto Castilla with Tegucigalpa. Other U.S. military units that came later for the multiple combined exercises that followed benefited from these improvements, as did the general economy of the area. When TF C-71 established its initial base camp they were almost completely flooded out by the first rainy season—no one anticipated just how bad the coastal flooding would actually be.

[45] Following a concept that would return in later years in both Iraq and Afghanistan to "clear, hold, secure, and sustain," providing an environment in

initial training was provided to a Honduran Army company that was assigned a security mission for the CREM. The ESAF units were not newly constituted; largely, they were battle-tested units that were undergoing refit and reconstitution. Both individual and collective tasks, culminating in battalion-level operations, were covered. Additionally, lessons learned and information on noted deficiencies that were being experienced by the U.S. Military Operational Planning and Training Teams (OPATTs) assigned to the ESAF Infantry Brigades were passed along to the training cadre at the CREM for incorporation into the program(s) of instruction to systemically spread them throughout the ESAF ground forces.

With efforts now underway to strengthen the operational capability of the Salvadoran Army to confront and succeed under the counterinsurgency combat conditions in their country, Gorman set his sights on key supporting objectives. Several key factors had to be addressed to meet the very real threat of Sandinista adventurism: the capabilities and resolve of Honduras had to be bolstered, lines of clandestine supply emanating from Nicaragua and Cuban had to be curtailed, and the threat of Sandinista incursions into Honduran territory to attack sanctuaries of the Nicaraguan opposition (commonly referred to as the Contras) had to be countered by clear demonstrations of U.S. resolve and genuine preparations to deal with such a contingency.

In February 1983, the United States and Honduras conducted a joint-combined military exercise, *AHAUS TARA* ("BIG PINE"), at that time the largest of its kind ever held in Honduras. It included roughly 1,500 U.S. military personnel[46] and over 4,000 members of the Honduran

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which the population could be secure from guerrilla action while the government sought to implement programs to win their confidence and meet social needs.
[46] Billed as an exercise to improve the interoperability of combined forces, it included a wide variety of US military elements. US Army elements provided mobility for Honduran forces and logistics and communications support. US

Armed Forces, but the level of participation of Special Forces was marginal. To continue U.S. engagement, SOUTHCOM immediately began the planning of a follow-on exercise, *AHAUS TARA II,* to begin in August. *AHAUS TARA II* was to be a considerably more extensive military exercise, involving over 5,000 U.S. military personnel with a JTF HQs (JTF-11) provided by Readiness Command (REDCOM) in Tampa to provide command and control. This exercise, however, was to have a much greater participation by Special Forces from the 7th SFGA. The Group, however, would find itself operating off two distinct task menus—one generated by the exercise planners and command element from REDCOM and another with much more significant real-world implications provided through the CINC and J3 of SOUTHCOM but not shared with the REDCOM JTF and its exercise planners and staff.

In the general exercise plan, 7th SFGA was called upon to plan and conduct a series of small-unit counterinsurgency exercises with the 11th Infantry Battalion of the Honduran Army, essentially to build upon the skills that they had received from an MTT from 3rd SF Bn 7th SFGA during the previous *AHAUS TARA I*. The 11th Infantry Battalion's cantonment area (*cuartel*) was strategically located in southern Honduras astride the Pan American Highway. The wider operational mission for the Group that was not addressed in the exercise plan, however, had many more moving parts.

True, there was a mission to conduct small-unit exercises, eventually culminating in battalion-level operations and planning, but there were other objectives beyond merely enhancing the proficiency of the unit in its individual and collective tasks. The exercises were to expand the operational presence of the battalion throughout its assigned sector away from the "close to the *cuartel*" modus operandi that had existed up

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Navy elements included two landing ships and landing craft for amphibious movement. USAF coordinated and supported air supply and sustainment operations as well as airfield and air traffic control.

to that time, while achieving a degree of interoperability with U.S. forces. These would be the same objectives for most of the other U.S. military units that would be participating in the *AHUAS TARA* II exercise, regardless of their Service or function.

However, beyond the awareness of the other exercise participants and the JTF cadre, the Group had additional tasks with more real-world connotations—tasks that significantly changed the SF component's profile from a simple exercise unit to something else. To understand these missions and their role in the overall strategic intent of the CINC, one has to appreciate not only the political-military environment of the situation but also the geographic importance of where the 7th SFGA's activities were to occur.
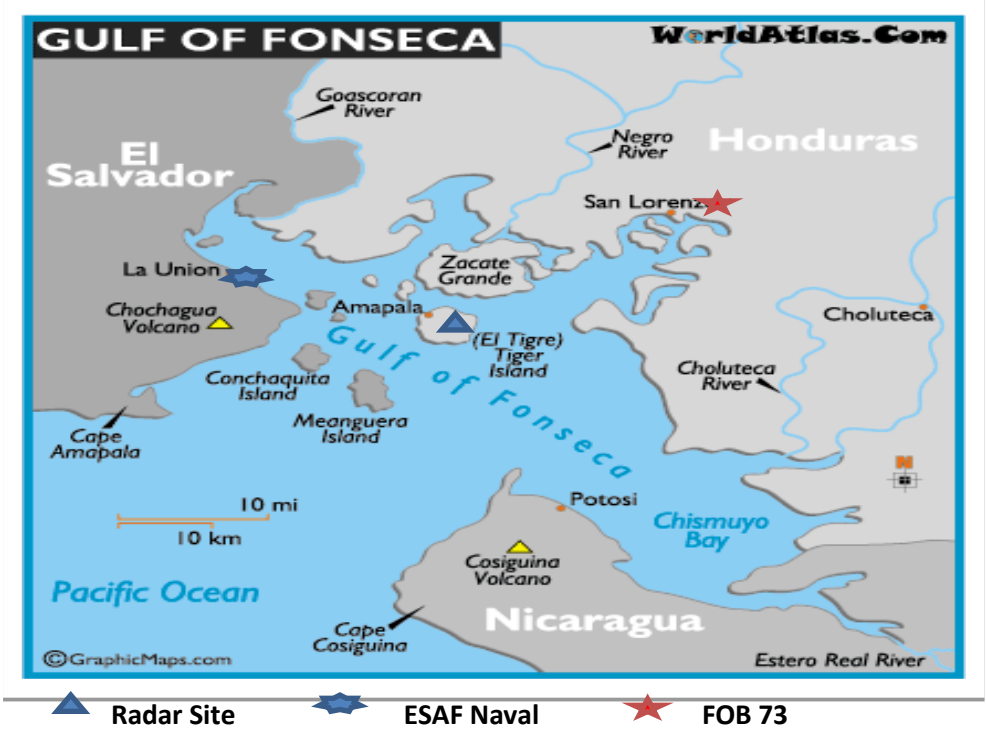
Figure 1: Gulf of Fonseca

The Gulf of Fonseca was a strategic LOC for Sandinista resupply of the FMLN insurgency in El Salvador. It provided direct maritime access for small craft, fishing vessels, etc., from Nicaraguan ports, particularly Potosi, to the southern coast of El Salvador to include access to the Lempa River. The Pan American Highway transited from Nicaragua along the Honduran coast into El Salvador, providing another key LOC for smuggling of weapons, munitions, and key equipment. In the lexicon of any military planner, the area was key terrain for the adversary. From another perspective, it was also key terrain to support the introduction of

U.S. force and sustainment into southern Honduras if a Sandinista invasion were to occur. The only viable docking area along the southern coast was near San Lorenzo, a short distance from the 11th Infantry Battalion's *cuartel*. To the western side of San Lorenzo was a rudimentary landing strip that, if enhanced, could be used as an air LOC. Tiger Island, a short distance off the coastline, provided excellent sight lines for radar to track maritime and air movement across the Gulf. The reasons why Gorman wanted 7th SFGA smack dab in the middle were blatantly obvious to the Group planners but largely escaped the understanding of many in the JTF, who were firmly entrenched in an "exercise" mentality.

The mission analysis at the Group level led to the development of a set of core missions that would drive all subsequent planning, particularly the task organization, i.e., its versatility, its robustness, and its preparedness to rapidly shift from an exercise paradigm to combat operations:

- Through persistent presence, deter and disrupt smuggling of weapons and supplies from Nicaragua to the Salvadoran guerrillas via the Pan American Highway LOC
- Expand proficiency and operational reach of the Honduran units(s) in order to be prepared to oppose/obstruct a Sandinista incursion across their border in the sectors paralleling the Pan American Highway; be prepared to counter a Sandinista incursion (to include anti-armor) along the Pan American Highway by force
- Conduct active force protection and situational awareness
- Maintain a mobile Quick Reaction Force capable of reinforcing Tiger Island and other contingencies as directed by SOUTHCOM

The mission clearly called for a Forward Operating Base (FOB) capable of conducting independent operations, with minimal reliance on

support from other U.S. forces that may be in-country. FOB 73[47] was tasked organized much like the Special Action Force concept originated by the 8th SFGA in the 1960s. The FOB C2 element was based on the larger SFOD-B model of the 70s with a full staff, S1 through S-5. Six SFOD-As were assigned.[48] The Group's Aviation Platoon was attached,[49] along with a PsyOps/Civil Affairs team to handle civil-military operations and civic action.[50] Additional engineer capacity was considered, primarily to assist in the construction of defensive positions (and to support civic action projects), but the idea was jettisoned when SOUTHCOM planners decided to collocate an Army Engineer Battalion with the FOB to improve both the docking piers and the austere landing strip to support contingencies requiring rapid reinforcement. The engineers were to be assigned an additional mission to support construction needs of the FOB.

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[47] The "73" designation was based on the fact that the then 3/7 SFGA Executive Officer (i.e., C-73) MAJ Phil Kensinger was to be FOB Commander. A fluent Spanish speaker was deemed essential to lead the mission, given the anticipated need to interact routinely with not only the Honduran 11th Battalion Commander, but others throughout the Honduran General Staff. LTG Kensinger would later culminate his career as the Commander of the U.S. Army Special Operations Command.

[48] One of the SFOD-As was detached from the FOB location at San Lorenzo and positioned on Tiger Island to lead the security efforts that protected the radar and communications facilities on top of the mountain and the OGA maritime activities at the base.

[49] The UH-1Hs operated from the FOB location; the 101st Air Assault Aviation Battalion based in Palmerola provided lift support to all other U.S. forces. To ensure the operational readiness of the FOB's helos, the 7th SFGA SFOB requested that SOUTHCOM direct a higher priority (FAD-1) for the FOB 73 Aviation Platoon for parts, supplies, fuels, lubricants, etc. A Forward Area Refuel and Re-arming Point (FARRP) were established at the FOB and to their great consternation the 101st Aviation Battalion was tasked to support any needs of the FOB Aviation Platoon as a mission-essential priority.

[50] Augmentation to the PsyOps/CA team was rolled in and out throughout the deployment to support a wide variety of civic action activities, such as dental, veterinary, well drilling, etc.

SOT-As from the Group's Military Intelligence Company, as well as counterintelligence personnel, were also included in the FOB's force package. If that wasn't enough, the package also required that a Secure Compartmented Information Facility (SCIF) be established at the FOB; without it, the SOT-As would have been marginalized and the FOB's connectivity to real-time sensitive intelligence from SOUTHCOM would not have existed. SOUTHCOM validated the need and requested the full support of the DIRNSA to make it happen, which it did. The only SCIF operational within the U.S. forces engaged in *AHUAS TARA II* was at FOB 73—something that should have been a signal to the planners in REDCOM and JTF-11 that there was more involved in the FOB 73 mission than it appeared.

As an aside, a little-known aspect shows the attention to detail and the level of preparations involved in the pre-deployment ramp-up for the mission. A pre-deployment site survey (PDSS) to the Honduran 11th Battalion discovered that the unit's proclivity to avoid extended patrolling was partially based on the fact that they had no means to resupply forward elements in the difficult terrain throughout their sector. The survey team itself had rented horses from local *campesinos* to do their off-road area reconnaissance, but the Honduran military had never considered that option. With these insights gleaned from the PDSS, the Group arranged for some members of the deploying SFOD-As to attend a civilian mule-skinning school in Pocatello, Idaho, where they learned the fundamentals of load packing and horsemanship in order to provide advisory assistance to the Hondurans on what was going to be for them a new method of resupply.

FOB 73 deployed to Honduras in August 1983 with a full combat load, plus all the training aids and equipment they'd need to conduct the individual and collective training of the 11th Battalion. Additionally, they brought in the materials (sandbags, concertina wire) that they would need

to convert the sleepy Honduran *cuartel* into the virtual firebase it quickly became.

With the CREM operating full bore on the north coast and FOB 73 in the south, the SFOB established a Forward Area Support Team (FAST) in Tegucigalpa to facilitate reception, staging, and onward integration (RSOI) of unit personnel and equipment moving through either the JTF 11 military airhead in Palmerola or the commercial facilities at Toncontin Airport in Tegucigalpa and to coordinate any matters with the Honduran General Staff that may be required. The FAST, led by a captain with several experienced E7s/E8s, all fluent linguists, was attached to the USMILGP but authorized direct liaison with key Embassy staff (e.g., Chief of Station, USAID Coordinator, etc.) to represent the Group's interests. This decision proved immeasurably productive, not only in support of the CREM and FOBs,[51] but also for the many other SF MTTs and smaller-scale combined exercises that emerged in 1984, e.g., the Area Command Base/SFOD-As in Mocoron, Jutigalpa, Tamara and Mercala.

While all this activity surrounding FOB 73's missions was underway, the Group couldn't afford to forget about the crucial issue of effectively sustaining the operational tempo. The troops at the CREM were on a 179-day rotational cycle; we were gearing up the second rotation back at Bragg to assume the mission from the first group. They were undergoing an intensive pre-deployment training and review cycle. Additionally, as soon as FOB 73 was out the gate and operational, SOUTHCOM generated another major requirement for a presence and training mission. The Group had fully anticipated that General Gorman

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[51] An additional FOB (FOB 72) was deployed to Palmerola in early 1984 to command and control similar combined exercises (individual and collective training) with Honduran battalions along the border areas of El Salvador/Honduras and the El Salvador/Honduras/Guatemala tri-border area. Much like its counterpart (FOB 73), FOB 72 had a strategic mission beyond the training mission.

would want FOB 73 fully operational well beyond the life cycle of the *AHAUS TARA II* exercise and was planning on doing so, requiring that the troops there would have to rotate out no later than January 1984 in order to stay within the restraints of Army deployment policy. Army regulations at that time required that a soldier could not be deployed in a temporary duty status overseas for more than 179 consecutive days, unless deployed in *declared hostilities*. For all intents and purposes, we were at peace, not a state of declared hostilities, so we decided that we needed to establish a prudent rotation plan so that the guys could plan their lives with some degree of assuredness. Regardless of the nobility of that goal and how many times we revised the plan, we were constantly behind the eight-ball for one simple reason: The requirements emanating from SOUTHCOM kept expanding … sometimes small, sometimes large. There was no point, however, where we reached a "stop that one, in order to do a new one" stage; it was always "keep up what you're doing and add this one."

AHAUS TARA III would immediately follow the *AHAUS TARA II* exercise and FOB 73 would roll along without skipping a beat. Additionally, however, there was another requirement—one that would require another FOB. This one would focus on combined exercises with Honduran Army units assigned in the western portion of the country, along the border areas of El Salvador/Honduras and the El Salvador/Honduras/Guatemala tri-border area. Much like its counterpart FOB 73, FOB 72, as we would designate it, had a strategic mission beyond the training mission. As Salvadoran military operations against the FMLN improved, the guerrillas began to seek the sanctuary of the contested border areas (*bulsones*) resulting from the 1969 Soccer War between El Salvador and Honduras. These five areas were essentially "no man's lands" where neither the Salvadoran nor the Honduran military would enter to exert influence because of the fear that each would perceive such actions by the other as a violation of Organization of American States negotiated cease-fire that ended the war and the eventual peace treaty that

both nations signed in 1980. The peace treaty left the adjudication of the status of the disputed border demarcation to the International Court of Justice, but at that time in 1983–84, the Court had not addressed the matter and it remained a sore point, particularly between the two militaries. With no sovereign force within the *bulsones*, the FMLN guerrillas had a secure safe haven—one where they could rest their forces, conduct training, stage and store resupplies, care for and rehabilitate their wounded, etc. Not only wouldn't either the Honduran or Salvadoran military employ any ground forces into those areas, they both also proscribed any indirect fire (artillery, mortars) or aerial fire (from helicopters or fixed wing aircraft) into those zones. The results were camps within the *bulsones*, fully evident in overhead photography, operating with impunity and completely unchallenged. The hope was that SF trainers with the Honduran Battalions and the SF OPATTs with the Salvadoran brigades and *cazadores* could influence the extant military animosity sufficiently so that the countries' militaries would cooperate in operations against the FMLN sanctuaries, under agreed-upon conditions … even if the U.S. SOF personnel had to act as the facilitators of that coordination and cooperation.

Though the FOB 72 mission was not expected to launch until late 1983 or early 1984, planning began in earnest in September 1983. One immediate wrinkle that was thrown into the mix by SOUTHCOM was an additional requirement for FOB 72 to provide secure compartmented intelligence support to the *AHAUS TARA III* Joint Task Force Headquarters that would be set up at Palmerola Air Base in Comayagua, Honduras. That wasn't something that we'd expected. We surely anticipated we'd deploy FOB 72 with a SCIF capability, similar and compatible with that already cranking at FOB 73 so that it had connectivity to national intelligence systems, particularly the National Security Agency, but we envisioned basing FOB 72 near the town of Santa Rosa de Copan near the tri-border area, not in Palmerola, which was in a more centralized location within Honduras. To adjust we did as we

were directed, placing components (to include the SCIF) of FOB 72 in Palmerola but positioned a large chunk of the staff and all the actual SFOD-As at the forward location near Santa Rosa de Copan, with the SFOD-As dispersed to the Honduran units they'd be operating with. One was designated FOB 72 (at Palmerola); the operational satellite was designated FOB 72X (at Santa Rosa). Just like some sort of amoeba, once FOB 72 launched the SF presence was all over the map of Honduras.

One of the interesting dilemmas that the Group encountered throughout the Central America campaign was the difference in funding streams that applied to the different activities. There were fundamentally three distinct categories:

- The CREM was a security assistance activity, which placed it under a distinct regulatory regime under the oversight of the Army's security assistance structure. The funding of supplies and materials required certain accountability and billing procedures; also, the Group's personnel who participated in the mission at the CREM were authorized a certain per diem since they were essentially a "mobile training team" … albeit not very mobile.
- The Group's personnel at the FOB locations (72, 72X, and 73), however, were under "field conditions" participating in combined exercises, so per diem wasn't authorized. Any transfer of materials to their partnered Honduran units had to be justified as occurring only to ensure the attainment of the "U.S. training objectives." This issue precipitated a number of audits and investigations as to whether such simple items as paper targets used by the Hondurans during marksmanship exercises should have been billed to the Honduran military rather than be provided from Group resources as an essential element to the attainment of the Group's training objectives. The Group's position was that the provision of key consumables within the context of the combined exercises

contributed to the maintenance of our Foreign Internal Defense core tasks (individual and collective) such as area/language immersion, training techniques, etc.; moreover, the overarching objective of achieving a confident degree of interoperability with Honduran forces in order to support the Group's ability to support combined operations that may be required by USSOUTHCOM in defense of Honduras or U.S. forces in-country. The concept of what became known as "Deployments for Training" (DFTs) eventually emerged and became a more acceptable practice. In later years (post-9/11), Congress granted specific authority to the Commander U.S. Special Operations Command to fund such activities with partner nations in support of the war on terror.

- The FAST in Tegucigalpa was TDY with full per diem allowances to include lodging allowance.

To achieve some degree of *equity* between the three, the Group also had to carefully manage the rotation of teams (and individuals) between the venues since assignment to each locale was compensated differently and the expectation was that the op tempo would not diminish in the foreseeable future.

The implications to the overall Group budget were also profound, factoring in significantly increased blade hours; repair parts and resupply for the FOBs; increased TDY budgets for travels to theater for planning and briefings, etc.; increased training costs for language training (or refresher) for new personnel; and many other unforecasted requirements. The "peacetime" forecasts in 1982 had in no way anticipated what would occur in 1983 and 1984. This caused ripples within the overall 1st SOCOM budget, requiring the diversion of funds from other 1st SOCOM accounts to sustain the 7th SFGA operational requirements. The Group Comptroller became more and more a key participant in the internal operational planning process.

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