J. Lat. Amer. Stud. **33**, 539–560 © 2001 Cambridge University Press
DOI: 10.1017/S0022216X01006149 Printed in the United Kingdom

The Public Battles over Militarisation and Democracy in Honduras, 1954–1963*

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Abstract. This article examines the process of militarisation in Honduras in the 1954–1963 period, also the public reaction to it and its political consequences. The extant literature ignores the significant public opposition to an institutionalised military. As an autonomous military institution was first taking shape in the 1954–57 period, the militarisation issue was one of the dominant themes in the national press, and a sophisticated public debate took place between school teachers and military officials over whether the country needed a military at all, or whether the country should follow the Costa Rican example of military proscription. The 1957–59 period witnessed pressures from politicians, students, and labour to curtail military power and excesses. Finally, the platform of the favourite candidate in the 1963 presidential elections called for demilitarisation and again the Costa Rican model was a high-profile alternative. Demilitarisation played well with the masses, and this contributed to the preemptive military coup just days before the elections. Militarisation affected power relations and undermined democratic consolidation.

Two negative images have dominated popular press and scholarly accounts of Honduras: the banana republic and the militarised state. During the first half of this century, popular magazines regularly referred to this country as the quintessential banana republic, and with good reason. Bananas totally dominated the country's exports, and banana companies strongly influenced the country's politics. Battles for land and competition for political influence between Samuel Zemurrey (the Banana-Man) and the United Fruit Company (the Octopus) often helped determine the identity of the country's president, and led to wars and the regular intervention of US Marines.[1] Domestic and international peace

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* The author thanks Víctor Hugo Acuña, Mario Argueta, Marvin Barahona, Rafael del Cid, Matías Funes, Jonathan Hartlyn, Evelyne Huber, Lisa Jacobs, Ramón Oquelí, Leticia Salomón, Lars Schoultz, the staff of the Honduran National Archives in Tegucigalpa and the anonymous referees from the *JLAS*. Research was assisted by the International Predissertation Fellowship Program with funds from the Ford Foundation and the American Council of Learned Societies, and by the Graduate College of the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

[1] An excellent and dispassionate account of US political and economic influence in Honduras in the 1907–1932 period is Marvin Barahona, *La hegemonía de los Estados Unidos en Honduras (1907–1932)* (Tegucigalpa, 1989).

was only possible after the banana archenemies merged in 1929.[2] In contrast to the earlier news reports, media stories and scholarly accounts in the 1960–1990 period most often focused on an intransigent and anti-democratic military caste, the human rights abuses of the security forces, and the US–Honduran military alliance against the Sandinistas. Constant in the portrayal of banana-company dominance or military omnipotence is the sentiment that Hondurans and Honduras were powerless and voiceless.[3]

Another widespread opinion is that modern states require an institutionalised military. This proposition is supported by two distinct strands of social science – one in the field of comparative politics/sociology and the other in the field of international relations. Comparativists interested in state formation and capacity often build on the Weberian proposition that states have a monopoly on the legitimate use of violence and effective control of a specific territory.[4] State-building and war-making are two sides of the same coin.[5] In recent years, Jeanne Kirkpatrick charged that Costa Rica was not even a legitimate state as it had no military.[6] In the field of international relations both realist and neo-realist schools posit that states seek to increase military power vis-à-vis competitors or enemies.[7] Given the ubiquitous expectation that countries would naturally build military institutions during the process of state

[2] Zemurrey's Cuyamel Banana Company supported the Liberal Party and the United Fruit Company supported the National Party. See Héctor Pérez B., *Breve historia de Centroamérica* (Madrid, 1988), p. 119.

[3] The perception of many scholars that the entire country was powerless in the face of international actors is evident in the titles of such scholarly books such as Nancy Peckenham and Annie Street (eds.), *Honduras: Portrait of a Captive Nation* (New York, 1985) and Richard Lapper and James Painter, *Honduras: State for Sale* (New York, 1986). Perceptions of Honduras and Hondurans in the international press have been uniformly negative. 'Every time that our country's name appears in the international press, it is because something bad has happened. Never, or almost never, are we mentioned for some positive action, for something that would really make us proud' in Víctor Meza, *Política y sociedad en Honduras: Comentarios* (Tegucigalpa, 1981), p. 23.

[4] A classic work on the state is P. Evans, D. Rueschemeyer and T. Skocpol, *Bringing the State Back In* (New York, 1985).

[5] See Charles Tilly, *Coercion, Capital and European States, AD 990–1990* (Cambridge, MA, 1990).

[6] In 1981 US Ambassador to the UN Jeanne Kirkpatrick informed Costa Rica that further US economic aid would be predicated on the re-creation of a professional army (Jan Knippers Black, *Sentinals of Empire: The United States and Latin American Militarism* (New York, 1986), p. 186). Kirkpatrick chided the Costa Ricans, telling them that 'Costa Rica is not a viable country because it has no military' (author's interview with Oscar Arias, 24 Nov. 1997, San José, Costa Rica).

[7] For a compelling discussion of this issue see Carlos Escudé, 'International Relations Theory: A Peripheral Perspective', Working Paper, Universidad Torcuato di Tella, Buenos Aires, 1993.

modernisation, it is no surprise that scholars fail to investigate the balance of forces that respectively supported and opposed the emergence of military institutionalisation and autonomy in developing countries.

This article deals with Honduran militarisation in the 1954–1963 period. Militarisation refers to the expansion or relative size of some integral part, scope or mission of the armed forces, and may be observed in the size of the budget, number of soldiers, training, equipping, war-readiness and institutionalisation of the armed forces.[8] As a secondary definition that is particularly salient in the Honduran case, politics can also become militarised when one observes an increase in military prerogatives and influence in political decision-making. As has been well documented, the Honduran military was extraordinarily impotent as an institution before 1950.[9] Indeed, in his classic study of important Honduran political actors published in 1950, Stokes does not mention the military as an institution even once.[10] The subsequent emergence of autonomous military political power was rapid and overwhelming, particularly during the 1954–1957 period. This process has been well understood since Ropp's 1974 article. The lacuna that endures is an account of the opposition to militarisation. Were Hondurans so docile that they were passionless observers of the militarisation of the state? Was there no public debate? Was the Costa Rican model of armed forces proscription completely ignored?[11] Was militarisation a natural part of state-building? This article reveals that, in reality, many Hondurans held very strong opinions about the effect of militarisation on democracy and nation-building. Honduran antipathy towards militarisation became an important part of the national political dialogue during three separate periods. A long and sophisticated public debate on whether or not Honduras even needed an army was waged in a leading newspaper from May 1954 to June

[8] This conceptualisation of militarisation is used regularly by scholars in both qualitative and quantitative research, see for example Phillip Williams and Knut Walters, *Militarization and Demilitarization in El Salvador's Transition to Democracy* (Pittsburgh, 1998) and Brad Bullock and Glen Firebaugh, 'Gun and Butter? The Effect of Militarization on Economic and Social Development in the Third World', *Journal of Political and Military Sociology*, vol. 18, no. 2 (1990).

[9] See Kirk Bowman '(De)Militarisation, State Capacity, and Development in Latin America', unpubl. Phd diss., University of North Carolina, 1998; Matías Funes, *Los Deliberantes: el poder militar en Honduras* (Tegucigalpa, 1995); Steve Ropp, 'The Honduran Army in the Sociopolitical Evolution of the Honduran State', *The Americas*, vol. 30, 1974; J. Mark Ruhl, 'Redefining Civil-Military Relations in Honduras', *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs*, vol. 38, no. 1 (1996), p. 35; and Leticia Salomón, *Política y militares en Honduras* (Tegucigalpa, 1992).

[10] William Stokes, *Honduras: An Area Study in Government* (Madison, 1950).

[11] The Costa Rican army was proscribed in 1948–1949, just before the militarisation period in Honduras.

1957.[12] After the military had achieved constitutional autonomy and the power to dominate the political arena in 1957, there was a second public debate – this time by politicians and university students in 1959 – to rein in the generals. Finally, demilitarisation became an important issue in the 1963 electoral campaign, and contributed to the preemptive military coup a few days before the scheduled balloting.

While the primary purpose of this article is to document the interplay between militarisation and public reactions to it in Honduras, the findings also shed some light on the democratisation process. Rueschemeyer et al. posit that three power relations are important for democracy; the state apparatus, transnational power relations, and class power relations. The authors argue that a strong military negatively affects each of these three power relations in Latin America and 'is quite unfavourable for democracy'.[13] Bowman employs inferential statistics to test the relationship, and reports that the size of the military or annual budget has a significant negative effect on democracy in Latin American in the 1973–1986 period.[14] And Muller quite ingeniously demonstrates the causal linkage between US Cold War military assistance and democratic collapse in less-developed countries.[15] The Honduran case helps to flesh out the causal mechanism between militarisation and democracy and to establish sequence and agency in the posited negative relationship.

[12] This article is largely based on Honduran newspapers from the 1954–1963 period that the author read in the Honduran National Archives in Tegucigalpa. The principal newspaper used is *El Cronista* because it was the most independent of the newspapers of the time and was the closest thing to a newspaper of record for the country, though the paper had its biases and a limited footprint. *El Cronista* was a Tegucigalpa-based daily that was published regularly from 1953–81 and had an estimated circulation of 10,000. In the 1950s, Honduras was largely illiterate and *El Cronista*'s impact was mainly among Tegucigalpa's intellectual elite and literate rural merchants and landowners. Nevertheless, this was the doyen of Honduran newspapers and is regularly used by scholars such as Funes to document the 1950s. It is also important to note that the paper provided both sides of the militarisation debate an ample public forum over a three-year period and that the participants in the public dialogue were from as far away as Copán. For more on *El Cronista* and the Honduran press see M. Gardner, 'The Press in Honduras: A Portrait of Five Dailies', *The Journalism Quarterly*, vol. 40 (1963); and Darío Euraque, 'Social Structure and the Emergence of the Bourgeois Press in Honduras: A Historical Perspective', unpubl. MA thesis, University of Wisconsin, 1986.

[13] D. Rueschemeyer, E. Huber Stephens and J. Stephens, *Capitalist Development and Democracy* (Chicago, 1992), p. 67.

[14] Kirk Bowman, 'Militarization and Democracy in Latin America', *Journal of Peace Research*, vol. 33, no. 3 (1996). For a larger number of countries, the same negative relationship is reported in A. Hadenius, *Democracy and Development* (Cambridge, 1992).

[15] Edward Muller, 'Dependent Economic Development, Aid Development on the United States, and Democratic Breakdown in the Third World', *International Studies Quarterly*, vol. 29, no. 4 (1985).

From Caudillo Politics to Militarisation

One of the common errors committed by observers of modern Central America is to believe that these countries were always saddled with powerful and professional military institutions. Yashar and others single out Costa Rica as the exception in Latin America for having a small military as measured by soldiers per capita.[16] In fact, in the first half of this century, Costa Rica had more soldiers per capita than Honduras, and the military was also more institutionalised in Costa Rica than in Honduras.[17] Unlike any of the other five Central American republics, the military had no political influence in Honduras 1900–1950. Indeed, it is difficult to find any mention of the military institution in Honduran newspapers before 1954. Honduras simply did not have institutionalised and professional armed forces until the 1950s.[18] The national military academy was not founded until 1952, and it was not until 1954 that the armed forces declared its first organic law.[19] The lack of forced labour may have inhibited early militarisation: '... the existence in El Salvador and Guatemala by the late nineteenth century of relatively strong military academies, supported by relatively solid financial ties with their respective states, permitted, generally speaking, more organic relationships between coffee oligarchies in these countries and 'their' governments. Such relationships resulted from the repressive police force and military necessary to sustain the exploitative labor relations' that did not exist in Honduras or Costa Rica.[20]

This does not mean that the country was free of militarist caudillos and civil war. Tábora and Holden document the high levels of violence in Honduras, much of it state-sponsored.[21] There were 146 military engagements between 1870 and 1949, most having fewer than 50–100 deaths.[22] But, most observers agree with Ropp that 'it seems clear that no military *institution* existed in Honduras ...'[23] These revolts were often simple and fierce quests for political power that many times resulted from

[16] Deborah Yashar, *Demanding Democracy: Reform and Reaction in Costa Rica and Guatemala, 1870s-1950s* (Stanford, 1997), p. 53.
[17] Mercedes Muñoz, *El estado y la abolición del ejército, 1914–1949* (San José, 1990), p. 167.
[18] Funes, *Los Deliberantes*; Ropp 'The Honduran Army'; and Salomón, *Política y militares*.
[19] J. M. Ruhl, 'Redefining Civil-Military Relations in Honduras', *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs*, vol. 38, no. 1 (1996), p. 35.
[20] Darío Euraque, *Reinterpreting the Banana Republic: Region and State in Honduras, 1870–1972* (Chapel Hill, 1996), p. 49.
[21] Robert Holden, 'Constructing the Limits of State Violence in Central America: Towards a New Research Agenda', *Journal of Latin American Studies*, vol. 28 (1996); and R. Tábora, *Masculinidad y violencia en la cultura política hondureña* (Tegucigalpa, 1995).
[22] Euraque, *Reinterpreting*, p. 45.
[23] Ropp, 'The Honduran Army', p. 515.

the fact that winning presidential candidates rarely received the fifty percent of the vote necessary to win the elections. When the candidate with the most votes was denied office by the congress, a revolt often ensued. The opposing sides were not militaries but largely unorganised militias.[24] The combatants were not professional soldiers, and are well described by a US diplomat:

> Many, perhaps the majority of the men which made up the armies' litigants did not know why they fought … On the other hand many were primarily interested, which is natural given the circumstances, in ending up on the winning side; and when the momentum of the battle shifted, desertion was complete. The commanders had no uniforms, just armbands. The soldiers were not liberals or conservatives but merely blues or reds. It was not uncommon that a blue soldier carried in his pocket an armband of the reds or vice-a-versa, and he did not hesitate in changing when the moment arrived.[25]

In the annals of Honduran history, 1954 will always be a critical year of watershed events that shaped the future of the country; the great banana strike, the use of Honduran soil to launch the invasion against Arbenz, and the signing of the Bilateral Treaty of Military Assistance with the United States. The great banana strike began on 2 May 1954 when a workers' spokesman was terminated for demanding extra pay for work on Sunday. Within days, some 25,000 UFCO workers and 15,000 Standard Fruit workers were on a strike that would last sixty-nine days and would cost millions of dollars.[26] Miners, brewers and other workers soon joined the strike, letting loose pent-up frustration from the stifling Carías years; the modern Honduran working class was born. What is surprising is that many among the national bourgeoisie and especially the North Coast emerging industrialists, the majority of which had received seed money from banana companies, supported the striking workers. North Coast elites donated large sums of money to the striking workers and many commercial and manufacturing elites formed the Committee to Help the Banana Strikers.[27] The strike was finally settled through repression and incentives, and a US-assisted campaign to smear the strikers as communist collaborators of the Arbenz government. The resulting settlement was a disappointment, but the strike was a long-term victory as it resulted in the

[24] Holden argues that at least in the 1889–1899 period, the Honduran military may have been more institutionalised than previously thought (Robert Holden, 'El carácter del ejército de Honduras a finales del siglo XIX: ¿Bandas armadas o institución nacional?,' *Revista de Historia* (July, 1997) (Managua, Nicaragua).

[25] Quoted in Funes, *Los Deliberantes*, p. 115.

[26] Donald Schulz and Deborah Sundloff Schulz, *The United States, Honduras, and the Crisis in Central America* (Boulder, CO, 1994), pp. 20–3.

[27] Euraque, *Reinterpreting*, pp. 92–4.

legalisation of unions, an eight-hour day, paid vacations, and overtime pay.[28]

The second important event in 1954 was when President Gálvez permitted the use of Honduran soil to launch the US-inspired invasion of elected President Jacobo Arbenz in Guatemala. The negative impact of Honduran involvement in this anti-democratic action goes far beyond the stain of shame for the country and the Gálvez regime. On 20 May 1954, in a quid pro quo for Honduran support for the Castillo Armas invasion and as a continuation of US policy of military assistance treaties,[29] the United States and Honduras signed a Bilateral Agreement of Military Assistance.[30] The agreement called for US military aid in exchange for free access to any materials required by the United States as a result of deficiencies or potential deficiencies in its own resources. The Honduran First Infantry Battalion was organised by the United States on 20 July 1954 – less than one month after the fall of Arbenz – and remained under US jurisdiction until August 1956.[31] With alleged communists in neighbouring Guatemala and Leftists participating in the banana strikes, the USA wanted insurance for their many investments. In 1950, George Kennan detailed future US strategy for Latin America in the face of communist threats:

> The final answer might be an unpleasant one, but … we should not hesitate before police repression of the local government. This is not shameful since the Communists are essentially traitors … It is better to have a strong regime in power than a liberal government if it is indulgent and relaxed and penetrated by Communists.[32]

The United States had previously encouraged militarisation in the country. The Lend–Lease programme was used by Carías to improve the air force. By 1942, the country had 22 airforce planes and a host of US-

[28] Schulz and Schulz, *The United States*, pp. 20–3.

[29] In March 1950, State Department official George Kennan stated the three goals of US policy in Latin America: the protection of 'our' raw materials; the prevention of military exploitation of Latin America by enemies; and the prevention of the psychological mobilisation of Latin America against the USA (Walter LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions: The United States in Central America* (New York, 1984), p. 107).

[30] Salomón, *Política*, p. 7.

[31] Funes, *Los Deliberantes*, p. 160.

[32] Quoted in Peter Smith, *Talons of the Eagle: Dynamics of U.S.–Latin American Relations* (New York, 1996), p. 126. US efforts to enhance the internal focus of the Latin American military dovetailed with the historical development of these institutions. Brian Loveman (*The Constitution of Tyranny: Regimes of Exception in Spanish America* (Pittsburgh, 1993)), and Frederick Nunn ('The South American Military and (Re)Democratization: Professional Thought and Self-Perception', *Journal of Inter-american Studies and World Affairs*, vol. 37, no. 2, 1995) have shown that the internal security focus of the Latin American military has deep roots going back to the colonial era.

trained pilots.[33] While the airforce never became an autonomous political force in the Carías period, this development contributed significantly to the process of military institutionalisation, as airforce pilots rose to armed forces leadership positions in the 1950s. In 1952 the United States helped found the Francisco Morazán Military Academy to train professional officers. And finally, at the height of the Cold War in Central America, US actions in 1954 fully established a military institution capable of 'repression of the local government' and 'strong' enough to topple any 'indulgent' 'liberal government'.

US Ambassador to Honduras Whitting Willauer provided the following analysis of the 1954 agreement:

> The Bilateral Treaty of Military Assistance, celebrated between Honduras and the United States is important for achieving the peace. A country that relies on a weak military force can never carry forward a plan of internal and international security. What is necessary is an organised military power that can respond to the techniques and the exigencies of national and international security.[34]

By 1954, various new forces were emerging in the country that would translate into new power dynamics in the years to come. A new urban bourgeoisie was growing, demanding change, and flexing its muscles. In addition in 1954, 'two new forces entered the scene, both with extraordinary energy, two actors called to carry out a very influential role in the political life of the nation: the Armed Forces and the Honduran working class'.[35]

The Public Debate over Militarisation

The Honduran press was greatly liberalised during the Gálvez regime, and political debates in the various newspapers became common. The professionalisation of the armed forces did not occur without a healthy public debate in the editorial pages and news columns. The level of sophistication of the arguments was at times quite impressive, and at other times eerily prophetic. The total absence of news or commentary about the military in the Honduran press ended abruptly with a piece about the military agreement with the United States:

> the spectacular notice that invites us to laugh that Honduras and the United States of North America will soon sign a military pact, and it makes us laugh because Honduras has never fought with anybody and has no one to fight with … and to think that we could be invaded by the Russian Soviets, this causes even more laughter because truth be told … it is easier to believe that we will be invaded by

[33] Mario Argueta, *Tiburcio Carías: anatomía de una época* (Tegucigalpa, 1988).
[34] Quoted in Armando Velásquez Cerrato, *Las Fuerzas Armadas de una democracia* (Tegucigalpa, 1954).
[35] Funes, *Los Deliberantes*, p. 160.

those that are now making treaties to protect us … we should seek another position … one misplaced comma can lead us to complete enslavement (by the USA).[36]

An official spokesperson for the Liberal Party provided a different opinion shortly thereafter:

among the stipulations figures or is specified the sending of an American military mission to Honduras with the goal of organising a small army that truth be told, the country does not have outside of some militias under command of a few officials … we believe that for some time the Honduran armed forces should be technically organised, with substantial modernisation … the best guarantee for the country is an armed forces well organised and equipped. If the Liberal Party triumphs, this will be our position of support for the national army.[37]

A year later a debate began with a long series of editorials and letters in *El Cronista*. This public dialogue, which lasted from May 1955 through June 1957, confirms the absence of a military institution in the country, and demonstrates a keen understanding of the potential dangers of militarisation. The first article was from one Néstor Alvarado.

A few days ago I read in a certain newspaper from the capital something that appeared as a plan for a school of advanced military studies, which according to the announcement, should be established shortly in Honduras. In government circles and even amongst the public opinion it appears that there exists a favourable climate for this new factory of creole 'Junkers'. This would be the masterwork of our ignorance. My people need only contemplate the upsurge of an ambitious military caste and unproductive equivalents of the same in the Dominican Republic, Cuba, Guatemala, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Venezuela, Peru, Colombia and Argentina who have used the *golpe de estado* to convert themselves into rulers and later reserve for themselves the greater part of the budget and the best positions in the bureaucracy … everything has its time and when that time has passed, nature has provided an end so that NOW IT SHOULD NOT EXIST. In ancient days militaries were necessary. However, today there is nothing to justify the existence of militarisation … now that the budget is in tatters, now when it would be wise to be economical with government expenditures, it would be a stupendous measure if the government would eliminate the defence minister, and with him all the commanders and soldiers in the country and establish in their place an efficient civil guard, and a mounted police to insure individual security in a civilised manner.[38]

René Zelaya Smith, an army captain, responded with a phrase that would be heard for decades in the country: 'If you want peace, prepare for war … The armed forces are necessary to oversee the order and tranquillity of the country.'[39]

[36] Antonio Gómez Milla in *Acción Democrática* 22 May 1954.
[37] Andrés Brown Flores in *Acción Democrática* 22 May 1954.
[38] Néstor Enrique Alvarado in *El Cronista* 9 May 1955.
[39] *El Cronista* 30 May 1955.

Néstor Alvarado responded on 13 June with a most interesting argument, similar to the one made to this author some four decades later by Gonzalo Facio in Costa Rica.[40] According to Alvarado, the United States was the hegemon in the region, and Honduras would be safer and have more money in the bank if it would free-ride on the USA and the security guarantees that the Panamerican system provided. After several more articles by Néstor Alvarado and defenders of the military, Andrés Alvarado Lozano, a school teacher from the Copán region, entered the fray.

> If there is one thing that Honduras has in common with Costa Rica … it is in the absence of a military caste which weighs on the politics of its people … from this national army, from this military academy that Señor Alonzo proposes, there will emerge an insolent military clique, that over time will become a great headache for Honduras for many years. It is better to be like Costa Rica with an army of teachers than to expose yourself to the creation of a military caste, which has caused bitter tears throughout the Caribbean.[41]

Captain Espinoza countered that the modern military was not like that of old, but was pro-democratic and non-political. And, added Espinoza, Costa Rica has 20,000 well-trained men.[42] A few days later, another pro-military argument appeared: 'In Honduras a professional army is not only necessary but urgent. The truth is that we have no military. And since we have no military, it is doubtful that we have a state. This is the truth. The military does consume the budget. With a military other services will be reduced. But the military guarantees the state.'[43] A week later, J. Simeon Alonzo of the military academy, confidently expounded pro-military arguments based on the Chilean example that would ironically devastate his own case:

> To give you my final point which will end the debate I will use the following example: The Republic of Chile is one of the most civilised and cultured nations of South America, its armed forces are a source of great pride, a complete democracy lives there, our first military mentors were from this exemplary nation and even today the teachings of the Chilean soldiers flow in our environment. If in Chile there has never been and there will never be the military caste that you so greatly fear, why can't Honduras structure similar armed forces?[44]

[40] Gonzalo Facio was a close colleague of José Figueres and a contributor to Costa Rican foreign policy in the 1953–58 period, when the Costa Ricans relied on military assistance from the Organisation of American States to defeat an invasion of armed exiles from Nicaragua in 1955. Facio told the author that at that time period, there was a strong faith in effectiveness of international organisations to halt regional conflicts (Interview 1 Dec. 1997, San José, Costa Rica).

[41] *El Cronista* 7 July 1995.

[42] *El Cronista* 9 July 1955. Andrés Alvarado responded that Costa Rica does not have a military and it only appears to have lots of soldiers when teachers and volunteers take up arms to fight Somoza, Picado and *Calderonistas* (*El Cronista* 19 July 1955).

[43] *El Cronista* 12 July 1955.

[44] *El Cronista* 18 July 1955.

Néstor Alvarado reminded the country that the movement towards militarisation was historic and asked his fellow Hondurans: 'On what do you base your optimistic belief that the situation with the military in Honduras will be the exception to the rule? In conclusion, our primary concern should be the full cultural and economic development of the country. It is easy to live in peace with our neighbours.'[45]

Alonzo and other military proponents continued to promise that a modern military did not meddle in politics, and did not act on its own account. Professional soldiers only fight external enemies. Colonel Armando Velásquez gave one of the first official military comments carried by the press. Velásquez, who had penned *Las Fuerzas Armadas de una democracia* in 1954 and who had received special training at Fort Leavenworth, would quite ironically participate in various coup attempts in the coming years. In the 3 October 1955 edition of *El Cronista*, the colonel celebrated the emergence of a professional military institution, and lauded the United States for assisting in its creation:

> We should give our most sincere gratitude to the members of the missions of the United States armed forces that have provided such ample cooperation to our government in this stage of the restoration of the military system. With their assistance, various information and training courses were organised in which the officers received much instruction on modern war, combining theory and practice. With these contingents of officials and this training we are able to give a start to the embryonic organisation of our armed forces.

By 1956, the Honduran military was sending the Defence Minister to the US-sponsored meetings of Central American War Ministers. These meetings would be institutionalised in 1963 as the Consejo de Defensa Centro Americana (CONDECA), a US-tutelaged creation that Costa Rica never agreed to join nor to cease to criticise as anti-democratic. With astute vision, a commentary in 1956 by one Hernán Robles identified the future role of this military cooperation on the isthmus, when he described the gathering of war ministers in Guatemala as:

> the final comedy performed in Central America … In short, the recent meetings of Central American war ministers contribute nothing in support of the continental cause, neither for peace nor for the likely acrimony … These councils have revealed the design of an especially strong egoism and support for the prolongation of dictatorships.[46]

And Robles was absolutely right. CONDECA's focus dealt strictly with internal security measures and was an instrument of US policy.[47] The same Robles also warned Honduras that the United States was arming and

[45] *El Cronista* 28 July 1955. [46] Hernán Robles in *El Cronista* 3 Oct. 1956.
[47] LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions*, p. 151.

supporting dictators in the supposed defense of democracy. The people were unfortunately ignoring it but these same weapons of democracy would some day be used to put down those that exercise their democratic right to protest.[48] In a 6 April 1956 commentary under the heading 'The Crisis of Democracy', *El Cronista* sharply criticised the United States and the militarisation of the continent:

> Instead of winning the support of our people with practical projects, they destroy the forces capable of defeating communism and opt instead for arming dictators with tanks, canons and planes … Militarism is the wrong answer to Communism, and Latin America will suffer for the US policy.

And finally in the following year, after the military had staged its first coup, greeted with widespread support, another wise Honduran scolded his fellow citizens for having too much faith in '*los gloriosos*'. 'You had better watch out, we can only have either militarism or Honduran democracy and culture, for militarism and democracy are mutually exclusive.'[49] By this time, Honduras had a strong military institution that would soon get much stronger with the Constitution of 1957. Honduras had chosen *los gloriosos*, and its democracy would be smothered by the same pro-military voices that so often promised that this was a new, pro-democratic and non-deliberative force.

The public debate on the pros and cons of militarisation confirms the claim by some scholars that Honduras lacked an institutionalised military at the mid-point of the twentieth century. It also reveals that the development of professional armed forces did not happen unopposed and automatically. Whether to have a strong military or whether to follow Costa Rica in only having a civilian-controlled police force was the dominant public debate in the press in the 1954–1957 period, although there is no evidence that organised groups worked actively to impede the militarisation. The articulate and far-sighted opponents of militarisation gave a sophisticated and well-founded defence of the then visible and viable Costa Rican model: a military consumes too many resources; the United States is the hegemon and little Honduras should free-ride as the United States will not permit serious threats to regional stability on the isthmus; the Panamerican institutions such as the Rio Treaty can ensure the existence of the Honduran state; the founding of a professional military will unleash a monster and will be a great ordeal for the country; and civilian leadership will never fully develop as it will be smothered by the power of the military. Looking back at these arguments forty years later, the opponents to the militarisation project were absolutely correct.

[48] *El Cronista* 22 Feb. 1956.
[49] Humberto Rivera y Murillo in *El Cronista* 26 June 1957.

With the United States actively pushing the militarisation project, however, the debate was unequal and the development of a military caste was unstoppable.

The Pro-Military Constitution of 1957 and the Anti-Military Public Backlash

The requirement of an absolute majority to win the presidency had led the country from electoral crisis to electoral crisis. The final impasse occurred in 1954 when the progressive paediatrician Ramón Villeda Morales was the clear choice of the people with 121,213 votes as against 77,041 for his nearest rival. Yet he was 8,869 votes short of an absolute majority and Honduran law called for the congress to determine the president. Unfortunately, two-thirds of the deputies was necessary to constitute a quorum and when the National and Reformist deputies boycotted the proceedings (in a ploy designed by US Ambassador Whitting Willauer), a stalemate ensued.[50] Julio Lozano, the vice president, seized dictatorial power shortly thereafter. This inept and repressive former bookkeeper for the Rosario Mining Company was himself ousted in October 1956 in the first military coup in the country in this century, indeed the '*first* institutional military intrusion into Honduran politics ...'[51]

Upon seizing power, the military junta declared that they would withdraw as soon as a constitutional assembly could be elected and a new magna carta produced. In early 1957 the military suggested that the country could not afford elections until 1958. This retreat was met with much protest.[52] In May 1957, the powerful and burgeoning Honduran labour sector demanded that the election be scheduled for 15 September 1957. Newspapers and the Liberal Party also placed pressure on the military junta. The Junta relented to political and civil society pressures and scheduled Constitutional Assembly elections for 21 Sept. 1958.[53] Villeda's Liberal Party dominated in a clean and honest ballot, gaining nearly two-thirds of the vote and deputies. On 21 October 1957, exactly one year after the ousting of Lozano, the Liberal Party-controlled Constitutional Assembly convened.

For our purposes, only two closely related results of the assembly need be discussed, the autonomy of the military and the selection of Ramón Villeda Morales as president. Everyone in the country knew who would win a presidential election. Villeda had unprecedented popularity. The Junta that took power after the 1956 coup had often declared that a new

[50] Mario Argueta, *Diccionario histórico-biográfico hondureño* (Tegucigalpa, 1990), p. 110. A leading Nationalist Party official from the era, Ramón Ernesto Cruz, also describes how diligently Willauer worked to deprive the presidency from Villeda both before and after the 1954 election in *La lucha política de 1954 y la ruptura del orden constitutional* (Tegucigalpa, 1982).

[51] Ropp, 'The Honduran Army', p. 515.

[52] *El Cronista* 11 April 1957.

[53] *El Cronista* 21 May 1957.

election would be held to select the president after the Constitutional Assembly had met. Dr Villeda himself wanted the legitimacy of a direct election, and scoffed at the idea that the Constitutional Assembly could select the president.[54]

On 14 November 1957, the Military Junta and the Liberal Party suddenly reversed course and decided that there should be no direct election and that Villeda should be declared president. The armed forces decreed that 'due to the difficult circumstances that affect the country, it has not been possible strictly to fulfil' the promise to hold a second election.[55] One member of the Military Junta – Roberto Gálvez Bournes – resigned in protest, and was replaced by Oswaldo López Arellano, a former airforce pilot who quickly became the strongman of the armed forces. The Liberals publicly argued that Villeda had won the two previous elections, and that the country could not afford to have another election when the outcome was already known.[56]

For Villeda to agree to become president without a presidential election appears completely irrational. He was immensely popular and held in almost saintly regard by the majority of the people. Pictures of the bookish doctor with thick horn-rimmed glasses appeared on newspaper front pages and were hung on the walls of homes throughout the country.[57] And before the sudden move to have him declared president, Villeda had unequivocally and publicly declared that he would not take the presidency without a direct election by the people.[58] What happened? It appears that a deal was made between Villeda and the military junta, the details of which remain a shrouded mystery of secret meetings, threats, and backroom deals. Most authors believe that a deal involving the US State Department, the United Fruit Company, the Honduran military and the Liberal Party resulted in the naming of Villeda.[59]

[54] *El Cronista* 24 Sept. 1957.

[55] Ramón Oquelí, 'Cronología de la Soberanía Militar', *Revista Tegucigalpa*, vol. 59 (Oct. 1981), p. 3.

[56] Longino Becerra, *Evolución histórica de Honduras* (Tegucigalpa, 1988), p. 169.

[57] Interview with Matías Funes 12 Dec. 1995, Tegucigalpa, Honduras; Interview with Ramón Oquelí 24 July 1997, Tegucigalpa, Honduras.

[58] *El Cronista* 24 September 1957.

[59] 'Various commentators have noted a meeting on 9 November 1957 attended by Ambassador Whitting Willauer, local executives of the United Fruit Co., State Department representatives and Villeda Morales. Only access to State Department archives or testimony of alleged participants will clarify this issue. However, State Department records later recognised that 'although the military supported the advent of power of the Villeda Morales regime, they did so with reluctance and only after being accorded special constitutional status making them semi-independent of the President' (Euraque, *Reinterpreting*, p. 176 fn. 64). This author attempted to arrange an interview with Oswaldo López Arellano who is rumoured to possess a copy of *el Pacto de Agua Azul* but was unsuccessful.

'What happened is very simple: military officers and Liberal Party officials held various secret meetings and agreed to various important agreements.'[60] But, these were not the only actors involved. Ambassador Willauer, executives of the United Fruit Company including company president Kenneth Redmond and other State Department officials, reportedly met at the UFCO's plush Blue Waters Villa and agreed to the 'Pacto del Agua Azul'.[61] This pact called for an exchange: the military and the United States would support the declaration of Villeda as president of the country, and in return Villeda would grant the military fundamental constitutional autonomy and independent power.

However, this explanation remains unconvincing. Again, Villeda would easily win a direct election that would provide him with legitimacy, whereas selection by the Constitutional Assembly would not. Ramón Oquelí, the noted Honduran scholar and journalist, and an objective and dispassionate authority on the country, provides the most logical explanation. According to Oquelí, the arrangement was masterminded by the calculating strongman of the military, Oswaldo López. López had previously declared to the people that 'on one day not very far off, the (armed forces) will become the maximum representation of the national conglomerate' and that the 'armed forces could no longer be considered a fleeting phenomenon in the institutional life of the country'.[62] To make this dream a reality, López tricked Villeda by telling him that the very popular Roberto Gálvez Barnes of the military junta would be the unified candidate of the military, the Nationalists and the Reformists if a direct election were held. He also warned Villeda that the military would not be able to guarantee a clean and fair election. Villeda was left with no better option than to accept the deal. After the deal was struck, Roberto Gálvez Barnes left the ruling junta to protest the decision to forego the presidential elections. In a conversation with Villeda, Gálvez told him that he had never contemplated running for the presidency. Villeda discovered the deception, but it was too late.[63]

Whether Oquelí's account is accurate or not, we are certain that a quid pro quo with far-reaching proportions was involved. The prize for Villeda was considerable, a six-year term as the president. The payback to the military was even greater. By a vote of 32 to 17, the Liberals pushed through Title XIII of the Constitution, which gave the Armed Forces

[60] Funes, *Los Deliberantes*, p. 194.
[61] Stafania Natalini de Castro et al., *Significado histórico del gobierno del Dr Ramón Villeda Morales* (Tegucigalpa, 1985), pp. 144–54; Funes, *Los Deliberantes*, pp. 194–7; Robert MacCameron, *Bananas, Labor, and Politics in Honduras: 1954–1963*, pp. 97–8.
[62] Funes, *Los Deliberantes*, pp. 92–3.
[63] Interview with Ramón Oquelí, 24 July 1997, Tegucigalpa, Honduras.

'more freedom of action (for a Latin American military) than any document since Paraguay's constitution of 1844'.[64]

Article 318: The Armed Forces will be under the direct command of the Chief of the Armed Forces; **through him** the President of the Republic will exercise the constitutional function that belongs to him respecting the military institution.
Article 319: The orders that the President of the Republic imparts to the Armed Forces, **through the Chief of the Armed Forces**, must be adhered to. **When a conflict arises**, it must be submitted to the consideration of Congress, which will decide by a majority vote. This resolution will be definitive and must be adhered to.[65]
Article 321: The Chief of the Armed Forces, upon taking up his office, will issue before the National Congress the following solemn oath: 'In my name and the name of the Armed Forces of Honduras, I solemnly swear that I will never resort to instruments of oppression; **even though our superiors command it, we will not respect orders that violate the spirit or letter of the Constitution**: that we will defend the national sovereignty and integrity of our land …
Article 330: The administration of funds assigned to the Defence Branch, will be controlled by the Bursar of the Armed Forces.

Article 330 led to a secret budget, completely shielded from civilian oversight. The Constitution of 1957 allowed the commander-in-chief of the armed forces to disobey the president, and directed the ranks to obey the military command in the case of a disagreement with the president. In addition, Title XIII provided for the armed forces to decide promotions and to control the naming of the Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces.[66] 'It is obvious that the autonomy conferred to the armed forces in 1957 converted the army into a sort of uncontrollable Frankenstein'.[67] Even at the time, the implications of these concessions were obvious. Deputy Horacio Moya Posas characterised Article 319 as 'a time bomb that will permanently lodged within the organisation of the Government'.[68] It was only a matter of time before the device exploded. Democracy was guaranteed to fail.[69]

[64] John Johnson, *The Military and Society in Latin America* (Stanford, 1964), p. 162. The Honduran Constitution was amended by a unanimous National Assembly vote in January 1999. The President is now the commander in chief and the power previously vested in the armed forces chief now rests with the president and his civilian defense minister.

[65] In the Constitutions of 1894, 1906, 1924 and 1936 the president had direct control over the armed forces.

[66] This section is drawn from *La Gaceta* (20 Dec. 1957), *El Cronista* (1957), Johnson, *The Military*, pp. 162–3, Funes, *Los Deliberantes*, MacCameron *Bananas*, pp. 94–5, and Becerra, *Evolución*.

[67] Funes, *Los Deliberantes*, p. 318.

[68] Quoted in Oquelí, 'Cronología', p. 3.

[69] The contrast between the Honduran 1957 Constitution and the Costa Rican 1949 Constitution is stark. The Costa Rican article dealing with the military states: 'The army is proscribed as a permanent institution. For the vigilance and conservation of public order there will be the necessary police forces'.

It soon became apparent to the Liberal Party that the constitutional prerogatives and power provided to the Honduran armed forces were incompatible with democracy. The military made constant demands on the civilian government, including requests for changes in the cabinet.[70] Beatings and even the shooting of civilians by the security forces occurred, and with the constitutional independence of the military no civilian charges could ever be brought. The press began to question the 'constant brutality' committed by soldiers.[71] The murder of two students at the hands of the military in 1959 resulted in a surge of protests.[72] In May 1959, Francisco Milla Bermúdez, then Magistrate of the Supreme Court and Designate to the Presidency – and one of the leaders of the Liberal Party who actively participated in the constitutional deal-making that granted near omnipotent powers to the military – declared to the *Miami Herald* that the best thing for Honduras would be the dissolution of the armed forces. The armed forces, added Milla, consumed too great a part of the budget and the army was politically aligned with enemies of the government.[73]

The generals were furious with the Milla statement. Yet it is striking and significant that the general public was not. In an article entitled 'Popular Opinion Says Suppress the Army', the country's independent daily reported that the public response to the Milla comments was completely unexpected; the people wanted the soldiers to abandon the barracks and 'seek other more dignified means of daily sustenance'.[74] The university students also seconded Milla's proposal. A declaration from the UNAH (Universidad Autónoma de Honduras) students applauded Milla and added that the students were neither supporters nor adversaries of Villeda's 'Government of the Second Republic', but that 'yes we are enemies of the military caste, because when this OGRE grows dictatorships are the result'.[75] Milla confirmed his earlier statements and added that he was not the enemy of the military, but that he did aspire to follow the lead of Costa Rica and replace barracks with schools.[76] Of course, the genie was already out of the bottle and the United States would never have permitted the demilitarisation of Honduras.[77] Yet, politicians

[70] *El Cronista* 7 April 1958.
[71] *El Cronista* 27 Feb. 1959.
[72] Oquelí, 'Cronología', p. 4.
[73] *El Cronista* 11 May 1959.
[74] *El Cronista* 14 May 1959.
[75] 15 May 1959.
[76] Funes, *Los Deliberantes*, p. 222. It should be noted that in this time period, there are many references to following the Tico example and going *sans armée*. In April of 1958, Costa Rica attempted to push a proposal through the Organisation of American States for the disarming of the all of Latin America. The proposal was voted down (*El Cronista* 18 April 1958).
[77] While the Costa Ricans were able to proscribe the military in 1948–49, this became much more difficult in the region once after the United States linked militaries with anti-communism in the early 1950s. After the Bolivian Revolution, there was a move

and large sectors of civil society clearly regretted the militarisation of the country and decried military impunity and human rights violations.

On 12 July 1959 Villeda faced his first military coup. Colonel Armando Velásquez Cerrato, who had written so eloquently in 1954 about the new, non-deliberative and apolitical military, led the rebellion – his second in two years.[78] Velásquez, who was closely associated with the National Party, Somoza in Nicaragua and the most reactionary forces in the country, was supported above all by the National Police.[79] The coup was violent, leaving many dead and injured. For the first few hours, the 'loyal' members of the armed forces stood on the sideline waiting to see if the coup would gain momentum. Students, labour and other members of civil society rushed to Villeda's defence and fought valiantly against the rebels; Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Honduras students and labour saved Villeda. When the coup produced no quick victory, the head of the military stepped in, brokered an end to the affair and permitted Velásquez to flee the country.[80]

The impunity of the armed forces, the coup against democracy and the belated defence of the government by the head of the military led to a backlash against the armed forces. Efforts to curb the power of the armed forces emerged on two fronts. One took place in the National Congress when Liberal Deputy Ildefonso Orellano Bueso introduced a motion to reform Title XIII of the 1957 Constitution.[81] This speech was considered so important that it was printed over a period of four days in *El Cronista*. Orellano's perspicacious speech included the following:

> This group of individuals clustered under pompous name of 'Armed Forces' wants to convert itself into a privileged and all-embracing caste, shielding behind Title XIII of our fundamental law itself to reach its goals, from which trench they are preparing to stab the Honduran people in the back, having now become not only the all-devouring octopus of the national budget, but also a real social threat, an imminent danger for our own security, and is an enemy of the functioning democracy in which we have dedicated our faith … When we established Title XIII of the Constitution, we did not have the right to toss the dominion of the bayonets on the patriotic people that loves its institutions and knows how to

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to proscribe the military in that Andean country. The United States found that unnacceptable; see Cole Blasier, *The Hovering Giant: U.S. Responses to Revolutionary Change in Latin America 1910–1985* (Pittsburgh, 1985).

[78] This is the same Velásquez who attempted a right-wing coup against the 'progressive' military junta in May 1957.

[79] The most conservative elements of both the National Party and the Reformist Party gave support and even organised right-wing guerrilla groups to aid Velásquez (Natalini et al., *Significado*, p. 117).

[80] Becerra, *Evolución*, p. 172 and Oquelí, *Cronología*, p. 4.

[81] The Orellana speech was reproduced in its entirety in *El Cronista* from 16–19 Dec. 1959.

defend them. A people that knows how to throw itself into battle at the instant of danger, knowing how to fight heroically for its rights when these were trampled on. It is therefore an obligation for us, as legitimate representatives of the people, to return the peace and tranquillity that they enjoyed before the implantation of the dictators. If we do not make this change, we are leaving open a great crack, an open door, and through this crack or this open door, a caste that longs to perpetuate itself in power can enter … This can be seen even by the blind and by the children. We are on the verge of a military dictatorship. The country has been left to the law of the bayonets … after a series of individual and collective murders … The country breathes blood everywhere. We repeat: Never has a tyrant dared to so challenge the citizenry! Not Tiburcio Carías Andino with his team of delinquents! Not Julio Lozano Díaz with his gang of gunslingers!

Orellano provided a list of 117 soldiers and officers who had committed serious crimes but who were protected by the military tribunal. His motion called for the substitution of the words 'Armed Forces' for 'Army' and the constitutional elimination of the autonomy of the military that created a 'state within a state'. The military would, under Orellano's motion, be controlled by elected civilians, soldiers would not be protected from the courts for common crimes, and the army's budget would be administered by the Executive Branch. Finally, all promotions and leadership positions would be determined by the president. *El Cronista* supported the motion stating that the future of Honduran democracy depended on the approval of the bill.[82] The Orellano bill ended up generating a great national debate and the bulk of the citizenry supported it, but the armed forces were far too powerful for such a law to pass.[83]

President Villeda knew that he could not at this moment weaken the power of the armed forces, and so he opted to create a neutralising force. Within a week of the Velásquez coup and the participation of the military-controlled National Police, Villeda began to organise a Civil Guard that would be under the complete control of the President.[84] The National Police was disbanded. The Civil Guard and the armed forces were constant rivals and violent clashes between the two forces were common. In March 1961, the army killed 9 civil guards after the army had lost a soccer game to their rivals. The soldiers were evidently upset when the goal that tied the game was disallowed.[85] In September of 1961 at Los Laureles, the Civil Guard massacred eleven soldiers and civilians when they were caught in a coup attempt against the government.[86]

The 1957–1961 period brought new participants into the battle over militarisation. Student organisations, labour, the media and politicians

[82] 16 Dec. 1959.
[83] Funes, *Los Deliberantes*, p. 227.
[84] Hernández Martinez in El Salvador, Ibáñez in Chile, and Leguía in Peru also created police forces to counterbalance the army, see B. Loveman, *For la Patria* (Wilmington, DE, 1999).
[85] Funes, *Los Deliberantes*, p. 229.
[86] Becerra, *Evolución*, p. 173.

were vocal opponents of military abuses and valiantly fought military coups. These groups were joined in the 1980s and 1990s by the Church, human rights organisations and business groups, and contributed to the eventual curtailment of military powers that had come into being in the 1950s and 1960s.[87]

The Anti-Military Character of the 1963 Elections and the End of Honduran Democracy

The National Party entered the electoral season in crisis. Due to the support given the Liberals by the peasants, the working class, the emerging middle class and the North Coast industrialists, the Liberal Party looked strong going into the election. At the National Party Convention Ramón Cruz defeated Gonzalo Carías Castillo, the son of the old caudillo, by only 3 votes. Gonzalo Carías proceeded to form his own party, splitting the Nationalists. The Liberal Party selected Modesto Rodas Alvarado, even though Villeda favoured another candidate. Villeda and most of the party maintained unity. Roque J. Rivera, a leader of the Tegucigalpa conservative elite who was expelled from the Liberal Party in 1962 for denouncing 'communist infiltration' in the Villeda government, organised the Orthodox Republican Party but it did not gain many adherents from the Liberal ranks.[88]

Rodas was the charismatic and intelligent former president of the Constitutional Assembly that drew up the 1957 Constitution. Some argue that he had fought the constitutional provisions granting autonomy to the armed forces.[89] He later supported attempts by Orellano and Bueso to restore civilian control of the armed forces. By 1963, he was campaigning in front of large and animated crowds largely on a demilitarisation platform. While the anti-military tone of the Rodas campaign is well known, the rationale for the platform has been misunderstood as extremist. In reality, the demilitarisation stance was actually quite centrist and reasonable, given the public opposition to the military. The debate on militarisation had never really ceased for the entire decade 1954–1963. The demilitarisation platform was popular with the Honduran masses, and Rodas was the clear presidential favourite. In one of the clearest signs of Rodas linking his campaign with the issue of demilitarisation, Costa Rican Foreign Minister Daniel Oduber visited the country at the height of the campaign season with an endorsement for demilitarisation: 'The

[87] For a complete discussion of the reduction of military power, see Kirk Bowman, 'Taming the Tiger in Honduras', *Latin American Studies Forum*, vol. 30, No. 1.
[88] Becerra, *Evolución*, p. 174.
[89] MacCameron, *Bananas*, p. 116; Schulz and Schulz, *The United States*, p. 31.

communist threat is banished with laws that benefit the peasants. I don't believe that the Armed Forces are even necessary in our countries.'[90]

In the months leading up to the elections, as in the 1953 election in Costa Rica, the oligarchy and the most conservative forces continued to smear the government with charges of communism. Monseñor Héctor Enrique Santos, the Archbishop of Tegucigalpa, delivered a series of masses in September asking God and the heavenly hosts to block the communist infiltration that was gnawing away the foundation of the nation.[91] Rumours of an impending coup had circulated since the spring.[92] The USA was well aware of the coup plans and publicly denied the possibility of a military overthrow of Villeda: 'Honduras represents a case of significant and true progress towards the stabilisation of democracy and institutional maturity. A democratically elected government is getting ready to finish its 6-year term, during which the military forces have been distinguished by loyalty to the Constitution and the democratic regime.'[93] Privately, the State Department and the embassy knew otherwise. Latin America had witnessed a number of coups in 1962 and 1963 and the Kennedy Administration did not want to see one of their favourites – Villeda – become the victim of yet another embarrassment for the Alliance for Progress.[94] Ambassador Burrows actively discouraged the coup, warning López Arellano that President Kennedy would suspend economic aid if the *golpe* proceeded.

On October 3, 1963, a mere ten days before the election, the military staged a preemptive coup. Cognisant of the democratic support of civil society and students in the previous coup attempt, the military unleashed an exceptionally violent coup. Scores of civil guards were killed as they slept and violence against civilians continued for days. Attempts by students and Liberal Party supporters to challenge the overthrow of democracy were met with brutal reactions by *los gloriosos*. One of the first actions of the armed forces was to bring the national police functions under complete military control; after 1963 there was virtually no difference between military and police training.[95]

The military ruled the country with only the briefest of interruptions

[90] *El Cronista* 7 Sept. 1963.
[91] Funes, *Los Deliberantes*, p. 236.
[92] *El Cronista* 9 and 23 April 1963.
[93] Secretary of State Dean Rusk on the Voice of America, *El Cronista* 28 September 1963.
[94] In March 1963 President Kennedy held a summit in San José, Costa Rica with the presidents of Central America (including Panama). In what must have been a great embarrassment for Kennedy and the Alliance for Progress, of the six countries on the isthmus, only Costa Rica and Honduras had democratic regimes, and that of Honduras would soon fall. For a complete transcript of the speeches including that of Villeda, see *Combate* (May and June 1963).
[95] Leticia Salomón, 'Challenges to Demilitarizing Public Order: Honduras and Guatemala', *Demilitarizing Public Order* (Washington, 1995), p. 42.

from 1963 to 1982.[96] The 1982–1999 period witnessed a protracted and often uncertain battle on the part of civil society and political forces to wrest back from the armed forces the very autonomy and prerogatives that were ceded in the 1954–1963 period.

Conclusion

This article challenges the conventional wisdom that militarisation in Honduras occurred as a natural or automatic consequence of state-building, and was achieved without considerable challenges and dissent. Opposition to militarisation emerged in three distinct periods. In the 1954–1957 period, the militarisation issue was one of the dominant themes in the major Honduran press. Schoolteachers and other citizens engaged in a national public debate with soldiers and military officials over the pros and cons of professional armed forces. Unfortunately for Hondurans, a strong military was established and many of the gloomy predictions made by the opponents turned out to be accurate. After the passage of the pro-military 1957 Constitution university students and leading politicians called for a drastic reduction in military power and prerogatives. Civil society, led by students and labour, fought in the streets to quell the 1959 military coup. Finally, in the 1963 election campaigns, demilitarisation became a leading component of the platform of the likely winner. There were clear signs that Honduras may have followed the Costa Rican demilitarised example. The demilitarisation campaign issue was highly popular and contributed to a violent *golpe de estado* just ten days before the scheduled balloting. The 1963 violent coup crushed the outwardly anti-military elements of civil society and the military dominated Honduran society and politics for many years thereafter.

Reuschemeyer et al. posit that strong autonomous militaries are threats to democracy in Latin America because they affect three kinds of power relations. The evidence from this case supports their expectations. Militarisation weakened state capacity by challenging legislative and executive authority. It undermined the judicial process. And it weakened the budgetary process. Militarisation altered class power relations, tilting the scales in favour of the landed elites. And militarisation both resulted from and affected transnational power relations that were shaped by the Cold War.

[96] While these periods were brief, they were nonetheless important. The failed presidency of Ramón Ernesto Cruz resulted in a two-year revolution from above. See Rachel Sieder, 'Honduras: The Politics of Exception and Military Reformism (1972–1978)', *Journal of Latin American Studies*, vol. 27, no. 1, 1995, pp. 99–127.