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1983/05/23

Directorate of
Intelligence



Latin America Review



23 May 1983

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23 May 1983



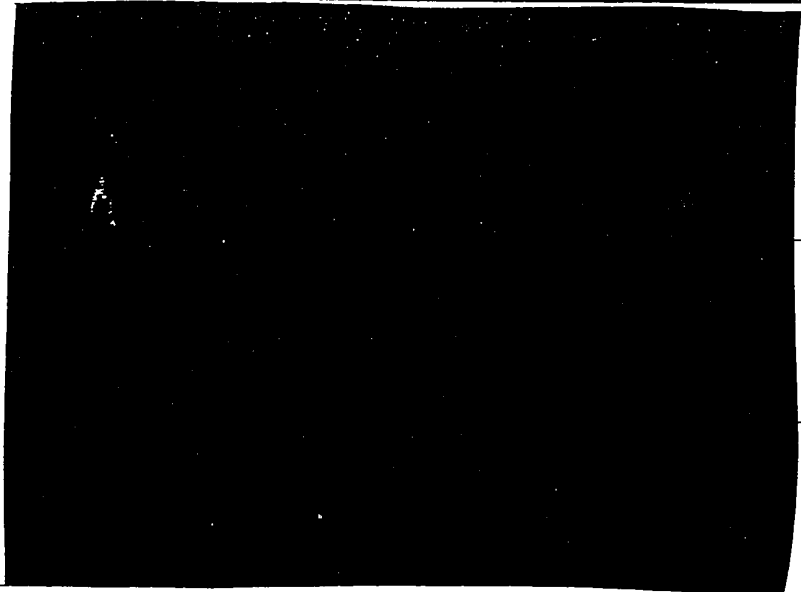
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Guatemala: Restructuring the Military

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Guatemala: Restructuring the Military

As Guatemala's Victory 1982 counterinsurgency campaign gives way to another called Strength 1983, the armed forces are reorganizing both at headquarters and in the field. The new command and control structure formalizes some operational practices that proved effective in Victory 1982, provides support for an increased military presence throughout Guatemala, and streamlines Army control of civilian government personnel, police, reservists, Civil Defense Forces, as well as all military personnel at the department level. Although we expect some transitional difficulties over the next few months—thinning of personnel and equipment, establishment of makeshift facilities, difficulties in logistic support—the reorganization is likely to strengthen the counterinsurgency program. Over the longer term, moreover, increased military presence throughout Guatemala could give the armed forces a popular power base that might further entrench military rule at the expense of the democratization process.

Evolution of the Task Force

Since July 1982, the Guatemalan Army¹ has served under two parallel—and sometimes conflicting—command and control structures: a formal system that evolved over the years and an operational one created to meet internal defense needs during the Victory 1982 campaign. On paper, the President was titular commander in chief, and the Minister of Defense was the senior officer and chief of the defense establishment. Under him, the Army Chief of Staff headed the General Staff and was formal commander of most ground, air, and naval units. Although they were under the control of the General Staff, the Navy and Air Force had separate staffs. Support services such as the medical, legal, and ordnance units were controlled by often overlapping entities under the Ministry of Defense and the General Staff.

¹ The Army encompasses all regular military units, including ground, air, naval, and marine forces and military police.

Ground forces battalions generally were attached to one of eight military regions.² Control extended from the region to subordinate detachments, patrol bases, and mobile patrols. Other units, such as the Mariscal Zavala and Honor Guard Brigades in the capital and the airborne battalion at San Jose, were designated as strategic reaction forces.

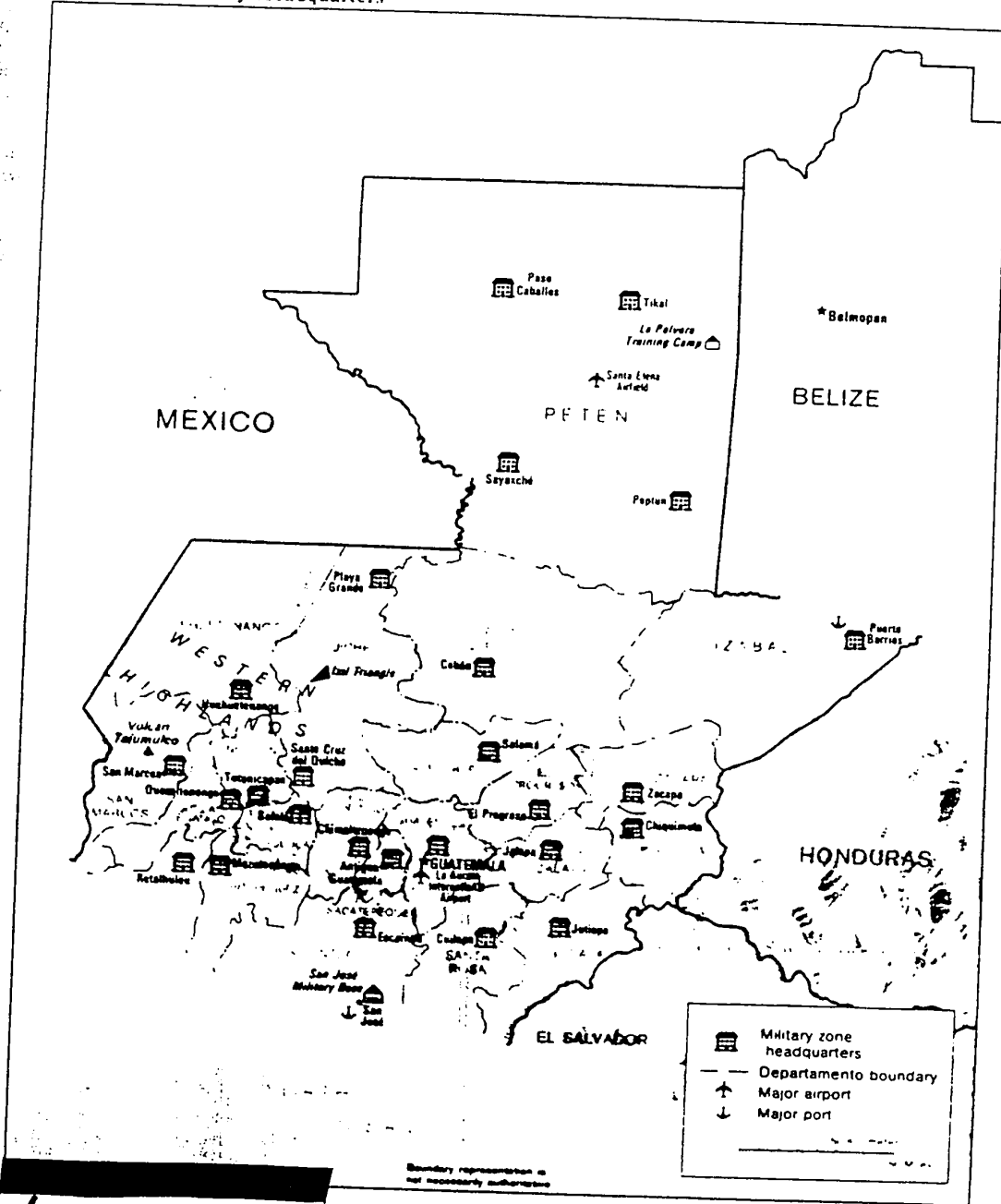
Reserve forces were organized by department; the commander of reserves for each department reported to the General Staff. In areas where there was no direct Army supervision, local military commissioners—part-time civilian representatives of the armed forces—or other Army-appointed civilians controlled the Civil Defense Forces (CDFs). Units of the 3,000-man Mobile Military Police, under the Ministry of Defense, were dispersed throughout the country and attached to the military regions. Nonmilitary security forces, including the National and Treasury Police, were controlled by the Ministry of Government, except during emergencies when they reverted to Army control.

In practice, a shadow operational command and control system functioned, particularly since last July. In areas of heavy guerrilla activity, the Army General Staff created task forces and “areas of operation”—geographical boundaries and operational mandates—that were independent of the military zones and brigades. Each commander reported directly to the Army General Staff and completely controlled operations in his area. To man the temporary units, the Army rotated troops from strategic reaction battalions; companies from less active military regions; and air, naval, marine, and engineer units. In addition,

² Military region headquarters were designated as brigades or zones. Brigades had extra headquarters staffs that facilitated expansion during emergency periods; zones did not.

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Guatemala: Military Headquarters



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from July 1982 through January 1983, the government mobilized 31 companies of reservists totaling approximately 5,400 soldiers. New recruits eventually replaced these temporarily mobilized reservists, however, and formed at least six additional companies early this year. [REDACTED]

Regular units also were fortified. Reservists were attached to the more active or undermanned permanent units. Last July, for example, Poptun Brigade took on five reserve companies, and Huehuetenango Military Zone was given eight. Zones and brigades also were assigned one or more areas of operation. During the state of siege (April 1982–March 1983), commanders of both permanent and temporary units controlled paramilitary security forces and civic action personnel in their areas. [REDACTED]

The task force system generally has been effective, at least in part because the Army has been able to vary its tactics to meet the needs of different areas. In the Western Highlands, for example, the Gumarcaj and Tigres Task Forces and Huehuetenango Military Zone personnel have cleared the area of most Guerrilla Army of the Poor (EGP) guerrillas—causing some to take refuge in Mexico—and regained considerable popular loyalty through aggressive civic action. The Army General Staff formed an additional area of operations to handle the remaining pockets of resistance in the Ixil Triangle. In the southwest, where the Organization of People in Arms (ORPA) is still entrenched, the General Staff set up two more task forces and several operational areas that corresponded to guerrilla fronts. Here the military is using large sweeps against ORPA's cadre, who work in larger groups and are less discouraged by small-unit tactics and heavy doses of civic action than the EGP members to the north. [REDACTED]

Despite these gains, heavy concentration of force in some areas sometimes spread manpower and materiel too thinly in other zones [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Between August and October 1982, for instance, operations in the Western Highlands left the southwest with a precariously small military presence. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Insurgents sometimes sought to exploit boundary problems by working in the "gray areas" near the borders of Army areas of operation. [REDACTED]

The New System: Formalizing the Task Force

Despite a two-tiered and somewhat haphazard command and control structure, the Army's tremendous strides in defeating the insurgency have helped to make it more amenable to change. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Although implementation was slated to be completed by 30 April, the Guatemalans slipped the schedule to mid-June so as not to disrupt the momentum of the counterinsurgency effort. We believe, however, that not all units will be in place or up to strength for at least six months. [REDACTED]

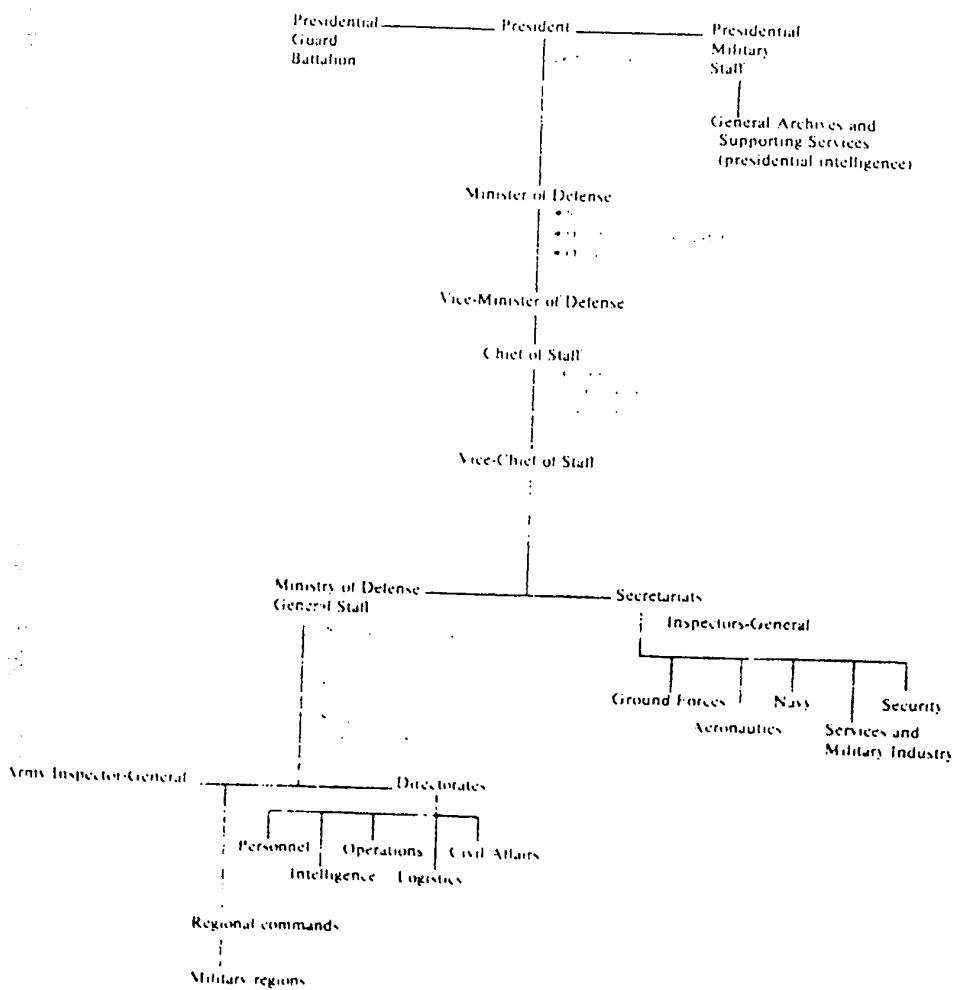
[REDACTED] other high-ranking officials believe that some officers mistakenly want to return troops to the garrisons once the guerrillas are contained. [REDACTED]

The Army is being streamlined at both staff and field levels:

- The Ministry of Defense Staff, responsible for strategic planning of security and defense, replaces the Army General Staff and separate Navy and Air Force staffs. It includes a chief, vice chief, the Army Inspector General, and directorate heads for personnel, intelligence, operations, logistics, and civil affairs.
- The Chief of Staff reports directly to the Minister of Defense and is responsible for command, organization, training, education, discipline, and conduct of the Guatemalan Army.

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Guatemala: Probable Command and Control Structure



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- The Chief of Staff also will oversee five independent secretariats: Ground Forces, Aeronautics, Navy, Security, and Services and Military Industry. Eventually, the secretaries may be civilian appointees.

We believe that the Ministry of Defense staff will retain actual operational control of all forces, while the secretaries probably will serve as inspectors general.

The Mobile Military Police and all paramilitary security services probably will fall under the Secretariat for Security. President Rios Montt reportedly plans to remove eventually all police functions from the Ministry of Government and to create a Civil Guard controlled by the defense establishment. The Army General Staff already has assumed control of the often unruly National Police detective component—the Department of Technical Investigations.

In the field, aspects of the new organization have been evolving since mid-February. Military zones will be smaller than the previous ones and often will be determined by operational needs rather than solely by departmental boundaries. The Peten, for example, probably will have four zones that will replace the current one. The zones probably will fall under the command and control of seven as of yet unannounced regional commands, which will report to the Ministry of Defense staff. Each military zone reportedly will house at least one battalion. Playa Grande, Coban, Quiche, Huehuetenango, and Guatemala City will have two or more battalions. The Navy will control Zone Six, or Izabal Department, from Puerto Barrios. In addition to an Army battalion, the majority of a new Marine battalion will be stationed there.

Some units will continue to be strategic reaction battalions. In Guatemala City, the two-battalion Mariscal Zavala and Honor Guard Brigades and the

Tactical Security Group, a 400-man unit whose primary role is to protect La Aurora International Airport, will continue to serve that function. The paratroopers at San Jose Military Base will be utilized better by deploying them to the military zones in the southern coastal areas, where terrain favors airborne operations. A Kaibiles (*ranger*) unit reportedly will be formed to serve the Western Highlands and the Peten. We believe some small groups of Kaibiles currently assigned to various military units also may be united eventually into a single battalion to increase their efficiency and impact on counterinsurgency. As during the state of siege, each commander will control security forces, CDFs, and eventually all reservists for his zone; his power will also extend to civilian government employees there.

Pluses and Minuses

In our view, the reorganization will help restore unity of command to the Guatemalan Army and will institutionalize the operational realities of the Victory 1982 campaign:

- On the zone level, more clearly delineated lines of authority could help eliminate police corruption, human rights abuses, and misuse of the CDFs by local politicians and military commissioners, as well as rivalries between temporary and standing units over boundaries, personnel, and equipment. The reorganization also will support a more even coverage of the countryside—a factor that should help improve intelligence collection in the departments.
- On the command level, a truly joint operational staff and secretariats should lead to better coordinated activities. We think the Secretariat for Services and Military Industry will serve as a logistic command and thus eliminate some of the duplication that has existed between Ministry of Defense and Army General Staff support units. Moreover, Guatemala's fledgling defense industry will receive the visibility and administrative support it needs to grow.

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Exemptions: (b)(1), (b)(3)

- A combination of factors—smaller military zones drawn up with terrain in mind, the assignment of a variety of personnel to each commander, and the diversification of strategic reaction forces—will allow the Guatemalans more flexibility in deployment. In this regard, each commander will have the mix of forces that best fits his zone and its problems.

Although the Guatemalans have denied that the reorganization requires heavy financial outlays, there will be operational costs associated with the move:

- The quality of training probably will decline under the Army's new plan. The Zacapa and Jutiapa training units have been eliminated, and each zone eventually will be responsible for the recruitment and training of its residents. Although the soldiers probably will be knowledgeable of local terrain and customs, settling local rivalries could consume disproportionate amounts of commanders' time and cause divisiveness among the troops.
- The officer corps faces a serious manpower shortage, particularly in the middle and junior grades. The reorganization requires additional midlevel officers to fill staff positions in zonal and regional headquarters, and junior officers for platoon and company command and staff posts. The Guatemalans have drawn heavily upon reserve manpower through the lower field grades but could be forced to promote some regular officers too rapidly.
- Some thinning in the enlisted ranks probably is occurring, but this probably will not deter the counterinsurgency effort. Because the 31 reservist companies have been converted to permanent units, we believe requirements for additional troops will not exceed six to eight more 780-man battalions. Until these troops can be brought on board, regular companies reportedly will be reduced in strength from 177 to 130 men, and some zones will lack their one-battalion complement for a few months.

[REDACTED] Zonal support units generally have been reduced from company to platoon size, and battalion support units often have been eliminated.

- Equipment, particularly communications gear, artillery, and some infantry weapons such as mortars and grenade launchers, will be spread thinly. Over the next year or two, we judge that the Guatemalans generally will keep most artillery and mortars where they were deployed before the reorganization, rather than try to equip all units uniformly.
- The reorganization will strain the overextended logistic network severely. Additional units will need supplies, especially in such remote areas as the Peten, where three or four new battalion headquarters will be created. Air transport services are already inadequate, and, with the new structure, the Army projects that it will be able to meet only 80 percent of its vehicular needs. We believe that the Guatemalans will redouble efforts to obtain aviation spare parts and possibly additional aircraft and trucks in order to rebuild supply lines.
- Several battalions will occupy makeshift facilities. Although most departmental capitals have had at least a small military presence recently, battalion-size facilities exist only in a few new zone headquarters.

Implications

Despite its weaknesses, the reorganization is likely to benefit counterinsurgency activities substantially, whether the Guatemalans continue to mop up the insurgents or face a new guerrilla offensive. Because the structure adopts the advantages of a proven operational system, eliminates resource-sapping repetition and rivalry, and—most importantly—projects continued Army presence into heretofore isolated

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areas, it will solidify the military and political gains of the past year. Guerrilla reoccupation will be harder, and the military presence will facilitate the civic action programs that could strengthen the government's popularity. [REDACTED]

Although we are unsure of the Army's motives in this regard, we believe that the reorganization also gives the Army the infrastructure to ensure that, when elections are finally held, its continued rule has the support of the majority of the public. The insurgency already has forced the military, the strongest political institution in Guatemala, to acknowledge that long-ignored sections of the country like the Western Highlands are exploitable political power bases. An increased military presence throughout Guatemala, and the permanent addition of all security forces to the Ministry of Defense, will help the Army to strengthen its control over the population while perhaps improving its image. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

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