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Security and Remilitarization in the Name of Democracy: The Impact of Global Crime Control Policies in Honduras

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Executive summary

During the past decade, the Honduran government has introduced hard-line security policies in order to reduce the alarming levels of crime and delinquency in the country. This CMI Working paper outlines the history of civil-military relations as characterized by a string of military dictatorships in the 20th century, followed by an analysis of the impact of contemporary security policies, known as Mano Dura (Iron Fist). The analysis shows that these policies have led to the gradual militarization of certain sectors of society, especially the poor urban neighborhoods where police and military carry out raids and arrests. The Working Paper concludes that the military still holds significant political power in Honduras.

Keywords:
Honduras, military, civil-military relations, security politics

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1. Introduction

In what ways has the Honduran government's new security agenda changed civil-military relations? In the 1990s, the Honduran government demilitarized various state institutions and subordinated the military to civilian authorities. Yet, with the levels of crime and delinquency rising dramatically—92.1 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants (UNODC 2013)—the Honduran government has gradually involved the military in public security issues.

This CMI Working Paper looks at the impact of the new security agenda on the civil-military relations in Honduras, a country with strong presence of maras1 violence, crime, delinquency, and organized crime. I argue that the new security agenda is gradually militarizing some parts of Honduran society—particularly those parts of the urban territory that are characterized by high levels of social exclusion, crime, and violence. This is partly because of a series of incomplete police reforms that started in 1998, and which have enabled the military to assume its role of a security force. This militarization has also come about because the Honduran government deliberately involves the military in public security matters.

In recent years, there has been an emerging literature on the subject of security policies as well as violence, crime and delinquency in Central America. Recent scholarship has mainly focused on the proliferation of illegal armed actors, in particular youth gangs or maras, in the new context of democratization and post-authoritarian or post-conflict era (Brenemann 2014; Bruneau 2014; Koonings and Kruijt 2004; Wolf 2012; Cruz 2010; Gutiérrez Rivera 2010; Peetz 2012). Other scholars have looked at the underlying factors of the emerging "new violence" pointing out structural and institutional factors such as the legacy of authoritarianism (Cruz 2011) and gender-based violence in urban areas (Chant 2013, Hume 2004). The recent changes of civil-military relations under the new security agenda have been neglected, or have been explored in isolation from the context of the new security agenda in the Central American region at large (see Ruhl 1996; Bowman 2004; Loveman 1999; Salomón 1999).

In order to contribute to filling that gap, first, I contextualize the Honduran government's security agenda, as well as the police and military, and place them a broader context of political developments in the region. Second, I discuss the impact of the new security agenda on civil-military relations. Specifically, I look at civil-military relations among the poor and excluded sectors of Honduran society. In the conclusion, I will draw these discussions together, arguing that security policies are gradually militarizing parts of Honduran society, representing a continuation of the authoritarian legacy from the 20th century.

[1] Maras are street gangs that are active in Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, and in some cities in the United States such as Washington D.C. and Los Angeles. Most members of the maras are adolescents and young adults and have been involved in criminal and delinquent activities.

2. Brief history of the military in Honduras: Shaping civil-military relations

2.1 Institutionalizing the military

Historically, Honduras had difficulties establishing a national army. Throughout the 19th century, liberal reforms introduced to centralize state power failed. The political game was dominated by various militias backing local *caudillos* (regional military strongmen), constituting a constant threat to the president (Mahoney 2014; Holden 2004). Moreover, the United States held considerable influence over political processes through a concessionary system that allowed foreign companies to gain control over the production and export of certain products. For instance, in Honduras, the government gave land concessions to the United Fruit Company for the production and export of bananas, which it monopolized throughout most of the twentieth century. Not until the first half of the twentieth century, under the dictatorship of Tiburcio Carías Andino (1933-1949), were the military and police unified under a centralized state. Yet, as Holden (1996) has pointed out, the United States continued to hold considerable influence over the military and police institutions. For instance, in 1953, the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) organized a coup to overthrow Guatemalan president Jacobo Árbenz Guzmán, who had introduced reforms that the US government deemed socialist. The Honduran government of Juan Manuel Gálvez (1949-1954) backed the CIA's operations to carry out the coup. Furthermore, the US government would continuously aid the Honduran military, which, in turn, contributed to consolidating the military institution (Barahona 2005).

The year 1956, with the overthrow of President Julio Lozano Diaz, marks a new period for the Honduran military. Three military officials led the coup with the purpose of stopping Lozano Díaz's apparent intentions of remaining in power. A military junta[2] ruled from 1956 to 1957, establishing a National Constituent Assembly in October 1957 for new presidential elections. Ramón Villeda Morales from the Liberal Party, who had won the elections prior to the coup, was designated president by the National Constituent Assembly. The military backed Ramón Villeda Morales on the condition that the Armed Forces would be autonomous from the Honduran government. This autonomy also entitled the military to pass a veto on the president's decisions.

2.2 Military dictatorship: 1963-1981

In 1962, the military overthrew president Ramón Villeda Morales, in part because of his agrarian and labor reforms, and in part because he backed various social movements such as the peasants' and workers' unions. Both the military and the traditional elites perceived Villeda Morales's social reforms and support of social movements as too leftist. The National Constituent Assembly voted Gen. Oswaldo López Arellano, who was part of the triumvirate during the previous junta (1956-1957), as president in 1965. The military halted some of Villeda Morales's social reforms and brutally repressed the social movements that the former president supported.

Backed by the traditional elites and the oppositional National Party (el Partido Nacional), the military ruled until new elections were held in 1971. The call for new elections was brought on by strong pressure from the social movements, particularly from the North Coast region—the economic center.

[2] The military junta was formed by three military officials: Gen. Roque J. Rodríguez, Coronel Héctor Caraccioli, and Major Roberto Gálvez Barnes. Barnes later resigned and Oswaldo López Arellano became part of the triumvirate.

Furthermore, these social movements were backed by the North Coast elites who had emerged as important economic players in the country—rivaling the traditional elites — and who had become increasingly unsatisfied with military rule [3] (Euraque 1996; Barahona 2005).

Ramón Ernesto Cruz, of the National Party, won the elections in 1971, but was ousted by the military in December 1972. Gen. Oswaldo López Arellano was chosen to rule once again. However, the military rearranged its alliances and instead backed the Liberal Party, especially the powerful North Coast economic elites. Furthermore, the military began backing the social movements they had formerly repressed, and even carried out an agrarian reform. In 1975 Gen. López Arellano was forced to step down because of his involvement in corruption—the "Bananagate.".[4] The military chose Gen. Juan Alberto Melgar Castro who ruled from 1975-1978. Melgar Castro halted some of the social reforms that were introduced by Gen. López Arellano, thus sparking agitation and organization among the social movements. The reaction of the military was brutal. Under Gen. Melgar Castro's orders, various peasant and union leaders were arrested, jailed, and repressed. Moreover, the military became involved in the massacres of peasants, taking place in the village of Los Horcones in the regional department of Olancho. Partly as a reaction to the massacre, The Superior Council of the military removed Gen. Melgar Castro and established a junta from 1978 until 1980.

During the junta, the US government pressured the military to reinstate democracy. Against the backdrop of the Sandinista revolution in 1979 and the civil wars in Guatemala and El Salvador, they feared another bloody conflict in the region. The National Constituent Assembly held congress elections in 1980. The new senators and the military chose Gen. Policarpo Paz García to be interim president until the presidential elections were held in 1981 and the new civilian president was sworn in. Officially, the military remained in power until 1982 when Roberto Suazo Córdoba of the Liberal Party, took office. However, as the next section discusses, the military remained in power even under the new civilian government.

2.3 The military during the Cold War: The reign of terror

So far, we have established that the military not only became institutionalized in Honduras, but also played a crucial role in the country's politics in the second half of the twentieth century. As we will see, this heavy-hand influence continued throughout the 1970s and 1980s. Justified by the fear of the spread of communism, the US government backed the Honduran military dictatorships and interventions in Honduran politics until the end of the Cold War. The government of Jacobo Arbénz Guzmán in Guatemala, the Cuban Revolution in the 1950s, the Sandinista Revolution in 1979 and the armed conflict in El Salvador and Guatemala concurrently became part of a political scenario that justified the Honduran military to adopt a discourse to defend "democracy" against "communism".

In 1982, the military formally handed power to civilians when President Roberto Suazo Córdova from the Liberal party was sworn into office. Democracy, however, was just a facade, as the military continued maintaining control over many state institutions. The military also had their own budget, which civilian governments could not monitor or supervise. Furthermore, the military—not the

[3] Another factor that led to dissatisfaction was the Honduras-El Salvador war in 1968 in which the Honduran army performed poorly.

[4] Bananagate refers to the scandal that involved the United Fruit Company's (UFCO) bribes to Gen. Oswaldo López Arellano in order to reduce taxes on each box of bananas. The UFCO paid Gen. Oswaldo López Arellano $2.5 million, which was deposited in Swiss bank accounts. The bribe was discovered by the Securities and Exchange Commission when investigating the suicide of Eli M. Black, the chairman and president of the United Brands Company, which managed UFCO, in New York City in 1975.

civilian government— appointed the head of the armed forces, in addition to holding considerable influence on political decisions in general.

This privileged position of the military vis-à-vis the civilian government had been negotiated in the National Constituent Assembly in 1981 and later with the elected president, Roberto Suazo Córdova (1982-1986). In these negotiations, the military also gained control over security issues. This topic was perceived as a matter of high importance, given the ongoing Cold War, regional civil wars and armed conflicts, and the domestic insurgent groups emerging in Honduras, such as the Popular Liberation Movement "Cinchonero" (*Movimiento Popular de Liberación "Cinchonero*").

2.4 National Security Doctrine

Honduras's security policy at the time was known as the National Security Doctrine (*Doctrina de Seguridad Nacional* or NS). As Meza explains,

> "National Security assumes that there is an outside enemy, a foreign threat that merges with domestic political and social conditions thus becoming an internal enemy…who is ready to use violent methods to conquer state power, change its institutions, and reset the political and economic system. In order to eliminate this threat the state uses all of its resources and possibilities, avoiding if necessary, the formalities and limitations of the judicial system as well as human rights." (Meza 2012: 12)

In Honduras, the military carried out the NS policies, providing them with exclusive control over certain state institutions such as the police, the criminal investigation unit (*Dirección Nacional de Investigación*, or DNI), and the telecommunications office (*Empresa Hondureña de Telecomunicaciones,* or HONDUTEL). Along with the creation of death squads—in particular the notorious Battalion 3-16—the military was able to effectively repress the Honduran population as well as to imprison, make disappear, torture, and even kill anyone perceived as a threat.

During the 1980s, the military committed hundreds of human rights abuses under the guise of the National Security Doctrine. The military targeted union and peasant leaders, student leaders, as well as anyone suspected to have links with the insurgent armed groups in El Salvador, Guatemala, or the Sandinistas in Nicaragua (Kruckewitt 2005). They prohibited any form of organization (students, peasants, teachers), arresting anyone they suspected posed a threat to national security. As Ruhl (1996) points out, Honduran civil society complied with the military out of fear. According to the Committee of Family Members of Disappeared Detainees in Honduras (*Comité de Familiares de Detenidos Desaparecidos en Honduras*, or COFADEH), military secret forces and death squads made more than 200 persons disappear. Others were tortured and killed. Compared to other countries such as Argentina or Chile whose security forces made thousands disappear, numbers in Honduras seem very small. However, in the context of the country's history, which does not encompass high numbers of forced disappearances in spite of successive military governments, this figure is considerably large.

In the 1990s, the military started losing its grip. International milestones such as the fall of the Berlin Wall and the signing of the Peace Accords in Central America, combined with a new democratization process in the country, decreased the military's power. The gradual democratization process entailed the demilitarization of various state institutions such as the police, as well as the return of the military under civil control. Moreover, many civil society organizations and human rights organizations demanded justice for the victims that suffered under military rule. The Honduran military had to deal with changes and find their place within Honduran politics in the post-Cold War era.

2.5 The peace accords

The Peace Accords signed in 1992 and 1996 put an end to more than a decade of armed conflict and civil war in the Central American region, and committed governments to reestablishing democracy through a democratization and demilitarization process.

As part of a regional policy, the Honduran government, which was now under civilian control through the government of Rafael Leonardo Callejas (1990-1994), started to demilitarize various state institutions in the 1990s. The military went through changes never seen before. It experienced drastic cuts in its budget and considerable limitations to its political power, as well as restrictions of their ability to influence and control civil society.

2.6 Changing civil-military relations

The demilitarization process that was taking place changed civil-military relations. As Ruhl (1996) points out, four key factors help to challenge the military's power and change civil-military relations. First, the end of the Cold War and the collapse of communism. In this new context, the doctrine of National Security became irrelevant, and replaced with the conditions outlined in the peace accords signed throughout the Central American region.

Second, the sudden shift in US policy toward Honduras when the Cold War ended. The US had financed most of the military's budget as part of its counter-insurgent policy. When the Peace Accord was signed, the United States stopped financing the military and demanded that the Honduran government readjust the military's budget under the new neoliberal policies that were underway.

Third, changes in the Honduran civil society. The new political context allowed formerly repressed social movements and organizations to denounce the military's actions in the 1980s and even non-politically motivated crimes in the early 1990s.[5]

And fourth, the business sector changing its alliance with the military, as they no longer felt they needed the military's support. Scholars also note that the business sector had undergone considerable transformation in the previous decades, emerging as a powerful political and economic actor in the Honduras and Central American regions (Gutiérrez Rivera 2014; Kasahara 2012; Robinson 2003), thus allowing them to rearrange traditional alliances with the military. Thus, the military was forced to redefine and renegotiate alliances with these emerging, and powerful, sectors of society.

Changes in traditional civil-military relations also involved demilitarizing state institutions formerly under military control, as well as subjecting the military to a civilian authority. For example, in 1996, the Ministry of Defense (*Ministerio de Defensa*) was formed, headed by a civilian. The police was also demilitarized. Formerly known as the Public Security Forces (*Fuerzas de Seguridad Pública*, or FUSEP), they were placed under civil authority in 1994. A new police law was also drafted in 1998, the Organic Police Law (*Ley Orgánica de Policía*), and the government removed the military's direct control over the Honduran Telecomunications (Empresa Hondureña de Telecomunicaciones, or HONDUTEL), as well as the military's indirect control over the Department of Immigration and the Merchant Marine (*Marina Mercante*) (Ruhl 1996). In short, successive governments passed reforms that gradually diluted the military's institutional power. In this new context, civil society

[5] One of the most notorious crimes was the rape and death of Ricci Mabel Martínez in July 1991. Martínez, 17, was visiting her boyfriend, who was stationed in a battalion in the outskirts of Tegucigalpa, when military officials–among them the head of the battalion–raped and dismembered her body.

organizations were also able to make demands without the fear of being threatened, tortured, or even killed.

2.7 The new violence

Despite these positive changes, other issues were emerging in Honduras as well as in Central America at large, differing considerably from the political violence of the 1980s. In the early 1990s, Leticia Salomón observed in her book, *The Violence in Honduras* (*La violencia en Honduras*) (1994), that a new type of violence was appearing in the country; a violence seen in the gradual proliferation of criminal and delinquent acts such as armed robbery and theft, which involve mostly male adolescents and young adults. Towards the end of the 1990s and early twenty-first century, various scholars recognized this "new violence" in the post-conflict scenario. Koonings and Kruijt aptly point out that the "new violence" means that "a variety of social actors pursue a variety of objectives on the basis of coercive strategies and methods" (2004: 8). Yet, this new form of violence is not directed toward the state, namely to overthrow the status quo, rather it can target anyone. In this sense, there is a "democratization" of violence (Koonings and Kruijt 2004; Rotker 2002).

The variety of actors that emerged in this context of "new violence" included death squads, paramilitary groups, members of organized crime, and youth gangs, among others. In Honduras, youth gangs and, more recently, organized crime proliferated. The former, known as the maras, appeared in the 1990s as a result of changes in the family and school institutions, increasing socio-economic inequalities caused by neoliberal policies, and especially the massive arrival of deportees from the United States with a background as active gang members.[6].

Neoliberal policies have been an underlying factor of the rise of this new violence. The Honduran government introduced neoliberal policies in the early 1990s. The backdrop was that the Central American armed conflict and civil wars had left the region bankrupt. The economic situation worsened as the US government withdrew aid. The Honduran government obtained loans from the World Bank and the World Monetary Fund (IMF) on the condition of introducing what is generally known as a Structural Adjustment Plan. The plan involved the usual recipe of fiscal austerity, tax reform, large-scale privatization, and lower government social spending; but had a series of negative social consequences such as increased poverty, inequality and unemployment.[7]

Today, around 60 per cent of the Honduran population lives in poverty (UNDP 2014). Most of the population, particularly the youth segment, has been hit by the lack of job opportunities in the country, forcing many to immigrate mainly to the United States. In other cases, entering the illicit

[6] Although there had been street gangs in Honduras since the 1950s, the new gangs were transformed in the 1980s, as were most gangs around the world. On the one hand, street gangs' organization became more complex due to increasing membership numbers; on the other, the use of violence became more institutionalized (Salomón, Castellanos, and Flores 1999). Another factor that changed the local street gangs was the massive arrival of deportees from the Unites States in the 1990s. Shifts in the US migration policy led to the deportation of documented and undocumented migrants who had criminal records. Many of the deportees were members of two street gangs from Southern California: the Mara Salvatrucha and the Eighteenth Street Gang (Dieciocho). Shortly after returning "home," a place where many had never lived and which did not even exist in their childhood memories, the deportees, who were members of either one of the maras, reorganized and merged the gang with the existing local ones.

[7] On the other hand, these neoliberal policies also entailed modernizing the state institutions opening up for more citizen participation. For instance, human rights groups become more organized. The Honduran governments also attempted to increase youth participation through the creation of the National Institute of Youth (*Instituto Nacional de Juventud*) and the National Forum for Youth (*Foro Nacional de Juventud*).

drug economy or joining the gangs becomes a solution to the difficulties of overcoming economic hardships.

2.8 Drugs and crime

The drug economy and criminal organizations have been present in Honduras throughout the twentieth century. However, they were first brought to national public attention in the late 1970s with the assassination of Mario and Mary Ferrari, a middle class couple. The authorities' investigation of this murder showed the Ferraris' involvement in the traffic of cocaine, emeralds, and arms, as well as their ties with Honduran drug lord Ramón Matta Ballesteros,[8] who worked with the Colombian Medellin Cartel and the Mexican Guadalajara Cartel.

In 1989, the Honduran government, perhaps foreseeing the drug problem, passed the bill Decree 136/89 that penalizes the improper use and illicit trafficking of drugs and psychotropic substances. By the turn of the twenty-first century, however, with the globalization of drug economy and consumption, Honduras became one of the main corridors for transporting drugs from South America to North America. The impact of drug trafficking and organized crime on the country has been devastating. Violence—in particular homicides—has increased considerably. In the late 1990s, the homicide rate was 46.31 per 100,000 inhabitants (Castellanos 2000); in 2013 the homicide rate doubled at 93.1 per 100,000 inhabitants (UNODC 2013).

3. The new security policy

The democratization and demilitarization processes may have changed, even improved, civil-military relations during the 1990s, in the sense that they reduced systematic oppression of social and political dissent. Yet, as we have seen, they did not stop the "new violence" that had emerged in the early 1990s. Rather, this form of violence was becoming more and more widespread. The media reported on gang violence, the maras' appeal among poor male adolescents, and the rising crime and delinquency in the country's main cities. Many Hondurans viewed this scenario as a serious problem that the government was not addressing.

Not that the government was not aware. The governments in the 1990s promoted mainly preventive policies toward violence and crime. Because most of the persons involved in crime and violence were adolescents and young adults, targeted preventive programs were introduced in the form of awareness programs in public schools focusing on drug use and gang memberships. Importantly, civil society organizations, youth organizations, local scholars, and government officials attempted to draft a bill that directly addressed the mara phenomenon—Decree 141-2001 and 170-2001 known as the Law for Prevention, Rehabilitation and Reinsertion of Gang and Mara Members (*Ley para la Prevención, Rehabilitación y Reinserción Social de Personas Integrantes de Pandillas o Maras*). However, the bill was stalled in 2001, and the government opted instead for the hard-line security policies that are in force today.

[8] Ramón Matta Ballesteros was arrested in Honduras by the United States Marshalls in 1988 and currently is serving 12 life sentences in the United States.

3.1 The hard-line security agenda: Mano Dura or Iron Fist

In 2002, the Honduran government introduced a harsher security agenda which involved carrying out military and police raids in poor neighborhoods (many of them controlled by gang members), the massive incarceration of "criminals and delinquents," and changes in the criminal justice system—in particular an increase in sentences. What led the government to change preventive security policies into hard-line, repressive ones? One factor was the popular demand for the government to reduce widespread violence, crime and delinquency. Importantly, a shift occurred when violence started affecting the upper middle class and the rich. The death of ex-president Ricardo Maduro´s son is illustrative. In 1997, the politician's son was shot to death during an attempt to kidnap him. The incident shocked the country and indicated that everyone, including the rich, could not escape the new violence. Ricardo Maduro became president in 2002 and any Honduran could relate to his tragic story. For his part, Maduro could easily relate to Hondurans' demands to reduce the widespread violence, prompting him to advocate for and introduce the first round of hard-line policies.

Changes occurring on a global scale regarding notions of social order, punishment, crime and delinquency in contemporary societies, leading to what Garland (2002) has coined "the culture of crime control," were another factor. As Garland (2002) discusses, the 1970s marked a significant change in crime control and the criminal justice system, which, in turn, transformed various institutions and technologies for social control, such as the police and the penal system. Rather than the traditional belief in the rehabilitation of criminals and delinquents that predominated until the 1970s, today's contemporary societies are driven by a culture of anxiety demanding a "tough-on-crime" approach. The result has been a considerable increase of the prison population, changes in attitudes and perceptions toward "criminals and delinquents," increasing use of technology for surveillance (for instance, rising use of cameras in public areas such as shopping centers) and private forms of security.

Neoliberal policies have also greatly contributed to this shift. Previous explanatory frameworks focused on the assumption that crime occurs due to lack of opportunities; i.e. analyzing individual behavior in relation to structural factors. However, in the new neoliberal culture of crime control, committing a crime is an individual's choice, a "bad" choice for which the person should be "locked up" in prison (Bourgois 2002; Wacquant 2010; Garland 2002). Yet, across the world, most of the persons imprisoned generally emerge from the poor and excluded sectors of society.

Honduras's hard-line security agenda, known as Mano Dura, is modeled after former New York mayor Giuliani's "broken windows" policies (Müller 2009). It mainly criminalizes poor young male adults, especially members of the maras.[9] The new security agenda has not only perpetuated the perception of poor unemployable young male adults as "criminals," it has also affected the institutions involved in shaping the social order, especially the police, the military, and the penitentiary system.

[9] Gang violence and, later, the maras' criminal activities made headlines in the late 1990s and the maras became easy targets of the new repressive security agenda. Despite the fact that gang violence and criminal activity accounted for a small percentage of the homicides in the country in 2002, the Maduro administration held the maras responsible for most of the violence and crime in the country. The government's discourse of holding the maras responsible legitimized their persecution and arrest (Peetz 2012; Huhn, Oettler, and Peetz 2009) leading to changes in the criminal code. For instance, the Maduro administration reformed article 332 of the criminal code in 2002 which establishes street gangs and maras as illicit associations. This means that the sole membership to the gang or mara is a criminal act entailing a fine and a sentence of 12 years in prison. It is worthwhile mentioning that in March 2015, current President Juan Orlando Hernández asked Congress to revise Article 332 because of the changes in street gangs and maras and their criminal acts.

3.2 Impact of the new security policies and civil-military relations

The twenty-first century has exposed what appears to be a gradual re-militarization of Honduran society. This turn has come about in part because of the government's new security agenda, and the abandonment of a tentatively preventive approach toward violence, crime, and delinquency. Moreover, this shift is also related to constant reforms in the security institutions, such as the police and criminal investigation units.

The Secretary of Security (*Secretaría de Seguridad*) is a relatively new institution, established in 1998 as part of the state modernization process. As Cruz (2011) notes, security and justice institutions are needed in a democracy in order to ensure the rule of law as well as to monopolize the legitimate use of violence. In this sense, the emergence of the Secretary of Security can be seen as part of the demilitarization process in which institutions, which were formerly under military control, are now under civilian authority. This was the case of the National Police (*Policía Nacional*), the Preventive Police (*Policía Preventiva*), and the National Directorate of Criminal Investigation (*Dirección Nacional de Investigación Criminal*).

However, since its inception, the Secretary of Security has been criticized by human rights organizations and civil society organizations, as it hardly seems run by civilian authorities. Some of the persons appointed to head this institution have ties to the military or were military officials. This is, for example, the case of Oscar Álvarez, whose brother Gustavo Alvarez was head of the armed forces in the early 1980s and leader of the notorious death squad 3-16. Likewise, for the most recently appointed secretary in January 2015, Julian Pacheco Tinoco, who resigned as general in order to become secretary. The fact that many persons named head of this institution have ties to the military or were formerly in the military with a questionable past (i.e., involved in human rights violations) suggests the continuation of a military and authoritarian approach.

The prevalence of authoritarian practices is not only linked to choosing ex-military officials to be part of the security institutions. As Cruz notes, the prevalence of authoritarian practices is also connected to pacts with agents "who hold power derived from their capacity for violence (army, police, paramilitaries, etc.)" (2011: 8); with some being illegal armed actors. For instance, it is well known that the military had links with drug traffickers in the 1970s (Salomón 1994) and there are reasons to believe that pacts between state officials and drug traffickers continue today. Naturally, these supposed inter-connections between parts of the military and the criminal underworld makes law enforcement a very opaque affair.

3.3 Monopoly of violence

Another hindrance for the Honduran state has been the monopolization of legitimate violence in the hands of the police. Although the former Forces of Public Security (*Fuerzas de Seguridad Pública,* or FUSEP) was demilitarized in the 1990s, the newly named National Police (*Policía Nacional*) is still undergoing reforms that have made it difficult for it to become a reliable public security institution.

The first set of reforms took place in 1993 and separated the former FUSEP from the military. Furthermore, the reforms eliminated the National Direction of Investigation and created a General Direction of Criminal Investigation (*Dirección General de Investigación Criminal,* or DGIC). The DGIC was initially part of the General Attorney's Office (*Ministerio Público*). These reforms also created the National Police (*Policía Nacional*).

In 1998, another set of reforms took place, which moved the National Police from the General Attorney's Office to the Secretary of Security. This decision stirred controversy, especially among

human rights organizations that believed it made the police more prone to abuse its powers because of the hard-line military approach found in the Secretary of Security.

Finally, a third set of reforms was implemented within a 12-year period, from late 1998 to 2011. These reforms produced the Organic Law of the National Police *(Ley Orgánica de la Policía Nacional)*. Under this new law, the police managed a range of different institutions related to law enforcement and investigation.[10] On top of that, the police's own Internal Affairs Unit (*Unidad de Asuntos Internos*) together with the National Council of Internal Security (*Consejo Nacional de Seguridad Interior*, or CONASIN) was put in charge of supervising the police. However, both institutions faced a range of problems, including insufficient resources and poor coordination. The Internal Affairs Unit had its headquarter in the capital Tegucigalpa, making it difficult to monitor the police in other municipalities of the country (Beltrán and Thale 2013).

In August 2013, the son of the president of the National University of Honduras was murdered by the police. This sparked demands for reforms from a range of civil society and human rights institutions. Consequently, the ineffective Internal Affairs Unit was abolished and a new institution to oversee police corruption, Directorate for the Investigation and Evaluation of the Police Career (*Dirección de Investigación y Evaluación de la Carrera Policial* or DIECP) was established. Yet, this unit continues facing the problem of insufficient funding and personnel.

3.4 The military's new role

Given that the National Police force, as well as the different units under its umbrella, suffers from corruption and widespread human rights violations, its internal control units would hypothetically be important instruments for keeping a check on these practices. But in the absence of such control mechanisms, a culture of violent and corrupt policing, poor police work, and high levels of impunity are allowed to flourish.

This conundrum of problems characterizing the police has allowed the military to step in on issues of public security. In many cases, the military has taken over key police functions such as policing poor neighborhoods or carrying out raids, thus blurring the lines that distinguish the police from the military. This is further complicated by the recent creation of a military police in 2013, Military Police for Public Order (*Policía Militar de Orden Público,* or PMOP)[11]. Due to this increased presence of the military on the streets, it comes as no surprise that many Hondurans are beginning to view the military as a more reliable institution for public security and fighting crime.

3.5 Poor neighbourhoods

The military's' presence in civil territories is not uniform throughout society. Since the new security agenda was introduced, the government has been constantly deploying both police and military forces to poor, crime-ridden neighborhoods in order to carry out raids. Arrests are being made at the officers' own discretion and not necessarily because of crimes being committed. These random arrests

[10] These institutions included: The Preventive Police (*Dirección de la Policía Nacional Preventiva*), Special Preventive Services (Dire*cción de Servicios Especiales Preventivos*), General Criminal Investigation (*Dirección General de Investigación Criminal*), National Traffic (*Dirección Nacional de Tránsito*), Special Services of Investigation (*Dirección Nacional de Servicios Especiales de Investigación*), Internal Affairs (*Dirección Nacional de Asuntos Internos*), and the Prisons (*Centro Penales*).

[11] However, in January 2015, the National Congress voted against granting constitutional status to the PMOP, which would have given this security body the same legal footing as the armed forces and the police.

are sanctioned through reforms in the criminal justice system, in particular the reform of Article 332 that establishes that all gangs and maras are illicit organizations, and that their members are henceforth automatically penalized. This law works in tandem with the 2002 Law of Police and Social Co-Existence (*Ley de Policía y Convivencia Social*), which allows police to detain "anyone suspicious or vagabonds" (Ungar and Salomón 2012: 30). Massive arrests followed, mainly of poor "unemployable" male young adults and members, even only suspected members, of the maras. As a result, the prison population has increased significantly during the past two decades, collapsing the penitentiary system. In the mid-1990s the prison population was 6,200. In 2013, it was 13,700, a little more than double (Gutiérrez Rivera, forthcoming).

3.6 The preventive approach to public insecurity

The constant raids, arrests, and use of indiscriminate state violence directed towards residents of poor neighborhoods have become an obstacle for building trust toward state institutions. Most of these poor neighborhoods are informal settlements with a history of lack of state presence. When the state finally appears, it is usually in the form of violence and through institutions that exercise violence over these communities. However, efforts have been made to modify this tendency of violent state presence. In the past few years, the Honduran government has introduced Community Policing programs. These are designed to have a more preventive approach, including the Preventive Police (*Policía Preventiva*). The Preventive Police works closely with residents of the community and civil society organizations present in these neighborhoods, such as the Catholic Church, as well as local state agencies, such as the city councils (*Patronatos*). The results have been positive in terms of crime reduction in some of the neighborhoods, enabling officers to identify crime patterns as well as youth at risk (Ungar and Salomón 2012). Nevertheless, it has still been difficult to establish trust between the community and the police. This is partly due to the general perception that the police officers are corrupt. In addition, communities point out the limitations of the community-policing program, such as lack of resources and manpower to police the neighborhoods and poor equipment to solve crimes.

3.7 Whose autonomy?

Seen as a whole, these difficulties show the institutional fragility underlying the establishment of the police as a dependable institution, making room for the military to step in on domestic politics regarding security issues. This has clearly re-militarized Honduran society, a fact that worryingly is accompanied by a growing dissatisfaction of Hondurans toward democracy. As Ruhl notes, a poll revealed that Hondurans are, "more willing than other Central Americans to accept confrontational political methods–including military coups–and to follow strong leaders who might employ undemocratic methods" (Ruhl 2010: 97).

Drawing on previous analysis put forward by Ruhl (2004), one can argue that civilian authorities have in fact been responsible for obstructing the democratization of civil-military relations. On the one hand, they have demilitarized the police and other state institutions, as well as successfully (until 2009 at least, as we will see below) subordinated the military to a civilian government. On the other hand, however, they have not been able to institutionalize civil authority, as evident in the blurred lines between the police and the military on security issues. Moreover, the military is not subjected to thorough supervision or oversight by civilian defense ministries, and national intelligence is still de facto dominated by the military. And finally, the military's backing of the 2009 coup against Manuel Zelaya raises the question of whether it is actually possible to say that the military is subordinated to civilian rule in contemporary Honduras.

3.8 The 2009 coup

The coup in June 2009 brought down President Manuel Zelaya, who had been elected for the Liberal party in 2006. Zelaya, who is a wealthy land and ranch owner belonging to one of the regional elites of the country, introduced free school enrollment, increased the minimum wage, increased wages for teachers, and attempted to reduce fuel costs (Gordon and Webber 2011). He also reformed the mining laws, introducing a new bill that would raise tax on foreign mining companies, and passed a Forest Law (Ley de Reforestación) designed to protect the environment. Furthermore, he refused to privatize the state-owned electric and telecommunications companies.

The traditional elites and the military, though not happy with these reforms, did not feel threatened. However, this changed, first as a result of an economic downturn in 2008, when Zelaya decided to join the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America (ALBA) led by Venezuela (Gordon and Webber 2011) and second, after Zelaya's decision to do a referendum in 2009 asking Hondurans to vote for a new Constituent National Assembly that would draft a new Constitution. The traditional elites and the military, as well as other conservative sectors of civil society such as the Catholic Church, immediately reacted against Zelaya. They claimed that the referendum was part of a plan for Zelaya to remain in power, and that Zelaya was becoming a puppet of Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez.[12]

The military refused to comply with Zelaya's order to distribute the ballots for the referendum, scheduled to take place during the presidential elections in November 2009. Zelaya then fired the head of the Armed Forces, Gen. Romeo Orlando Vásquez Velázquez. Shortly thereafter, the Minister of Defense, Ángel Orellana, resigned. The Supreme Court ruled both the referendum and Gen. Vásquez's dismissal as illegal. In Congress, Roberto Micheletti from the Liberal party and president of Congress, as well as other members of the Liberal party, turned against Zelaya. This group, constituting the right-wing faction of the Liberal party, became allied with the military high officials, conservative groups such as the Catholic Church—especially the Opus Dei—and the traditional elites to overthrow Zelaya. On Sunday, June 28, Zelaya was ousted. The military arrived at Zelaya's home and sent him to Costa Rica in his pajamas. Roberto Micheletti became interim president until the new elections in November 2009.

The coup shows that, despite a formal demilitarization process, the military are still involved in politics. It also indicates the existence of military pacts with political and economic elites that, depending on the circumstances, will back a faction, be divided among the political factions, or even "switch sides" (Ruhl 2010). In the case of the 2009 coup, the military joined forces with the traditional elites, the National party, and right-wing factions of the Liberal party. The 2009 coup has since produced political instability and has considerably hindered the advancement of the democratization of civil-military relations.

[12] The traditional elites and the military believed Zelaya wanted to change the constitution to allow reelection for a second term, which is prohibited in the current constitution. Ironically, Honduras's current president, Juan Orlando Hernández from the National Party, is also seeking to change the constitution to allow reelection. However, contrary to Zelaya, the traditional elites and the military have backed him. On 26 April 2015, the National Congress approved the reelection of the Honduran president.

4. Conclusions

This CMI Working paper has looked at the impact of the Honduran government's new security agenda on civil-military relations in the light of the country's authoritarian history. It shows that, despite a decade of successful demilitarization of state institutions as well as of subordination of the military to civilian rule, the security agenda emerging in the 1990s has led to a progressive militarization of Honduran society. One factor underlying this change is the inability of the Honduran government to establish dependable security institutions, in particular the police. As scholars have pointed out, the country's authoritarian legacy is still present, particularly when civilian authorities reach out to the military in order to solve domestic security issues and, more recently, for reinstating "political stability" (Cruz 2011; Ruhl 2004, 2010).

The difficulties for the Honduran government to properly institutionalize the police force have translated into both a spatially and socially differentiated security policy. Those affected the most and who have to live with the consequences of the "iron-fist" strategy, are the poor sectors living in neighborhoods with high levels of crime and delinquency. Historically these urban areas have little or no state presence, thus allowing the proliferation of illegal armed actors such as the maras, which have gained considerable control over some of these neighborhoods. The new security agenda involves more state presence in these neighborhoods in the form of arrests, raids, policing—in other words, state-society interaction mediated by the use of violence. As the police is generally perceived as corrupt and abusive, the general population is caught in the middle of two disruptive and violent forces.

A more preventive approach towards crime and delinquency, and an effective institutionalization of civilian rule, could help reduce the high levels of crime and delinquency. Well-funded state programs that focus on prevention, such as Community Policing, have contributed to reducing crime as well as very gradually rebuilding trust among community members. This could also contribute to making the military retreat from domestic security issues, and in so doing, play a part in changing civil-military relations towards a less tense, and more democratic order. For the time being, however, prospects for such a shift seems bleak.

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During the past decade, the Honduran government has introduced hard-line security policies in order to reduce the alarming levels of crime and delinquency in the country. This CMI Working paper outlines the history of civil-military relations as characterized by a string of military dictatorships in the 20th century, followed by an analysis of the impact of contemporary security policies, known as Mano Dura (Iron Fist). The analysis shows that these policies have led to the gradual militarization of certain sectors of society, especially the poor urban neighborhoods where police and military carry out raids and arrests. The Working Paper concludes that the military still holds significant political power in Honduras.

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