
Military Training and Education in Honduras: Coping With Post-Cold War Realities

By

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Consistent with post-Cold War realities the Honduran Armed Forces (HOAF) find themselves in perhaps the most critical juncture of their history as they transition to a role and status generally accepted as normal in a constitutional democracy. The requirement for a relatively large standing military force poised to protect national territorial integrity and defend sovereignty against external threats is somewhat diminished as the major focus is now on defending against threats internal to Honduras' borders. A sample of these missions include supporting police activities dealing with a general state of lawlessness; active cooperation with civilian agencies countering narcotics, illegal alien, and stolen vehicle smuggling operations; environmental protection, including forest firefighting and guarding against lumber poachers and smugglers; demining operations along the Honduran-Nicaraguan border; and humanitarian and civic action operations aimed at improving the quality of life of Honduran citizens. All these missions place considerable stress on the Honduran military in view of limited resources and manpower.

The HOAF are also facing internal challenges. According to Honduran government officials, the budget for the HOAF cannot support all HOAF requirements. Budget shortfalls prevent the HOAF from increasing military compensation and improving the quality of life. These deficiencies dissuade potential recruits from volunteering their service, while career personnel from junior to mid-level officers and trained technicians are simultaneously departing the ranks to seek more lucrative opportunities elsewhere. These realities, especially when combined with the reductions of the U.S. military aid characteristic of the 1980s, make the prospects of fielding a military force capable of executing all its internal and external security missions a difficult prospect indeed. However, the International Military Education and Training Program (IMET), in conjunction with other US activities in the region, proves an effective means of supplementing host nation training and education as the host nation military forces transcend this difficult period.

MILITARY TRAINING AND EDUCATION STRATEGY

The foremost challenge we face jointly with our Honduran allies is to develop an effective long-term training and education strategy while faced with severe resource constraints. Our desired end state is a self-sufficient, professional force which respects civilian control and human rights, can accomplish its external and internal security missions, and contributes to regional stability—perhaps a tall order but an achievable one if we are determined, creative, patient, and remain engaged for years to come.

The ways we are currently pursuing this strategy include: sustaining a core of professional personnel through continued Professional Military Education from junior through senior-level; programming critical technical training in those specialties that exceed HOAF in-house capabilities; supporting the development of adequate logistics systems in all the services by programming training and education in logistics-related areas; encouraging and supporting participation in multinational military exercises and operations with an eye towards enhanced

interoperability; and promoting civil-military education as a means for enhancing understanding and cooperation between the HOAF and their civilian partners. Here again we are faced with the formidable challenge of effectively managing limited resources so that the greatest enduring impact can be achieved while avoiding a "shotgun" approach which dilutes efforts.

SECURITY ASSISTANCE-FUNDED TRAINING AND EDUCATION

We have various *means* with which we can conduct required training and education. Foremost among these is the IMET Program. While IMET funds shrank from a high of \$1,250,000 in 1989 to \$325,000 last year, the program remains among the best methods for forging enduring professionalism and values and supporting US policy objectives. This year's total of \$400,000 will fund over 280 civilian and military students of all ranks and services for schooling in the US or Honduras. Over 16 percent will attend PME courses, while 13 percent will attend technical courses, and about 5 percent are slated for Management and Operations courses. Programmed courses include CGSC, basic and advanced service branch-specific education, counterdrug operations, joint operations, civil-military operations, and logistics related courses. Most technical training courses are directed toward the Honduran Air Force, which lacks in-house facilities necessary for sustaining skills required for flight operations safety of their relatively sophisticated aircraft.

The remaining 66 percent are programmed for courses conducted in Honduras by teams of visiting U.S. instructors. These courses, which consume over 33 percent of the entire IMET allocation, are acknowledged by Honduran authorities as the most effective means for educating both senior military and civilian leaders, and are critical in the transition to civilian primacy over the military.

Premiere among the courses scheduled to be conducted in Honduras are the Naval Justice School (NJS) seminar on human rights and military justice; the Defense Resources Management Institute (DRMI) course; and the Center for Civil-Military Relations (CCMR) seminar. In FY 1996, the DRMI team will present its sixth seminar to the National Defense College, while the NJS will conduct its third. The CCMR presented its inaugural course in March of this year. These seminars educate civilian and military leaders of the future and contribute significantly toward improved civil-military relations. The relevance of the topics, together with the superb quality of the instructors, makes these courses cornerstones of our training efforts.

FMS training cases are the main source for funding in-country technical training and a most valuable asset to our overall training strategy. We currently fund a Logistics Extended Training and Services Specialist (LOG ETSS) team with a budget of about \$150,000. This team, comprised of three U.S. Army logistics warrant officers and headed by an ordnance major, is crucial to our efforts in building Honduran self-sufficiency. Charged with training HOAF logistics personnel in basic supply, maintenance, and ammunition management procedures, this team instilled technical expertise in over 350 logistics personnel from all military services. They are also supporting the implementation of a logistics plan we developed jointly with the Hondurans. This plan once fully implemented will result in efficient logistics systems tailored to specific HOAF needs.

Also funded through FMS is a Drill Instructor ETSS averaging about \$25,000 per year. We currently have a top-notch U.S. Army NCO assigned to the Honduran Army Center for Military Training, where he trains trainers and assists in basic training for new recruits, junior officers, and NCOs. The DI ETSS also conducts training in Honduran Army units throughout the country.

In FY 1996 we also hosted a Weaponeer Marksmanship Trainer Mobile Training Team (MTT). This two-man MTT, which cost approximately \$22,000, trained 16 Honduran Army and police personnel in maintenance and training procedures. A collateral benefit derived from this training was the repair of the weaponeer trainer located at the military academy which will provide valuable marksmanship training at a considerable cost savings for the academy.

Finally, for FY 1996 we programmed close to \$70,000 to fund Honduran Military Academy cadets' attendance at the Cadet Leadership Development (Logistics) Course at the School of the Americas. This course was traditionally funded through IMET but FY96 funds were insufficient to cover this significant expenditure. This cadet course provides us the opportunity to support professional development early in an officer's career when he is most impressionable. Additionally, the course complements the military academy's curriculum, particularly in leadership development and logistics training.

MEASURES OF SUCCESS

As indicated previously, improvements and changes will take time to manifest themselves. Yet, we can state confidently that our strategy is proving effective. Almost all of the Honduran senior military leaders assigned to critical positions, from the CINC down to brigade and battalion commanders, have participated in the IMET program. Noteworthy among these are the new Minister of Defense and the Director of Operations, Organization, and Training (C-3) of the HOAF, both of whom are graduates of the Army War College. All of these individuals know and understand U.S. training doctrine and are instituting changes within the military institution which will improve training and operations. One such significant change is the implementation of an IG inspection program aimed at eliminating incompetence and improving maintenance and training programs.

The in-country instruction by Americans are pivotal in tearing down barriers which impede civil-military relations. The Military Justice and Human Rights Seminar conducted in September 1995 by the NJS spurred much interest and a genuine desire on behalf of the HOAF Auditor General to improve the military justice system. A civilian participant and representative of the Attorney General's office stated that he came into the seminar with preconceived feelings of distrust and confrontation, yet these feelings quickly dissipated as he left with a better understanding and appreciation of the military. Military participants echoed similar remarks as the civilian participants. All agreed that we must continue to schedule similar seminars: we will, elevating the seminar to "graduate-level" subject matters hoping to attract key military and civilian officials.

The Civil-Military Relations Seminar conducted by the CCMR in March of this year was almost canceled by the Hondurans because of the controversial nature of the subject; we managed to convince them to allow the seminar. In his remarks during the closing ceremony, the Director of the National Defense College (who sponsored the seminar) admitted to the predominantly civilian audience of sixty participants that he had much trepidation regarding the seminar but that after seeing what was accomplished during the week he was glad it was conducted. The success of the seminar was best captured by this statement made by a Honduran Army Colonel while addressing the participants: "People fear each other because they don't know each other, they don't know each other because they don't talk, they don't talk because they never get together." This is perhaps the greatest contribution of these seminars: bringing civilian and military leaders together in a neutral atmosphere which permits them to discuss, argue, and exchange ideas regarding topics many of which were never before discussed between them.

The Hondurans are participating effectively in multinational operations and exercises. They successfully deployed two 120 man contingents in support of UNMIH II operations in Haiti. They are improving logistics management, understanding that self-sufficiency is a must and national resources are limited. Most importantly, the HOAF are in fact acting responsibly and are working in close partnership with civilian authorities. Even while facing what would appear to be insurmountable odds, they are effectively executing their assigned security missions. In so doing they support the democratically-elected administration and contribute to the existing climate of stability.

A LOOK TOWARD THE FUTURE

Our training and education strategy will change little for years to come: we have to remain engaged, determined, and patient. We will continue to aggressively encourage Honduran participation in all opportunities as are feasibly possible to manage. The various US initiatives discussed in this article will continue to be critical resources for training. The HOAF face great challenges as they work to accomplish their assigned missions with limited and diminishing resources. Whatever the future has in store for Honduras, we will be there by their side every step of the way.