
Charting A Course For The Future: The Honduran Naval Forces

By

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The Naval Forces of Honduras (F.N.H.) are basically a coastal patrol and riverine navy consisting of 31 patrol boats and landing craft from eight different classes. Based at three principal bases—Puerto Cortez, Puerto Castilla (on the Caribbean side), and Amapala (on the Gulf of Fonseca)—these vessels perform the missions of maritime interdiction, fishery protection, and counternarcotics when tasked. The F.N.H. is also opening a new base at Barra de Caratasca, in the distant, isolated Mosquitia region. This will serve as a base for counternarcotics operations in the future, but is in an embryonic stage at this point.

The USMILGP Honduras Navy Security Assistance Program is broad-ranging and diverse. It encompasses the traditional aspects of security assistance including Foreign Military Sales/Foreign Military Financing (FMS/FMF) and International Military Education and Training (IMET), but also includes the avenues of Military-to-Military Contact, Traditional CINC Activities (TCAs), and Exercise planning and coordination.

In the world of FMS/FMF, MILGP Honduras Navy cases include 32 projects, all of which are funded with residual funds from previous years' assistance. Due to Brooke Sanctions under which Honduras has labored in recent years, not much activity has taken place since FY 1994. It has been the strategy of MILGP Honduras to commit residual funds to cases as soon as sanctions are lifted and start work on projects during the typically short "windows of opportunity" between the lifting of sanctions and the reimposition of sanctions which inevitably follow the next time a payment comes due. An example of the success of this strategy has been the completion and delivery of Phase I of a Navy Pier Construction Project in Puerto Castilla in August of 1995. Other significant Navy cases which are active include:

- Renovation of a World War II-era hospital into a modern headquarters building and barracks;
- Phase II of the Navy Pier Construction Project (i.e., inclusion of electrical and firefighting capabilities);
- Survey, repair, and certification of a decompression chamber in Puerto Castilla;
- Spare parts for naval vessels and propulsion systems;
- Purchase of diving equipment for tactical divers;
- Computer and communication systems acquisition; and
- Acquisition of a water purification system for the new Barra de Caratasca base.

The total value of all active Navy cases is \$2,678,000—approximately eighteen (18) percent of the remaining MILGP Honduras FMS/FMFP program. It is a modest and sometimes intermittent program to be sure, but one which provides significant activity and

engenders a strong spirit of cooperation between the Honduran Naval Staff and MILGP Naval Section.

The other major branch of security assistance affecting the Navy, is IMET. With a budget of \$52,200 in FY96, there are adequate resources to fund eleven courses of instruction for Honduran naval personnel in the U.S and Panama. The cornerstone of the Naval Training Program is the Surface Warfare Officers' School (SWOS International) which exposes junior officers to all aspects of Naval operations and maintenance while reinforcing Human Rights and subordination of the military to civil authority. At sixteen percent of the total IMET budget, the Honduran Navy receives a proportionate share of the overall IMET allocation with respect to its sister services.

With respect to fostering strong military-to-military contacts, the MILGP Honduras Navy Section is involved in a variety of other activities. Through the Naval Personnel Exchange Program (PEP), the MILGP maintains a close liaison on the technical front. At the Honduran Naval Base in Puerto Cortez, one U.S.Navy Lieutenant provides propulsion engineering expertise to the principal Honduran Naval maintenance facility. Navy PEP is an invaluable technical resource to the Hondurans which has provided not only maintenance assistance and coordination, but mentorship for junior Naval officers as well. Further, under the heading of MIL-to-MIL contact are efforts sponsored by the Navy Section Chief to bring about a counternarcotics "Embarked Observer" accord. This diplomatic endeavor would permit the embarkation of Honduran naval or law enforcement personnel aboard U.S. vessels of opportunity to conduct combined visit and search operations of vessels suspected of narcotrafficking. The MILGP also remains active in coordination of U.S.Navy and Coast Guard ship visits to Honduran ports which often result in training availabilities and maintenance assists for the Hondurans. A good example of this was seen in the December 1994 visit of a Medium Endurance Coast Guard Cutter to Puerto Cortez (under the aegis of "Operation Vista"). Many shipboard repairs were accomplished, and a classroom training syllabus was taught during the inport phase of this operation. Subsequently, Honduran naval personnel were embarked aboard the cutter for an underway phase of operations and training. These types of interaction, in general, promote excellent working relationships with host nation military authorities and enhance the effectiveness of other Security Assistance programs.

Traditional CINC Activities (TCA) are a Unified Command-sponsored program that funds numerous conferences, assessments, skill exchanges, and orientation tours. MILGP Honduras will be participating in several such activities in the coming fiscal years. Some of the areas in which the Navy will be involved include:

- Naval Operations/Logistics Symposium
- Riverine Maintenance Exchange
- Communications Executive Level Coordination
- Medical Aspects of Underwater Operations Exchange

Additional TCA events will be requested to improve Honduran expertise in Supply Management, Naval Training, Maintenance Management and Surface Warfare. Although a relatively new initiative, the TCA program holds great promise for promoting bilateral and multilateral cooperation in the SOUTHCOM area of responsibility.

Exercise management is another significant area in which the MILGP Honduras Navy Section is involved. In cooperation with the Embassy's Country Team and JTF-B, the MILGP

develops the exercise concept and obtains the U.S. Chief of Mission's approval. Due to the existence of a unique, bilateral agreement that governs military exercises with Honduras, Diplomatic Notes (which are normally required to obtain host nation approval for exercises) are not mandatory. In the place of a DIPNOTE, however, the MILGP concludes an "Implementing Arrangement" with the Honduran Joint Staff for each exercise and deployment. This document delineates responsibilities, lists milestones, and identifies issues to be resolved. It is drafted by the MILGP, cleared by all concerned, and ultimately signed by senior officials of both nations. An example of a significant military exercise coordinated by the MILGP Honduras Naval Section was EXERCISE UNITED FORCES RIVERINE-95 (FU RIV-95). This was the largest joint and combined, multi-nation naval operation in Central America since the "Contra War" of the 1980's. Involving over 1000 members of all services of the United States, Honduras, El Salvador, Guatemala, Costa Rica and Belize, as well as observers from Nicaragua and Mexico, FU RIV-95 accomplished impressive training objectives by bringing the Central American nations together in a month-long, maritime counternarcotics scenario on both the Atlantic and Pacific littorals. Significant Military Exercises such as FU RIV-95, represent an opportunity for developing nations, like Honduras, to take advantage of congressionally appropriated funds for training. In FU RIV-95, the Honduran Navy very effectively used "Title 10" monies to fund food, fuel, and training ammunition. These scarce opportunities must be, and are capitalized upon, as an augment to traditional security assistance during these austere times. The Navy Section also coordinated EXERCISE ALLIED FORCES HUMANITARIAN-96 (FA HUM-96), a command post exercise (CPX) which brought together all the region's disaster relief organizations in a tropical hurricane scenario. MILGP also develops and coordinates many smaller exercises and deployments; for example, it is currently working on a ship visit/training availability in the fall of 1996.

The future of the F.N.H. is one of self-sufficiency. As recently as the late 1980's, the United States was providing generous military assistance funding for Honduras. With the end of the Cold War and accompanying cuts in U.S. foreign aid, FMFP funding for Honduras came to an end in FY 1993. As residual FMFP dollars are gradually depleted, the Naval Forces of Honduras will have to account for themselves in a more individually responsible way. Unless there is a radical change in U.S. policy toward developing nations as a whole, the Honduran Navy will be wise to make the most of participation in exercises and TCAs while using IMET to accomplish its training objectives, and must program national resources to satisfy its logistics sustainment requirements over the long term.