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# **Partners in Development: The Honduran National Defense College**

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Each February, a large number of Honduran citizens gather to compete for some forty vacancies in the National Defense College. Requirements are tough: all applicants must be Honduran by birth, possess the potential for leadership in their field, and pass psychological screenings. Additionally, military applicants must be lieutenant colonels or higher and graduates of a command and staff college, while civilians must hold university degrees and be determined to have contributed significantly in the social, economic, or political sectors. All must be recognized as leaders in their field and willing to invest significant hours into the course; students continue their daily employment during the mornings, then participate in classes from 1400 to 1800, Monday through Friday. When finally assembled, each class of the National Defense College boasts the future leadership of the country.

Unlike its U.S. counterparts, the Honduran National Defense College is a predominantly civilian enterprise, with two thirds to three quarters of its student body made up of civilians. Founded in 1991 at the initiative of President Rafael Callejas, the College combines military and civilian leadership for a ten-month program, studying the comprehensive workings of national defense.

The objective of the College is primarily to study and conduct research in a wide variety of aspects impacting on Honduran national security and internal development; the U.S. observer will immediately note the relationship of social and economic progress to national security. Although administered by the Armed Forces, the College derives its operating budget from the Presidency, allowing a great deal of autonomy in the development of a unified strategy of national development doctrine.

While the College's small full-time faculty is about half military and half civilian, the vast majority of instructors are civilians, representing national government bodies, nongovernmental agencies, and foreign nations. Over 200 guest instructors are involved in presenting topics, which are divided into four phases:

- **Preparatory:** Introductory, conceptual subjects which develop class cooperation and lay the foundation for the phases which follow.
- **Developmental:** Detailed study of the social, economic, political, diplomatic, and military aspects which collectively form the basis of national power. Comparative studies of other nations and regions occur in this phase.
- **Consolidation:** Here, the students begin the simulations which force them to apply previously learned subject matter in a variety of challenging situations, including disaster relief, military operations, and economic crises.
- **Terminal:** During the course, students are charged with preparing analyses and studies, both individually and in groups. This phase requires each student to present and defend his study before the faculty and his peers.

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Several annual events supplement the program of instruction at the College. Each class undertakes an orientation trip to assess national development in a neighboring country. Recent courses travelled to Mexico and Peru to assess the policies of those republics in the struggle for national development.

The U.S. contribution to the College in special events is profound. Through coordination with the U.S. Military Group, Honduras, each class receives a two week seminar conducted by visiting U.S. instructors from the Defense Resource Management Institute (DRMI) in Monterey, California. More recently, a seminar in military justice and human rights was presented by the Naval Justice School; in March, the Center for Civil-Military Relations presented a seminar in civil-military relations, a vital topic in the fledgling democracies of the developing world. In keeping with its mission of spreading the doctrine of internal development, the College opens these seminars to senior government and military representatives in addition to the regular student body.

The College draws great support from the American Embassy as well as the Military Group. The Ambassador and Deputy Chief of Mission have addressed seminars; the Ambassador annually hosts a reception which coincides with the DRMI seminar. The Economic and Political Attaches are constantly called upon to discuss issues regarding commercial and governmental policies; and the chief of the United States Information Service discussed the importance of a free press in a democracy and the need to keep the public informed to develop popular support for actions and policies.

While an American is not assigned to the National Defense College, the Military Exchange Officer at the Armed Forces Command and General Staff School accomplishes many coordination tasks with the faculty of the College, since both institutions are located in the same building. His office traditionally serves as the forward command post for the DRMI instructors when they come for a seminar. He arranges for guest speakers from the American Embassy and Military Group, and frequently presents instruction regarding U.S. policies to the course.

The National Defense College is the first level at which the civilian and military leadership of Honduras come together as peers in the quest for effective strategies for national development in an academic environment. During the first few weeks of each course, the class invariably divides into three groups: civilian males, civilian females, and the military. The barriers slowly relax, however, and by the end of the first month the class has integrated completely. If nothing else is accomplished during the course, the different sectors of Honduran society merge in a common effort; students representing the press and human rights groups mix socially and professionally with Army and police colonels, who, for ten months, are their peers every afternoon. In a society with a history of stress in civil-military relations, this in itself constitutes a remarkable accomplishment.

National Defense College faculty and graduates are beginning to make their impact on Honduran society. The former College director was named earlier this year as Minister of Defense; graduates occupy key subordinate positions among several government offices and teach in the Autonomous National University. Each graduate brings a more complete view of Honduran society and national power to his job, making possible far more comprehensive policies and strategies for the future.

Lasting change tends to be evolutionary in its development. Evolution takes time and patience, and the realization that change has occurred is often made after the fact. However,

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the creation of the Honduran National Defense College is an important step in the evolution of democracy in this Central American ally. It marks the integration of military and civilian officials in the struggle for national development as partners rather than adversaries.