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Latin America Review (U)

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**El Salvador: Cleaning Up
the Military** [redacted]

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Public and internal criticism of the military's image and effectiveness has intensified since the insurgent offensive last November, increasing pressure on the High Command to confront human rights abuses, corruption, and incompetence in the officer corps. Thus far, reform efforts have focused principally on removing some members of the military academy class—or *tanda*—of 1966, which holds many senior leadership positions. Although this class—known as the *Tandona* because of its large size—assumed its positions only last year, critics, including the government, the US Embassy, and junior officers, already are calling for the dismissal of many class members from their command posts. In April, the High Command transferred two long-criticized *Tandona* members, but failed to make other anticipated changes, including the long-awaited promotion of Chief of Staff Ponce—a *Tandona* member generally regarded as a reformer—to Minister of Defense [redacted] (b)(3) NatSecAct

The Defense Attache Device

Over the years, the military has taken care of undesirable elements in the officer corps by "exiling" them to well-paid defense attache jobs, where they can preserve their pensions and pursue their own businesses. The "exiles" typically are officers accused of human rights abuses or corruption who are considered politically unsuitable by civil authorities or the Army High Command. Reporting indicates that the class of 1966 supported the ousting of the following senior officers because they stood in the way of ambitious *Tandona* members who wanted to move up:

- Col. Denis Moran, now the defense attache in Guatemala, has also filled attache positions in Washington and Colombia. In 1979 he reportedly directed a rightist terrorist group called the White Warriors Union. He headed the National Guard intelligence section in the early 1980s, when it was linked to death squad activities, and was implicated in

the murders of three land reform experts in a (b)(1) Salvador hotel in 1981. (b)(3) NatSecAct

- Gen. Adolfo Blandon serves as defense attache (b)(3) CIAAct (b)(6) Washington following his removal as Chief of Staff last year. [redacted]

- Col. Oscar Rodolfo Campos Anaya is the defense attache in Brazil and has also served in Washington. While commanding the 1st Brigade, [redacted] and blocked an (b)(1) investigation into alleged human rights abuses (b)(3) NatSecAct company. [redacted]

The Tandona's Record

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More recently, the *Tandona* has resisted cleaning up the military. [redacted] (b)(1) indicates that the class of 1966 does not want to (b)(3) NatSecAct curtailed by reforms that place merit and accountability above loyalty and tradition—the values emphasized by the *tanda* system. Chief of Staff Ponce, although aware that disgruntled junior officers are demanding wholesale changes, has been reluctant to defy class unity and purge the *Tandona*. Ponce also has not complied with a request from President Cristia (b)(1) last year, [redacted]

[redacted] (b)(3) NatSecAct (b)(3) NatSecAct

Ponce, who repeatedly tells US officials he believes reform is desirable, has responded to critics pressing for change by stressing the need to minimize the disruption of the officer corps during the war. [redacted] (b)(1)

[redacted] Ponce wants to avoid the perception (b)(3) NatSecAct caving in to the Faribundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN), which is demanding the dismantling of the *Tandona* as part of any political settlement. [redacted]

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[redacted] that Ponce believes he can control junior officer discontent. [redacted] (b)(3) NatSecAct

Nevertheless, the Chief of Staff has demonstrated his willingness to make some concessions by "exiling" four *Tandona* members to defense attache positions:

- Col. Natividad Jesus Caceres now serves as the defense attache in Chile after being removed from his command post last year on charges of corruption, brutality, extortion, and an armed confrontation last year with the US Ambassador.
- Col. Carlos Mauricio Guzman Aguilar was recently reassigned as the defense attache in Costa Rica after an investigation—ordered last fall by Cristiani—of allegations of incompetence and corruption. He previously headed the National Police and the National Intelligence Directorate.
- Col. Roberto Staben, a military detachment commander, has been appointed attache in Honduras. Although he is reputed to be an effective commander, he had been exiled to an area of little combat activity because of allegations of a pattern of abuses of authority, human rights violations, and corruption over a long period, including earlier involvement in a kidnapping ring.
- Col. Humberto Villalta, commander of the Navy, has been appointed attache in Spain. Last fall Cristiani ordered Ponce to investigate Villalta on charges of corruption, specifically of using Navy fuel to power his shrimp boats. [redacted] (b)(3) NatSecAct

Other long-denounced commanders escaped transfer in the most recent series of changes, but reporting indicates pressure continues to build for their removal.

- Col. Jose Emilio Chavez Caceres commands the 5th Brigade. He is suspected of involvement in a possible coverup of an investigation after his troops executed 10 peasants suspected of FMLN affiliations last year.
- Col. Hector Heriberto Hernandez was reassigned early this year to command the 6th Brigade, a move that angered critics demanding his placement in a noncommand position. He previously had directed the Treasury Police, where he reportedly was widely disliked because of incompetence and corruption.

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Outlook

Junior officers complained directly to the President last year about the incompetence and corruption of many *Tandona* members, and the failure to make changes faster is likely to encourage more unhappiness in junior officer ranks. These officers, increasingly concerned about their own progress upward, probably will be especially dissatisfied over the repeated delay in promoting Ponce to Minister of Defense—a move that would trigger advancement of lower academy classes. The ouster of senior commanders, in our view, would be an important step toward weakening the *tanda* tradition and paving the way for a system of promotions and assignments based on merit rather than class loyalties. Moreover, we believe such a reform would go a long way toward improving the effectiveness of the military and making it more responsive to civil authority. The precedent also could preempt problems with the next large *tanda*, the class of 1973, whose members were recently promoted to lieutenant colonel. [redacted] (b)(3) NatSecAct

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