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El Salvador: Managing the Military

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An Intelligence Assessment

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ALA 88-10025
May 1988

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El Salvador: Managing the Military

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An Intelligence Assessment

[Redacted]
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This paper was prepared by [Redacted] Office (b)(3) CIAAct
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El Salvador:
Managing the Military [redacted] (b)(3) NatSecAct

Key Judgments

*Information available
as of 15 April 1988
was used in this report.*

President Duarte, by cultivating and consulting with the High Command and giving it wide latitude in fighting the insurgency, has secured strong military backing for the democratic process in El Salvador. Despite periodic irritants in civil-military relations, this military support has weathered repeated economic and political crises and has reassured Duarte and his administration that the High Command has little interest in taking part in civilian politics. For their part, senior military officers have become increasingly confident that the civilians are largely content with the present, considerable, political role of the Army in national affairs. While demonstrating a willingness to recognize civilian authority, the armed forces continue to view themselves as a separate branch of government and as the final arbiter between the country's contending political forces. [redacted]

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Nevertheless, the new political climate resulting from the ruling party's loss of control of the Legislative Assembly in the March 1988 elections, as well as from the political maneuvering in anticipation of the presidential election next year, may provoke friction on several key issues that could derail what has been until now a stable civil-military relationship:

- **Military Funding.** Increasing political pressure for more government spending on social programs and rural development projects conflicts with the military's requirement for money to fight the insurgency.
- **Human Rights.** The Army continues to resist civilian efforts to influence the conduct of the war or to prosecute officers for human rights abuses.
- **Public Disorder and Economic Conditions.** Many officers increasingly resent the civilians' refusal to allow a crackdown on leftist protests and violence, sparked in part by economic mismanagement and war-induced economic hardships. [redacted]

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Cordial relations between Duarte's successor and the officer corps will depend on a continuation of the President's carefully constructed accommodation with the armed forces and on the new mix of civilian and military leaders. A lackluster field of presidential candidates increases the potential for mounting military impatience with the slow, ponderous workings of the political machinery. The military is concerned about political infighting in Duarte's party and would strongly oppose the election of the party's present leading contender, Julio Rey Prendes. While many officers are sympathetic to the political and economic agenda of the right wing, the military probably fears that election of the rightist candidate would jeopardize continued US aid. Finally, the military is worried that leftist political

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leaders, who have returned from self-exile and who continue to support the insurgents, will take advantage of the more open political process and capture significant protest votes. [redacted] (b)(3) NatSecAct

The pending retirement of several top members of the General Staff—who have been important advocates of civilian government within the officer corps—is likely to force reassignments of key officers before 1989. There will be considerable maneuvering within the armed forces both to ensure the preservation of military autonomy on internal affairs—such as a free hand in assignments and promotions—and to preclude the appointment of antidemocratic, confrontational officers to key positions. The attitudes of middle-level officers, who have been the focus of most serious antidemocratic sentiment in the Army, will be crucial to civil-military relations during the transition to a new administration. [redacted] (b)(3) NatSecAct

The officer corps is likely to provide backing for a civilian government at least through mid-1989, when Duarte's single term ends. Mounting frustrations with declining US financial assistance, the pace of the war, a stagnating economy, and continued civilian ineptitude, however, may well forge a consensus within the middle and upper ranks of the officer corps that civilian government is a hindrance to prosecution of the war. In such circumstances, they would sharply criticize US policies as no longer serving national interests and blame Washington for El Salvador's problems. A military coup—even if disguised by retaining a civilian figurehead as chief of state—could lead the military establishments of Guatemala and Honduras to launch similar coups to end their frustrations of dealing with nascent, US-nurtured civilian institutions. [redacted] (b)(3) NatSecAct

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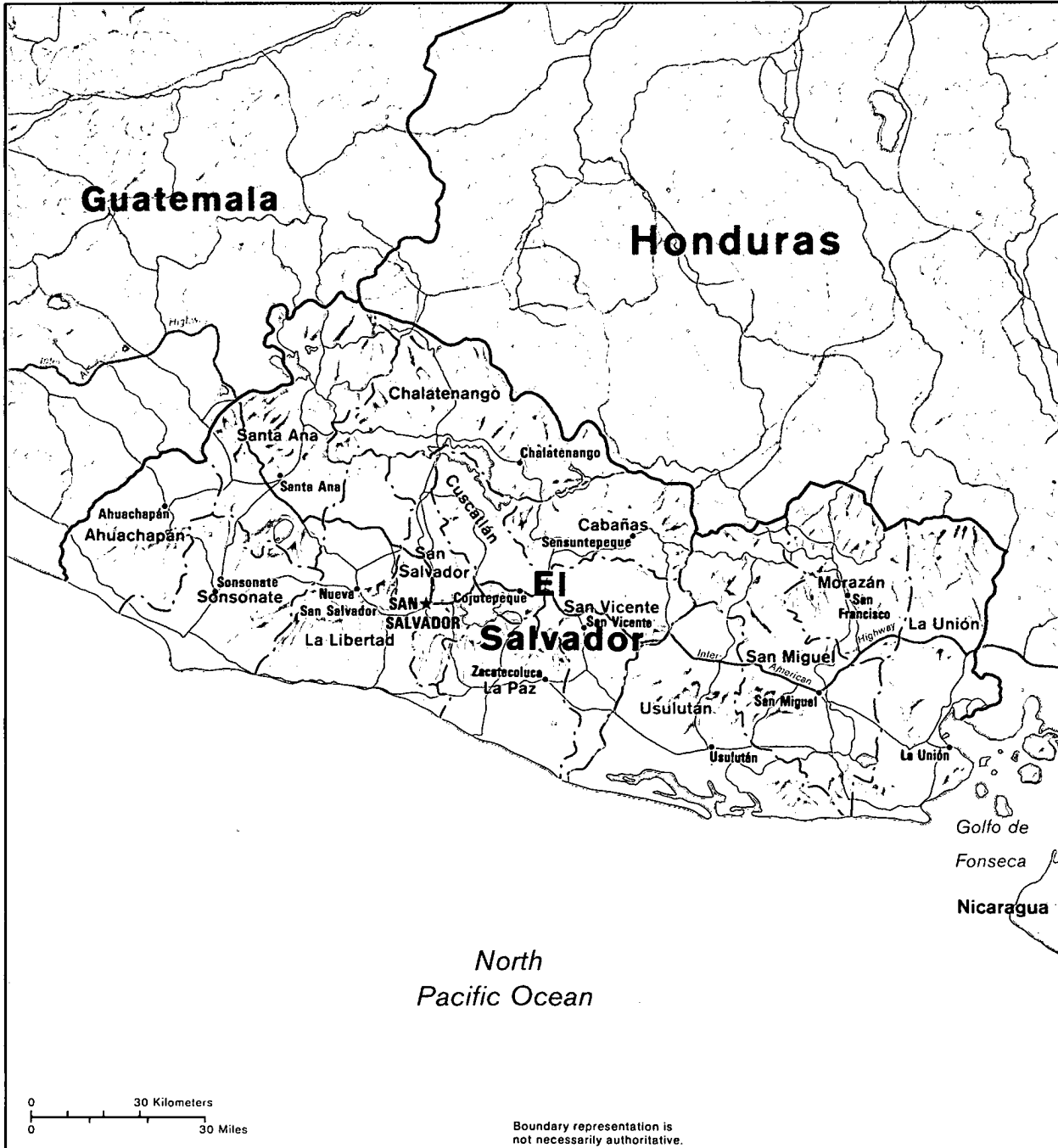
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**El Salvador:
Managing the Military**

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Introduction

The Army's willingness to back democratic institutions has been vital to the stability of civilian government in El Salvador since 1984. Most recently, impartial military support for constitutional civilian procedures was reemphasized during orderly legislative and municipal elections on 20 March 1988 that resulted in the ruling party's surrendering its majority control of the legislature for the first time in Salvadoran history. Nevertheless, long-term Army backing for an elected government is far from assured, particularly should key officers perceive dwindling US military assistance as reflecting declining US interest in institutionalized civilian rule in El Salvador and elsewhere in the region. [Redacted]

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This paper examines the working relationship between the military and elected officials in El Salvador, their attitudes toward each other, the key issues that affect the relationship, and pressures within the political parties and the armed forces that could derail what has until now been a prescription for stability. Finally, the paper assesses the prospects for continued Army backing of the civilian government and the implications for US interests [Redacted]

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Civil-Military Relations Under Duarte

The key question President Jose Napoleon Duarte faced following his election in 1984 was the degree of tolerance the military would have for civilian government. Fifty years of repressive rule by the military—which exercised authority primarily to protect the interests of the upper class—had exacerbated tensions between the small, monied elite and the large, disenfranchised worker-peasant class, which profited little from the economic boom of the 1960s and 1970s. As political polarization increased and became more violent, El Salvador's military regimes resorted to political killings and official intimidation—Duarte was himself a victim of military torture and exile in the early 1970s—to maintain control. [Redacted]

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Jose Napoleon Duarte Fuentes



President
(since June 1984)

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First popularly elected president in over 50 years . . . firm adherent to democracy and Christian Democratic values . . . PDC's March legislative defeat will force him into lameduck status, in our judgment . . . maintaining cooperative relations with military has been key to his staying power . . . has initiated several social and economic reforms, but progress has been slow . . . has often allowed political considerations to supplant pragmatic policies . . . [Redacted]

dedicated family man . . . age 62. [Redacted]

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By 1980 the international legitimacy and domestic credibility of the political process in El Salvador were seriously eroded, and the newly organized guerrilla fronts were seen by many intellectuals and the working class as the only alternative to continued government repression. The installation of an elected Constituent Assembly in 1982 to replace a military-installed junta marked the beginning of the US-nurtured move toward democratic rule that culminated in Duarte's election. [Redacted]

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guerrillas during Operation Monterrosa, which began in May 1987, Duarte signed the Central American peace accord. Embassy reporting indicates the President considers such initiatives less risky when they follow military successes because the officer corps is buoyed—and distracted—by its accomplishments and less likely to focus on political [redacted] (b)(3) NatSecAct

Military tolerance for civilian government has been encouraged by the recognition that US military assistance—as well as Duarte's willingness to dedicate a large portion of domestic spending to support military operations—has been the deciding factor in gaining the upper hand against the insurgency. Salvadoran officers admit privately to US officials that periodic temptations to intervene politically are tempered by the knowledge that such a move most likely would result in a cutoff of US military aid and training. Similarly, we believe senior officers recognize that public acceptance of decisions to devote a larger portion of the domestic budget—up to 25 percent since 1984—to security has been facilitated by the fact that the decisions have come from an elected civilian government and not a military regime [redacted] (b)(3) NatSecAct

Civilian Perceptions of the Military

Despite success in getting the Army to acquiesce to the authority of Duarte's administration, US Embassy reporting indicates that the President and leaders of his ruling Christian Democratic Party have periodically become suspicious that the armed forces harbor significant numbers of anticivilian hardliners. They also have worried that rightwing political parties and conservative businessmen retained undue influence among these officers and might foment unrest within the military. [redacted]

[redacted] for instance, that a retired officer belonging to one of the rightwing opposition parties was lobbying among active-duty military officers for a coup [redacted] that another extreme rightwing group had raised money to buy support among the military for ousting Duarte. Nevertheless, the High Command publicly continued to deny any involvement in politics, and the officer corps privately rejected these rightist attempts to draw the military into political intervention. [redacted]

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In our judgment, four years of relatively consistent military backing in the face of repeated economic and political crises have reassured Duarte and his administration that the Army High Command has little interest in undercutting the government. In fact, the High Command has often taken the side of the Christian Democrats—we believe more to ensure stability than out of fondness for the ruling party—in policy confrontations with rightwing politicians and the business sector. According to US Embassy reporting, this support has repeatedly angered conservatives, who feel their interests are no longer being protected by the officer corps. [redacted] (b)(3) NatSecAct

The military's willingness to back the democratic process and remain largely aloof from politics has reinforced positive attitudes among civilians toward the armed forces. Besides allowing the country's first elected center-left civilian government to take power in 1984, the Army, according to Embassy reporting, strongly opposed efforts by the conservative parties to characterize the 1985 legislative elections as fraudulent and blocked efforts to overturn the results. The military's acceptance of the decisive conservative victory in the March 1988 legislative and municipal elections, on the other hand, is ameliorating long-standing rightwing suspicions that the High Command has sided only with the ruling party. [redacted] (b)(3) NatSecAct

Residual Military Unhappiness

Despite the High Command's commitment to democracy, many within the armed forces continue to view civilian government as poorly administered, rife with corruption and incompetence, and plagued by petty political bickering among (b)(1)litical parties [redacted]

[redacted] (b)(3) NatSecActilitary relations had reached their lowest ebb since Duarte's election following a three-month boycott of the Legislative Assembly by the conservative parties, a rightwing business strike, and Duarte's unilateral decision not to renew suspended state-of-emergency legislation. Subsequent improvement in rel(b)(1)with the Christian Democrats, [redacted] (b)(3) NatSecAct largely because most officers believed that no other political party had the popular support or leadership to run the country more efficiently. [redacted]

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The Monied Elite and the Military

In our judgment, one of the most noteworthy changes in Salvadoran society over the last several years has been the deterioration in the relationship between the military and the country's most affluent and conservative families. Traditionally, the military ruled the nation on behalf of the oligarchy. Monied families often provided financial support for cadets from humble backgrounds, and as they rose through the ranks, these officers were expected to serve their patrons' interests. [redacted]

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The 1979 coup—which brought to power a group of reform-minded officers who saw breaking the power of the oligarchy as necessary to prevent the country from falling to the burgeoning guerrilla movement—illustrated that an important section of the military no longer equated its interests with those of the upper class. The new attitude was underscored in 1980 when the military initiated the first significant agrarian reforms by sending troops to remove wealthy landowners forcibly from their plantations and to seize their banks. [redacted]

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The privileged class continues to support the armed forces as a barrier to Marxist insurgents coming to power. Nonetheless, the US Embassy reports that

many rich Salvadorans hold the military in contempt and argue that it is one of the country's most serious problems. The wealthy maintain—often publicly—that the officer corps has no interest in a quick end to the war because that would result in an end to US military aid, a reduction in the size of the Army, and a loss of officers' perquisites and opportunities for corruption. Further, although few rich apply, they argue that the High Command rejects officer candidates from the upper class, fearing they will come to dominate the institution. In our judgment, these attitudes are generally motivated by political frustration growing out of the belief that the military has cast its lot with Christian Democratic reformists. [redacted]

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According to US Embassy and [redacted] (b)(1)

[redacted] military attitudes toward the monied elite (b)(3) NatSecAct

are equally negative. Many officers consider the upper class greedy and unpatriotic because of its tax evasion and opposition to new tax measures intended to fund the war. Many officers attribute the refusal of wealthy families to allow their children to join the Army to narrow, self-serving interests. [redacted]

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Many hardline officers believe that Duarte and the Christian Democrats have used military support as a political shield during confrontations with the right- [redacted] *opposition—making the military appear a tacit ally of the ruling party.* [redacted]

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for example, that, following the imposition of an unpopular economic reform package in 1986, Duarte warned conservatives in a private meeting that the [redacted] would not tolerate attempts to incite public disturbances. Embassy and [redacted] indicate that the right wing believes that Duarte can count on the Army to support him during political crises. [redacted]

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The US Embassy reports that hardline officers also feel civilian leaders do not sufficiently value the opinions of the military on political matters of national importance. Many officers view the Army's relationship to the administration as collegial rather than hierarchical and resent any effort by the civilians to implement policy without prior consultation. When Duarte has been sensitive to these concerns, friction has been minimized. In 1986 and 1987, for example, the President enlisted military support before implementing controversial economic austerity and tax packages. [redacted]

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Figure 1. Rightwing political cartoon showing General Blandon (standing) and President Duarte (on knees):

Blandon: "This year the soldiers can vote."
 Duarte: "No, please! Don't 'vote' for me."

This cartoon uses a play on words. In spoken Spanish, Duarte's comment can also be interpreted to mean, "Don't throw me out" (11)

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Assessing Key Issues

Despite generally good working relations between the civilians and the military, several issues remain potentially troublesome. The scheduling of a presidential election in 1989 and a changed political climate since the ruling party lost control of the Legislative Assembly in March 1988 may provoke changes in several sensitive areas that could create fissures between the Duarte government and the officer corps.

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Military Funding

Increasing political pressures from the public for more government spending on social programs and rural development projects are conflicting with the military's requirement for continued funding to fight the insurgency. We believe Duarte has so far been willing to earmark a large portion of the budget to the military—in hopes of buying military loyalty—in the belief that political costs were low because his party's traditional worker-peasant constituency had no realistic alternative to supporting the ruling Christian Democrats. The electoral success of the rightwing political opposition in the March elections, however, demonstrated that Salvadoran voters are impatient for improved living standards. (b)(3) NatSecAct

Human Rights

Duarte's efforts to end human rights abuses are a continuing irritant in civil-military relations. While allowing the Army wide latitude on internal issues and counterinsurgency operations, the administration has insisted on the strict observation of the human rights of prisoners and civilian noncombatants. Duarte also has blocked the appointment of officers suspected of continuing human rights violations to positions of increased responsibility. US Embassy reporting indicates, for instance, that during the summer of 1987 Duarte prevented the assignment upward of a battalion commander notorious for his antiadministration views and suspected of (b)(3) NatSecAct executions of suspected insurgents.

Moreover, the armed forces continue to resist government attempts to investigate human rights abuses by military officers. (b)(3) NatSecAct indicates the Army has systematically protected or covered up for officers alleged to have participated in political killings earlier in the decade. One group of middle-level officers—the powerful military academy class of 1966, known as the *Sinfonica tanda*—has been particularly active in opposing efforts to pursue investigations of officers' abuses. When one *Sinfonica* colonel was arrested for involvement in a kidnaping-for-profit ring in mid-1986, the group successfully pressed the

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The Sinfonica Tanda—A Study in Cohesion

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The military academy class (tanda) of 1966—nicknamed the Sinfonica (symphony) because of its large size in comparison with other classes of the time—is remarkable for its cohesiveness, influence, and the number of key Army commands it controls. The

evidence of continuing military links to the death squads. In addition, [redacted] has indicated that Sinfonica members are more inclined to political involvement and more critical of civilian rule than their superiors. [redacted] (b)(3) NatSecAct

(b)(1) [redacted] that the Sinfonica is extremely protective of its members and has close ties to Minister of Defense Vides Casanova, a former instructor at the academy. This group of colonels controls four of six brigades, all eight military detachments, and four of the six General Staff positions. [redacted]

We believe, however, that the Sinfonica has at the same time been instrumental in mobilizing military support for the Duarte administration. [redacted] indicates General Vi [redacted] (b)(3) NatSecAct

(b)(3) NatSecAct In our judgment, the Sinfonica is potentially a major obstacle to the consolidation of civilian authority; paradoxically, it also has been a key aid in maintaining the civilians in power. Many of its officers were labeled extreme rightists by US diplomats in the early 1980s, and some are alleged to have been involved in rightwing death squad activity and coup plotting during that period. Critics of the Duarte administration repeatedly have pointed to the failure of the government to prosecute these officers as

his close ties to the colonels of the Sinfonica to explain civilian policy decisions, lobby for their support, and pressure Sinfonica members to calm potentially dissident officers. In addition, the 1966 tanda has so far been willing to act as an intermediary between the civilian administration and High Command on the one hand, and junior and middle-level officers on the other. US Embassy reporting indicates this group of colonels—although often cynical about democracy—seems content, for the present, with civilian government. [redacted] (b)(3) NatSecAct

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Minister of Defense for his release, [redacted] Duarte repeatedly has found it necessary to block Sinfonica efforts to bring the security services—which have become increasingly moderate and are generally more responsive to civilian efforts to investigate human rights cases—under more direct Army control. [redacted]

guerrilla urban activities. [redacted] and Embassy reporting indicated that, by early January 1987, the reluctance of the police to use force to prevent street violence by Communist front groups caused significant discontent among hardline officers. This reporting also suggests such police inaction also caused many voters to turn against the ruling party during the March elections. [redacted] (b)(3) NatSecAct

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Economic Conditions and Public Disorder

Declining economic conditions, in particular in urban areas, have given rise to political pressures from both the right and left that periodically spark concern within the armed forces. Early last year, for example, officers were critical of Duarte's inability to end a rightwing legislative boycott provoked by a proposed economic and tax reform package. Leftist demonstrations and urban violence have caused friction between a civilian government concerned about its international image and determined to prevent police overreaction and a military establishment intent on preventing

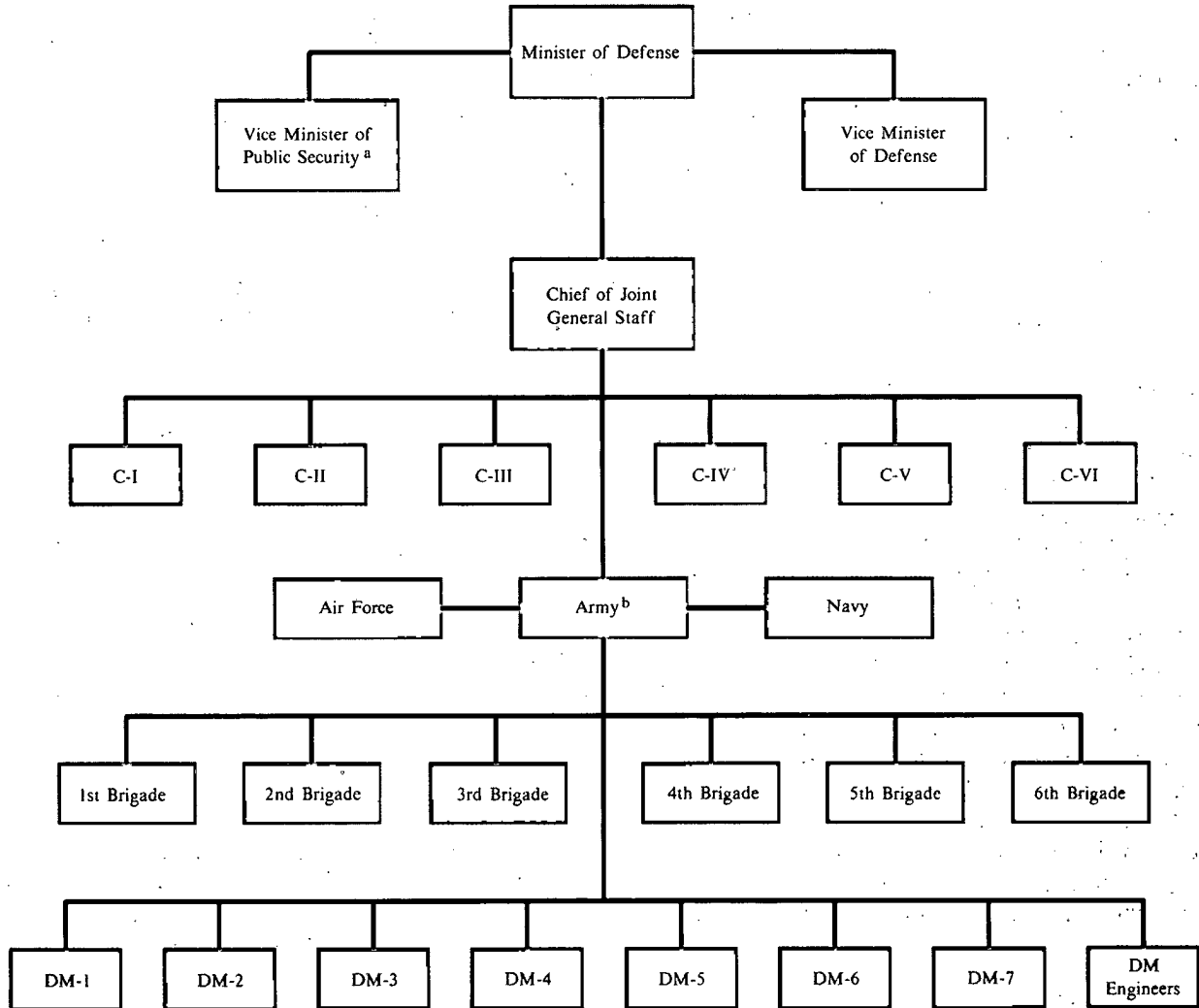
Maneuvering for the Transition

In our judgment, the defeat suffered by the ruling Christian Democrats in the March 1988 elections will engender significant anxiety within the armed forces. Before the election, most observers believed Duarte's party was the one most likely to win the 1989

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Figure 2
Extent of *Sinfonica* Influence Within Armed Forces Chain of Command

Commanded by a *Sinfonica Tanda* member



DM: Military Detachment.

^a There are three subordinate commands, but none belong to the *Sinfonica Tanda*.

^b There is no Army commander slot; the Army is commanded by the Chief of the General Staff.

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presidential election. With the capture of half of the seats in the legislature by the right wing, however, neither party has a decisive political advantage, and the Embassy believes that stalemate and political bickering between the executive and legislature will characterize the presidential campaign. We believe that, although there is no indication the Army intends to take sides, many officers are concerned that political infighting within and between the major parties could detract from national unity and significantly raise tensions that would press the Army toward political intervention. In trying to position itself between the ruling Christian Democratic Party, whose performance has been repudiated by the voters, and the rightwing opposition, which is publicly critical of the military and could capture the presidency, the High Command hopes it will be able to maintain smooth working relations with the civilian executive in the post-Duarte era. [redacted]

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Presidential Politics

We believe the struggle for the Christian Democratic presidential nomination is of particular concern to the military. Infighting between the two leading candidates—Julio Rey Prendes and Fidel Chavez Mena—resulted in significant disunity and disaffection within the party and contributed to its defeat in the March elections according to the Embassy. [redacted]

(b)(1) NatSecAct [redacted]
(b)(3) NatSecAct [redacted] the military despises Rey Prendes.

Although he has repeatedly bested Chavez Mena in internal party political maneuvering, Rey Prendes has seen his presidential aspirations seriously damaged by the Christian Democrats' poor showing in March, because he handpicked 58 of the party's 60 legislative candidates. Breaches within the party will not be healed easily, and we believe that, if internal squabbling continues, the electoral prospects for the Christian Democrats in 1989 will be diminished further.

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Senior officers have mixed feelings about the possibility of a rightist president. [redacted]

indicates that many middle-level and senior officers are sympathetic to the conservative social and economic policies of the right, led by the Nationalist Republican Alliance. On the other hand, reporting from the US Embassy has indicated that the Army

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Fidel Angel Chavez Mena



Presidential Candidate

Popular PDC member . . . has support of labor, business, Army, church, and international Christian Democrats . . . must overcome Rey Prendes's control over party machinery, however, to win presidential nomination . . . will undoubtedly characterize PDC's legislative defeat as a rejection of Rey Prendes . . . former Minister of Planning; served as Duarte's point man on economic policy and liaison with private sector . . . honest, competent, pragmatic . . . center-left politically, but believes in a strong private sector . . . unsuccessfully challenged Duarte for PDC presidential nomination in 1983; has since supported Duarte . . . age 49. [redacted] (b)(3) NatSecAct

has become increasingly alienated from the conservatives by rightwing criticism of military counterinsurgency policy, sporadic attempts to destabilize the government, and repeated public allegations that senior officers—in collusion with the US Embassy—actively support the ruling Christian Democrats. Moreover, some officers fear that a rightwing presidential victory would jeopardize continued US aid.

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Attempts by the left since late 1987 to form a legal political organization to contest future elections also concern the military because leftist political leaders—

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Julio Adolfo Rey Prendes



Deputy-Elect,
National Assembly

An astute and shrewd politician . . . controls PDC political machinery . . . a PDC presidential contender . . . his party's March legislative defeat has impeded his thus far steady rise to attaining presidential nomination; will undoubtedly work to regain credibility . . . as former Minister of Culture and Communications, was a key adviser to President Duarte . . . an able negotiator, but poor administrator . . . widely attacked for his manipulation of party . . . has tolerated corrupt activities by supporters . . . has many enemies in military, private sector . . .

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many of whom have returned from self-exile to live openly in the capital—have refused to sever their longstanding ties to the insurgency. [redacted] [redacted] has indicated increasing disaffection within the officer corps over the freedom of the left to participate in the democratic process while supporting armed groups trying to seize power through force. Further, some officers may fear that, if the legislature performs as poorly under the right as under the Christian Democrats, a disenchanting public may turn to the left. Army anxieties are tempered somewhat because the left—which chose not to run in the March 1988 elections—faces significant funding problems, remains disorganized, and seems unlikely to make a credible electoral showing in the near term. [redacted] (b)(3) NatSecAct

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Preserving Equities Within the Military

We believe the High Command recognizes the need to begin to replace key officers—some of whom have held their jobs since before Duarte's election and are anxious to retire—before the 1989 elections. Their efforts have been stalled, however, because Duarte has insisted, [redacted] that top leaders such as Generals Vides Casanova and Blandon remain in their positions until the end of his term. The President apparently believes no other officers command equal respect and authority, and he is probably concerned that establishing a close working relationship with their replacements during his remaining year in office would be difficult. [redacted]

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Nevertheless, pressures to retire senior officers continue to mount. The limited opportunities for promotion to general officer has caused some impatience among some senior field-grade officers whose careers are blocked by lack of movement of generals eligible for retirement. [redacted] that over the years Vides and Blandon—as they rep(b)(1) interceded with officers during various crises (b)(3) NatSecAct the civilians and the Army—lost much of their original credibility among the officer corps, which has come to view them as spokesmen for the civilian administration. Finally, in the midst of these mounting pressures Duarte probably recognizes that, if key personnel changes are made well before the election, he can play an influential role. He will want the High Command to choose moderate officers who support civilian rule rather than hardliners who might attempt to play a more assertive role in government policy-making. [redacted] (b)(3) NatSecAct

Outlook

In our judgment, the officer corps is likely to provide backing for a civilian government at least through the end of Duarte's final year in office. The evidence provided by the first four years of civilian rule indicate that the armed forces have established a firm working relationship with the civilians that is sufficiently flexible during periods of political instability

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and crisis. We believe Duarte, viewing his relations with senior officers as a top priority, will continue to employ the techniques he has used to placate the military over the past four years. Thus, he is likely to remain generally aloof from internal military affairs, avoid policies that could be perceived as threatening to the integrity of the officer corps, and allow the military a relatively free hand in its conduct of the war. (b)(3) NatSecAct

We believe civil-military relations will continue to be tested in the period leading up to the presidential election. A contentious relationship between the conservative-dominated legislature and the executive—and the administrative inertia and increased political bickering that result—will reinforce doubts in the military about the ability of the civilians to govern. Although Duarte may attempt some bureaucratic housecleaning and administrative reform to improve his party's image before the presidential election, general preoccupation with preparations for the campaign will be a significant distraction from the business of governing, and military sympathy for civilian rule is not likely to be enhanced over the next year. Should the officer corps perceive the ruling party is headed for another electoral loss, senior and middle-level officers may become less inclined to bend to civilian executive authority as the Army positions itself politically for a conservative win next year. (b)(3) NatSecAct

In our judgment, political uncertainties will spur efforts by the Army to make key and long-expected reassignments among the High Command. By making such changes well before the 1989 election, senior officers can ensure continuity within the General Staff during the presidential transition, as well as preserve the principle of military preeminence in internal personnel matters. Finally, a timely shuffle of the General Staff would avoid leaving the new president to face wholesale and potentially contentious and destabilizing personnel changes. (b)(3) NatSecAct

Another critical test for civil-military relations will come following the 1989 election. While the military probably will accept any candidate who wins in a free election, the new president will need quickly to establish good relations with key senior officers and reassure the military that he intends to continue Duarte's

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 Coup Factors (b)(3) NatSecAct

In our judgment, a military coup, while always possible, is not probable. The US Embassy and (b)(3) NatSecAct suggested that only civilian political interference directly threatening the integrity of the military institution, or inept policymaking that undermined the constitution, would produce a coup. So far, the Duarte administration has kept well within safe bounds on these two issues. Indeed, the only serious coup rumors have come about not as a result of unhappiness over allegations of corruption or lack of movement on serious economic reform, but when the Duarte administration attempted to influence military promotions or attempted negotiations with the guerrillas that the military perceived might lead to powersharing. (b)(3) NatSecAct

We believe the military is further constrained from launching a coup by the realization that it probably would cause a US aid cutoff, as well as seriously distract military resources from the (b)(1) (b)(3) NatSecAct for instance, that (b)(3) NatSecAct by less politically active police officers—are loyal to Duarte and would be likely to resist a coup attempt. In addition, the strategic First Brigade, located in the capital, has traditionally been headed by politically neutral or pro-Duarte commanders who would more likely follow the lead of the General Staff than dissident officers attempting a coup. According to this reporting, few officers would associate with a coup that would result in military or police casualties, or that would divide or weaken the military institution. (b)(3) NatSecAct

policy of periodic consultation. In addition, the new president will have to improve on Duarte's weak administrative performance and make some effort to demonstrate serious intent to correct bureaucratic lassitude, incompetence, and corruption. We believe the military would accept a rightwing victory, despite fears of a political restructuring of the officer corps through wholesale reassignments and forced resignations. (b)(3) NatSecAct

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As in the past, antipathy for civilian rule is most likely to come from field-grade officers and their subordinates. The degree to which unhappiness at the middle level can be controlled will depend largely on the ability and willingness of senior officers—many of whom may be relatively new to their jobs—to intercede on behalf of the civilians. By almost all accounts, field-grade officers—in particular the class of 1966—have enough cohesiveness to act in unison should they perceive a civilian threat to internal military autonomy or determine that policies of the new president were seriously undermining political stability. Given these conditions, we believe that many junior officers would look to the *Sinfonica* to take the lead in confronting the General Staff with demands for changes in civilian policy or in launching a coup. [redacted]

(b)(3) NatSecAct

Implications for the United States

We believe that perceptions of a declining US commitment to foster civilian government in the region would prompt the officer corps to become more involved in politics. [redacted] indicates that reduced US funding for the Nicaraguan insurgents and for El Salvador has caused the Salvadoran military to question US resolve in Central America. If public frustrations mount over declining US assistance, the pace of the war, a stagnating

economy, and continued civilian ineptitude, a consensus could well build within the middle and upper classes as well as officer corps to blame Washington, arguing that US policies no longer serve the national interest. Some might point to Guatemala as an example of a Central American country that defeated an insurgency—albeit under an extremely repressive military government and at an enormous human cost—with no significant US assistance. [redacted]

(b)(3) NatSecAct

A coup, even if disguised by the retention of a civilian figurehead as chief of state, would be widely perceived as a defeat for US policy in the region. In our judgment, the nascent Central American democracies would view such a development as a failure of US resolve and policy, and the militaries of Guatemala and Honduras might feel less constrained to launch similar coups reflecting their frustrations in dealing with civilian institutions. [redacted]

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