THE UNITED STATES AND CENTRAL AMERICA: FROM STOPPING COMMUNISM TO STOPPING KIDS

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Abstract

The Northern Triangle countries of Central America consisting of El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras have the highest homicide rates in the world and are characterized by corruption, drug trafficking, and impunity. It is likely the 50,000 unaccompanied alien children attempting to cross into the U.S. in 2014 will increase in 2016. The U.S. Congress appropriated $750 million for the region. Based upon past experience with the umbrella program for the region, the Central America Regional Security Initiative, it appears the perilous situation in the region is unlikely to improve. Approaching the problems of the region from a political perspective, this article draws upon the experience of Nicaragua, where the security sector is integrated, and recommends the consideration of the intelligence fusion center concept, proven by the 78 currently functioning in the U.S., to encourage the integration of the security sector under democratic control in the three countries.

Introduction

It is difficult to imagine a more illustrative relationship to contrast U.S. foreign policy during the Cold War to today than the country's role in and relationship with the countries of Central America. During the Cold War, and particularly during the administration of President Ronald Reagan (1981 -1989), the overwhelming focus of the U.S. in Central America was to stop the spread of leftist revolutions, supported by Cuba and ultimately the Soviet Union, from Nicaragua with its successful revolution of 1979, throughout the region. While there was periodic opposition from the House of Representatives in which the Democratic Party held a majority and the administration at times engaged in operations of dubious legality such as mining harbors in Nicaragua and the Iran-Contra affair, there was general agreement in the U.S. during the Cold War that Communism had to be stopped, and Central America was the place to stop it.

Today, a quarter of a century after the end of the Cold War, and the collapse of the Soviet Union, with China and Vietnam having adopted authoritarian capitalism,

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Communism is no longer an issue. Indeed, the U.S. has renewed relations with Cuba and both Republican and Democratic administrations in Washington are able to live with President Daniel Ortega of the the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) party in Nicaragua and now two presidents of the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN) in El Salvador (Mauricio Funes, 2009 -14 and Sánchez Serén, 2014 –present). In both cases, Nicaragua and El Salvador, FSLN and the FMLN were the main focus of opposition by the U.S. in its support of the Contras against the FSLN in Nicaragua and the military in El Salvador.

The main challenges for the U.S. in the region are different and more intractable and complicated. They concern transnational organized crime (TOC) whose wealth is mainly based on moving illegal drugs from South America through the region to consumers in the U.S. They also include generalized public insecurity, much of which is caused by street gangs, *pandillas* or *maras*, which have given the Northern Triangle of Central America of El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras the dubious distinction of the highest homicide rates in the world. And, if it were not enough that the TOC raise most of their money supplying the U.S. market for illegal drugs, the most brutal and feared street gangs, the *Mara Salvatrucha,* also called *MS-13* and the 18th Street Gang, were both founded in Los Angeles, California, and are not only regional in the Northern Triangle, but are found through the U.S., and are considered a major security issue in many parts of this country.[1] Further, due to the pervasive public insecurity, poorer people, including most recently unaccompanied children, are fleeing the region in huge numbers, risking everything on the long and dangerous trek north. Nearly 51,000 having been apprehended at the U.S.–Mexican border in 2014, and their numbers were again increasing in late 2015. Their apprehension and deportation is currently causing a serious rift in the Democratic Party.[2]

As the U.S. continues providing, and even increasing, assistance to countries in the region, the undertaking should be reevaluated. I recommend a strategy to deal with the manifestations of public insecurity based on the successful implementation of intelligence fusion centers throughout the United States, Guam, Puerto Rico, and U.S. Virgin Islands, now totaling 78, that seek to achieve an integrated approach to providing security, and are under democratic control and oversight. I argue that the imple-

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[1]Lest I be accused of being too tough on the U.S., see the comments of General John Kelly, Commander of the U.S Southern Command on the relationship of drug consumption in the U.S. and problems in Central America. Available at http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/events/webcasts/the-future-of-us-defense-cooperation-in-latin-america accessed January 11, 2016. And, on the origins of the gangs in Los Angeles see Al Valdez, "The Origins of Southern California Latino Gangs," in Thomas Bruneau, Lucía Dammert, and Elizabeth Skinner, Maras: Gang Violence and Security in Central America (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011).

[2] United States Government Accountability Office, *Central America: Information on Migration of Unaccompanied Children from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras* (Washington, D.C.: GAO, February 2015), 1. On the recent increase see Marc R. Rosenblum and Isabel Ball, "Trends in Unaccompanied Child and Family Migration from Central America," *Fact Sheet of Migration Policy Institute* January 2016 available at www.migrationpolicy.org accessed January 11, 2016. See William A. Kandel, *Unaccompanied Alien Children: An Overview* (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, 2016).

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U.S. Vice President Biden meets with Central American Presidents to discuss the Alliance for Prosperity. From the left, Honduran President Juan Orlando Hernandez, U.S. Vice President Joe Biden, former Guatemalan President Otto Perez Molina, and Salvadoran President Salvador Sanchez in Guatemala City, March 3, 2015. Since this photo was taken Perez Molina was arrested on corruption charges. Photo credit: Voice of America.

mentation of a fusion center strategy can serve as a forcing mechanism to encourage different elements of the security sector in the region to work together in conjunction with U.S. agencies to begin to bring the illegal actors, including TOC and street gangs, under some semblance of control and to reduce rampant impunity. If security can be provided, then, as was the case during the past decade in Colombia, socio-economic development may be achieved and some of the "root causes" of violence diminished. The main observations and recommendations in this article are based on the author's personal experience and research, which began with his first trip to all of the countries dealt with here in 1964, and continued until today, in many cases with multiple week-long research trips. The most relevant facts for the argument in this paper include direct involvement in the reforms in the Colombian Armed Forces and Ministry of Defense between 1998 and 2008, interviews in San Salvador in 2006 with members of and the head of the Permanent Secretariat of the integrated National Security Council, inter-views in Managua in June 2003 and August 2008 on the Sandinista's integrated secu-rity strategy, and interviews with leaders of and involvement with intelligence fusion centers in the United States.

Central America and the U.S. During the Cold War

The main focus of this paper is not the U.S. and Central America during the Cold War. In fact, one should go back to before the Cold War and analyze the pervasiveness of non-democratic regimes and the subsequent explosion of insurgencies or civil wars which drew the attention and support of Cuba and the USSR. I believe the concept of

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"reactionary despotism" captures extremely well the political dynamics in most of the region.[3] Suffice it to say that at the end of the Cold War, and ultimately the disintegration of the Soviet Union, funds were no longer available to support revolutionary movements in Central America and the U.S. could stop supporting those opposing these movements.

With the end of the Cold War and the separate but interrelated dynamics of conflict in each country - the stalemate between the Salvadoran government forces and the FMLN guerrillas resulting from their "final offensive" in November 1989, the electoral defeat of the FSLN of Nicaragua in 1990, and the ultimate victory in 1996 of the Guatemalan Army over the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity (UNRG) - political peace became possible across Central America. Furthermore, in all but Honduras, which did not experience armed conflict as had the others, the peace processes were brokered by the United Nations. In all cases, the negotiations included establishing electoral democracies and greatly diminishing the roles and influence of the armed forces. It has to be remembered that the countries under consideration here – El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua – were under what Fabrice Lehoucq terms autocracy for 88% of the period 1900-1980.[4] None of these countries had ever been a consolidated democracy. Therefore, unlike democratic transitions in Southern Europe (Greece, Portugal, and Spain) or in the Southern Cone of South America, democracy did not emerge "organically."[5] In fact, the transitions from conflict to peace and from authoritarian and most often military regimes to democracies were externally-sponsored. It is probably not too strong to say the democratic regimes were imposed. The results in the three Northern Triangle countries were weak democratic institutions, weak rule of law and judicial systems, and ambiguous roles for the security services. All of the countries under consideration here are rated as "partly free" in the Freedom House classification system.[6]

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[3] See Enrique Baloyra-Herp, "Reactionary Despotism in Central America," *Journal of Latin American* Studies Vol 15, No 2 (Nov 1983), 295-319. For updated analyses see John A. Booth, Christine Wade, and Thomas Walker *Understanding Central America* Sixth Edition (Boulder: Westview Press, 2014). This book provides extensive suggestions for further reading. For an analysis of the dynamics of civil war and development see Fabrice Lehoucq, *The Politics of Modern Central America: Civil War, Democratization, and Underdevelopment* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012).
[4] Data taken from Lehoucq, 2012, 22. Lehoucq uses the term autocracy, but reactionary despotism is also accurate.
[5] Excluded are Belize, Costa Rica, and Panama as their historical and political dynamics are very different from the other four countries discussed here. On the nature of the peace and democratization processes see Cynthia J. Arnson, (ed.) *Comparative Peace Processes in Latin America* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1999).
[6] Freedom House, 2015. Available at freedomhouse.org, accessed October 5, 2015. The title of the article by José Miguel Cruz, "Criminal Violence and Democratization in Central America: The Survival of the Violent State," *Latin American Politics and Society* Vol. 53, no 4, 2011, pp. 1 – 33 captures this sense well.

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The Current Witches' Brew of Crime, Violence, and Homicide.

If we fast forward to the contemporary situation, the region is best perceived in terms illustrated by the data in the following table.[7]

    In a Congressional Research Service (CRS) report on economic and social indicators, all four Central American countries under consideration here are classified as "lower middle income." Gross national income per capita covers a wide range: El

Table 1. Gang Membership and Homicide Rates in Central America, 2010-2011.				
Country	Number of gang members	MS-13 and 18th Street in country	MS-13 & 18th Street members in prison	Homicide rate per 100,000 (as of 2014)
El Salvador	17,000	Yes	7,000	68.8
Guatemala	32,000	Yes	400	31
Honduras	24,000	Yes	800	66
Nicaragua	4,500	No	NA	8.7

Salvador, $2,850; Guatemala, $2,440; Honduras, $1,600; and Nicaragua, $980.[8] (Within the region, only Haiti is "low income," with an average per capita income of $560 before the January 2010 earthquake.) The United Nations Human Development Report aggregates various measures of health, education, and access to economic opportunity, and ranks countries according to how well they meet these basic needs; the lower the number, the more developed the society. Data collected in 2014 rank all four Central American countries in the "medium human development" category: El Salvador, 116 at 0.666; Nicaragua, 125 at 0.631; Guatemala, 128 at 0.627; Honduras, 131 at 0.606.[9] (For comparative purposes, the United States is 8, Canada 9, and Niger is in last place at 188. Haiti is 162. Panama at 60 and Costa Rica at 69 are the only two Central American countries in the "high human development" category.) In the much more comprehensive Bertelsmann Transformation Index for 2016, El Salvador is ranked 29 with a rating of 6.90, Honduras is 56 with a rating of 5.94, Nicaragua is 68 with a rating of 5.53, and Guatemala is 76 with a rating of 5.13.[10] The four Central American countries focused

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[7] The data for this table comes from several sources that I consider most credible. On homicides, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, Global Study on Homicide; Trends, Contexts, Data (Vienna: UNODC, 2011), 23. The gang numbers and presence of MS-13 and 18th Street are from material provided by Dr. Humberto Posada of the Policía Nacional Civil (PNC), El Salvador, at anti-pandillas conferences held in San Salvador, El Salvador in 2007 & 2008. The data on numbers in prison are from the author's interview with Ismael Rodriguez Batres, Deputy Director General of Prisons for El Salvador, 27 March 2009, San Salvador, and subsequent email communication, 13 March 2009. Homicide rates from InSight on Crime at http://www.insightcrime.org/news-analysis/insight-crime-2014-homicide-round-up, accessed July 2, 2015.

[8] Julissa Gomez-Granger *Latin America and the Caribbean: Fact Sheet on Economic and Social Indicators* (Washington, D.C: Congressional Research Service, 2009).

[9] United Nations Development Programme, *UN Human Development Indices: A Statistical Update* 2015. Available at http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/human-development-index-hdi Accessed April 1, 2016.

[10] http://www.bti-project.org/en/home/ Accessed May 19, 2016.

on here are lower income. In socio-economic terms, Nicaragua is not an outlier.

In addition to their political and socio-economic weaknesses, these societies face "vulnerabilities" that have been outlined in an U.N. report specifically focused on crime and its impact on development in the region.[11] The report highlights the main vulnerabilities as follows: geography; demographic, social, and economic conditions; weak criminal justice systems; the region's long history of conflict and authoritarianism; and population displacement and deportation. However, while based on credible data and a very useful summary, the report nonetheless has a major and common flaw in that it fails to differentiate between countries regarding the implications of these vulnerabilities. What this UNODC report can do, and does well, is provide a background of conditions in the region.

The Problems of Geography: The report begins with the observation that Central America's vulnerability to crime is due to its "misfortune of being placed between drug supply and drug demand."[12] In addition to drugs, Central America's proximity to the United States makes it a natural corridor as well for the trafficking of firearms and people. The geographical explanation hinges on the extreme disparity of wealth between the United States and Central America. The implications of this geographical vulnerability is captured well by the concept of "bridge states" in an impressive book by Bunck and Fowler who conclude their analysis in the following terms: "The cardinal fact remains that, although with outside assistance the Central American bridge states have been able to disrupt numerous drug transactions and arrest key members of particular drug-trafficking groups, their actions and resources have not nearly sufficed to reverse the flow of drugs through the region. These bridge states lack the capacities, their deficiencies are too many, and the scope of the problem is too vast for all the countries in the region simply to 'push the traffickers out,' as U.S. officials have sometimes urged."[13]

Demographic, Social, and Economic Vulnerabilities: According to the U.N. report, "most street crime is committed by young men between the ages of 15 and 24, often against their peers. The higher the share this demographic group comprises of the population, the greater the number of potential perpetrators and victims in the society, all other things being equal." Violent crime is often attributed to economic factors, as well. The report states "studies of the correlates of crime have found that the distribution of wealth in a society is actually more significant than raw poverty in predicting violence levels. It has been argued that stark wealth disparities provide criminals with both a justification (addressing social injustice) and an opportunity (wealth to steal) for

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[11] United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), *Crime and Development in Central America: Caught in the Crossfire.*" (Washington, D.C.: UNODC, 2007).

[12] UNODC 2007, 25.

[13] Julie Marie Bunck and Michael Ross Fowler, *Drug Trafficking and the Law in Central America: Bribes, Bullets, and Intimidation* (University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2012), 384.

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A mother grieves for her dead child, a victim of the extreme levels of violence in Central American countries. Photo credit: Council of Foreign Relations.

their activities."[14]

A Limited Capacity for Criminal Justice: The report's third reason for extremely high crime rates focuses on the Central American governments' inability to enforce compliance with the law. It observes that, "The citizenry, large portions of which may have traditionally regarded the law enforcement apparatus as the enemy, also needs time to learn to trust and cooperate with those charged with protecting them. Lingering suspicions teamed with transitional hiccoughs may strain this trust relationship. Corruption can derail it altogether."[15] Only in Guatemala so far, has a country recognized this perilous situation and asked the United Nations to assist the criminal justice system by establishing the International Commission against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG) which supplements, or even supplants, the national justice system which most observers recognize is totally broken.[16]

The justice and morality void left by state corruption and incapacity is often filled by gangs, vigilantes, and other local power brokers. Where the state tries to co-opt these actors, its legitimacy is called into question and the rule of law is reduced to an arbitrary standard of local preferences. The battles between the drug cartels, and the "ethnic cleansing" seen in Guatemala, are widely assumed to involve to some degree the sufferance of the state.

Displacement and Deportation: A significant Central American *diaspora* of generally extremely poor refugees reached the United States after fleeing from the Central American civil wars of the 1980s and early 1990s. The most active NGO working on

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[14] UNODC 2007, 12.
[15] UNODC 2007, 29.
[16] For more information and updates see http://www.cicig.org. Accessed July 1, 2015.

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the Central American gangs issue has this to say on the topic: "Deportation policies played an important role in the evolution of gangs in the Central American region and a key role in the 'transnatalionalization' of the problem. As migration between the U.S. and the region continues to surge, the connections and influences between the gangs in each country have only become stronger."[17] And according to the UN report, "There is a widely held belief in both Central America and the Caribbean that recent crime troubles can be tied directly to criminal deportees."[18]

Central Americans ride a cargo train nicknamed "La Bestia" through Mexico in an attempt to reach the United States. Photo credit: John Moore, PBS News.

A History of Conflict and Authoritarianism: The report includes psychological trauma, warlike mindset, weak state capacity and legitimacy, and police militarization as legacies of the Central American civil wars. It suggests that "violence can become 'normalized' in communities where many people were exposed to brutality, and may be tacitly accepted as a legitimate way of settling disputes, particularly where the state continues to be viewed as incompetent, corrupt, or biased."[19]

With the data organized in these five categories, the UNODC report provides useful information to explain broad aspects of the Central American crime and violence problems. The result is a list of conditions that contribute to the problem of violence in general, without attempting to explain the variations across different countries. With the addition of the factors reviewed earlier – the fragility of new democratic institu-

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[17] Washington Office on Latin America, "Youth Gangs in Central America: Issues in Human Rights, Effective Policing, and Prevention" A WOLA Special Report, (Washington, D.C. WOLA, November 2006), 4.
[18] UNODC 2007, 41.
[19] UNODC 2007, 34.

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tions, superimposed on reactionary despotisms, and chronically low socio-economic development - it is possible to begin to comprehend the context within which criminal activity takes place and, in these problematic societies, the seriousness of the danger to society it poses.

The Policy of the U.S. in Central America

In contrast to the 1980s, or to Colombia from 2002 until recently, U.S. aid to Central America today is not security assistance in the sense of using the U.S. military to train and advise. Even though the umbrella assistance program is named the Central American Regional Security Initiative (CARSI), the role of the Department of Defense and the U.S. military is mainly to intercept illegal drugs at sea and to train Central American police units to interdict on land and sea.[20] Between 2008 and 2013, U.S. agencies allocated over $1.2 billion in funding for CARSI and non-CARSI funding that supports CARSI goals.[21] In the $750 million appropriation for fiscal year 2016, $348.5 is specified for CARSI.[22] To better comprehend this relatively large investment in the region, even before the massive movement of unaccompanied children (UAC) in 2014, we must call attention to the importance of security issues posed by gangs for the U.S. itself. The Federal Bureau of Investigation established the MS-13 National Gang Task Force in December 2004, and publicly terms MS-13 the most dangerous gang in the U.S. President Barack Obama issued Executive Order 13581 on July 25, 2011 blocking property of transnational criminal organizations and, on October 11, 2012, the Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control designated MS-13 as a significant transnational criminal organization under this Executive Order, freezing their U.S. assets and banning Americans from conducting business with them. The gang was targeted for its involvement in "serious transnational criminal activities, including drug trafficking, kidnapping, human smuggling, and sex trafficking, murder, assassinations, racketeering, blackmail, extortion, and immigration offenses."[23] In June 2013 the Treasury Department designated six leaders of the MS-13 international criminals.

A number of U.S. government reports address the threat posed by the Central American security crisis. The Congressional Research Service (CRS) has published widely on the matter. The Government Accountability Office conducted at least four

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[20] In addition to the interception at sea, the 7th Special Forces Group from SOCSOUTH is training the TIGRES in Honduras for roles defined by the INL. E-mail communication from the Program Manager of the TIGRES dated December 10, 2015.

[21] Government Accountability Office, *Central America: U.S. Agencies Considered Various Factors in Funding Security Activities, but Need to Assess Progress in Achieving Interagency Objectives* (Washington, D.C.: GAO, September 2013), 43 – 55 for US funding sources.

[22] Peter J. Meyer and Clare Ribando Seelke, *Central American Regional Security Initiative: Background and Policy Issues for Congress*, (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, 2015), 18.

[23] U.S. Department of Treasury, "Treasury Sanctions Latin American Criminal Organizations," Press Center, October 11, 2012. At http://www.treasury.gov/press-center/press-releases /Pages/tg1733.aspx Accessed November 10, 2013.

studies on the effectiveness of different U.S. programs to combat crime and violence in Central America. The United States Senate Caucus on International Narcotics Control published a report on violence in Central America. Five U.S. agencies, including the Department of Justice and the Department of Homeland Security, provide Central American Regional Support Initiative (CARSI) support activities. Most recently, the United States Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs held hearings on "Ongoing Migration from Central America" on 21 October 2015.[24]

There are major concerns about the effectiveness of U.S. policies in the region.[25] It must be stressed that CARSI began only in 2010, having grown out of the Mérida Initiative that began only in 2007. Initially there were huge bureaucratic problems, and even as late as September 2015, of the $1.2 billion appropriated for CARSI, $984 million (86%) had been obligated and only $457 million (40%) expended.[26] In addition to bureaucratic problems is that the U.S. armed forces cannot be involved in policing at home or abroad. There is a conscious decision to not "militarize" a U.S. role in the region. Rather, there are bilateral relationships between big city police departments in the U.S. and individual countries, although the Department of State sponsors an International Law Enforcement Academy (ILEA) in San Salvador to share information and insights between and among the U.S., Central American, and Caribbean law enforcement officials. In addition, having read the analysis and recommendations of prominent think tanks on the problems of crime and insecurity in the region, I don't believe that anybody has discovered an effective way to deal with *pandillas,* crime, and insecurity

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[24] See the following: Clare Ribando Seelke, *Gangs in Central America* (Washington, D.C.: CRS, January 28, 2013); Government Accountability Office, *Combating Gangs: Federal Agencies Have Implemented a Central American Gang Strategy, but Could Strengthen Oversight and Measurement of Efforts* (Washington, D.C.: GAO, April 2010); Government Accountability Office, *International Affairs: Status of Funding for the Central America Regional Security Initiative* (Washington, D.C.: GAO, January 30, 2013);); United States Senate Caucus on International Narcotics Control, *Responding to Violence in Central America* (Washington, D.C.: US Senate, September 2011); Peter J. Meyer and Clare Ribando Seelke, *Central America Regional Security Initiative: Background and Policy Issues for Congress* (Washington, D.C.: CRS, May 7, 2013); and US Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs available at http://www.hsgac.senate.gov/hearings/ongoing-migration-from-central-america-an-examination-of-fy2015-apprehensions. Accessed 28 October 2015.

[25] The February 2015 GAO report notes that El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras are among the top five countries with the highest homicide rates worldwide. And, the centrality of violence to the kids' fleeing is dealt with in detail in a report by Manuel Orozco and Julia Yansura, Inter-American Dialogue, August 2014, available at www.thedialogue.org/.../FinalDraft_ChildMigr, accessed July 1, 2015. To better understand the data on migration and deportations see Rodrigo Dominguez Villegas and Victoria Rietig, "Migrants Deported from the United State and Mexico to the Northern Triangle," Migration Policy Institute, 2015. Available at www.migrationpolicy.org accessed 6 October 2015. A recent *CRS Insight* "Escalating Violence in El Salvador," of 22 October 2015 notes that the homicide rate in El Salvador has exceeded 90 per 100,000 in 2015. A more recent *CRS* Insight, of April 20, 2016, puts the rate at 104 homicides per 100,000 people. For an comprehensive analysis of the impact of CARSI see Cristina Eguizábal, et al.; Editor Eric L. Olson *Crime and Violence in Central America's Northern Triangle: How U.S. Policy Responses are Helping, Hurting, and Can be Improved* (Washington, D.C.: The Wilson Center, 2015) Available at www.wilsoncenter.org/lap accessed November 15, 2015. In the most recent CRS Report for Congress, Peter J. Meyer and Clare Ribando Seelke, state the problem very candidly, "U.S. officials have acknowledged that CARSI, as it is currently formulated and funded, is not capable of substantially altering the security situation in Central America." *Central America Regional Security Initiative: Background and Policy Issues for Congress*, (Washington, D.C.: CRS December 17, 2015), 23.

[26] Peter J. Meyer and Clare Ribando Seelke, December 17, 2015), 19. For an analysis of the early, and even continuing, bureaucratic problems see Cris Matei, "The Impact of U.S. Anti-gang Policies in Central America: *Quo Vadis"* in Thomas Bruneau, Lucía Dammert, and Elizabeth Skinner, eds. *Maras: Gang Violence and Security in Central America* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011), 203-05.

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Overcrowding problems in jails in El Salvador are widely perceived to be contributing to the gang problem in the country because gangs use prison connections to build criminal networks. Photo credit: Giles Clark, UK Daily Mail.

in Central America.[27] Before suggesting an alternative policy, it may be worth reviewing the contrasting experience of Nicaragua.

Why is Nicaragua Different?

Nicaragua is no different from the three Northern Triangle countries according to the global and comparative data of the Human Development Index for 2014 cited above and the even more comprehensive Bertelsmann Foundation Transformation Index. In the Human Development Index it too is Medium Human Development and is ranked lower than El Salvador. As noted above, in the Bertelsmann Transformation Index for 2016, Nicaragua, ranked #68, with a rating of 5.53 is below El Salvador, ranked #29 with a rating of 6.90 and Honduras, ranked #56 with a rating of 5.94, and only above Guatemala, ranked #76 with a rating of 5.13.[28] Yet, as shown in Table 1 and virtually all data and studies, Nicaragua has a lower homicide rate than its three Northern neighbors, no presence of the most serious *pandillas,* MS-13 and 18th Street, and kids are not fleeing Nicaragua for the U.S. Whereas crime and insecurity are considered the major national problems in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras, they are not in Nicaragua.[29]

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[27] See, for example, Michael Shifter, "Central America's Security Predicament", *Current Affairs* February 2011, 49-55*;* International Institute for Strategic Studies*,* "Central America: confronting the drug gangs," *IISS Strategic Comments* Volume 18, Comment 23, August 2012; and, John Maisto, "U.S. Policy toward Central America" University of Miami, Center for Hemispheric Policy, The Central America Task Force, May 3, 2013.

[28] Available at http://www.bti-project.org/en/home/ Accessed May19, 2016.

[29] Marta Lagos and Lucía Dammert, *La Seguridad Ciudadana: El problema principal de América Latina* (Lima: Corporación Latinobarómetro, May 9, 2012), 5. I think it worth noting that the very highly regarded Latin American Security and Defense Network, RESDAL, does not include Nicaragua in their Índice de Seguridad Pública y Ciudadana en América Latina: El Salvador, Guatemala y Honduras (Buenos Aires: RESDAL, 2011).

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Oft cited reasons for the contrast emphasize differences between Nicaragua and the three Northern Triangle countries in terms of emigration, to Miami and Costa Rica and not Los Angeles, and land tenure.[30] When queried, however, even the most respected expert on the topic, José Luis Rocha, calls attention to the very different security apparatus in Nicaragua in contrast to the other three countries.[31] Following the 1979 Sandinista revolution, with the help of Cubans and allies in East/Central Europe, the FSLN subordinated the military and police under its control. As Margarita Villarreal states, the security forces were "part of the political and ideological apparatus that supported the revolution."[32] The Sandinistas consolidated control over the new security sector, which consisted of the Sandinista Peoples' Army (EPS), a newly created Civilian National Police (PNC), and Comités de la Defensa Sandinista.

The most important element for dealing with crime and violence was the creation of the Comités de Defensa Sandinista (CDS), or Sandinista Defense Committees. These committees originated from the Comités de Defensa Civil (CDC) established by the FSLN during the revolution. The CDS combined social services with public security. They drew on the Cuban model of local defense committees for "defending the revolution from ideological and political enemies, but also as a way of organizing the communities."[33] By 1986 membership in the CDS included 500,000 out of a total population of 3.5 million.[34] The FSLN created an echelon of "revolutionary" guards within the CDS responsible for reporting on individuals to higher authorities.[35] This model of grassroots security has acted as a bulwark against the adoption of the *mano* dura policies criticized in the next section of this paper. Indeed, if it were only differences in emigration and land tenure, and not the different structure of the instruments of security, these factors would "flatten out" after a few years, as the *maras* have established themselves in Guatemala and Honduras after their deportation from Los Angeles and their initial growth in El Salvador. In simple terms, the security sector is integrated in Nicaragua, and does not allow "spaces" for the malignant growth of the *maras*. This

[30] See José Luis Rocha, "Street Gangs in Nicaragua" in Thomas Bruneau, Lucía Dammert, and Elizabeth Skinner eds., 2011, 105-122 for a summary of this argument.

[31] These theories on Nicaraguan exceptionalism were validated by the author's interviews in Managua and Tegucigalpa, as well as communications from a prominent Nicaraguan, who was Minister of Defense and is now a Supreme Court judge. Interviews were conducted in Tegucigalpa with General Romero (Honduran military attaché in Managua and Secretary of Public Security in Honduras) on 30 July 2008; José Luis Rocha in Managua on 12 August 2008; and an email interview with Dr. José Adan Guerra, who had been Minister of Defense in Nicaragua on 3 August 2015.

[32] Margarita Castillo Villarreal, "Nicaragua: Civilians and Military After the Sandinista Revolution," *Military Review* Vol 85, no 2 (2005), 6 available at http://search.proquest.com/docview/225307641?accountid=12702 Accessed January 13, 2016.

[33] Orlando J. Perez, *Civil Military Relations in Post-Conflict Societies: Transforming the Role of the Military in Central America* (N.Y.: Taylor & Francis, 2015), 75. I am indebted for several of these insights to a student working with me on his masters thesis on Central America, Lt. Geoffrey Ellis, USN.

[34] Kate Stout and Richard Dello Buono, "Nicaragua's Emerging Model of Popular Justice," *Humanity and Society* Vol 10, no 2 (May 1, 1986). For a very useful, and glowing, description of the CDS see *envoi* "CDS: Revolution in the Barrio" available at www.envio.org.ni/articulo/2738 Accessed July 6, 2016.

[35] United States Army Intelligence and Threat Analysis Center, *Army Intelligence Survey: Nicaragua* Vol. 3 (1984), (now declassified) http://search.proquest.com/docview/1679048599?accountid=12702. Accessed January 7, 2016.

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observation encourages me to consider the state and its ability to deal with security issues.[36]

The Failure of *mano dura* policies

The main street gangs, and especially MS-13 and 18th Street, are considered regional threats. However, the primary focus so far is to respond to them in the individual countries of Central America. The principal response so far in the Northern Triangle is the heavy hand, or *mano dura*.

Three elements characterize the implementation of *mano dura* policies. First, the policies were, at least in terms of rhetoric, inspired by zero-tolerance policies, oriented more toward penalizing wrongdoing than preventing it as implemented in some North American cities particularly New York City. As probably the most respected analyst of the Central American *pandillas* states, "It [*mano dura*] was selected as a model because of its apparent success in reducing levels of criminality, but also because U.S. agencies such as the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Drug Enforcement Agency, and police departments from several U.S. cities cooperated extensively with Central American governments in the area of public security."[37]

Second, the policies implemented in Honduras and El Salvador entailed enacting special laws, executive acts, and the rewriting of criminal codes to allow the police to round up, incarcerate, and prosecute gang members and any youth suspected of criminal activities. In 2003, the government of Honduras revised Article 332 of the Penal Code which opened gang members to prosecution for membership in a criminal organization regardless of whether they or their group had actually been convicted of any crime. A tattoo indicating membership in a gang was reason enough for imprisonment.

In El Salvador, where the *mano dura* policy reached its highest level of sophistication, an anti-*mara* law was enacted in July 2003. This act, known as *Ley Antimaras,* also aimed to facilitate the detention and prosecution of suspected gang members based on the newly defined felony of "illicit association" (*asociación ilícita*) and gang membership. In both cases, the new rulings gave complete authority to the police – and in some cases to military personnel – to carry out arrests based on arbitrary decisions and thin evidence. In the case of El Salvador as in Honduras, police could use the presence of tattoos, hand signals, some dress codes, and physical appearance as evidence of gang membership.

In Guatemala, although legal measures were not passed to support the anti-gang

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[36] These differences are to some degree recognized in Douglas A. Kincaid, "Demilitarization and Security in El Salvador and Guatemala: Convergences of Success and Crisis," *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World* Affairs Vol 42, no 4 (Winter 2000), 40-41.

[37] José Miguel Cruz, "Government Responses and the Dark Side of Gang Suppression in Central America," in Bruneau, Dammert, and Skinner, 142.

crackdowns, the police implemented suppression plans based on arbitrary interpretations of the existing laws. The general term referring to these policies was *Plan Escoba* (Operation Broom). The police jailed youth they suspected of gang membership by indicting them for possession of drugs, despite the fact that most of those detentions were carried out illegally.[38] With the inauguration of President Otto Pérez Molina in January 2012, an even more explicit *mano dura* policy was implemented.[39] In short, public security institutions were given a license to hunt gangs and youth based on flimsy legal constraints.

The "youth bulge" in many Central American countries presents a risk that disenfranchised young men and women may resort to criminal activities. Photo credit: Diálogo Magazine.

Third, these heavy hand policies were essentially plans for suppressive police intervention. In all three countries, the governments used these plans as linchpins for larger government agendas. All used the armed forces in operations against gangs and all developed operations that allowed for the capture and mass incarceration of gang members, thus saturating and overpopulating their prisons. A major problem with these policies was that the prison system could not (and cannot) support this level of incarceration. For example, in El Salvador, in early 2011 the prison system had sufficient space for 8,000 prisoners. At that time there were 24,600 imprisoned, at least one-third for gang-related crimes.[40]

One can only understand the implementation of the heavy-hand policies by analyzing the political dynamics in this region, where the democratically elected politicians are expected to "do something" to show they do not tolerate widespread crime and violence. However, although homicide rates initially decreased with *mano dura*,

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[38] Elin Cecilie Ranumm "Street Gangs of Guatemala," in Bruneau, Dammert, and Skinner, 79.
[39] International Crisis Group, "Police Reform in Guatemala: Obstacles and Opportunities" *Latin American report* number 43, July 20, 2012, 1.
[40] Author interview with Edgardo Amaya, Advisor, Ministry of Public Security and Justice, San Salvador April 1, 2011.

within two years they reached - and in some cases exceeded - the previous rates.[41] Analysts demonstrate that the *mano dura* policies actually facilitated gang organization and recruitment due to the simultaneous incarceration of thousands of youth gang members and "wannabes." It was in the prisons that dozens of members from widespread regional *"clicas"* of the same gang were first able to establish contact with each other, recognize that their gangs consisted of a myriad of uncoordinated groups, and work together to develop more structured and even more lethal organizations. Incarceration enabled gang members to form a sort of permanent assembly in jail in which they could debate, make pacts, and decide on structures, strategies, and rules of operation that had to be observed by the members of all the *clicas*. This was made even easier, in part, by the decision of the authorities to separate prisoners in prisons according to their gang affiliation to cut down on inter-gang violence within the prisons.[42] The *mano dura* laws, by sweeping up gang members from several countries, also facilitated communications and connections at the international level among gang members.

Political Dynamics and Political Will

The political dynamics in the Northern Triangle lead to *mano dura* policies. Even the first FMLN President Mauricio Funes (2009-2014) within a year of taking office implemented heavy hand policies very similar to his ARENA predecessors. His FMLN successor, President Salvador Sanchez Ceren, is taking an even harder line regarding the gangs. The political dynamics of these new fragile democracies, however, do not directly lead to sufficient tax revenues to support security. The author became aware of this issue from both academic and practical perspectives. Probably the best single book on democratic transitions and consolidation is *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation: Southern Europe, South America, and Post-Communist Europe* by the late Juan J. Linz and Alfred Stepan.[43] Among their five posited "major arenas of a modern consolidated democracy" are a state apparatus with sufficient monetary support.[44]

While conducting workshops and interviews in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras the author became aware that the state is very weak in all three countries due in part to a lack of revenue. It is obvious to anyone who visits the Northern Triangle countries that wealthy people pay for their own security with bodyguards and live in fortresses for houses or apartments. The same is not possible for the poorer sectors of society that by definition lack the resources to pay for private guards. Whenever the au-

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[41] José Miguel Cruz, "Government Responses and the Dark Side of Gang Suppression in Central America," in Bruneau, Dammert, and Skinner, 151.
[42] José Miguel Cruz, in Bruneau, Dammert, and Skinner, 155.
[43] Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996.
[44] Linz and Stepan, 14.

thor brought up the issue to middle class or upper - middle class groups of "you pay for what you get" in terms of security, there was total silence. If one reviews the *CIA World Factbook*, the data is illuminating. The percentage of tax revenue to GDP in El Salvador in 2014 was 20%, in Guatemala 12.6%, in Honduras 17%, and in Nicaragua 25%.[45] In Colombia in the same year it was 28.5%.

The Armed Forces in most Central American countries, as with this Salvadoran soldier, have been called to the streets to assist police with high levels of crime. Photo credit: Gloria Cañas, Dialogo Magazine.

When the author and his colleagues first started working in Colombia in the late 1990s with the Colombian Government on issues of insecurity, some considered the country a failed state, with minimal security. There was wide political recognition that the country would be lost without an increase in taxes to fund the war effort against the FARC in particular. Through a wealth tax adopted in 2002 aimed at the wealthiest tax-payers the government generated enough income to finance a major increase in the size and professionalization of the Colombian military. It should be noted that the tax was continued throughout President Uribe's two terms of office (2002–2010) and continued throughout his successor's, President Santos, first administration 2010-2014.[46] Today, in early 2016 the peace process between the Colombian Government and the FARC appears likely to be successful. Without an effective and well-resourced armed forces, it

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[45] Central Intelligence Agency, *The World Factbook* available at https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/fields/print_2221.html accessed June 2, 2015.
[46] This topic is dealt with in great detail by Gustavo A. Flores-Macías in "Financing Security through Elite Taxation: The Case of Colombia's 'Democratic Security Tax', *Working Paper 3* (Brighton; Institute of Development Studies, July 2012).

seems unlikely that the FARC would have engaged in serious negotiations.[47]

Impunity

Virtually all analysis of problems of crime and violence in the region call attention to impunity.[48] In the most recent United Nations Development Program (UNDP) report on Citizen Security in Latin America they refer to "… alarming levels of impunity…"[49] In a recent Congressional Research Service (CRS) report the authors state, "Weak state presence, corruption, and criminal infiltration have contributed to widespread impunity, which has further eroded public confidence in Central American governments. Of all the homicides committed in Honduras between 2010 and 2013, for example, only 4% resulted in convictions."[50] Before CICIG was implemented, the Guatemalan legal expert Javier Monterroso Castillo called attention to this problem, stating that only 2.7% of criminal cases result in conviction.[51] It is not accidental that the United Nations organization is named "The International Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala."

The data on El Salvador is somewhat better in that in the 2009-2013 period some 15% of judicial processes resulted in a decision.[52] The states, deriving minimal resources through taxes and without an integrated and effective security sector, are unable to respond to the many threats that challenge them. The results are obvious for all to see in terms of homicide rates, arrests for corruption, the U.N. being asked to take over justice through CICIG in Guatemala, and kids fleeing violence.

In the academic and policy literature, attention to the causes of impunity always focus on the judicial system. Normally, attention does not go beyond this to those who do the arresting, except to say, as does the University Institute of Public Opin-

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[47] On October 29, 2015 the Legislative Assembly of El Salvador approved a 5% tax on telecommunications and 5% for individuals or companies that exceed $500,000 annually to finance El Salvador's security plans. It remains to be seen how the estimated $140 M/ year are in fact used. It should be remembered that in FY 2014 El Salvador received $22.3 million in bilateral assistance from the U.S., is a Millennium Challenge Corporation member with a $461 million compact in 2006, and is the only Partnership for Growth Country in Latin America with $43 million allocated in FY 2014. For data see Clare Ribano Seelke, "El Salvador: Background and U.S. Relations," (Washington, D.C.: CRS April 9, 2015), 17-19.

[48] Interestingly enough, in the author's communications with prosecutors in the U.S. they are not familiar with the term "impunity" in the U.S. justice system.

[49] United Nations Development Programme, *Citizen Security With a Human Face: Evidence and Proposals for Latin America* (New York: UNDP, 2013), v.

[50] Peter J. Meyer and Clare Ribando Seelke, CRS Report, December 17, 2015, 6. See also the UNDP Report. PNUD, *Informe Regional de Desarrollo Humano 2013-2014; Seguridad Ciudadana com Rostro Humano: diagnóstic y propuestas para América Latina (*NY: UNDP, 2013). (Full report only in Spanish.) More specifically, on El Salvador, see Banco Mundial, *El Salvador: estudio Institucional y de gasto públic en seguridad y justicia.* (San Salvador: Imprenta La Tarjeta, 2012).

[51] Javier Monterosso Castillo, "Investigación Criminal: Estudio comparativo y propuesta de um modelo de polícia de investigacion en Guatemala." (Guatemala City: Instituto de Estudios Comparados en Ciencias Penales de Guatemala, 2007), 73 and 158.

[52] See Instituto Universitario de Opinión Pública, *La situación de la seguridade y la justicia 2009-2014* (San Salvador: IUDOP, 2014), 165.

ion (IUDOP), that the armed forces should not be doing police work.[53] Yet, as Erik L. Olson states in the Wilson Center report on CARSI, "After decades devoted to rule of law reform and judicial strengthening, there has been precious little improvement." He then asks, "So, after decades of U.S. support for rule of law and institutional reform programs for the police and judiciary, why are corruption, ineffective police work and prosecutions still the hallmark of most law enforcement agencies in the Northern Triangle?"[54]

Stop Security Sector Coordination in the Northern Triangle

In Nicaragua the security sector is integrated. It is integrated in a way that would not be acceptable to most democracies, but it has been effective in controlling gang-generated violence and has not seen the fleeing of unaccompanied kids to the U.S. In the Northern Triangle countries, the military may possibly be under democratic civilian control, (although the ministers of defense in El Salvador and Guatemala are active duty or retired military officers and civilians' roles are minimal) and may even be effective in El Salvador, but there is minimal coordination between the military, the national police, and intelligence agencies. The reasons for this situation are many, and there is now a useful and growing literature attempting to explain it.[55] None of this literature, however, deals with the effectiveness of the armed forces, let alone the police and intelligence agencies.[56] In addition, the political leaders in the Northern Triangle have yet to perceive violence and lawlessness as an issue of national security and defense. And the U.S. approach to problems in the region is one based on development and crime prevention, with the Department of State, specifically USAID and INL, in the lead. The combination of the lack of political incentive for the elites, the limited or even flawed scholarly analysis, and the feckless policy approach of the U.S. results in a bad situation that gets worse and worse.

Coordination of different security providers is indeed possible in the region. In 2005, the Government of El Salvador, receiving what they considered credible threats for their military support of the U.S. in Iraq, created a Permanent Secretariat for their

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[53] Instituto Universitario de Opinión Pública, 165. Item 18 in report. The same requirements are contained in the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) condition IX of Sec. 7045 3 B for release of an additional 50% of the appropriated funds.

[54] Cristina Eguizábal, et al. p. 41 & 42.

[55] See, for example, Orlando J. Perez, *Civil-Military Relations in Post-Conflict Societies: Transforming the Role of the Military in Central America* (London: Routledge, 2015), José Miguel Cruz, "Criminal Violence and Democratization in Central America: The Survival of the Violent State, " *Latin American Politics and Society* Vol 53, no 4, 2011, 1-33; José Miguel Cruz, "Police Misconduct and Political Legitimacy in Central America, *Journal of Latin American Studies* Vol 47, part 2 (May 2015), 251-83; Jack Spence, "War and Peace in Central America: Comparing Transitions Toward Democracy and Social Equity in Guatemala, El Salvador, and Nicaragua," (Brookline, Mass.: Hemisphere Initiatives, November 2004).

[56] On our approach to civil – military relations which includes effectiveness see, "Towards a New Conceptualization of Democratization and Civil-Military Relations," with Cris Matei, *Democratization* December 2008.

National Security Council (NSC). The Secretariat brought together the armed forces, intelligence services, and the national police (PNC), which in the words of the then (since deceased) NSC Secretary, "provide integration, co-ordination, and continuity of the NSC."[57] When President Funes took office, he disbanded the secretariat of the NSC. Currently there is no effective integration of the security providers in any of the Northern Triangle countries.

CARSI remains the main "security" program of the U.S. in the region. Eric L Olson in his Executive Summary of the major study of CARSI at the Wilson Center states: "A central conclusion of this report is that CARSI does not reflect a comprehensive strategy to address the critical public security threats that have shaken the region, and thus its impact on the problems of crime and violence driving Central American migration to the United States is quite limited."[58] In short, CARSI is not a strategy, but instead a package of very different programs implemented very differently from one country to another. Today, as part of the appropriation of $750 million for Central American in the FY 2016 budget, there is a very long list of conditions. If the twelve conditions were fulfilled then there in fact might be a "strategy" behind what is currently called the "CENTAM strategy."

Intelligence Fusion Centers to Implement a Strategy?

The most recent CRS Report on CARSI states, "The U.S. government has advised Central American Nations to employ 'intelligence-led policing' and has called on legislatures in the region to give police and prosecutors new law enforcement tools."[59] The authors give examples from Costa Rica and Panama. The conditions imposed in the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for Fiscal Year (FY) 2016 make no mention of "intelligence-led policing." However, the strenuous conditions imposed on the recipient countries if they wish to receive the $750 million appropriated by the U.S. Congress for the FY 2016 budget are likely to require direct involvement of the U.S. ambassadors in the region, and not just INL representatives or USAID contractors. It is in this context - direct involvement of the highest level of the U.S. government in each country - that I suggest the implementation of the intelligence fusion center concept to combat impunity.[60]

There are currently 78 intelligence fusion centers in all the states but Wyoming, with more in territories, and several in the larger states such as California, New York,

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[57] Author interview with Colonel Miguel Antonio Mendez, Salvadoran Army (Ret.) in San Salvador on March 24, 2006.
[58] "Executive Summary" of Equizábal, et al. pp. 6-7.
[59] Peter J. Meyer and Clare Ribando Seelke, CRS Report, December 17, 2015, 12.
[60] This suggestion is based on the author's personal experience from participating in a meeting with President – Elect Álvaro Uribe, and his cabinet, with the U.S. Ambassador and representatives from the U.S. government in Washington, D.C. one week before President Uribe took office in 2002 to discuss expectations if funding were to be provided for Plan Colombia and other programs to combat the FARC and other illegal armed movements.

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and Texas. In what follows, the author will first define intelligence fusion centers and then highlight three of the main points. He recommends exporting the intelligence fusion center concept to Central America.

Fusion centers are essential to ensure unity of effort among security forces battling organized crime groups. Photo credit: Jason Barnosky, Brookings Institution.

While virtually all of the literature on intelligence fusion centers is unclassified, there is little general awareness of their presence and functions. The author communicated with U.S. and other experts on crime and insecurity issues in Central America and found that none of them had ever heard of intelligence fusion centers. That is probably good in that it demonstrates that they are not a serious threat to human or civil rights. And, while the initial justification for creating intelligence fusion centers is counterterrorism, once created they establish programs to combat the main challenges in an area; they are, in short, responsive to all hazards and all threats, including street gangs and organized crime.

The formal definition of a Fusion Center is "[A fusion center] is a collaborative effort of two or more agencies that provide resources, expertise, and information to the center with the goal of maximizing their ability to detect, prevent, investigate, and respond to criminal and terrorist activity."[61] Intelligence processes – through which information is collected, integrated, evaluated, analyzed, and disseminated – are a primary focus. Fusion involves the exchange of information from different sources – including law enforcement, public safety, and the private sector. Relevant and actionable intelli-

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[61] Fusion Center Guidelines: Developing and Sharing Information and Intelligence in a New Era. August 2006. Available from http://it.ojp.gov/documents/fusion_center_guidelines-law-enforcement.pdf.

gence results from analysis and data fusion.[62]

Fusion centers, or entities that came to be called fusion centers, existed in New York and Los Angeles prior to the 9/11 attacks. Today they remain a local or state-level initiative. Seeing that fusion centers were a useful concept and had become central to several national innovations in fighting terrorism and crime, the federal government and especially the Departments of Homeland Security (DHS) and of Justice (DOJ) supported their development.

The 78 fusion centers vary tremendously in focus as they have been established to meet local and state needs. Today they are a component of the U.S. Information Sharing Environment (ISE) that was established by the Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act of 2004 to facilitate information sharing, access, and collaboration to combat terrorism more effectively.[63] The National Strategy for Information Sharing stipulates that fusion centers will serve as the primary focal points within states and localities for the receipt and sharing of information on terrorism. Through the National Strategy for Information Sharing, the federal government promotes fusion centers to achieve a baseline level of capability and to ensure compliance with privacy laws, to become interconnected with the federal government and each other in a national network of sharing terrorism-related information.

Federal Funding

The federal government supports fusion centers through funding, personnel, and access. While federal funding accounts for most of the fusion center budgets, states and local governments determine the amount of federal funding they allocate to fusion centers each year among a number of competing homeland security needs.

Personnel

DHS and DOJ deploy, or assign, either part-time or full-time personnel to fusion centers to support their operations and serve as liaisons between the fusion center and federal components. As of July 2010, DHS had deployed 58 intelligence officers and the FBI had deployed 74 special agents and analysts full time to 38 of the then 72 fusion centers.

Access to Information and Systems

DHS and DOJ share classified and unclassified homeland security and terrorism information with fusion centers through several information technology networks and

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[62] The *Fusion Center Guidelines* of 2006 and the *Baseline Capabilities for State and Major Urban Area Fusion Centers: A Supplement to the Fusion Center Guidelines* of September 2008 elaborate on the guidelines and key elements of fusion centers. Available at www.it.oip.gov, accessed July 2, 2015. For more information, see John Rollins, *Fusion Centers: Issues and Options for Congress*, CRS Report for Congress, January 18, 2008.

[63] Government Accountability Office, *Information Sharing: Additional Actions Could Help Ensure That Efforts to Share Terrorism – Related Suspicious Activity Reports Are Effective* (Washington, D.C.: GAO, March 2013).

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systems. DHS reports that it has installed the Homeland Secure Data Network, which supports the sharing of federal secret-level intelligence and information with state and local partners. DHS also provides an unclassified network, the Homeland Security Information Network, which allows federal, state, and local homeland security and terrorism-related information sharing.

Training and Technical Assistance

DHS partners with DOJ to offer fusion centers a variety of training and technical assistance programs.[64] It is the combination of "intelligence" with "law enforcement approaches to intelligence" taking place in the same physical location which provides the synergy of the fusion center phenomenon. There is heavy emphasis on analysis, based on collection of information in accord with pre-defined requirements. Obviously, combining these different approaches is a serious challenge as there are cultural as well as bureaucratic obstacles to the intelligence fusing process. The fusion center concept, in which the two types of intelligence are done simultaneously and come together in the same location, makes for the unique dynamic of fusion centers. It is important to add that the intelligence fusion centers are transparent and fully aligned with First Amendment guarantees. In my opinion, it is telling that there have been minimal "exposes" of intelligence fusion centers although they have been developing since shortly after 9/11.

A Forcing Role for Fusion Centers in Central America.

The Intelligence Fusion Center concept could be used as a forcing mechanism to encourage the components of the security structure in the individual states of El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras to coordinate their analysis and operations in order to begin to confront the serious crime and violence situation. Unlike in Nicaragua, this would be done under democratic oversight. Obviously, there are major challenges, not the least of which would be resistance of some civilian elites in the Northern Triangle whose illicit activities may be exposed and the inherent inertia of U.S. bureaucracies. However, one of the major attractions to the intelligence fusion center is that it is not a Department of Defense (DOD) initiative and therefore not perceived as a militarization of the security problem in the region. It is rather an initiative of civilian agencies in the U.S. and could be the same in Central America. If the U.S. can exert its influence in any region of the world, it is in the Northern Triangle of Central America. Whether there is the political will to do so is a totally different question. The fusion center concept has proven effective in the U.S. and it could prove effective in Central America.

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[64] Government Accountability Office, *Information Sharing: Federal Agencies Are Helping Fusion Centers Build and Sustain Capabilities and Protect Privacy, but Could Better Measure Results* (Washington, D.C.: GAO, September 2010).

Conclusion

The reality of crime, violence, and public and personal insecurity in the Northern Triangle of Central America is horrible for much of the population and is not improving. The U.S. has a direct stake in the causes of this situation as much of the violence is due to drugs consumed in the U.S. and the most violent gangs were founded in Los Angeles and through deportation introduced back to El Salvador and then spread to Guatemala and Honduras. There are also important security implications with the two main *maras*, particularly MS-13, active in many parts of the U.S.[65] The bad situation was most recently dramatized by the arrival of 57,000 unaccompanied minors on the U.S. southern border in 2014. The conditions stipulated in the 2016 NDAA for Central America are very onerous. If there is any hope that they can be implemented, then it is not much of a stretch to attempt to implement the fusion center concept. The implementation of this concept may be used as a way to force the cooperation of the now separate elements of security – military, police, and intelligence – and as a way to cooperate with the U.S.

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[65] For a very scary analysis of the penetration of the MS-13 from El Salvador into the state of Texas see Juan M. Arredondo, "Defining Mara Salvatrucha's Texas Network" MA Thesis, Naval Postgraduate School September 2015 available at http://calhoun.nps.edu accessed 18 December 2015. It makes clear that the expansion of the MS-13 is not only in Central America, but the *maras* can just as readily expand in certain parts of the U.S.

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