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# Civil-Military Relations Program in Guatemala: Lessons Learned and Future Challenges

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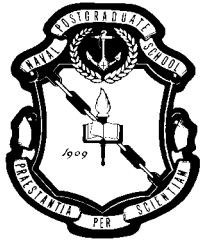
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**THE CENTER FOR  
CIVIL-MILITARY RELATIONS  
NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL  
MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA**

**Occasional Paper #1**

**Civil-Military Relations  
Program in Guatemala:  
Lessons Learned And Future Challenges**

**Thomas C. Bruneau  
July 1999**

# Report Documentation Page

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The views expressed in this publication are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of the Department of Defense of the United States Government.

## **The Center for Civil-Military Relations**

The Center for Civil-Military Relations at the Naval Post-Graduate School (CCMR, Monterey, CA) is an implementing organization of the U.S. Department of Defense's Expanded-International Military Education and Training Program and has amassed both scholarly and practical expertise educating civilian and military defense professionals from more than 40 countries. CCMR was established in 1994 and is sponsored by the Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA). CCMR conducts civil-military relations programs designed primarily for military officers, civilian officials, legislators, and non-government personnel. These programs include courses designed to be taught both in residence at NPS and in a Mobile Education Team (MET) format, depending upon requirements. Three programs offered by CCMR include the MET, the Masters Degree in International Security and Civil-Military Relations, and the Executive Program in Civil-Military Relations.

## **Thomas C. Bruneau**

Thomas Bruneau is a Professor in the Department of National Security Affairs, Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, California. He joined the School in 1987 after having taught in the Department of Political Science, McGill University, Montreal, Canada since 1969. He became Chairman of the Department in 1989, and continued in that position until late-1995. He has researched and written extensively on Latin America, especially Brazil, and Portugal. He has published more than a dozen books in English and Portuguese as well as articles in journals including *Latin American Research Review*, *Comparative Politics*, *Third World Quarterly*, *Journal of Interamerican Studies* and *World Affairs*, *Journal of Latin American Studies*, and *Encyclopedia of Democracy*.

A native of California, Professor Bruneau received his B.A. from California State University at San Jose and his M.A. and Ph.D. from the University of California at Berkeley. He was a Fulbright scholar to India (1962-63) and to Brazil (1985-86), and has been awarded fellowships from Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (several awards), the International Development Research Centre, the Rockefeller Foundation, the Gulbenkian Foundation, and the Luso-American Development Foundation. He has traveled extensively in Latin America and Europe, with shorter trips to Africa and Asia.

In addition to his position as Professor in the National Security Affairs Department, Professor Bruneau is the Regional Director for Latin America in the Center for Civil-Military Relations.

# **Civil-Military Relations Program in Guatemala: Lessons Learned and Future Challenges**

## **Introduction**

The Center for Civil-Military Relations (CCMR) was invited to offer a program in July 1997 to assist Guatemala in consolidating democratic civil-military relations. By the end of 1998 the program had gone through four phases, and appears to have established a momentum in which discussion regarding the proper roles for civilians and military officials in a democracy is both legitimate and increasingly frequent. In this short report I will describe the different phases of the program, discuss the lessons learned during the last year and a half, and highlight some of the remaining challenges.

## **Background**

Guatemala has endured the same experiences of arbitrary military regimes and political violence as other Latin American countries, only more so. Between at least 1966 and 1985, all governments were dominated by the armed forces, and the coup d'etat was the most common

mechanism for changing governments. For example, when Vinicio Cerezo assumed the presidency in November 1985, he was only Guatemala's third civilian president since 1945. And, between 1960 and 1996 the country was engaged in an armed insurrection, a virtual civil war. During this period 140,000 people were killed, one million uprooted (out of a total population of 11 million), and the abuse of human rights, by both the government and the insurgent forces, was common. Largely due to decisions and dynamics within the armed forces themselves, as each sector realized that they could never win the internal war militarily and through repression, the country gradually transitioned towards a democratic regime from the mid-1980s. Even in the early 1990s, however, this regime was not consolidated as evidenced by the attempted auto-coup of President Jorge Serrano in May of 1993. That attempt was opposed by large sectors of the civil society, and not supported by the armed forces, indicating that progress had been made in the eight years since the end of the military regime. Progress was also made by the armed forces and the governments after 1986, but particularly those of Ramiro de Leon Carpio, 1993 - 1996 and Alvaro Arzu, from January 1996 until the present, in achieving a negotiated peace with the umbrella



guerrilla organization, the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity (UNRG). A central element in the peace agreement, signed on 29 December 1996, was the stated goal of civilian control of the armed forces. By 1997, therefore, peace had been achieved, and the elected civilian government of President Arzu felt confident enough in power, and no longer confronted with the armed insurrection, to shake up the military high command.

There were of course many remaining problems including the serious socio-economic inequalities of the population, particularly that half which are indigenous peoples, a long and macabre backlog of deaths and abuses, and a wave of criminal violence. And, since the country has enjoyed little civilian government in its history, but much internal violence, there were virtually no civilians with experience in dealing with security and defense who could assume responsibility in elected civilian governments. Although the attempted coup in 1993 failed due to a lack of military support, this did not signify that the civilians controlled the military. Indeed, all issues in the realm of the politics of civil-military relations, the relations of power between civilians and the military, had yet to be defined let alone resolved. The challenge is to institutionalize the

structures and processes whereby democratically elected civilians control the armed forces as a part of the state, rather than the latter usurping the state itself. These are precisely the issues that CCMR's programs are designed to address.

### **Program**

The program we are conducting with Guatemala is financed under what is termed Expanded-International Military Education and Training (E-IMET). IMET was originally created for the U.S. armed forces to provide training and education to the armed forces of our allies to assist them in better fighting the common enemy, the Soviet Union and its allies, expressed or not. At the end of the Cold War IMET was not only much reduced but also redefined, particularly under the Expanded version, to promote democratic civil-military relations, human rights, military justice, and resource allocation. IMET is part of the State Department's appropriation but is administered by the Department of Defense, specifically the Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA). This arrangement is designed to ensure that IMET fulfills U.S. foreign policy goals. Further, the U.S. Congress plays a very active role in its utilization,

particularly in Central America. Abroad, the IMET funds are managed by the U.S. Military Group (USMILGP), which is part of the embassy although not necessarily co-located with it.

A very important and unique characteristic in the Guatemala program is the cooperation between the MILGP and other sections of the embassy, particularly the Political and the Cultural sections. This is particularly relevant since our programs always include civilians and military, as there is little merit in discussing and seeking to improve civil-military relations unless both sectors are present and participating. A problem in many countries is that while the MILGPS have close and ongoing contacts with the military, they normally have little to do with civilian sectors; that is simply not their job. Through their close cooperation, initially the MILGP and the Political Section decided to invite the CCMR to offer a program in July 1997; the MILGP handled the invitations to the military and the Political Section met with and invited the civilians. This was critically important to the success of the program since, clearly for the civilians, there was absolutely no tradition in Guatemala of them dealing with security and defense. To have been involved in these issues in the past would likely have invited attack, if not

from elements in the armed forces then from the guerrillas. The Political Section thus had to identify those organizations and individuals that might be, or become, interested in issues of security and defense from the NGOs, think tanks, Congress, universities, and ministries such as Foreign Relations. There could be no civilians from the Ministry of Defense as virtually everyone, from the Minister on down, are military officers. The invitation for the military officers went from the MILGP to the Chief of the Defense Staff who requested that certain officers attend. Logically the military would be interested in the topic of civil-military relations since theirs is a military career and, under a democratic regime, they will ultimately be responsible to the civilians. They thus have obvious reasons for knowing more about the general topic and meeting civilians. With the civilians, as they have no background and are more diverse, the challenge is much greater as it is to identify and further interest these individuals who have no career in common nor, as yet, obvious employment opportunities in security and defense. In sum, the civilian side of the nexus is most complicated and challenging as there is no cadre to begin with and no obvious immediate career role for them in security and defense. This situation is not unique to Guatemala.

The MILGP contacted the CCMR in early 1997 and asked us to put together a team and a program. We had several discussions with the MILGP and developed a one-week program on democratic civil-military relations. The CCMR had by that time offered programs in more than a dozen countries in Asia, Africa, East and Central Europe, and Latin America, and this experience, combined with the scholarly work of members of the CCMR, suggested the central issues in a country seeking to institutionalize democratic civil-military relations. It should be noted that civil-military relations is not a discipline per se. Rather, it draws upon the disciplines of History, Political Science, and Sociology, and requires a good deal of first hand experience. The final program included ten lecture blocks, mainly centered on the roles and responsibilities of civilians and officers in democracies. These include such issues as the officer promotion process, civilian control of intelligence, responsibilities for defining roles and missions, the differing roles of militaries and the police, military roles in peacetime, and responsibilities in resource allocation. We have also developed simulation exercises, which are designed to encourage civilians and military officers to discuss key issues in a country's security environment, to prioritize resources for defense and

other needs, and to allocate funds for different sectors within security and defense. As is normal, the final program was about one third presentations by the instructors, one third discussion, and one third the simulation exercise. The team assembled for the program included one academic with expertise in the region and topic, another with a Ph.D. and with extensive experience in policy making in the Department of Defense with regard to Latin America, a retired Navy Seal captain with a Masters degree in Political Science and long experience in Latin America, and a retired Navy rear admiral with extensive military experience as well as in management and in simulations. The purposes in composing a team are to embody the expertise to cover the defined topics, to be able to respond to a wide variety of questions on all sorts of topics and relate these to civil-military relations, and to have sufficient credibility, to get the attention and respect of the participants. The composition of this team was extremely effective. The Center does not have one program or one team. One size does not fit all. Rather, the topics are defined according to each country and the needs at its particular stage of democratic consolidation, and the team is assembled accordingly. The program is based on scholarly concepts and is integrated by an intellectual logic. The team is

recruited to implement the program in situations that are always dynamic and quickly evolving.

The program was held at a hotel in Guatemala City, which was agreed upon as it was neutral turf. There is a military facility nearby in the center of town, the old military academy, or Antigua Escuela Politecnica, with very good facilities, and it would have been free, but several of the civilians were unwilling to participate in a program at a military facility. The participants were 20 officers, mainly majors and lieutenant colonels, and 22 civilians from seven NGOs, six think tanks, two universities, the Ministry of Foreign Relations, three political parties, one member of Congress, and one member of the UNRG. Obviously, and intentionally with such a diverse group at the first program, the goal was to begin a dialogue. Initially the civilians sat together as did the military officers, and regarded each other with apparent suspicion. The program met daily from 8 AM until 4 PM, with a break for lunch on the premises. Before long the interaction became incredibly dynamic, not only in the four simulation groups, but in the lectures and discussion. The overall theme was to provide information and insights whereby the participants would think about and discuss the roles and responsibilities of civilians

and officers in a democracy. While examples from the U.S. were used, more general concepts were also provided and cases from other so-called “new” democracies. The participants learned from the presentations and from each other, and by the end of the week they were working together as Guatemalans and not as civilians or military officers. By all indications the program was a tremendous success. In the end of course evaluations the participants reported that it was a great success and an indicator that several gave was the loyal attendance; 100% of the participants were present and participating 100% of the time. And this when they all had other jobs and tasks, and our program went eight hours a day. The instructors were gratified that their work in preparing and presenting, with a large element of thinking on their feet, was well received. We were also pleased to see how pragmatically the participants behaved. The instructors tried to set this tone by frankly discussing some topics, including human rights and control of the intelligence apparatus, that have not only extreme sensitivity in Guatemala but also cause tensions in Guatemala and U.S. relations. We left Guatemala with a sense of accomplishment, but did not at that point know what, if any, would be the next stage.



## **The Next Stage**

One of the results of the program in July was that several of the civilians from the NGOs, think tanks, and universities began to meet and discuss how to keep the process initiated by the program going. The program had served as a catalyst to legitimate their interest in the future of civil-military relations in Guatemala, provided them with some information and insights, and stimulated them to form a network, which also included several of the military officers. In the Fall some of the civilians approached the embassy and asked if the U.S. government could assist them in institutionalizing in the universities the study and teaching of civil-military relations. The embassy contacted the CCMR, and we proposed a three-phase program.

The first phase of this follow-on program was a one-week trip to Guatemala in January 1998 by two team members from July. We wanted to identify how to implement a program in the universities and thus met with the rectors of the five universities and the director of the military academy, students from the civilian universities and the academy, representatives from the NGOs and think tanks, the Catholic Church, the

armed forces, and other informed or interested people. All together there were 22 scheduled meetings with a total of 50 individuals. Since this was the first time the CCMR had planned a program for the universities, and it was obviously the first time anything like this had been done in the Guatemalan universities, we all had much to learn. The meetings at the universities were organized by the cultural attaché at the embassy. At this stage, then, the program was supported by the MILGP, Political, and Cultural Sections. We found that the impact from the first program was very positive. Officers told us they stayed in contact with civilians they met at the program, members of NGOs told us that our techniques in teaching were being put to use throughout the country, and it was clear that the program had helped legitimate the study of and publishing on civil-military relations as an issue of politics in democratic consolidation.

The challenge at hand, however, of how to institutionalize the study and teaching on civil-military relations in the universities was not simple. Those most interested in the topic were clearly the NGOs and think tanks, but they do not offer degrees. The universities are very distinct as they have their own histories, bureaucratic priorities, and politics. For example, the University of San Carlos, the public university,

was founded in 1676 and has 88,000 students. The four private universities were all founded between 1961 and 1972, and have a total of 33,000 students among them. Of the four private universities two are religiously based and one is dogmatically free market oriented. Through a series of meetings with the rectors at their universities, and then their representatives at the embassy, we decided that the most promising path was to encourage the rectors to identify the individuals they wanted to prepare to teach civil-military relations. None of the universities had courses on this topic, and it was not clear where such a course, or components of such a course, would be located. Again, it must be remembered that security and defense has been a monopoly of the armed forces. In at least two cases the rectors were reticent to put their students in contact with students from some of the other universities. When we met with the students, including the cadets at the military academy, they were eager to participate with students from other universities. It should be noted that Guatemala, unlike El Salvador and Nicaragua for example, has a very rigorous process for recognizing new universities, and for this reason there are only five civilian universities (with two new ones now emerging) and the military academy. The military academy does indeed

require an academic component in its program and the cadets graduate with a recognized university degree. The five universities with their very different political/religious orientations draw their student bodies from different class and religious backgrounds. It became obvious to us, as it is to them, that most adults in Guatemala have serious emotional scars from the generation of armed insurrection. To some degree the universities, separated as they are into different orientations, perpetuate a divided society. It is also clear to us that one has to focus on the younger generation, and particularly the future leaders who are in the universities and the military academy, to supersede the country's tragic and violent past. In addition to investigating the feasibility of and establishing the bases of the next phase of the program, part of the agenda during the intense week in Guatemala was to promote the goals of the program in civil society, the government, and the military. When one has the opportunity to meet with such a diverse group of influential individuals and organizations no moment should be lost in discussing the theme and content of civil-military relations in democratic consolidation.

The second phase was a one-week program at the Naval Postgraduate School in May for ten educators from the five universities

and the military academy. Five of the educators occupied administrative positions and the other five were primarily faculty members with teaching responsibilities. This program was the first the CCMR has ever offered on the teaching of civil-military relations and was intentionally broad and diverse. We outlined twenty of the key civil-military relations topics and went into detail on five including the military as a profession, military roles and missions, the role of the budget in civil-military relations, and institutional frameworks for civil-military relations. We showed them how we develop courses including use of the web, and even created a website for them on civil-military relations. They attended courses on civil-military relations, one of our U.S. students who was completing his Masters thesis on Guatemala briefed them, a group of students told them about instruction and research from their perspectives, and we developed and worked through a simulation in defense decision-making. Since U.S. faculty traditionally are not taught how to teach, it was a challenge to attempt to teach others how to teach. In sum, they were involved with a great many faculty and students, and exposed to extensive course and research materials. It became obvious again during the week how distinct the orientations of the different universities are in Guatemala. It also

became obvious that several of the participants had not begun to think about how they would participate in future stages of the program. Again, we were breaking new ground and were prepared to learn about the dynamics of the Guatemalan university system by doing this program with them. The more we learned about their universities, and the structure of the Guatemalan university system, the better we could prepare for the next stage of the program.

The third stage of offering the course to university students in Guatemala was the culmination of the program, and was probably the most difficult. It was difficult to organize and it was problematic to know how to achieve the desired level of student participation. For that matter, and to be completely candid, we did not know what to anticipate in terms of student participation. We used a rough estimate of between 50 and 60, but in fact did not know for sure how they would be identified and in what numbers.

In January 1998 we agreed in our last meeting with the representatives of the rectors that there would be two simultaneous courses over two weeks. In this manner we would be able to attract both the students who had classes or worked in the afternoon as well as those

similarly occupied in the morning. Each course would meet for three hours per day for nine days for a total of 27 hours. It was the responsibility of the universities to identify the students, and we raised it as an issue with them, but it was never clear to us exactly how the different universities would in fact do this. It later became obvious during the course that two universities and the military academy had a plan to select students whereas the other three institutions were more ad hoc. One university in fact did not send any students at all which was due in part to a conflict of scheduled examinations.

The difficulty in organizing the course itself was the challenge of who to involve to make the presentations. As it worked out, a combination of participants from the first program in July of 1997 along with half of the faculty from the universities and the military academy who attended the course at NPS assumed responsibility for offering the two courses. They divided up the tasks, in some cases using materials we provided and in other cases starting with completely new materials, but in all cases basing them on the types of concepts we use on democratic politics, the military as a profession, and the mutual responsibilities of both, and making the presentations relevant to Guatemala. Only one

instructor from the Center for Civil-Military Relations participated, and his role was to act as a resource person, make one presentation, and introduce the four-stage simulation. As one of what became defined as the core group had to travel abroad during the program, he invited another researcher to make a presentation who also did an excellent job. It is likely that he will now become part of the core group. It should be noted that none of the instructors in this course received any financial compensation for their work. In short, the Guatemalan university faculty and think tank researchers assumed responsibility for teaching the program. They did it because they believe it is important for the future of their country.

The course took place under very adverse circumstances, which almost resulted in its cancellation before it began. It started on the first Monday in November which was precisely the day that the remains from Hurricane Mitch caused very serious damage throughout Guatemala, including in the capital. President Arzu declared a state of national calamity and instructed the population to stay home and away from work in order to keep the roads free for repairs and emergency relief. We went to the Old Military Academy, where the course was to be held at 7:30 AM



and were prepared to delay the start of the course as we expected that few if any of the students would be present. Instead we found 19 students ready and waiting for the course to begin, and so we began. Later in the day as the extent of the devastation became known, the U.S. embassy canceled all events it was sponsoring in order to assist in the relief effort. The MILGP representative responsible for the course, however, convinced the ambassador to allow the course to continue. The afternoon attendance was more spotty, since word of the national calamity and the request to stay off the streets was widely known, but we began that segment of the course as well. Day by day, as the disaster situation became stabilized and the word about the course spread in the universities, the enrollment increased. We kept daily attendance and by the end of the course there were sixty-three students who were awarded diplomas. The diplomas were signed by the U.S. Ambassador, the Chief of Staff of the Army, and the Director of the Center for Civil-Military Relations.

The course dynamic was excellent. The researchers and faculty members made their presentations on different aspects of democratic civil-military relations and the students debated and discussed with them and with each other. It was clear that they had not been exposed to these

topics previously. And in the case of students from some universities, they had never been encouraged to debate and discuss political issues. Their participation in the simulation was extremely active and productive. Indeed, they became so proficient at the simulation that at the end we not only asked them for results in terms of priorities for funding but also recommendations on new structures and processes. We had never done that before, and the students did a superb job of it. At the beginning of the course several of the military academy cadets noted that they had little or no contact with students in civilian universities, and several of the civilians reported that they had never had contact with the military. By the end all of the students, military and civilian, were mixed and discussing actively with one another. At the end of the course we had an open session to stimulate their comments and suggestions for the future, and also gave them an end-of-course evaluation. The comments were very positive with good suggestions on how to institutionalize the process in the universities. Probably the main lesson learned in this regard is to identify in each of the universities the organization, or individual, most likely to implement courses on civil-military relations. We sought to deal with this issue by inviting to the graduation ceremony representatives

from universities. Once we discussed with them this problem they agreed whether to handle future liaison themselves or indicate the individual in their institution who would. We anticipate that the core group, from the think tanks and the universities, will maintain contact for the liaison function.

### **Overall Lessons Learned and Ideas for the Future**

In line with our overall goal in calling attention to the importance of civil-military relations and having it discussed, the MILGP invited a number of important figures to speak at a plenary session of the Friday of the first week. Those who spoke included the Deputy Chief of Mission from the embassy (as the ambassador was overseeing U.S. support to the relief effort; for this same reason the Chief of Staff of the Army was unable to attend), a retired U.S. general who had been Commander of the U.S. Southern Command, a member of the professional staff of the U.S. House of Representatives, the Guatemalan Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs, and the Director of the Guatemalan President's Office on Human Rights. The students had already participated in presentations by the general and the Congressional staffer, and all of the students attended the plenary session

as did representatives from NGOs, the universities, and the military. The high level representation was very useful to further highlight to the students the importance of the topics taught in the course, and for those presenting we know it was important (as they told us) in demonstrating the interest and enthusiasm of the civilian and military students.

Based upon our experience in four phases of the Guatemala program, the most obvious lesson learned is the keen interest in civil-military relations. Judging from the quantity and quality of participation by faculty, students, NGOs, military officers, etc. there is great awareness of the importance of civil-military relations for democratic consolidation and peace in Guatemala. Our programs have provided the catalyst whereby the Guatemalan participants can have their interests legitimated, receive some new information, and obtain insights on how to deal with difficult political issues. One of the most important insights is that civil-military relations is about politics and thus about power. In a democracy it is the popularly elected civilians who should have the power over the armed forces. This concept appears to be new in Guatemala, as elsewhere, and there has been a tendency to confuse civil-military relations with civil affairs. The latter is basically winning the hearts and minds of the

population, normally through infrastructure development, and does not deal with power. The attention to politics is a real insight in Guatemala, and likely elsewhere. The programs we have offered have also allowed the Guatemalans to establish networks, which include civilians from a variety of sectors as well as military officers. We have found that several of those involved in these networks are now researching and writing on civil-military relations. Exactly how courses in civil-military relations become institutionalized in the universities remains to be seen. However, the experience in the course shows that the Guatemalans can indeed offer a high level course and the students who took it are likely to act as pressure groups to encourage adoption of courses or components of courses.

We did not begin this program in July of 1997 with any notion that it would lead to subsequent phases, let alone courses at the university level. That it did is due to the responsiveness and requests of the Guatemalans and the willingness of the embassy, and particularly the MILGP, to respond to these requests. There has been a great deal of work involved, particularly logistics and coordination, which has been handled by the MILGP and the core group of Guatemalans. CCMR has been keen

to participate in the programs as it is both the right thing to do and encourages the center to continually develop and implement new programs. We probably learn as much as the Guatemalans, and what we learn there we will apply elsewhere.

Obviously, education is long term. In the short term contacts with and programs for other sectors-NGOs, think tanks, members of political parties, senior military officers, members of congress, etc.-must also be promoted. Establishing democratic civil-military relations is not only about structures and processes that can be identified in other democracies and possibly implemented in Guatemala. It is also about beliefs and attitudes that support these structures and processes. The latter take even longer to change than the former and our programs appear promising in their impact.