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**Master's Thesis**

**The Unattended Regional Security Agenda of  
Central America**

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**Graduate School of International Studies**

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Central America**

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## Abstract

The security challenges in Central America are latent. The region experienced high levels of violence during the decades of 1970 and 1980, especially El Salvador, Guatemala, and Nicaragua with the civil wars. This experience was a turning point in the regions political system and since the decades of 1990, the region started a new model of security that continues to this day.

The military rule, the violence of Civil War, the international isolation, economic stagnation, and democratization processes pushed Central America towards the revival of the Central American Integration System with new goals and functions. Common security was one of the new additions to that framework with the aim at gaining capability to fight back the threats to the region. Nonetheless, these threats have increased over the years and they have become a huge burden on society and the State.

In some cases, like the Northern Triangle countries, violence has reached new highs, even when compared to the worst years of the civil wars. In the southern part of the isthmus, unpopulated territory is being used for drug storage by the *cartels*. Gang members move around the region freely and organize illicit acts across countries without any problem, even from within jails. This situation has hacked the security institutions in each of the countries, as well as the joint efforts the region is making to counter these illicit organizations.

Therefore, the purpose of this thesis is to provide an overview of the security institutions that exist in the region, and to assess if the new security model implemented in the region after 1990 is effectively acting against the threats to the region. Based on the Central American Integration System as a collective defense institution, the region is trying to jointly fight the threats it must overcome. The main problem is that these threats, as they come from within the region, makes it harder for any security institution to implement any total elimination plan.

In addition, the region has two main factors that greatly influence the security policy. The first one is the huge dependence on the United States as a major founder and cooperation agent, while the second is the human rights

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# Chapter 1

## **Background**

Historically, the civil institutions have lacked strength and capacity to implement the state's policies, especially when it comes to security issues. Civil elites have never placed enough importance to this topic due to their desire to benefit from the patrimonial legacy of the State's economic power. Therefore, the main pillar of the societal, individual, and State security always fell within the responsibility of the Armed Forces and not, as in other countries, in the police force.

From the decade of 1960 onwards, the Central American isthmus experienced increasing levels of violence in three main levels, individual, State, and Region. Although there are differences in each of the countries, the Civil Wars in El Salvador (1980-1992), Guatemala (1960-1967; 1974-1996), and Nicaragua (1979-1990) demonstrated the increasing tensions within and outside the region. The conflicts ended through peace and democratization processes in Nicaragua, in El Salvador, and later in Guatemala, and all of the signed accords placed a strong emphasis in the reform of the security system of each country and of the region.<sup>1</sup>

With the ongoing democratization processes, the end of the Cold War Era, and the end of internal conflicts, the Central American state's internal peace started to disintegrate quickly at the turn of the millennium. The increasing spiral of the violence problem, especially against the individual citizen demonstrated that

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<sup>1</sup> Hampton-Gaines, Berthea. (2012). *State Capacity and Effectiveness in Combating Crime*. Naval Postgraduate School. California, U.S.A: p. 1.

dismantling the military structures of the past meant the destruction of the States capability to secure and protect its people, its territory, and fight against internal and external threats.<sup>2</sup> In addition, pressured by the international community to evict the military establishments from the government, the newly elected civilian authorities experienced a decrease of functionality, capability, and capacity throughout the state institutions when they civilianized the security structures. Moreover, following the Washington Consensus, all the countries introduced the neoliberal reforms without analyzing their outcomes; which in turn weakened the already fragile structure of power in each country.

According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, Central America is the most violent region in the World outside of active war zones<sup>3</sup> due to the fact that these countries are located between the World's largest drug consumer country and the World's number one supplying country. The illicit drug trafficking business, the prevalence of gang activity, the rise of transnational criminal organizations, the weak and lax security institutions, plus the corruption undermining State institutions, have seriously challenged both, the social and economic development of the region.

In addition, one must mention that although the region experiences more or less the same amount of threats and violence, there is a big difference between the Northern Triangle and the Southern triangle of the isthmus. In the north part (El

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<sup>2</sup> Jütersonke, O., Muggah, R., & Rodgers, D. (2009). Gangs, Urban Violence, and Security Interventions in Central America. *Security Dialogue*. Vol.40.

<sup>3</sup> The Economist. "Security in Central America: Rounding up the governments", June 23, 2011, <http://www.economist.com/node/18867590/print>

Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras) the illegally enriched elites have slowly started to play domestic power politics against the more traditional and industrial elites. While in the other three countries (Nicaragua, Costa Rica, and Panamá) still do not possess this problem due to their status as “drug warehouses” in the illicit trafficking business to the United States.

### **Importance**

In general, the Central American countries have always had a common security objective: nobody outside the region should interfere with whatever happens inside the isthmus. This said, the security agenda has always been a dichotomy for each country. In the one side, due to the historical and social binding of the societies, each country is bound to protect the others from external threats. On the other side, each country protects itself from the involvement of the neighbors in its domestic politics. All of this happens under the nuclear umbrella of the United States that does not contemplate, until very recently, the internal capability of illicit groups to challenge the power of the State. Therefore, the civilian elites have never placed enough importance on advancing the security needs of the region and since the end of the Cold War and the Civil War, the unattended regional security issues have been stuck for more than 20 years.

## **Major research questions**

When it comes to security issues and research in Central America, there are many problems regarding information, data, analysis, but the worst is regarding the politicization of the topic. Both at the regional level, nor at the domestic level does a common or standard understanding of what security is, what it should have, and who should provide it. Therefore, this investigation's major curiosity is to explore **how the Central American States arrange their security agenda after 1990.** From there other questions like **which security institutions exist in Central America, what are their roles and structures,** and more importantly, **are they successfully providing security** arise. Lastly, concerns about the current security model of the region and its sustainability also come to mind, especially because it seems to be losing the battle against the threats and forces it should withstand.

## Chapter 2

### **Conceptual Framework**

In order to understand the Central American security agenda and issues, it is necessary to define the concepts revolving around it. Some of the concepts have ongoing debates on their definitions and I must say I do not plan to settle those debates. Rather, I seek to find an operative definition that contributes to the understanding of the topic in general and the Central American case in particular. Lastly, we will do a review of the existing literature about international security institutions in order to understand what these are, why they exist, and why they are important.

The first and most important concept we need to define for this research is «Security». For this, we will utilize the discussion presented by David A. Baldwin (1997) in his paper “The Concept of Security”<sup>4</sup>. In his text, Baldwin argues for two discussions around the concept. The first one starts by mentioning that there is much under-clarification and unexplained assumptions that confuse more than what they shed light over the real meaning of security. Even when the Post-Cold War decades have hardly tried to redefine security, Baldwin argues that it has been neglected as a concept. His first argument goes in the line that it has not received the serious attention it deserves, especially if compared to concepts like justice, freedom, representation, power, equality, or obligation. The second argument refers to the lack of interest within the academia to distinguish between the concepts of power and security, despite the differences.

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<sup>4</sup> Baldwin, David. A. (1997). *The Concept of Security*. Review of International Studies, Vol. 23, No. 1, pp. 5-26.

The second discussion revolves around the lines of security being a contested concept. This means that no matter the amount of evidence or arguments presented, there will never be an agreement (or a single version) that can be understood as the “standard use” of the concept. The problem with this discussion is that the different schools along the spectrum of international relations ignore the positions of others when it comes to security. Therefore, there is virtually no serious conceptual debate, since each side does not engage in the philosophical debate about the nature of the concept, and thus it cannot be proven different.

Lastly, Baldwin explains the ambiguity with which the concept is used, especially when it comes to discourse and policy. To this matter, he suggests that many authors take advantage of this situation and use this as an excuse for not formulating a concept of their own, which in the end only adds to the existing confusion. In order to avoid falling in the same mistake, Baldwin characterizes security by reformulating Wolfer’s definition as “a low probability of damage to the acquired values” (1997: p. 13). From there, security can be defined in terms of four main characteristics and three supporting questions. The four characteristics are, a) *security for whom* and can refer either to individuals, states, or international systems, according to the level of analysis and the scope of the research; b) The second one is *for which values* and, again, this depends on the level of analysis since individuals, states, and other actors express different values across time and space. The next one is *how much security* and, following Wolfer’s characterization, Baldwin argues that security is to be seen as a scale or varying degrees because absolute security is unattainable (1997: p. 15). The last one is *from what threats* and

should be specified since the authors of research and policies always have particular kinds of threats in mind when they talk about this issue.

The three supporting questions are *by what means* and involve all the actions devoted to pursue security. Baldwin adds that there is a tendency to define the subfield in terms of threat, use and control of military force, which leads to confusion on which security is being pursued, favoring the military solution to any security problems. Pursuing security always involves costs, therefore the fourth question is *at what cost* since independent of the level of analysis (individual, state, or international system) there has to be a trade-off between other goals and security. The last question is the *time period* in which security is going to be achieved. This might be the most important of the questions because between long run and short run security policies differ greatly (1997: p. 17).

For the last part, Baldwin explains the value of security, independently of level of analysis because pursuing security involves the sacrifice of other values. He points out that there are three main approaches for answering the question of *how important* security is relative to other values. The *Prime Value Approach*, follows Thomas Hobbes line of thinking and answers that security is the prime goal to be achieved in order to enjoy other values like freedom, or prosperity. Nonetheless, he refutes this by explaining that the value of anything is the result of external social conditions, like supply and demand.

The *Core Value Approach* is the second he explains and says that it follows the same logic as the first approach with the difference of having to classify between core and non-core values. The biggest flaw here is that it cannot justify the

allocation of any amount of resources to pursue of non-core values. The last approach, the *Marginal*, is according to Baldwin the best possible choice when analyzing security. This method assumes that the law of diminishing marginal utility can be applied to security and from there, any policy regarding security has to compete for scarce resources. This way, the value of an increment of national security to a country will vary from country to country, depending on how much security is needed, taking into account how much the country already has.

Baldwin concludes by explaining that the concept of security implies nothing about the degree of interdependence among states with respect to their security relations. Nor can the concept blind one's thinking on the security dilemmas or to the more general interdependence of states in their security relations (1997: p. 26). Those who believe otherwise, are challenged to explain cases with evidence and argument rather than by definition.

To complement Baldwin's definition of *security*, I find that the explanation made by Pinar Bilgin (2003) in the article "Individual and Societal Dimensions of Security" helps to fully comprehend this academic field. In general, security has always been more related to the State than to people, especially because the most basic argument for the existence of the State is as an instrument for providing security to its peoples (Bilgin, 2003: 203). Although other conceptions of security have always existed, they never had the chance to develop and gain enough political space to challenge the State-centric view that has been the norm since Westphalia in 1648. Inside the state centric paradigm, three main approaches were discussed

during the Cold War, which are: a) common security, b) stable peace, and c) the Third World Security (Bilgin; 203-204).

Nonetheless, the end of the Cold war provided a moment for new conceptions of security to rise that moved away from the traditional state centric paradigm. In this debate, the concept of «human security» gained support and changed the focus from the State to the individual. This means that between individuals' and governments' security, the first ones should come first (Booth; 1991), mainly because the security of the state is not necessarily synonymous with that of the people who live within its boundaries. This differentiation created the need for a more complex and multilayered analysis to understand the dynamic relationships and interactions of the actors and how they affect each other's' security.

Some years later, the concept of societal security came to complete the new approach to security where the human being is the referent and not the State. This concept is focused to help the scholars understand how a societal group creates and recreates its identity, orders its interests, and the channels through which it provides security. Although it gained supporters outside the academia and within the NGO community, it has remained a vague concept, as well as it is not useful to understand what security is or means. Not to say that it does not contribute to the formulation of better security policies since it has been used by many interest groups to promote specific causes.

Another important definition need is that of «international institution». Terrence Chapman (2007), in his article published in the Journal of Conflict Resolution 51 titled *International Security Institutions, Domestic Politics, and Institutional Legitimacy*, focuses on the role of international institutions as channels of credibility, legitimacy, and support for implementing foreign policy. He argues that many studies, and the general public, treats international institutions either as altruistic, because of their primary concern is policy success, or as a possessing symbolic legitimacy, from which they can exercise enough influence over States and societies. Even when this institutions lack the robust enforcement power, their decisions affect -in different degrees- the turns and outcomes of foreign policy.

These institutions serve as a “rationally ignorant” domestic audience, but the degree to which institutional decisions affect public behavior and opinion varies considerably among States. This means that a powerful State might not be affected as much as a powerless State by the institutional opposition of an international organization. Thus, the preferences and behavior of institutions and their ability to affect any State’s foreign policy depends on the perception of institutional legitimacy that is endogenous to other members of that institution, as well as of external observers. For this specific matter, Chapman says “legitimacy is not constant, it varies across institutions, context, institutional features such as membership and decision-making rules, and across observers” (2007; p. 137).

Later, Chapman explores the informal dynamics of why States seek policy approval from international organization, from where he draws two lessons. The first one is that as international institutions are seen as neutral (or technical)

organizations, they are able to provide information to the uninformed outside observers. The second lesson is that they constitute an effective test to measure the support for specific policies because they provide incentives and signals credible enough to maintain, and even enlarge, that support. These signals are important because the general public tends to take into consideration the statements voiced by international institutions more seriously than those from individual States because they are seen as public forums and have a symbolic importance. In addition, the perception of international institutions is that these can make public position taking much more costly for any State. Nonetheless, it all depends on the perception that the public has of the organization. The more effective it is, the more legitimacy it will have when voicing statements.

Based on the assumption that States create institutions to serve their self-interest and that these become channels to achieve outcomes that otherwise would be impossible; or prevent actors from undertaking behaviors that attempt against the interest of other members, voicing statements in the twenty-first century is useful to affect the outcome of international foreign policy, especially in the area of security. David Lake (2001) in his article titled “Beyond Anarchy: The Importance of Security Institutions” published in *International Security* 26, mentions that any «institution» is a “persistent and connected set of rules (formal and informal) that prescribe behavioral roles, constrain activity, and shape expectations.” (p. 131). By using this definition, Lake not only limits all international institutions as a voluntary agreement between sovereign states, but also allows for a broader interpretation of them, than mere alliances, concerts, or collective security organizations.

In his research about international security institutions, Lake mentions that it is important to focus on the behavior of third parties towards any institution because the greater the change of nonmembers, the greater the effect that the institution has. There are two types of organizations, the first one is the anarchic one, and States chose to build this kind of institution when the trust on cooperation is potentially high and the need to alter the behavior of any of the contracting parties is small. The second type, the hierarchic, is created when the risks, challenges, and other factors at stake is high, plus the risk of defection are bigger than the potential benefits of cooperation.

He concludes by saying that even when the international arena has an anarchic nature, hierarchies within the world system arise and have been common since the Treaty of Westphalia (1648) came in place. These hierarchic orders, first as treaties and nowadays in the form of institutions, affect the outcome of the foreign policies around the globe and has its biggest expression when the topic in question is State security. In this sense, power is important when defining relationships with subordinate States but it does not explain fully the form or effect of any security institution.

In this sense, Alagappa (1997) in his article *Regional Institutions, the UN and International Security: A Framework for Analysis*, published in the Third World Quarterly 18, says that the end of the Cold War reinforced the trend towards regional security as an increasing way of addressing the growing gaps between developed and developing countries, and as a way of reducing the burden on the United Nations on keeping international security.

In many cases, the same role of the UN was given to regional institutions - maintain international peace and security after the collapse of the Cold War security architecture - whether these institutions were created for that goal or not. In stark contrast to what had happened in the formative years of the United Nations, when any regionalization process was seen as competing and detrimental to the universal approach, it is now acknowledge that regional institutions work better in promoting international peace and security. This has added another layer to the UN system, because regional organizations consist mainly of local personnel that has experience, legitimacy and knowledge to act within the region. In addition, the cooperation between this regional institution and the UN system has been proved useful, especially in regions where external intervention is harshly criticized, controversial, and without a clear mandate.

Alagappa acknowledges that the terms *peace* or *security* are not sufficiently defined and therefore, in the international arena, this has two important effects. The first one, the positive side, is that institutions pursuing any of the two are allowed constantly to redefine and update their missions and visions according to their needs across time and space. This means that as the concept of *peace* or *security* evolves, in the same way the institution can reshape its limitations and actions. The second effect is the unnecessary ambiguity, criticism, and diminished legitimacy that international institutions suffer due to the ongoing debates in many topics around both concepts. In extreme cases, the latter can mean inaction, stagnation, and ultimately, loss of purpose of the institution. To avoid this, States build up these

institutions either for a specific issue or within a wider framework that will allow redefinition and future arrangements.

Complementing this arguments, Haftendorn (1991) opens the discussion arguing that *national security*, *international security*, and *global security* not only refer to different sets of issues but also refer to different historical moments and philosophical contexts that have influence the international structure. Each concept, although referring to security, possesses intrinsic meanings that shape the practices, rules of behavior, capabilities, and enforcement of rules, according to the need of the time and space it came to be. While *national security* was born with the Nation-State, *international security* appeared during the 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe. *Global security*, in contrast, was born during the 1980s and developed in the 1990s to shape the Post-Cold War era.

She acknowledges that most authors limit themselves when analyzing security to the protection of the nation from external overthrow or attack, or the absence of military threats. Nonetheless, security studies have three main traditions, and each of them have dominated the international relations field, even for a short period. The Hobbesian current proposed national security as the way to end the war of all against all and to secure domestic peace through the state. The Kantian current expressed the necessity of restructuring the international system as to create a community of humankind through federations. While the Grotian current proposed to limit the inter-state conflicts through the creation of institutions that would be acceptant of coexistence and cooperation by enhancing the security of nation-states,

not preventing war. The struggle within these currents have shaped today's international system.

She outlines some examples to show the rise and fall of what she calls the *security regimes*. Defined as “regularize cooperative behavior in issues relating to the national security of two or more states, governed by either explicit or implicit norms and rules which permit nations to be restrained in their behavior in the belief that others will reciprocate”, security regimes are patterns of cooperation among states. The regimes are; the Concert of Nations, founded in 1814, destroyed itself with the First World War, which in turn created the League of Nations. This regime, based completely on the Kantian current, failed to provide security and thus destroyed itself with the outbreak of the Second World War. This gave way for the revival of national security regime, with the addition of an institution that would guarantee a system of collective security, the United Nations. Nonetheless, the latter also failed to provide security because of the dominance of the national over the collective interests.

The newest regime is that of *Global security*, which attempts to replace mutual deterrence and lead to a situation of global peace, as a condition in which each nation and each individual can enjoy justice and happiness. This presupposes a universal concept of security that, in her words, is still nonexistent. Nonetheless, this concept has already set in motion changes that at two levels; first, affecting the capabilities of states, and second, relating to patterns of interaction among units. According to her, this is way the decade after the end of the Cold War saw an unprecedented shift towards regionalization that continues to this day.

Haferndorn concludes her article by explaining that although security studies can fall into ambiguity, or emphasize the military and strategic aspects of security, it has already developed a catalog of concepts and analytical frameworks that ensure its continuity and further enlargement. The field is a subfield of International Relations and should be treated as such, especially now that the world is demanding innovative frameworks to address the multipolarity of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

Now that we have a background on *security, institutions, and international institutions*, it is also important that we define «Regional Integration» because in the World, and Central America, the regionalism has received a great impulse after the Cold War.

According to Bull (1999), the re-emergence of integration between the Central American countries in the early 1990s occurred within the context of a series of other regional and subregional integration projects in the Americas. However, that specific project had goals beyond opening economies towards third parties. This goals, related to peace, democracy, and political integration led to the interpretation that this time there would be a “new regionalism”.<sup>5</sup>

Two parallel processes started to affect the project of integrating Central America. The first one is the globalization of the world economy, seen or treated as a necessary stepping stone enabling national economy to reap the benefits of the new dynamics of the global economy. The second is the decline of the US

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<sup>5</sup> Bull, Benedicte. 1999. “New Regionalism in Central America”. *Third World Quarterly* 20 (5): 957-970.

hegemony and the transformation of the global power structure, due to the end of the Cold War and the assumption that moving past this power hierarchy has left room for new regional projects. Proponents of this current point out the inclusion of security agreements in regional projects as an expression of political movement in the region, especially because the contact between the Central American countries has always been far-reaching and inexplicably more profound than within states in other regions. Nonetheless, this has not had the expected effect of triggering and accelerating regional integration. This “familiar ties” have only worked in keeping the region at the same pace.

The region’s processes have had a series of changes during the first years of the launching of the “new regionalism”, which appears to be a change of direction and of focus. During the first three to four years, the direction was the region itself and the citizens of Central America was the main public. The second phase, probably beginning in late 1995 or early 1996 and corresponding with the end of the Guatemalan Armed Conflict, the focus of the project suffers the change from public, from the Central American citizens towards the International Community. In this respect, the author notes that within the integration project, the main sources of the state legitimacy become external actors and institutions, making the internationalization of the state the main goal of the project. Which in turn, weakens the integration process by making it a secondary goal and delaying the implementation of all the agreements.

Bull concludes that the “new regionalism” experienced in Central America, although it showed particular characteristics when compared to other regional

integration projects, it quickly started to stagnate due to the increasing importance placed on economic development. This goal, as originally conceived, aimed at creating a regional market that would behave as national market, but as of 1999, the result was internationalization of national market. This means, each national market fluctuates and competes separately at the global level, contradicting the original objectives.

For Perry & Primorac (1994), the decade of 1990 presents a dramatic transformation of the relationship among the countries of the Americas. The opportunities created by the end of the Cold War present a first moment in the history of the continent to truly rethink, redirect, and develop a new security agenda, especially because almost all countries in the hemisphere accept and exercise democratic values.

The renaissance of sub-regional initiatives has revived the efforts for gradually come together and form a better continent for all. However, almost all efforts have failed to advance cooperation in the realm of security, and when contrasted to the achievements in economic and political cooperation, this area clearly lacks behind. For the authors point out several topics that any security agenda for the continent should address in order to improve cooperation, but to truly secure the hemisphere. The most important ones are, a) defense of democracy, b) elimination of Cold War residuals, c) insurgency and terrorism, d) drug trafficking and organized crime activities, e) arms control and non-proliferation controls, f) conflict resolution and peacekeeping operations, and, g) civil-military relations and the role of the armed forces. For each of the issues they present the actual state of

relations, past experiences and failures, as well as opportunities that arose from the sudden change in the international arena in 1991.

Right after that, they explore the policy options opened for the Americas, especially for Latin America to redefine their position towards the US. In this regard, they predict that failure to move forward in the security agenda will not only affect the region in terms of cooperation ability, but also will leave the handling of threats to each of the countries, as well as reinforce the unilateral policy of the US to act *de facto* in any topic they consider necessary.

Although they do not explicitly say it, the reader can infer from the article that the post-Cold War Era has set in motion two agendas that contradict each other and will eventually clash if the security sector remains far behind. The first agenda handles the economic growth and development areas, focusing on improving and enhancing trade among the countries. The second agenda, the security one, seems to be stuck in the decades of 1950 and 1960, where each country seeks to secure itself without caring about the others and the US still defines the pace at which security processes occur.

To overcome this situation, the authors point out the existence of regional diplomatic infrastructure that could be either revitalized or reformed to address many of the issues revolving around the security agenda. Nonetheless, they also mention that organizations like the OAS, the Inter-American Defense Board and structure, and others, have one flaw: the US has long used them to advance its interests in the region. In addition, the problem that many civilian governments are willing to neglect the role and respect that military establishments deserve within a

democratic life, not only reduces the capacities of cooperation but also creates fear among the public of anything concerning the military. In a way, creating a self-fulfilling prophecy of militarism.

They conclude by comparing the actual situation of the security agenda to that of the European countries, where they were able to quickly advance and create these huge economic and social progresses, but still depend on the US for their external security and are reluctant to confront their own security issues.

Although Kelly (2005) does not oppose the idea of «regional integration» , he does raise questions about it, especially because after approximately 20 years of the end of the Cold War, regionalism has not been able to achieve many of its objectives. In his article *Security Theory in the New Regionalism*, he aims at comparing the different models of regional security that arose after the Cold War and distill the commonalities in order to understand their processes and effects. The first distinction he does is the acceptance of the *region* as a level of analysis between the State and the Globe. There are three distinguishable characteristics of regional systems, these are: a) structurally they are open to intervention from above, b) geographic density qualifies the security dilemma each region possesses, c) regional organizations facilitate joint repression rather than integration there were the State has turned the security dilemma inwards.

The end of the Cold War brought significant retrenchment of great power involvement from much of the developing World, which means greater autonomy for regions. The new regionalism is broad and multidimensional and builds regions

according to the relevant dimensions and not according the pre-existing cartographic entities.

According to Kelly, the regionalism movement arise every time there is a systemic confusion in the International system. He adds that this period of dislocation allows regionalism to bloom and create subsystems that when the dislocation ends, serve as pivots for the global system to dominate. Academically, there is no consensus about the region being a useful and meaning concept and unit of analysis, especially since each current of International Relations keeps adding variables to it.

There are five (5) fundamental claims in the regionalist theory that argue in favor of this. The first is the “loss of strength gradient” which explains that most states worry about their neighbors rather than about distant states. This makes local dynamics much more intense and necessary for most States and limits the threats to each region, which at the same time means the security dilemma is uneven and power projection is a luxury of great powers. Second, when great powers intervene, local partners exploit patrons to pursue local opponents. Small states do play power games within their regions and reject the one-way transmission that the dominant international system imposes. Third, the constant imperialism and colonialism debate has virtually limited the overlay of the international system. Fourth, capabilities to resist, at least in home territories, have risen as willingness to intervene have declined in the great powers, especially the publics of the major powers do not support semi-imperial ventures anymore. Lastly, traditional IR insists on abstract, systemic theory that conveniently sidelines the study of other places and

leaves USA as the sole winner of the international system. Therefore, it cannot capture the regional interactions and dynamics, which regionalists intend to enrich within the IR theories.

Kelly argues that there are two regionalism waves. The first one came about during the decades of 1960 and 1970 and occurred mainly because of the dramatic expansion of the state system after de-colonization. The second wave started in the late decade of 1980 and followed during the 1990 with the European Union as a model of integration. Nonetheless, each wave has specific interests and characteristics. During the 1960s and 1970s, the regionalism was used as the mean to protect independence, nonalignment, and resist systemic overlays of the bipolarity between US and USSR. While the second wave tried to follow the political and economic model of the EU, and facilitated the spread of great power interests by ensuring subsystem subordination to the primary (international or global) system.

Overall, regions remained weakly conceptualized and ill-defined due to the turn away of academics from integration theory to interdependence. Nonetheless, William Thompson (1973) identified four master indicators of a region. (1) Regular and intense interaction, (2) geographic proximity, (3) actor recognition of the subsystem as a distinctive area, and (4) a minimum of two actors.

The collapse of the bipolarity made the regions regain the lost interest. This does not mean that a definition was agreed upon and therefore a region maintain the possibility of multidimensionality. In many cases, regional security never really

took off, while regional economic integration accelerated, or regional social interaction tighten similar societies together.

Buzan's *regional security complex* (1986) means that regions have stronger security dilemmas than the whole international system, and is complementary to the neorealism's structural scheme. He defines regions specifically in functional terms of security, territorially coherent subsystems defined by interlocking patterns of securitization. Buzan also concludes that the region is the most important of the four levels of the international system analysis because they require States to project amity or enmity towards each other.

Not opposed but analyzing regions from another perspective, Lemke (2002) uses Buzan's regional security complex as a "local hierarchy" and explains that the larger global system is composed of separate mini-hierarchies that create a pyramid model with the global hegemon at the top. In the paper, *regionalism* means "a policy and project whereby states and non-state actors cooperate and coordinate strategy ... to create an interlocking web of regional governance structures..." (Fawcett 2005: p.24), that usually culminates with the creation of a regional organization.

Even when States create the regional organization, this institution is more likely to become the suppressor of internal dissidence in regions where the State power is internally weak. This means that the organization works as a sovereignty reinforcer that becomes a project and a policy in itself, and therefore real integration does not occur. In this case, the organization also becomes an instrument of the

elites to promote their “collective internal security” (Leifer 1989:1; Ayoob 1995:61-65).

Not opposing but complementing, Katzenstein (2005) takes new regionalism seriously and constructs a systemic theory based on much of the literature reviewed in this paper. He accepts that regions are porous and this factor increments there were the state is weak and that it is much more tempting for powerful states to intervene when this occurs. Nonetheless, Katzenstein also explains that after the Cold War, it is in the interest of the US to coordinate regions through powerful regional hubs. Therefore, if any region is experimenting autonomy is only because of the hegemonic disinterest.

He concludes by clarifying the three main variables that all the regionalism literature has in common. These are 1) *openness*, understood as the frequency with which great powers can penetrate the regional structures from above and affect the regional autonomy; 2) *Proximity*, means the fall back on geography due to the intensity of the interactions between neighboring states; and, 3) *weak state*, meaning the overall institutional strength and capabilities of the states involved in the regional organization (Kelly 2007: 223-224).

The next concepts that need clarification and that are meaningful for this research are «governance» and «institutionalization».

About the first concept, I will follow the discussion in Krahnemann’s article titled “National, Regional, and Global Governance: One Phenomenon or many?” (2003). The authors aim is to explore if *governance* can be understood as a general phenomenon that occurs at the national, regional, and global levels of analysis, and

if so, she aims at defining it. As a concept, it is being employed since the decade of 1980 to describe policymaking processes in the national, regional, and global arenas. The flexibility of the concept has contributed to its growing popularity but also has restricted its utility that needs to be addressed due to the continuous observable trend in the World that sectors such as security have started to move from government to governance.

Usually, the term is associated with government, the exercise of authority, or a method or system of management but lack of differentiation between levels of analysis obscures the definitions given by many authors.

Following Stoker's definition of «Governance» as the “concern with governing, achieving collective action in the realm of public affairs, in conditions where it is not possible to rest on recourse to the authority of the state.” (2003: 326). From there, Krahmman explains that in general the term has four main uses. The first one is as a synonymous concept of political system or state structure. The next use is concerned with the public administration and mainly refers to the devolution of political authority to local and communal agencies and bodies. The third use is understood as a particular policy for a specific sector, while the fourth aims at the multilevel decision-making and the most common place for its use is international organizations and the global arena. In addition, Governance is defined by the fragmentation of political authority in seven dimensions: a) geography, b) function, c) resources, d) interests, e) norms, f) decision-making, and, g) policy implementation.

The general definition Krahmman gives is “the structure and processes that enable governmental and non-governmental actors to coordinate their interdependent needs and interest through the making and implementation of policies in the absence of a unifying political authority” (Krahmann: 331).

Nonetheless, in order to achieve the general definition of governance, the author places governance and government as two opposing poles of the same continuum. The latter representing centralization, hierarchical decision-making process, and exercise of authority. While the first represents horizontal decision-making process, decentralization, negotiation between actors, and voluntary self-government according to the established norms. Krahmman concludes by acknowledging the doubts that states, civil society, and other international organizations have addressed regarding efficiency, effectiveness, political transparency, and accountability.

## Literature Review

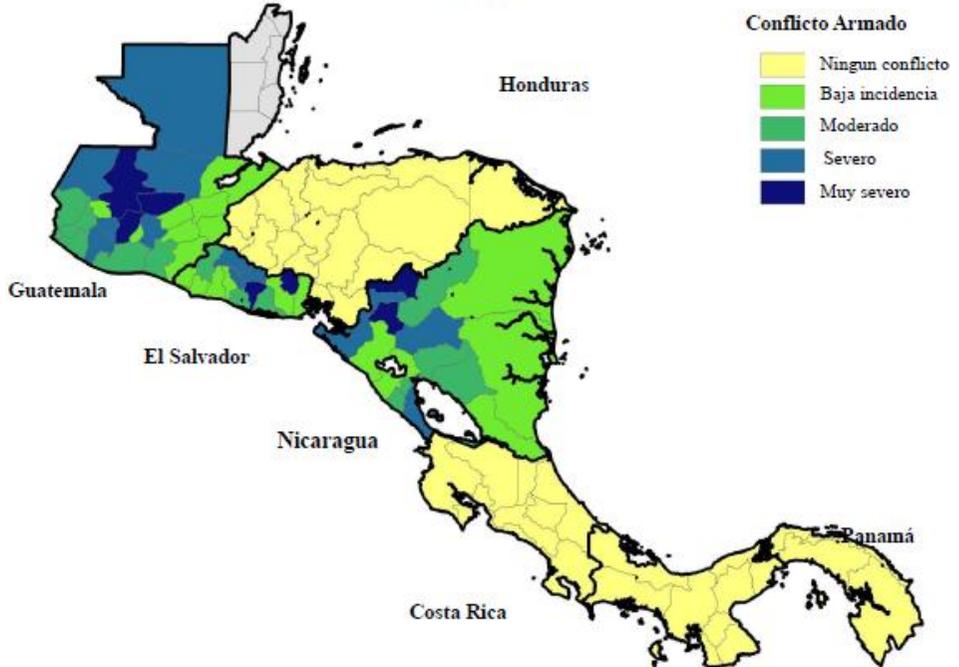
Every region of the World implements, consciously or not, a security regime. In the case of Central America, the main framework of security has relied with the United States as backbone since the beginning of the 20th Century.

According to North (1990), the decades of 1980 and 1990 for Central America were marked, especially by international relations, due to the processes that led to the various agreements. The first phase ended the three on going civil wars, the second one was to design and ensure a new regional security regime, and lastly, the manifested attempt to gain diplomatic independence from the US.

In North's article, the author makes the distinction between what he calls the *old security regime* that worked in the region until 1980s. He explains that it rested on two main pillars. The first pillar is the alignment of traditional elites and military groups to the military hegemony of the United States, which often resulted in a high-degree of cooperation. The second pillar, probably the soft one, is the domination of these societies through political pressure and intervention to secure the common interest of the US and the elites (1990: 226).

Nonetheless, this regime was exhausted towards the middle of the 1970s. Cornered by the civil wars, the international pressure, and the isolation, the region decided to found a *new security regime* to address the interstate and intrastate aspects of conflicts and insecurity. The next map shows the violence, crime, and other threats intensity during the peak years of the Civil Wars in the region.

Gráfico 1.15: Intensidad de los pasados conflictos armados



Fuente: Cuevas y Demombynes (2009).

Figure 1 - Estado de la Nación (2010)

In the late years of the 1980s, based on the drafts made by the Contadora Group and by the region's presidents themselves, Central America signed the *new security regime* based on the Integration System. The characteristics of the *new regime* followed the principle of self-determination and legitimacy of all existing governments, and strictly imposed a non-intervention on both sides of the civil conflicts, which meant cessation of external aid to the governments as well as insurgent forces. It started and fostered arms control and demilitarization programs and processes as well as the negotiation for the closing of foreign military bases, especially United States ones in Honduras. Lastly, it focused in the respect and

promotion for civil liberties, it granted amnesties to both fighting sides, pursue dialogue, ceasefires, and the establishment of National Reconciliation Commissions (NRCs).

Overall, Central America needed to redefine its relationship with US in particular, and with the international system in general. Esquipulas II started as a 'pact of coexistence' that dismantled the critical sources of interstate conflict but left the fundamental changes for later negotiations. The critical topics agreed were those regarding the armed forces cooperation instead of competition, the acceptance and establishment of the free flow of people, products, services, and capitals between the region, and lastly, the establishment of the regional structure of power based on the integration system. However, later Washington was able to exert enough pressure and power as to reverse many of the achieved agreements on security for the region, undermining the achieved independence and interfering deliberately in internal political affairs, especially in those concerned with the integration system. This endangered the peace processes and almost saw another outbreak of violence in the region in the late 1990s and early 2000s.

Those interventions, according to the authors, not only undermined the independence, but also hindered the buildup of the new security regime. Thus, leaving the "regional" level of international security without proper procedures to solve external threats, ensure regional cooperation, and coordination.

Together with the democratization processes, the overall institutional structure of the region weakened. In his article "War Transitions and the New Civilian Security in Latin America" (2002), Charles Call highlights the great

challenge that the region faced in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Because of the notorious human rights violation that occurred, when the countries returned to democracy, many believed that this would automatically produce significant changes in society. When these changes did not occur overnight and the overall security deteriorated; democracy started to lose its legitimacy, even when the reduction of military power was achieved, civil liberties were guaranteed, and civilians gained and retained control of the State. The main problem with these processes was that the reduction of the military institutions left the State without proper security pillars. In addition, civilians lacked the full understanding of the security needs of the State in general. In particular, they did not want to address the specific security needs of the country because that would mean commitment to change the internal status quo between the private sector and the government; between the socially excluded groups, and the recently demobilized rebels. In a way, one can say that they were blind optimists that believed that democracy would somehow, produce the institutions and management required to provide security without addressing internal challenges democracy faced. Therefore, the reforms introduced to the political systems, especially in Central America, that concerned the security field, were later reversed to some extent due to the skyrocketing of violent crimes, civilian corruption, and the lack of guidance and continuity.

In reality, the reforms introduced to the military establishments by civilians were never fully reversed because the cost of rebuilding the infrastructure for the armed forces was just too costly and no civilian elected government had the political willingness and legitimacy to do so. Especially when the State had already

spent resources in reorganizing the military establishment, infrastructure, and upgrading the police institutions. Furthermore, the incoming flow of money from the international community to support other programs in areas of education, health, or civil society conditioned the State to limit the armed forces budget. The main problem with the new security was that it left large portions of the territory of each State without the institutional presence, which traditionally was represented by the scattered military bases.

Without the military bases, the territory was left without state and soon the illegal activities started to gain strength. It would be naive to say that many of the actual problems and threats to the region started in the late 1990s. However, it must be said that this decade provided the perfect mixture of institutional weakness of the State and societal misgivings. Smuggling and drug trafficking and gangs activities began in the late 1990s, would be naive. Nonetheless, these activities found the perfect opportunity to grow roots, especially when the United States started the mass deportations of Central Americans in the middle of the 1990s.

Ana Arana (2005) in her article “How the Street Gangs Took Central America” studies the beginnings, expansion, and evolution of the biggest gangs in the region. These groups started in Los Angeles, California, formed by Central Americans that fled the violent civil wars. When the deportations started, these gangs were slowly being transplanted from California to the isthmus and the continuous and increasing inflow of gang members meant the geographical spreading of the group, especially because at the beginning the authorities were not aware that the deportees were criminals. Between 1998 and 2004, around 120,000

deportees arrived in Central America from the United States and due to the lack of capabilities within the Police forces, jails became the schooling and recruiting centers for gangs, as their members circulated in the penitentiary system.

At the beginning, the gangs got involved in petty theft, after that they started to battle the police force for the control of whole neighborhoods, and later for complete sections of cities. The last stage in their evolution was paid assassinations and drug dealing, which increased their revenues exponentially. This increased flow of money not only allowed the gangs to gain more power but to effectively challenge the State for the control of territory.

According to the United Nations (2007), the gangs have around 70,000 members divided into 920 different groups. The table below shows the distribution of the groups among the region. More important is to notice that between the size of the police force and the number of gang members there is not much difference. The ratio is close to one-to-one.

*Table 1 United Nations (2007)*

<b>COUNTRY</b>	<b>NUMBER OF MEMBERS</b>	<b>NUMBER OF GANGS</b>
HONDURAS	36,000	112
GUATEMALA	14,000	434
EL SALVADOR	10,500	4
NICARAGUA	4,500	268
COSTA RICA	2,660	6
PANAMA	1,385	94
BELIZE	100	2
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>69,145</b>	<b>920</b>

The next map shows the areas that suffer the most from gang related violence, crime, and illegal activities. Curiously, if compared to the first map, the reader will notice that the areas that were most hit by the violence of the Civil wars are now the ones with the less violence, and vice versa.

Homicide Rates in Southern Mexico and Central America, by Municipality or Department  
(Mexican Rates from Vital Statistics)

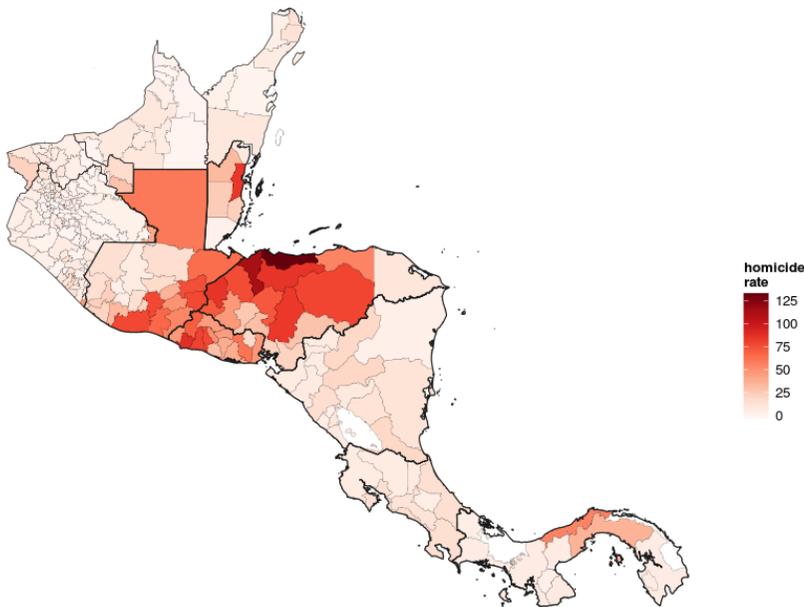


Figure 2 -

In response to this threat, all the Central American governments started the “zero tolerance” policies, which aimed at getting rid of the gangs. This approach not only became unpopular within the international community, but it faced a growing opposition from within the countries too, and especially in sectors of the so-called organized civil society<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup> In this case, “civil society” refers to the civil organizations, NGO’s, and other forms of participation that exist in Central America but, even when legally organized, they do not

The gangs, together with the drug *cartels* represent the biggest threats to the security of the region because of their territorial coverage, multiple connections and distribution channels across the countries. Due to the actual circumstances, it is unrealistic to expect any of the Central American countries to engage in a unilateral crusade to solve the gang problem, which makes the multilateral option the most viable. This means coordinating strategies, state forces, creating joint databases, and supporting the regional institutional structure can be of great help, but Washington refuses to fully support any serious integration agenda.

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posses the public support and legitimacy to act as a real civil society. They are mere rent seekers that oppose State action for the purpose of revenue and pressure.

## Chapter 3

Now that we have clarified the important conceptual framework and the meaningful literature review, it is time to explore Central America's security institutions and agenda. Central America has had two security agendas, the pre-1990 one and the post-1990. This research focuses on the second one but before we fully engage the agenda, it is important to revise the institutional structure and arrangements that deal with it. Therefore, I will try to include all the relevant institutions and explain them in order to fully understand the situation.

### Overview of Central America

The Central American isthmus is between Mexico and Colombia and comprises of seven countries. These are Belize, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Panama. The table<sup>7</sup> below shows the most important characteristics of the region.

*Table 2 - Security budget and force size.*

Country	Population	Size of Police Force	Police Budget	Size of Armed Forces	Armed Forces Budget
Belize	322,453 (2010)	1,300	\$20,408,087 (2008)	1,050	N.D.

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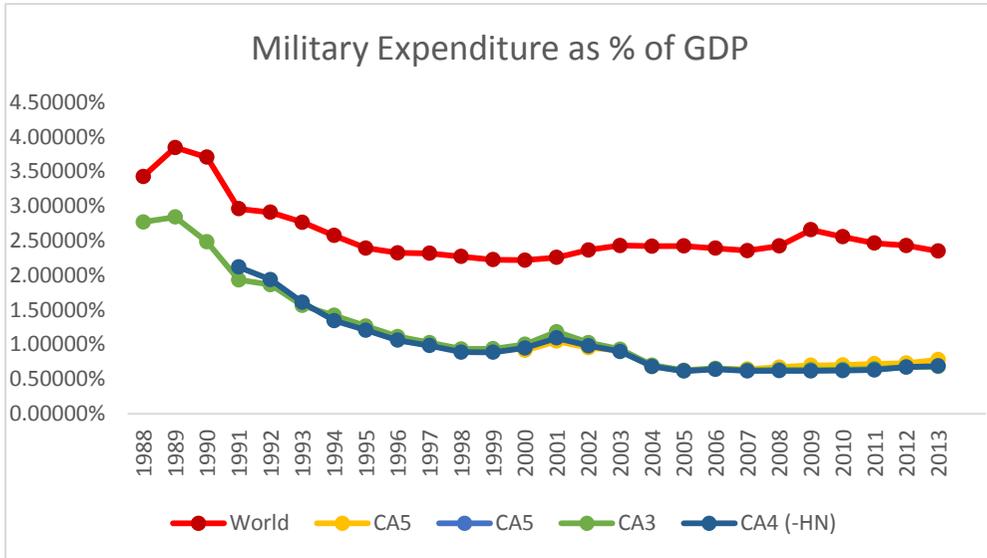
<sup>7</sup> The table is my own creation based on data from publications of the a) National Statistical Institutes, b) World Bank data, and c) newspaper publications. See the references for detailed sources.

Costa Rica	4,586,353 (2013)	20,700	\$890,418,490 (2012)	Abolished in 1948.	\$315,305,503 <sup>8</sup>
El Salvador	5,744,113 (2009)	21,900	\$391,651,510 (2012)	15,500	\$145,784,858 (2012)
Guatemala	15,806,675 (2014)	24,000	\$343,855,827 (2012)	16,000	\$210,816,824 (2012)
Honduras	7,529,403 (2007)	13,500	\$246,432,411 (2012)	12,000	\$188,926,130 (2012)
Nicaragua	6,071,045 (2012)	12,000	\$107,685,131 (2013)	14,000	\$65,756,103 (2012)
Panama	3,608,431 (2014)	18,000	\$997,570,543 (2013)	1,500	Included in the police budget
Total	43,668,473	105,200	\$2,998,021,999	60,050	\$926,589,418

The next graph shows the military expenditure as percentage of the GDP in the region, comparing with the World average. The data is according to the World Bank for the years 1988 through 2013 and clearly shows that the regions spending is less than half of the World average. In addition, the graph is consistent with the revival of the regional security system within the Integration System., which would mean that the system itself is the security model that the region adopted.

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<sup>8</sup> Although Costa Rica abolished its military establishment in 1948, the government still allocates resources to a section called “special armed forces”. The only difference is that these operate under the National Police institutional umbrella.



Graph 1 – Own creation with World Bank data available on: <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/MS.MIL.XPND.GD.ZS>

## Central American Security Agenda

Every regional agenda is constructed on two main levels and each has two levels of its own. The Central American Security Agenda is no exception. This means that the domestic level has an internal and external subanalysis and the regional level also has this subdivision. The first levels are the domestic, which means that each country assesses the internal and external threats independently and sets its policies according to its needs. The second level is the regional and, again, there is an internal and external analysis of threats. Since we are handling the regional agenda, I will focus on the goals, threats, and policies that revolve around

it. If the necessity arises, I will include explanations to the domestic situation in order to clarify the regional outcome.

With this in mind, the first part of the regional agenda that needs to be explained is the goals from which all the security policies point towards. It has four main goals, these are: 1) Peace, 2) Freedom, 3) Democracy, 4) Development. The countries signed the Protocol of Tegucigalpa (1991) and committed themselves to follow these as the broad guidelines and framework of the policies.

The next part are the threats to the region. Since the setting of the agenda, the threats have not changed but some have intensified over the years. These are:

- Drug trafficking

The drug trafficking issue became a threat to the region during the decade of 1990, when the demilitarization and the introduction of neoliberal reforms loosen the State control in economic activities and weakened the overall institutionalism. The drug trafficking groups entered the region in the late 1970s mixed in the unrest and confusion of the civil wars and started to develop the drug trade and transport between South America (mainly Colombia, Peru, and Bolivia) and the United States.

- Violence (increased)

Immediately after the Civil Wars ended, the State had to face the new challenge of gangs that started to settle down in the region coming from the United States. These gangs extended territorially and increased in membership rapidly due to the combined factors of youth unemployment and economic stagnation.

- Domestic and regional terrorism (decreased)

During the late 1990s and the early 2000, domestic and regional acts of terrorism occurred but they were mainly linked to groups that remained unhappy with the negotiated peace accords between revolutionary *guerrillas* and the State. Although terrorism *per se* is not a permanent threat, it remains a possibility due to the rising tensions between society and illegal groups, mainly drug lords and gangs.

- Arms smuggling (increased)

According to the available data, illicit arms trade in the region has skyrocketed after the official end of the civil wars. There are two main sources for arms. The first one, occurring during the 1990s and early 2000s, is the trade based on the leftovers of the conflict when demobilization occurred. The second source is the arms smuggled directly from Mexico and the United States, which nowadays accounts for more than 75%, according to United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime report on 2012. This means the majority of arms traded in the region enter after 2000 and refers to not only small and medium size pistols and shotguns; it also involves small artillery and other types of bombs.

- Impunity and corruption (increased)

Impunity and corruption has increased in the region.

- Civil unrest and conflict (generally, it has decreased)

Overall, the civil unrest and conflict has decreased since the end of the civil wars. Although there have been major riots and citizens manifestations in all countries (Guatemala 2003 & 2009; Honduras 2009; El Salvador 2007; Panama 2006) due to the pressures of corruption, state inefficacy, violence, and the lack of other public services, these have not changed the established rule of law in the region. Nor have

they started bigger movements that can become rebellious groups against the democratic order.

The figure below shows the three main institutions that the Central American States created during the decade of 1990 as framework to attend their security needs.

*Table 3 - Main Security Framework in Central America. Red de Seguridad y Defensa de America Latina (2012).*



## **Central American Integration System**

Originally founded in 1951 under the Charter of San Salvador with the name of Organization of Central American States (ODECA), the utmost aim of it was the reunification of the isthmus into one political system. The creation of this organization covered two aspects, political and economic. During the 1960s the institution showed great dynamism, especially in the economic aspect of the integration, but by the end of the decade the chosen model was exhausted and the

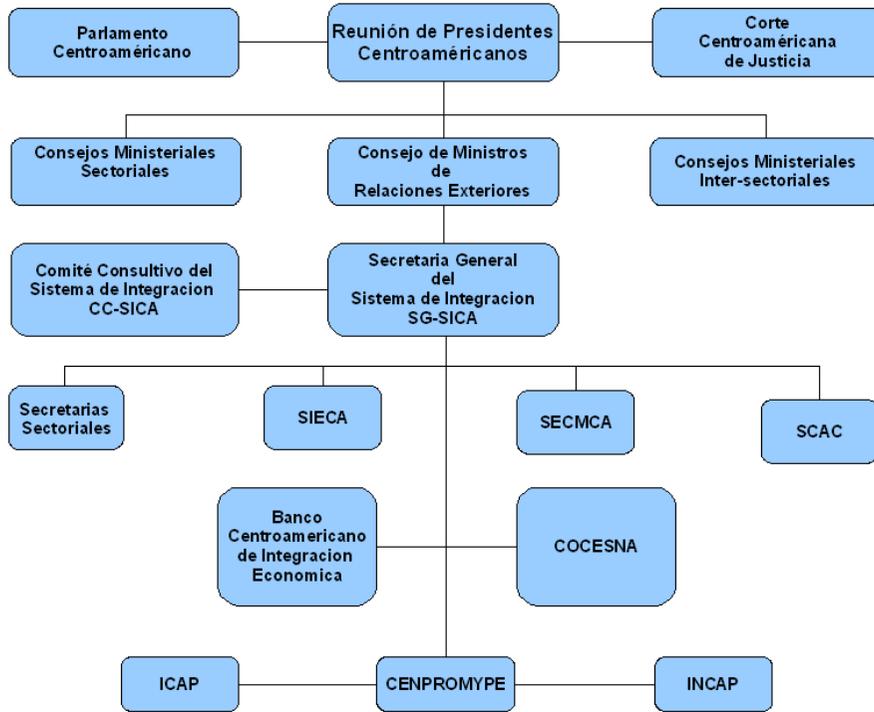
100 Hours War between El Salvador and Honduras gave it the killing strike. Although many of the economic achievements continued to work for the region, the outbreak of civil wars and continuous political tension stopped, almost completely, the regional cooperation. It was until the end of the 1980s that the system was revived with the setting of the new regional security agenda.

The Charter of Tegucigalpa, signed in 1991 by El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Costa Rica, transformed the ODECA into the Central American Integration System (SICA). Based on the past experience, the countries decided to include other areas, such as security, economic and social development, to the integration project. This means that new institutions were introduced in order for the system to fully cover all the areas it was design to coordinate, and to some extent, manage. The new goals of the system aim at making Central America a region of peace, freedom, democracy and development.

The structure of the system is based on the Presidential Conference that has to take place once a year, the Central American Parliament, and the Central American Supreme Court of Justice. The figure below illustrates the complete institutional arrangements of the Integration System.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> «Orgasica» de Ruben Bardales - Own creation. Available under Public Domain Licence in Wikimedia Commons - <http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Orgasica.PNG#mediaviewer/File:Orgasica.PNG>



Although the Protocol includes a wide range of specific objectives to achieve these main goals, the ones regarding security are based on the pursue of a new regional security model with a reasonable balance of forces, constant vigilance of human rights, the subordination of the armed forces to the legitimate civil authority, and the abstention of any member state to unilaterally take actions that endanger the security of the region.<sup>10</sup>

Each country had to redefine the mission, functions, and goals of their forces according to the Tegucigalpa Protocol, which in some cases represented a big challenge for the young democracies but was possible because of the institutional

<sup>10</sup> Based on the Protocol of Tegucigalpa (1991) articles 3 & 4. See the annex section of this document for the whole Protocol.

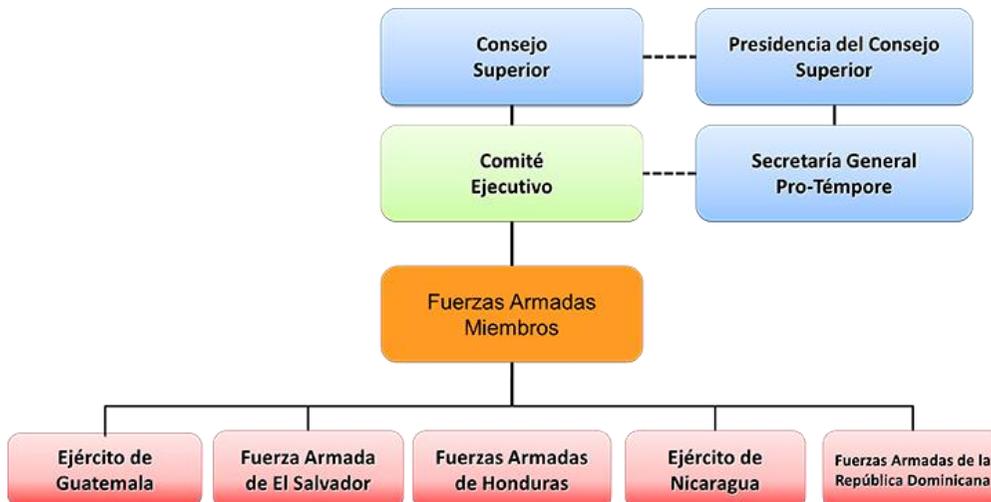
attrition of the military during the civil wars. In order to comply with the agreements and dispositions, in 1997 the governments of El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua, created the Central American Armed Forces Conference (CFAC). Costa Rica and Panama did not join this institution because of their decision to eliminate their armed forces.

### **Central American Armed Forces Conference (CFAC)**

As mentioned before, the CFAC was created in 1997 and is the successor of the now defunct Central American Defense Council. It was created to comply with the dispositions agreed in the Protocol of Tegucigalpa in 1991. The mission of this institution is to promote the systematic and permanent cooperation, coordination, and mutual support among the Armed Forces of the region. It aims and integrating and developing the military establishment in order to conduct humanitarian and peacekeeping operations, as well as to defend the region against threats to democracy, peace, and freedom.

The CFAC has three main mechanisms to implement its mandate, these are: a) joint border patrol operations and patrol, and b) information exchange and permanent inter-military education programs, and c) schedule arms control procedures and inspections in order to preserve the balance of forces. In addition, the CFAC added the *White Book* to each of the participating armed forces in order to facilitate the transparency of each institution towards their civilian counterparts.

The figure below shows the institutional structure of the CFAC.



In reality, the CFAC is a control institution for the armed forces of each country and has little power in deciding or influencing the military defense policy of Central America. Particularly, this is a result of three factors that affect any active defense policy in the region. The first one is the general minimal of resources that can be allocated to the armed forces without the political forces, both internal and international, harshly criticizing the policy. Even in recent years, when the violence and generalized crime has surpassed by far those of the civil war days, many social movements, NGOs, and other groups refuse to allow more budget allocation to the security institutions.

The second factor is the historical fear of the armed forces controlling the State directly. In other words, a setback for the civil and democratic framework in which the region has been living for the past 25 years. This fear is well rooted within the press and media sectors, who are able to divert public attention negatively when either any of the security institutions try to design, implement, or

renew their infrastructure. The third factor, and the last one, is the strong dependence of the region on the US military power and the political interference of that country in domestic politics in each Central American countries.

In reality, the CFAC can be categorized as a *collective defense* institution because it is able to further the cooperation among the member states to satisfy their security needs against external actors and its framework is very specific and has defined purposes. Moreover, it does not constrain member states in their interaction with other international actors and is designed to increase a state's power through the potential call on allied strength.

Nonetheless, the fact that it does not possess a headquarter does influence its performance and slows down its institutionalization process. In addition, the threats that the region must overcome are mainly not conventional and therefore, the traditional approach is not working.

### **Central American Security Commission**

The Central American Security Commission was created in 1990 as a result of the support provided by the Contadora Group and later it was integrated to the Regional Integration System with the reforms introduced in 1991. It is in charge of implementing, evaluating, and, monitoring, all the agreements, resolutions, and treaties regarding international and regional security that any of the countries or the region agrees to. It includes four areas, these are:

- 1) Public Security Sub-Commission, which is composed of members of the ministries of Foreign Affairs, Interior, and, Police commissioners. Their

task is to study and analyze all the regional initiatives and projects regarding security.

- 2) Defense Sub-commission, is in charge of the regional security and is exclusively composed of members of the ministry of defense of each country. Its main tasks are crisis management, maintaining peace, arms control, and the permanent program fostering trust and confidence among the armed forces of each country.
- 3) Violence Prevention Sub-Commission, overlooks all the topics around violence prevention. Its main task is to monitor and implement those projects and policies agreed in the Central American Security Strategy.
- 4) Legal Sub-Commission, is in charge of producing legal instruments for the Security Commission in order to achieve its goals and agreements. In addition, this office also makes sure that all the initiatives, projects, and actions taken by the CASC do not contradict or overlook any of the regional legislation.

Although its activities go unseen by the general public, this Commission functions as the main coordinator between police forces outside the police institutions. Since it was created, it has pushed forward the creation of the Central American Forensic Analysis Institute, the joint Central American Police Academy, coordination of the penitentiary systems and even the creation of a Guatemalan/Salvadoran joint maximum-security jail.

This commission is, generally speaking, the counterpart to the CFAC and therefore focuses its attention in the Police institutions across the region. Although

the commission itself does not suffer from societal tensions, it is greatly affected by the struggles between the governments and the civil society organizations that are focused on the police institution in each country. In turn, this affects the continuity of the work of the Commission, especially when its members tend to change rather quickly.

Lastly, the commission remained for many years another rubber stamp but recently it has focused itself in providing educational training and programs to police officers, coordinating activities in different levels between the police forces of the countries, and working together with the ministry of education to provide violence prevention programs in public schools in Central America.

### **Central American Security Strategy (2007; 2011)**

This first adopted in 2007 was renewed in 2011 by all the countries of Central America and Mexico. Generally speaking, the CASS develops the main threats identified in the Framework Treaty on Democratic Security in Central America and sets, for some of the goals, mechanisms of coordination and cooperation between domestic institutions. The most benefited institution within this Strategy is the police force, following the goal of the FTDSCA on the strengthening of the civil supremacy in State matters.

The strategy's main points are:

1. The implementation of the Regional Plan Against Organized Crime;
2. Tackle the human trafficking in the region and provide protection to the victims;

3. Combat regional and local drug trafficking organizations;
4. Terminate gang violence;
5. Track, combat, and stop arms smuggling in the region;

Nonetheless, the meeting from where this Strategy came out was held ten (10) years after the signing of the Framework Treaty on Democratic Security in Central America, more as a reassurance of the commitment of all the parts to continue the fighting of the common threats than actual accountability of the progress made in that decade. Of course, I am not implying that there was no progress but the point is that the regional agenda on security has not changed. In addition, it must be said that the mechanisms agreed are ambiguous for a meeting with 10 years of accumulated experience to work on. Moreover, during this meeting exposed the United States pressure to the region to act according to their security needs and interests.

This Security Strategy was renewed in 2011 in the Declaration of Guatemala, where all the States committed themselves, again, to pursue the goals set in 2007 and in 1995. In both occasions, 2007 and 2011, the purpose of the strategy was to direct financial resources (aid, loans, and, grants) to the regional security needs. Although these came mainly from the United States, in the recent years, European countries such as Spain, Germany, and Sweden have increased their cooperation to the region.

## **International aid in security**

The international community has been eager to support the regional security agenda since it was created. Nonetheless, it has always been within a double morale because they support the regional structure only when it serves their interests.

The biggest donor is the United States because Central America became the main corridor for drug trafficking towards that country. The drug trafficking organizations started to move upwards from Colombia after the implementation of *Plan Colombia* started in early 2000. These groups found a demilitarized, tear apart society with an endemic weak State region where they could settle down. The overall situation in Central America quickly started to deteriorate and even surpassed the levels of violence in the worst years of the civil wars.

The most interested country in the regional situation is still the United States because that country is the last market for the drugs transported by illicit organizations. Therefore, in order to tackle the developing fight against drugs, which would later become a war, the US design the “Mérida Initiative for México and Central America”. This initiative started under the Bush administration with an original \$1.6 billion dollars of funding for three years. Mexico received \$1.2 billion and Central America the remaining \$400 million. The money destined to Central America must be used to address a “comprehensive public security” approach which included effectively addressing criminal gangs, improving information sharing between countries, modernizing the police force, expanding maritime capabilities, judicial sector reform, human rights issues, and institution-building

programs. Indeed, a very broad and ambitious plan for the total amount that effectively entered the region.

However, as soon as this initiative was created, the US realized that it could not continue treating Central America as a remnant to other plans, because that is how it was treated in both, the Plan Colombia in the early 2000 and now in the Mérida Initiative. With that in mind, the United States Department of State launched in 2011 the plan known as the “Central American Security Initiative”, which I will explain below.

### **Central American Regional Security Initiative (2011)**

The Central American Regional Security Initiative -CARSI- was created in 2011 by the government of the United States in order to properly address the regional issues. This initiative has five main goals, which are 1) create safe streets for the citizens of the region; 2) disrupt the movement of criminals and contraband to, within, and between the nations of Central America; 3) Support the development of strong, capable, and accountable Central American governments; 4) Re-establish effective state presence, services, and security in communities at risk, and, 5) foster enhanced levels of coordination and cooperation between the nations of the region, other international partners, and donors to combat regional security threats.

Since 2011, the implementation of CARSI is ongoing but it has had little to no effect on the region due to the ambiguous and broad goals it seeks to achieve, moreover it does not include supporting any regional institutional structure. In my opinion, the US created this initiative in order to restore its position as a benefactor

to the Central American governments, than actually committing to the security needs that the region has. Committing would mean spending greater amounts of money and involving many other US government institutions, especially the Armed Forces. Of course, improving the Central American armed forces is a task that the US military has been reluctant to do since the early 20th Century because of the geopolitical importance that it has placed on the isthmus.

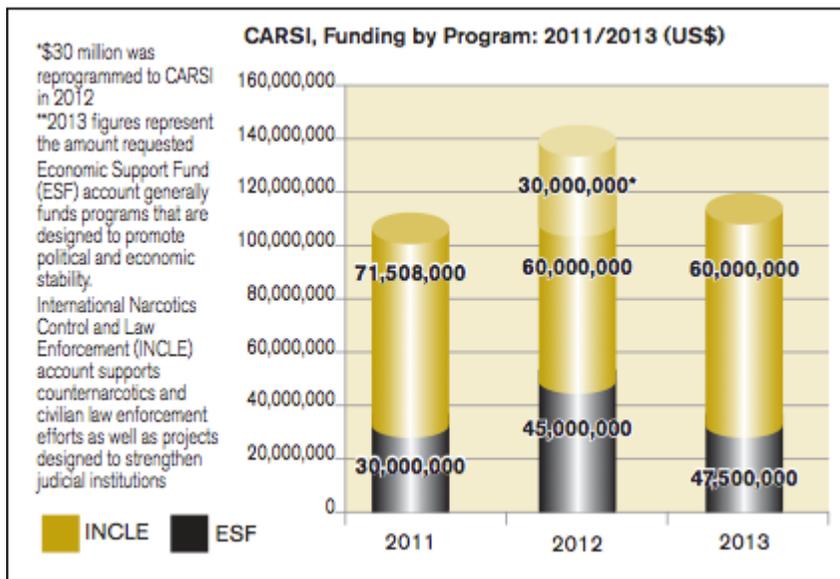


Figure 3 – Image taken from the Public Security section of the Security and Defense Network of Latin America webpage (RESDAL, in Spanish). [http://www.resdal.org/ing/security/tackling\\_02.html](http://www.resdal.org/ing/security/tackling_02.html)

## Chapter 4 - Main Threat: Drug Trafficking and their impact on Security

### Drug Trafficking Overview

The biggest threat that the Central American region faces is the Drug Trafficking Organizations, commonly known as *cartels*. These organizations were born in Peru, Bolivia, and Colombia, from where the cocaine leaf is produced and transformed into cocaine powder. For long time has the United States been the biggest market of drugs, consuming an estimated value of \$150 billion yearly (UNODC, 2010b: 5-6).

In the past thirty years, the United States has also contributed to the globalization of drug consumption through the breakup of *cartels*, fragmentation of markets, and the territorial chase of drug lords across Latin American countries. The war on drugs started in the decade of 1970 in the Caribbean. During the eighties and early nineties it continue in the Andes, mainly Peru and Bolivia, and from the late nineties and early 2000 it started to move from Colombia towards Mexico and Central America, especially after the implementation of *Plan Colombia*. This chase contributed to diversify and expand the number of *cartels* in the region, as well as help them to sophisticate their production sites, laboratories, and organizational schemes and structures.

Bagley (2011)<sup>11</sup> mapped the drug trafficking organizations for Mexico, which also act in Central America and fight with the Colombian *cartels* for territory. Is important to show this table because in only four years, the

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<sup>11</sup> <http://spp.revues.org/docannexe/image/1010/img-2.jpg>

fragmentation of the organizations increased the total number from six to twelve. This crumbling shows a different type of that experienced by Colombian *cartels*, where the organizations lost the ability to challenge the state security institutions in general and the state authority in particular. While in Mexico and Central America, the re-accommodation of groups has created more organizations with the ability and willingness to challenge authority and security. Moreover, it has doubled the organizations that the State institutions have to fight, draining resources from other areas like education, healthcare, or infrastructure, which creates a vicious cycle of poverty and drug trafficking.

2006	2007-2009	2010
Pacífico Cartel	Pacífico Cartel	Pacífico Cartel
	Beltrán Leyva Cartel	Pacífico Sur Cartel
		Acapulco Independent Cartel
		"La Barbie" Cartel
Juárez Cartel	Juárez Cartel	Juárez Cartel
Tijuana Cartel	Tijuana Cartel	Tijuana Cartel
	"El Teo" Faction	"El Teo" Faction
Golfo Cartel	Golfo-Zetas Cartel	Golfo Cartel
		Zetas Cartel
La Familia Michoacana	La Familia Michoacana	La Familia Michoacana
Milenio Cartel	Milenio Cartel	La Resistencia
		Jalisco Cartel-Nueva Generación
6 organizations	8 organizations	12 organizations

(\*) Table elaborated by the author based on personal interviews in Mexico in 2011.

As mentioned before, the drug trafficking business started in Central America during the seventies. Although it has changed and evolved in terms of sophistication, procedures, and overall impact on society, it must be said that the region remains largely a non-consumer area. This means, the territory is only a

bridge towards the main market and therefore *Cartels* fight not for consumers but for trafficking routes. According to the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) 90% of the drug entering the United States moves through Central America (DEA, 2012, p. 7).

Between the decade of 1970 and 1990, the drug trafficking was controlled under the military rules in the region, which constrained the growth and impact of that illegal activity on society. After the democratization processes and the retrenchment of the armed forces to the bases, the drug activities were left alone to act as they pleased. In 2003, the revenues of the cocaine market in the United States and Europe was estimated in \$60 billion<sup>12</sup> (UNODC; 2007, p. 15), which means that even if only 10% of that amount entered Central America, it still doubles the amount that the region spends on security.

The map below shows the estimated trafficking routes between South and North America that go through Central America and México. It is important to notice that the land-based routes do have a primacy over sea and air routes, especially when they all interconnect in Guatemala and Honduras<sup>13</sup>.

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<sup>12</sup> [https://www.unodc.org/pdf/research/Central\\_America\\_Study\\_2007.pdf](https://www.unodc.org/pdf/research/Central_America_Study_2007.pdf)

<sup>13</sup> [http://www.stratfor.com/weekly/20090326\\_central\\_america\\_emerging\\_role\\_drug\\_trade#axzz3JxT78n3W](http://www.stratfor.com/weekly/20090326_central_america_emerging_role_drug_trade#axzz3JxT78n3W)



Figure 4- Source: Beaubien, 2011.

## Impact on Security

The network these organizations have created connects from the Colombian Amazonia area to the Mexico-United States border, especially since their revenues continue to increase year to year. People have argued that from 2010 onwards, the new organizational model of the *Cartels* has shifted from hierarchy to federative<sup>14</sup>, which means that groups started to affiliate to secure their own routes and profits, while maintaining greater autonomy for one another, but allowing an increase on the tension between the old and new groups.

As mentioned before, the democratization processes greatly affected the security institutions of the State in Central America because the overall

<sup>14</sup> <http://spp.revues.org/1010#tocto1n2>

institutionality of the State could not absorb at once all the politically active groups that remained after the demobilization, creating unhappy groups that delegitimize democracy in its early stages. In addition, the inability of the State to eradicate criminal organizations or at least subordinate them to the legitimate authority, as it happened in Japan with Yakuza or in Russia with the Mafia (Bagley, 2004), has continuously increased the tension between factions of the elite, the politically active groups, and the illegal elites.

Thus, the traditional security institutions –police and armed forces- do not possess the connectivity and communication that the illegal drug trafficking organizations have. Therefore, their actions, although they can be accurate, tend to be reactive rather than proactive in dismantling the *cartels*<sup>15</sup>. This means that the State is always behind when chasing the criminals, who possess the ability to travel along the region as freely as they want due to their economic capacity to bribe or kill.

Another way in which these organizations have been coopting institutions is through the sponsoring long-term education of white-collar workers who become puppets of the drug trafficking organizations<sup>16</sup>. Their connections are hard to trace but as long as they remain inside the public service, they can move, paralyze, or mislead the public institutions in order to benefit their sponsors.

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<sup>15</sup> <http://www.vivelo hoy.com/noticias/7988557/el-salvador-donde-el-narco-mexicano-libra-su-guerra-territorial>

<sup>16</sup> [http://www.elsalvador.com/mwedh/nota/nota\\_completa.asp?idCat=6358&idArt=5881115](http://www.elsalvador.com/mwedh/nota/nota_completa.asp?idCat=6358&idArt=5881115)

In this sense, the both the CFAC and the CASC are trying to achieve the communication level, connectivity, and even force coordination that the drug *cartels* are able to pull by themselves. Nonetheless, as both institutions depend on State budget, willingness of public workers to communicate between them, and being able to coordinate policies and force, their actions are extremely limited.

## Chapter 5 - Conclusions

1. Mismatch between the goals, the threats, and the policies regarding security.
  - 1.1. The goals (peace, freedom, democracy, and development) respond to ideal situations. In addition, they do not set a concrete time frame in which they should be, at the minimum, in acceptable levels.
  - 1.2. The regional threats have not changed since the security agenda was created and set in motion in the mid 1990s. They have only intensified due to the state weakness and inability.
  - 1.3. The policies designed and implemented through state institutions have lost strength and legitimacy because of the historical institutional underdevelopment of the state institutions. In other words, the ability and capability of the State has decrease in time as more and more groups become politically active. Their pressure, interests, and needs of representation have not made the political system any more accountable or transparent than it was before. Instead, it has only skyrocketed the state corruption, stagnated political processes that lead to institutionalization, and overall, increased the tension between economic, social, and political actors.
  - 1.4. It should be noticed that the threats to the region come, mainly, from inside. This means that, according to the literature reviewed, Central America is one of the cases of insecurity dilemma. This

means, that instead of outside threats, the state faces greater internal insecurities, threats, and challenges, than from the outside world.

- 1.5. Much of the regional infrastructure is not being utilized to its full potential, which decreases the capacity of the region to achieve its goals. The lack of public knowledge about the different institutions that the Integration System has already establish, makes it easier for the elected governments to not commit to the previous agreements and this results in a slow regional policy implementation.
2. The setting of a regional security agenda has not made the region more independent from outside interference, especially from the US and the UE. Instead, it has increased the number of actors that engage and superimpose their interests, for example Mexico, Colombia, Venezuela, and Brazil, have increasingly become more important to the region than what they were before 1990.
  - 2.1. The case of Venezuela must be treated with special attention due to the fact that the Chavista regime was able to revive the leftist parties and movements across the region with its “21st Century Socialism” ideals and policies.
  - 2.2. Colombia, although it still remains a weak state dependant on the US aid, has become the raw model for the rightist parties and movements, especially in regards to the military establishments. The Colombian armed forces have received more than \$10 billion dollars approximately in 11 years, while in the same period; the

whole Central America has received little more than \$1 billion. That billion has not been available for military development because of the mixed pressure to corner the Central American armed forces.

3. International Aid and the security agenda

3.1. Since the birth of the regional security agenda, the donors have focused in developing the goals more than in supporting state action, which means that international aid has been focusing in social and political movements rather than actual strengthening of state capabilities and institutions.

3.2. In the specific case of the regional structure, it can be concluded that it has been “captured” by the international aid structure, which further increases the mismatch between the regional needs and the solutions offered due to the fact that, in order to receive resources, the regional structure needs to comply with the donors desires.

3.3. The international aid provided by the United States created controversy in the region because of the decision to work bilaterally and not multilateral as the countries expected. This not only weakened the position of the states, but also weakened the regional security structures.

4. The State internationalization that came with the revival of the Integration System has had a greater negative impact than it has been beneficial for the region.



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