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GUATEMALA: A COUNTRY IN TRANSITION

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Exercise Solo Flight

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GUATEMALA: A COUNTRY IN TRANSITION

INTRODUCTION

Guatemala is a country in transition. Since the signing of the Peace Accords in 1996, the country has been on path seeking peace and stability following the civil war that spanned more than three decades. That conflict left a legacy of violence, insecurity and weakened social institutions. Moreover, socioeconomic indicators took a plunge during the early 1980s, and have barely begun recover 30 years later.

The transition process has been rocky, at best. Widespread reforms across the entire government sector focused specifically on security institution like the military and the national police. In the case of the Army, the 1996 Peace Accords led to a mandatory downsizing of its total strength, from over 50,000 troops, down to about 17,000.¹ The rationale behind such a measure was that Guatemala would not need such a sizeable military force during peacetime. In addition, its constitutional mandate was modified in order to limit its scope to national defense and border protection.

In the case of the national police, it was completely overhauled. The former “Policia Nacional”, which was a militarized police force, was stripped down and rebranded as the “Policia Nacional Civil” (national civilian police or PNC, in Spanish). The new and improved civilian police force was intended to move away from its darker past, and move into a more professional law enforcement role. However, it kept its nationwide status and was not localized

¹ The Guatemalan Government's Enduring Security Problem. The Atlantic.
<http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2011/09/the-guatemalan-governments-enduring-security-problem/245217/> Last Modified 16 September, 2011.

to municipalities or districts. As with the Army, there was a new constitutional mandate where it would only look after domestic law enforcement issues mainly related to law and order and crime prevention.

In the wake of the 1996 Peace Accords, crime rates skyrocketed. Many of the criminal activities that were attributed to leftist guerrillas, such as kidnapping and extortion, increased considerably. Despite efforts made by democratically elected, civilian governments, many high-profile crimes rocked security and justice institutions, such as the murder of Bishop Juan Jose Gerardi in 1998, days after the publication of the “Memory of Silence”, which was a United Nations sanctioned report on the alleged atrocities committed during the civil war.

Almost 20 years have passed since peace was signed in Guatemala. According to many experts, Guatemala City is one of the most violent cities in the world, placing at number 25 in recent ranking published online.² Public perception of violence is at an all-time high, while it has been very clear that penetration from transnational organized crime syndicated have gained a significant foothold in the Central American region. These cartels have moved their operations from Mexico and into Central America where they have found fertile ground for criminal activities such as: drug trafficking, arms dealing, illegal immigration and human trafficking, murder for hire, and even smuggling operations.³

It is, therefore, the main objective of this paper to analyze the main reason behind the exponential growth of criminal gangs in Guatemala. While there are many different factors that

² The 50 Most Violent Cities In The World. Business Insider. <http://www.businessinsider.com/the-50-most-violent-cities-in-the-world-2015-1?op=1> Last Modified 23 January, 2015.

³ Guatemala Congress Launches Probe of VP Over Graft Scandal. ABC News. <http://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/guatemala-congress-launches-probe-vp-graft-scandal-30883141> Last Modified 7 May, 2015.

come into play at any given moment, the fact remains that there is one particular overlying factor that envelopes this issue: the limited scope of security forces in Guatemala with regard to their capacity to deal with transnational organized crime. As such, two main research questions have fueled the development of this paper: first, to what extent does the Guatemalan Army's limited constitutional mandate provide gaps for local and international criminal groups to exploit? Secondly, did the 1996 Peace Accords undermine the role that Guatemalan security forces played before and during the 36-year civil war?

The answers to these questions are complex. Nevertheless, all possible explanations regarding this issue boil down to a common denominator: the 1996 Peace Accords changed the Guatemala Army's constitutional mandate which eventually led to its downsizing, thus rendering current security forces unable to combat transnational organized crime. In addition, the overhaul of the national police force is yet to yield the desired results in terms of readiness, crime prevention and overall reduction of violence.

The first section of this paper will focus on the current threats facing Guatemalan security forces. An overview of their impact upon society and the efforts done to combat them aims to provide insight into the specific task that current security forces in Guatemala must deal with. Consequently, the research questions will come into focus, paving the way for the next section of this paper.

The second section intends to hone in on the specific efforts done to combat national and transnational criminal groups, and the degree of effectiveness that these efforts have had since the end of the civil war in Guatemala. In essence, this section seeks to illustrate the thesis

statement which explains the reason as to why existing security forces have been unable to adequately deal with transnational crime syndicates.

The third, and final, section of this paper seeks to analyze the possibility of creating an intermediate security force that has a clear constitutional mandate that can enable it to adequately fight all national and transnational organised crime groups, thus relieving the PNC to focus on policing civilian populations, and leaving broader national security matters to the military. Ultimately, it is intended to generate an informed debate into this issue, potentially leading to the creating of this new security institution at some point down the road.

TRANSNATIONAL THREATS IN GUATEMALA

Central America is a region that is plagued by several different types of transnational threats. In particular, the Northern Triangle, which is composed of Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras, has been a prime target for organized criminal groups, street gangs and other assorted types of criminal syndicates. In that regard, there is a considerable amount of criminal activity within these three countries. For Guatemala specifically, its geographical proximity to Mexico has made it ideal for criminal activity, from moving drugs, to enlisting street gangs to carry out assorted tasks.

The biggest threat currently facing Guatemalan security forces is drug trafficking. Mexican drug cartels have found ample space within Northern Guatemala's Petén region, in which the border between both nations is scantily guarded. The scarcity of available troops assigned to patrol this area has permitted drug cartels to use these routes for moving drugs, but

also for moving persons, either as illegal immigrants, or victims of human trafficking. The loosely guarded Petén region has also provided these cartels with access to Belize, which also serves as a trade route.

As has been previously stated, the considerable downsizing of the Guatemalan military led to the closing of several bases and detachments. This, in turn, has led to severe understaffing in which the Guatemalan Army has had considerable difficulties in carrying out its constitutional mandate of national defense and border security. In addition, restrictions in financing and budgeting have left the Guatemalan military ill-equipped and grossly out-gunned by the cartels.⁴

The war that the Mexican government declared on drug cartels forced these organizations to branch out and move further south. The case of “Los Zetas” is a prime example. “Los Zetas” began as the military arm of the “Cartel del Golfo”. However, internal feuds led to the separation of this military arm and led to the creation of “Los Zetas” as an independent drug trafficking organization. The escalation of violence in Southern Mexico eventually spilled over into Guatemala, as “Los Zetas” sought to take over traditional trade routes available to other cartels. The newfound escalation of violence in Guatemala prompted traditional Guatemalan cartels, like the “Zacapa Cartel” to be wiped out by “Los Zetas”. Meanwhile, Guatemalan security forces were unable to put a stop to this.

As drug cartels gained power and strength in Guatemala, their activities moved into other areas of potential profit. Human Trafficking immediately became an appealing operation to take over. With the aid of organized street gangs, drug cartels are able to organize travel routes for would-be illegal immigrants who seek to gain entry into the United States. In many cases, men

⁴ Tkachuk, Kimberley. *Transnational Threats: Smuggling and Trafficking in Arms, Drugs, and Human Life*. Praeger Security International. Westport, Connecticut, 2007. P. 26.

are subjected to inhuman treatment during these trips, while women and children are enslaved, usually as sex slaves throughout Mexico and even into the United States.

In addition, transnational criminal organizations have been active in the illegal arms trafficking business. Many of these cartels have gained access to military-type weaponry, which in many cases, is superior to the firepower that security forces utilize in Guatemala. As such, confrontations between cartels and security forces usually come down to individual training, in which formal military institutions still have the upper-hand, despite the fact that many of these cartels have recruited ex-military.

To a certain extent, the penetration of cartels within Guatemala had been mostly in rural, sparsely populated areas where there was little law enforcement presence. Since taking over critical trade routes, cartels have progressively moved into more densely populated, urban areas. While drug-related violence as such has not been prevalent in large urban areas, the cartels have recruited local street gangs in order to carry out other types of operations. These operations include: murder for hire, extortion, drug peddling, recruitment of youths into gangs and women into human trafficking, among others.

Therefore, the escalation in urban violence has practically overrun local law enforcement. The PNC is virtually unable to cope with the amount of crime on a daily basis. One of the most popular types of urban crime is extortion to bus and taxi drivers. Local street gangs set a quota that the drivers and owners must pay, lest they are killed. In many of these attacks on bus drivers, children as young as 13 have been hired as assassins.⁵

⁵ Farah, Douglas. *Central American Gangs and Transnational: Criminal Organizations The Changing Relationships in a Time of Turmoil*. Washington, February, 2013. P. 13.

There is no question that drug cartels have managed to exploit the gaps left behind by the downsizing of the Army in the late 1990s and early 2000s. The closing of bases and detachments allowed for criminal groups to sneak through areas which were once heavily patrolled by security forces. However, it has been rampant poverty, marginalization and discrimination that has allowed criminal groups to cement their power in rural communities throughout the Guatemalan countryside.⁶ In addition, precarious living conditions in urban areas, lack of access to education, health and employment, and overall social insecurity, have fueled demand for illegal immigration into the United States. Consequently, criminal groups have seen an exponential growth in business opportunities. In other cases, the lack of law enforcement presence has led some communities to seek protection from armed cartels against petty crime and street gangs.⁷

It should come as no surprise then that security forces have been basically overrun by organized crime. The Army has done its best to cope with the barrage of attacks from all angles, while the PNC has been clearly unable to make any headway in terms of crime prevention, while barely keeping up with the amount of crime in urban areas.⁸ As a conclusion to this first section, it's important to highlight that the priorities for the Guatemalan government in their security agenda shifted from combating organized, armed militias in mostly rural areas of the country, to international organized crime syndicates. The vindication sought from victims of the civil war led to the considerable downsizing and restructuring of security forces. This vindication was motivated by civil society groups who identified the military as the main culprit of atrocities committed during the war, while basically exonerating armed guerrilla militias from any

⁶ *Ibid.* P.15.

⁷ *Ibid.* P.20

⁸ *Ibid.* P.21

wrongdoing. In defense of government officials at the time, the context in which the renovated security forces emerged wasn't as complex as it is now. While transnational drug cartels are nothing new, their presence and penetration in Central America was very low in the 1990s. Therefore, it seemed logical that a considerable downsizing at the time would not pose a risk to national security. The gaps left by the military would be filled by the PNC, which was meant to have been a professional law enforcement agency capable of preventing crime. As such, current government officials have tried their best to find adequate strategies in order to combat these phenomena. Their efforts and consequent results will be the focus of the next point of this paper.

FIGHTING TRANSNATIONAL CRIME

Efforts to combat transnational crime in Guatemala have been, at best, insufficient. The downsizing of the military following the 1996 Peace Accords, and the overhaul of the national police force, have proven to be largely ineffective against combating large, international crime rings. While petty crime and other types of urban violence have been largely contained, organized crime is at an all-time high.

The current administration of former General Otto Perez Molina promised a severe crackdown on violence and crime during his 2011 political campaign. The "Partido Patriota" ran a conservative platform based on security and employment. Some three plus years later, the effects of the government crackdown on violence have been rather limited. While a recent

corruption scandal has rocked the current administration, violence and drug-related activity remain business as usual.⁹

While it is clear that the escalation in transnational crime is not a recent phenomenon, efforts have yielded very little results. One of the efforts made to control violence and crime was the creation of the so-called Citizen Security Battalions. These battalions were a type of hybrid force, while militarized, their mission is to support civilian law enforcement in providing perimeter security while police, justice personnel and investigators carry out their work. Moreover, their functions include supporting police during raids and arrests, security checkpoints, and even humanitarian aid.¹⁰

Also, there has been close cooperation with the United States in providing capabilities to the Guatemalan Army in terms of border protection and fighting criminal groups along the Guatemala-Mexico border.¹¹ This cooperation has led to the creation of new brigades in charge of patrolling border crossings, which in many cases are virtually lawless. In addition, international cooperation has led to the strengthening of coast guard capabilities which has led to the capture of ships in Guatemalan waters. The majority of ships captured at sea contain illegal

⁹ The Guatemalan Government's Enduring Security Problem. The Atlantic.
<http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2011/09/the-guatemalan-governments-enduring-security-problem/245217/> Last Modified 16 September, 2011.

¹⁰ Washington Office on Latin America. WOLA Monitoring the Administration's Central America Aid Request.
http://www.wola.org/commentary/wola_monitoring_administrations_1_billion_aid_request_for_central_america
Last Modified 19 February, 2015.

¹¹ Espach, Ralph, et al. Criminal Organizations and Illicit Trafficking in Guatemala's Border Communities. CAN Analysis and Solutions. February, 2011. P. 24.

drugs, while a considerable amount of these ships also seek to smuggle Asian immigrants into the United States via Central America.¹²

Another important element to highlight is the strengthening of the justice sector. The International Commission against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG, in Spanish) was created by a United Nations mandate in order to provide technical support to the justice sector and criminal investigation organizations, like the Public Ministry. In the 10 years that CICIG has been in Guatemala, its efforts have been focused on aiding Guatemalan law enforcement in investigating, arresting and subsequently prosecuting suspected drug traffickers, corrupt government officials and other criminal groups. The result of this collaboration has led to high profile arrests and extraditions of drug traffickers to the United States.¹³

In spite of all of the efforts made and achievements attained, the United States Overseas Security Advisory Council (OSAC), considers Guatemala's violent crime rate as "critical" as of 2013.¹⁴ In addition, OSAC, in its 2014 Crime and Safety Report on Guatemala, indicates that Guatemalan authorities report an average of 101 murders per week. The report goes on to say: "...the sheer volume means that local officials, who are often inexperienced and underpaid, are unable to cope with the problem."¹⁵ This clearly indicates that there are gaps that still need to be bridged in order to contain the widespread threat of violent crime. Moreover, statistical underreporting also needs to be considered since Guatemalan crime scene investigators don't consider homicide when a victim leaves the crime scene still alive. Even if victims die afterward,

¹² *Ibid.* P. 11

¹³ Lohmuller, Michael. Mandate Renewed, But CICIG Will Not Save Guatemala. Insight Crime. <http://www.insightcrime.org/news-analysis/even-with-mandate-renewed-cicig-will-not-save-guatemala> Last Modified 23 April, 2015.

¹⁴ Guatemala 2014 Crime and Safety Report. United States Overseas Security Advisory Council. <https://www.osac.gov/pages/ContentReportDetails.aspx?cid=15656>. Last Modified 14 May, 2014.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

their death doesn't count toward official statistics. This leads to an approximate 8-16 percent higher murder rate than what law enforcement officially reports.¹⁶

Considering all murders are due to drug-related violence, a great deal of it, is the result of the overall violent conditions of the country. In 2009, the murder rate sat at 6,498, and eventually fell to 5,155 in 2012.¹⁷ Nevertheless, 2013 statistics report a 2% jump, to 5,253.¹⁸ This increase seems to totally contradict the hard-line stance of the Perez Molina government. Notwithstanding, the arrests of high-profile drug lords would naturally lead to a readjusting of the balance of power within the cartels, consequently, leading to an increase in violence. Additionally, some rackets of organized crime, such as, extortion and murder for hire, have also increased. This provides specific insight into the reasons behind the jump in the murder rate in 2013. One other racket that is attributed to local gangs is kidnapping. The Guatemalan government reports a 207% increase of this activity between 2009 and 2013. It goes without saying that the local gangs that engage in this type of activity are usually under the command of the larger cartels.¹⁹

Also, a United Nations report highlights that cocaine traffic in Central America increased dramatically from 2000 to 2006, and even more so thereafter. Cocaine seizures in Central America hit an all-time high in 2007 totalling 97 tons, but since then, total seizures fell to 80 tons in 2011.²⁰ While this doesn't mean that total cocaine traffic has been reduced, it indicates that

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. Transnational Organized Crime in Central America and the Caribbean. Vienna, Austria, September, 2012. P. 19.

cartels have found ways around security forces. This is why it is such a tough task for security forces to keep up with the cartels' operations.

At this point, the thesis statement presented in the introduction of this paper springs forward: the 1996 Peace Accords changed the Guatemalan Army's constitutional mandate which eventually led to its downsizing, thus rendering current security forces unable to combat transnational organized crime. In addition, the overhaul of the national police force is yet to yield the desired results in terms of readiness, crime prevention and overall reduction of violence.

In the case of the PNC, it is evident that the lack of training and staffing has made it virtually impossible to control urban violence, much less make any headway in crime prevention.²¹ Experts consider the PNC to be largely inefficient, as a 2013 study has shown that 18 out of 22 precincts operate well below their operational capabilities.²² As a result, soaring crime rates are nothing to be surprised about.

Nevertheless, the problem is not a lack of funding. The Ministry of the Interior, the official government body in charge of running the PNC, has seen a considerable increase in its budget allocation in the period from 2000 to 2011. In this period, the Ministry's budget has been increased by \$2.5 billion.²³ As such, the problem is not financing, but overall operational inefficiency and struggling to cope with the high volume of crime.

The final point in this section is not meant to be an apology, but rather a harsh reality: the struggles of law enforcement and security bodies in Guatemala has left an enormous gap that

²¹ Corcoran, Patrick. Report Puts Guatemala National Police Under the Microscope. InsightCrime. <http://www.insightcrime.org/news-analysis/report-puts-guatemala-national-police-under-the-microscope>. Last modified 26 March, 2014.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*

drug cartels have fully exploited. Consequently, these gaps need to be closed off in order to contain the expansion of drug cartels and street gangs. Furthermore, it is an urgent matter considering the ever-present threat of global terrorism. While there is no evidence of international terrorist organizations branching into Guatemala, it's only a matter of time before these groups attempt to gain entry as well. As a result, both regional and continental security are at stake here.

To that end, it is imperative that the current administration addresses this issue, not as a domestic issue, but as a regional one. While it is true that 2015 is an election year in Guatemala and there will be a new government in January, 2016, presidential candidates also need to be serious build upon current efforts. If previous efforts have yielded results below expectations, now is the time to find measures that can control a situation that is quickly getting out of hand.

In the next section of this paper, the focus will turn on an alternative that can contain criminal groups at first, and then move on to actually eradicating them. It's clear that is not just a security issue, there are other underlying matters, such as, poverty, inequality and discrimination, it is first, and foremost, a security issue that needs to be dealt with decisively. To that end, the closing of gaps cannot be done by current security forces; additionally, expanding them into larger forces may not necessarily yield the desired results. In a sense, bigger does not make better. In order to achieve the desired results, a brand-new agency needs to be created specifically designed to deal with the issues of transnational threats and dedicated to the fight against the criminal organizations that have gained power exploiting the gaps left by the military and civilian police. A force of this nature needs to be militarized, but with a mandate focusing on domestic security and crime fighting. In this regard, Mexico's efforts in combatting drug cartels can be seen as a model which could be used to develop this new security force.

CLOSING THE GAPS

In order to effectively close off the gaps currently available to transnational criminal organizations, it's of the utmost important that an effective security force be created in order to deal solely with the enhanced capabilities that many of these groups possess. In that sense, this force needs to be an intermediate force; it needs to come in between the Army, which would be dedicated to border security and territorial defense, and the PNC, which would return to its original mandate of crime prevention and policing the population. Consequently, this new force would be able to act upon intelligence provided by traditional sources and move against the cartels. This would imply busts, raids, and other types of interventions.

In Mexico, federal agencies have joined state forces, with the help of the Army and Navy, in order to combat cartels and bring down many different organizations and individual. Considering that Mexico has a federal structure and can allocate resources at both a local and national level, Guatemala faces a challenge from the fact that its institutions all act at a national level. As a result, policies and strategies are the same across the board, rather than being tailored to each region's specific characteristics.

Mexico's war on drugs has led to the many high-profile arrests, the destruction of many organizations and a considerable reduction of drug-related violence.²⁴ While there is still a long way to for Mexico, the results of these efforts provide a light at the end of the tunnel for

²⁴ Reed, Tristan. Mexico's Drug War: A New Way to Think About Mexican Organized Crime. Forbes. <http://www.forbes.com/sites/stratfor/2015/01/15/mexicos-drug-war-a-new-way-to-think-about-mexican-organized-crime/> Last Modified 15 January, 2015.

Guatemala. Since the effectiveness of Mexico's war on drugs prompted the cartels to move further south to Guatemala, there is certainly reason to believe that a similar strategy in Guatemala would yield similar results.

Unlike Mexico though, Guatemala does not have local, state and federal law enforcement agencies. That is why creating a new law enforcement agency makes all the more sense. While it would be a national institution, its scope should be focused more on acting upon those areas which have been identified as hot zones. This implies taking back control of the Petén region, and porous border crossings leading into Mexico and Belize.

However, a proposal of this nature would not be met without its share of objections. First of all, there is the usual discussion on budget and financing. As mentioned earlier, the Guatemalan government sank over \$2.5 billion into the budget for the PNC. This kind of resources could well be allocated to the new security force. Also, there would be the question of the cost of equipping such a force. The United States has been active in providing support to task forces that are dedicated to fighting these groups. The "Tecun Uman" Task Force located in the San Marcos-Mexico border of Northern Guatemala has been supported by the United States through the donation of equipment and weapons.²⁵ This is the type of on-going support that can be utilized in order to further the development of the new agency.

There is, undoubtedly, a counterargument that needs to be explored: is this new security force the only solution to the problem? There could be other alternatives considered, such as, a surge in the Guatemalan Army with specific units dedicated to the fight against drugs and

²⁵ Oak, Gillian S. Building the Guatemala Interagency Task Force Tecun Uman. Lessons Identified. Rand Corporation. Santa Monica, California, 2015. P. 6.

transnational threats. Perhaps even the creation of military-style police units dedicated to bringing law enforcement to those regions that do not currently have permanent presence.

While these solutions may seem more cost-effective and could provide immediate results, they would not only run into the same legal and constitutional dilemmas that current forces have, but also, they would be nothing more than the result of political decisions seeking to produce quick results so that public perception of violence can radically shift. Moreover, simply attacking cartels and crime syndicates via a military surge would prove to be ineffective against dealing with the actual root of the problem. Naturally, a surge would only mean a temporary solution to the most pressing concerns of the crisis at hand.

Another alternative that could be explored is a joint military venture with other countries, such as the United States and Mexico. Furthermore, the problem could be addressed as a regional concern in Central America in which the armed forces of the Northern Triangle could come together and contribute troops and resources. In that sense, a new multinational force could take over border crossings and other known routes in order to snuff out criminal organizations and crack down on illegal immigration, and so forth.

Nevertheless, there would also be issues of sovereignty and the limits a multinational force could potentially have in this type of operation. It's easy to see how a multinational force might be seen as a de-facto invasion by other nations. While that may not necessarily be the case, local communities could see it this way and potentially rebel against a coalition force looking to secure certain areas. That could lead to potential civilian uprisings and create even more instability in critical regions.

Despite potential counterarguments, the creation of a new security agency, specifically designed to combat organized crime and transnational threats, seems to be the best way to go, if there is the desire to achieve a long-term solution to this crisis. While the results won't necessarily be immediate, the creation of this new body would certainly go a long way toward alleviating the load on beleaguered forces at present, and inject new life into the task of combating these threats.

Another element to consider in this discussion is the need for political will in order to carry out the task of forming a new security agency. There's reason to believe that there would be some opposition on many sides considering that civil society may have some qualms regarding the creation of a new security force. In addition to civil society, leftist political groups would be more inclined toward supporting a liberal agenda that does not necessarily include a widespread crackdown on transnational threats. Also, local communities may end up rejecting the permanent presence of security forces on their lands, considering the long history of conflictivity in certain parts of the country. Nevertheless, this proposal needs to be treated as a state policy, and therefore consider any and all potential actors, as well as, due consultation with the people in the areas of major conflict.

As a corollary to this security force, additional steps need to be taken to foster de Guatemalan Navy and develop an effective coast guard that can be dedicated to tasks like search and rescue, humanitarian relief policing territorial and international waters, intercepting vessels that carry illegal drugs and immigrants and stop any smuggling activities from reaching land. A significant presence at sea is important deterrent in order to adequately stop any potential threats and eliminate gaps that are currently being exploited by organized crime groups.

At the end of the day, the task before Guatemalan security forces regarding the fight against transnational organized crime is a daunting one. The experiences of Mexico and Colombia aren't precisely the most optimistic. Nevertheless, both these countries have made conscious efforts toward attacking these threats, as well as, concentrating their resources into producing effective solutions. While this isn't something that Guatemala can achieve in isolation, the fact remains that regional cooperation is also necessary.

CONCLUSION

The success of combating the threats that loom over Guatemala, and Central America, ultimately comes down to the success of political will in constructing a policy that can effectively lead to the creation of a new security force, with its corresponding budget allocation, equipment and training. Since it's a matter of political will, the leadership in government needs to find the proper mechanism that would involve society as a whole and allow for every Guatemalan to take ownership of this endeavor. There is no doubt that with the full backing of civil society, private sector, indigenous rights groups, military forces, national police, government and international community, Guatemala can effectively head down a path that can lead to the containment of these threats and being constructing a truly representative democracy.

Current security forces in Guatemala have done a remarkable job thus far considering the serious limitations they face. In that light, the work that has been done up to now has been just enough to keep the situation from getting out of hand. Naturally, international support has been pivotal in achieving this. Nevertheless, Guatemala cannot totally rely on international support to

carry out this task. That's why it is important to harness current capabilities, and use all available resources to put an end, once and for all, to the threats at hand.

It's become clear that current security forces have been unable to effectively combat transnational threats and organized crime syndicates. Crime-related statistics have reflected this trend in the way the murder has climbed, drugs busts have fallen and human trafficking is thriving. Since the problem stems from the constitutional mandate of current forces, a fresh security agency would provide much needed manpower toward closing existing gaps. While a new security agency isn't the only viable solution available, it's the best one in terms of providing a long-term solution to this matter.

Ultimately, transnational threats in Guatemala boil down to a regional security matter. The security of Central and North America is at stake since criminal groups could potentially take over the entire region and compromise the advances that democracy has made in the region. Crime has also fed off the vicious cycle of poverty and exclusion. Of course, long-term policies need to address these issues, but the most pressing concern is dealing with the current security risk. Once all security risks are in check, regional governments can move toward fostering democracy and building more equal societies.

In conclusion, the resources, manpower and support are there. It's up to the Guatemala leadership to make a conscientious effort to advance current efforts in the fight against transnational threats, and create new policies that will lead to the ultimate eradication of these threats. The end result will provide an opportunity for the Guatemalan people to build the society that they have always dreamed of.

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