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Despite the avoidance of a civil war during the 1980's Honduras is very much threatened by the proliferation and misuse of small arms and light weapons. In addition to the flow of arms from post-conflict El Salvador, Guatemala and Nicaragua, Honduras finds itself in the middle of the drug trade towards the United States and arms trafficking towards Mexico and Colombia. During the 1980's, Honduras was used by the US military as a base of operations to support the wars against the FMLN in El Salvador and the Sandinista government in Nicaragua. As a US military ally the Honduran armed forces received significant quantities of weaponry. According to the information obtained by the Arms Sales Monitoring Project of the Federation of American Scientists through the Freedom of Information Act between 1980-1993 the Armed Forces of Honduras received the following weapons from the US government in addition to hundreds of thousands of rounds of ammunition:

<u>Item</u>	<u>Quantity</u>
Colt 45 pistol, model 1911A1	1,116
M-16A1 Rifle, 5.56 mm	13,107
M203 40mm grenade launcher	629
M79 40mm grenade launcher	18
M67 fragmentation grenade	22,268
M14 hand grenade	1,139
Law Rocket 66mm	300

In recent years, with a shift in US foreign policy after the Cold War, military and government to government small arms transfers have been reduced considerably. According to the Norwegian Initiative on Small Arms Transfers (NISAT) Database on Small Arms Production and Transfers the US made the following transfers to the Honduran government.

1996

Unspecified cartridges up to 22 mm for a value of US\$72,000

1997

Unspecified cartridges up to 22mm for a value of \$57,000

102,000 unspecified grenades

1998

Unspecified cartridges of 37 to 75 mm for a value of \$1,000

One unspecified pistol of unspecified value

According to Jane's Infantry Weapons 1999-2000, the Honduran military has the following models of small arms and light weapons in its stocks:

- ◆ FN FAL 9 mm pistol
- ◆ Beretta 9 mm 93R sub-machine gun
- ◆ Mini-Uzi 9 mm sub-machine gun
- ◆ H&K 9 mm MP5 sub-machine gun
- ◆ Mini-14 5.56 mm rifle
- ◆ M16A1 5.56 mm rifle
- ◆ FN FAL 7.62 mm rifle
- ◆ M-14 7.62 mm rifle
- ◆ M60 7.62 mm machine gun
- ◆ FN MAG 7.62 mm machine gun
- ◆ Browning 0.50 M2HB machine gun
- ◆ M79 40 mm grenade launcher
- ◆ M203 40 mm grenade launcher
- ◆ M1 81 mm mortar
- ◆ Soltam 120 mm and 160 mm mortars
- ◆ Carl Gustaf 84 mm anti-tank weapon
- ◆ M40 160 mm RCL anti-tank weapon

In recent years, legal commercial firearm sales from dealers in the United States to Honduras' retail firearms monopoly known as *La Armería* have greatly surpassed government to government transfers. *La Armería* is owned by the Honduran military pension fund and is the only entity authorized to sell firearms and ammunition. According to NISAT, the US government granted licenses to US dealers for the export of the following firearms to Honduras from 1996-1998¹:

- ◆ 12,433 pistols and revolvers for a value of US\$5,736,114
- ◆ 2,664 rifles for a value \$1,473,857
- ◆ \$687,984 in additional non-military rifles, quantity undisclosed
- ◆ 39,852,600 rounds of ammunition for a value of \$3,786,046

In the post-Cold War period Honduras has experienced levels of insecurity similar to those found in Guatemala, El Salvador and Nicaragua. Youth gangs with ties to other Central American countries and the United States have proliferated. Regional crime bands consisting of former military, guerrilla and police personnel dealing in drugs, arms, stolen autos and kidnappings have caused an increase in the hiring of private security companies to protect businesses and residences. According to Saul Bueso, director of the

¹ These figures represent export licenses granted to US arms dealers, not actual sales. There is no routine verification mechanism in place for US commercial firearm exports.

Honduran *Dirección de Investigación Criminal* (DIC) 500,000 weapons are legally registered in Honduras while another 500,000 circulate illegally.²

At present there are three major items related to small arms being debated on the Honduran political scene.

- ◆ Proposed reforms to the arms control law
- ◆ Creation of a national commission to collect military weapons in the hands of civilians
- ◆ Implication of the military in a war arsenal found in northern Honduras

Proposed reforms to the arms control law

The national legislature has been debating over a series of reforms to the *Ley de Control de Armas de Fuego, Municiones, Explosivos y Artículos similares* (arms control law). Most of this debate has been internal and kept secret from the general public. If the law is not approved in 2000 it is unlikely that it will pass in 2001, a presidential election year. While the content of the law is unknown, it is assumed that it will also govern the use of firearms by private security companies.

Creation of a national commission to collect military weapons in the hands of civilians

Because of the large quantity of military style weapons such as AK 47 assault rifles and hand grenades the government has established the national commission for the collection of military weapons. This commission is the joint responsibility of the Ministerio Público (Public Ministry) and the Ministerio de Seguridad (Security Ministry) which is in charge of the new civilian police force. While the commission does have the mandate of collection military-style weapons in the hands of civilians, as of this writing, there was no clear plan of action. Several newspaper articles mention the proposed use of cash incentives to bring in weapons while the World Food Programme has offered to collaborate with foodstuffs should that be feasible.

Implication of the military in a war arsenal found in northern Honduras

The chronology of articles below relates to an arsenal of war weapons owned by a Cuban-American and managed by a Panamanian corporation that is stored by the Honduran military for sales to third parties, including individuals from Iran.

Timeline

19 March 1988	Honduran Armed Forces and Longlac Enterprises sign contract to store arsenal in Naco, Honduras near the industrial center of San Pedro Sula.
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² Interview, Tegucigalpa, Honduras, 9 February 2000.

- 25 May 1998 Former Honduran armed forces chief prosecuted for illegally holding 167 military weapons in his residence.

- 1 December 1999 Ex-member of Police Transition board (from military to civilian control) announces Longlac's plan to sell the arsenal.

- 5 Jan 1999 Arms are seized by Honduran court. Inventory list shows irregularities. Some weapons are missing. Some are found that do not appear on the inventory.

- 14 August 1999 Fearing some arms may have been shipped to Colombia, Honduran court requests a report from Colombia about INDUMIL, a company whose name was found among various items in the arsenal. Suspicion arises that FARC may have received some of the weapons.

- 2 September 1999 Attorney General requests an internal report on the situation.

- 10 October 1999 Ex-FLMN members report that small arms including surface-to-air missiles regularly were trafficked through Honduras to FARC insurgents.

- 17 February 2000 Fourth Criminal Court orders arsenal released to Longlac who has an Iranian buyer for them. An appeal is filed to block the release.

Ex jefe militar enfrenta juicio por poseer armamento ilegal

The former chief of the Honduran armed forces, Humberto Regaladao Hernández, was prosecuted for the possession of 167 illegally held military arms in his residence. Among the weaponry confiscated by the police were fragmentation grenades, UZI sub-machine guns, FN Fal assault rifles, AK-47 and M-16 assault rifles. *La Nación Digital 25 May 1998*

Investigan a militares por tráfico armas tras decomiso arsenal

Honduran authorities are investigating irregularities and the involvement of the military in trafficking arms after the discovery of an arsenal owned by a Panamanian company. A tribunal will be requested to investigate the involvement of ex-leaders of the Armed Forces among others.

The arsenal of weapons, ammunition, and explosives was confiscated on 5 January 1999. It had been stored for more than 10 years in Naco—legally according to the Armed Forces because of an agreement signed with the Panamanian company Longlac Enterprises, Inc. Cuban-American arms dealer Mario Dellamico owns Longlac.

The situation began to unfold in December of 1998 when a member of the now defunct *Junta de Traspaso* of the police reported Dellamico's plan to sell the arms to the police.

The initial investigation uncovered evidence of possible trafficking of arms from Honduras to other countries. Additionally, arms found in the arsenal did not match arms listed in the inventory and weapons mentioned in the inventory were not found. Weapons including AK-47 rifles that are not used officially in Honduras were found. An internal police report stated that the weapons could have been sold to any number of non-communist countries. Other sources say that Delamico could have sold part of the arsenal to Guatemala, Jamaica, Portugal, the Czech Republic, Yugoslavia, the U.S., or rebel groups in Africa and Central America.

The agreement between the Armed Forces and Longlac was signed on 19 March 1998 and allowed the company to store the arms with the idea that they would sell them to the Armed Forces of Honduras, but granted the right to sell to third parties.

EFE Spanish News Service 9 Jan 1999

Pedirán fiscal colombiano informes a empresa y armas decomisadas

A Honduran court requested that the attorney general investigate the relation between a Colombian company and the arsenal of weapons that were confiscated in Naco. During the search of the arsenal, several letters and materials were found bearing the name *Industria Militar* (INDUMIL) a company based in Bogotá. *EFE Newswire Services 2 September 1999*

Los misiles de las FARC

The association of ex-FMLN combatants reported to U.S. authorities that video and photographs existed concerning the shipment of surface-to-air missiles from Honduras to the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). The missiles including SAM 7, 14 and 16s were transported in part by boat through Nicaraguan and Honduran rivers. *La Tribuna 7 October 2000*

Empresario de Irán compra arsenal de Naco

The arsenal stored in Naco was ordered returned to the Longlac Company of Panama by a Honduran court. The company reports that the arsenal will be sent to the U.S. and has been purchased by an Iranian businessman.

It is reported the exportation of the arms to the U.S. should pose no problem since the arsenal apparently was brought to Honduras legally. An appeal of the decision is expected.

La Prensa 18 February 2000

Fiscalía: Es apresurado entregar las armas de Naco

Public prosecutor Erasmo Jiménez stated that the Fourth Criminal Court decision to return the Naco arsenal to Longlac Enterprises is on shaky legal ground. He added that he was appealing the decision and that more time was needed to investigate the ownership of the weapons.

Jiménez said that a report needs to be made that identifies the makers of the weapons, who the seller was as well as determining the circumstances surrounding the signing of the contract to store the arms in Naco and which Honduran officials participated in that signing. *La Prensa 18 February 2000*

Other articles on small arms proliferation in Honduras not directly relating to the above-mentioned case

Militares hondureños inauguran nuevos negocios

The Armed Forces of Honduras plans to open six new businesses in San Pedro Sula, the nation's industrial center. Among these businesses is a firearms retail establishment. *La Prensa 2 March 1998.*

Arsenal abandonado

The Honduran police found an abandoned arsenal just twenty-five kilometers outside the capital of Tegucigalpa. The arsenal included RPG-7, Czech and US-made hand grenades and more than 3,000 rounds of ammunition. *La Nación Digital 21 April 1998*

Arrestan a vendedor armas exportadas al Caribe y Centroamérica

The US Bureau for Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (ATF) arrested a Miami pawn shop owner for illegally exporting firearms to Central America and the Caribbean. According to the ATF weapons sold by this individual were linked to crimes in Haiti, Honduras and the Dominican Republic. *Efe News Services 21 May 1999*

Hondureño arrestado por tráfico de armas

The US FBI arrested a Honduran national in Tampa, Florida for attempting to buy 100 M-16 assault rifles for US\$ 250 each. He was believed to be acting as an intermediary for drug traffickers. *Efe News Services 2 October 1999*