

Experts warn of increasing violence in Honduras

By HELLE NIELSEN
Staff Writer

To most Americans Honduras has served largely as the backdrop for the civil wars in its neighboring countries, but increasing political violence in Honduras may be a warning to pay attention to Honduras' own social and political problems.

Deep political and economic problems threaten to move Honduras toward revolutionary war, Central American scholars say.

"Time is running out," said William LeoGrande, a political scientist at the American University in Washington. "If basic social and economic problems continue to be ignored... those with a violent program will get support," he said.

Honduran governments were relatively open to social reform in the past, but this decade governments have been consumed by the Contra war, LeoGrande said.

Honduras is one of the poorest countries in Latin America. The country's gross domestic product has decreased in the 1980s, unemployment and underemployment have risen to double digits and inflation has made basic commodities less

affordable.

"The economy is unable to get the basic foods to the people who need it most," said Jeff Boyer, a UNC graduate and professor at Appalachian State University. "That causes people to react."

A rapid increase in political violence during the last few months is evidence of increasing unrest, Boyer said. But he said crackdowns on political opposition is also on the rise, citing disappearances and detentions without trial.

"In political terms, there has been a great erosion of democracy," Boyer said. "Because the government has embraced a kind of security-state philosophy, it has become much more repressive against its own people."

Boyer has visited Honduras regularly since the 1960s. His last visit was in October.

Honduran and U.S. officials denied Honduras is in a political crisis.

The four political parties running in upcoming elections testify to a sound political system, said Victoria Goldstein, information officer at the Honduran Embassy in Washington.

"We are definitely a democracy," Goldstein said. "There is nothing endangering the democracy. There has never been an opposition to the government."

But elections ensure only formal democracy, said Michael Fonte, director of the Central America Historical Institute.

"Power — veto power — may be with the military," Fonte said. "There is a lot of concern in Honduras that that's what's happening."

Honduras' role in U.S. policy toward Nicaragua and El Salvador has imperiled a fledgling democracy by strengthening the Honduran military, the scholars said.

"If you strengthen the military institution, it has a way of eroding political institutions," Boyer said.

The United States stepped up its flow of military resources to Honduras at the same time the Honduran military was turning formal power over to a civilian in government in 1981.

"(They) were beginning on that gradual shift," LeoGrande said. "It was into that situation the United States began to provide huge re-

sources to the military. That made the military the dominant actor."

Although economic aid was also increased, the benefit was offset by the country's militarization, Boyer said. "The economy has been put over on a wartime footing. That scares away capital; there has been a steady flight of capital out of the country."

Honduras became involved in U.S.-Central American policy largely by providing shelter for the Nicaraguan Contra army. The presence of several thousand Nicaraguan Contras in southern Honduras has been a major destabilizing factor, LeoGrande said.

"The Hondurans are extraordinarily nervous that they are going to be stuck with the Contras," LeoGrande said. "They feel the Contras are the responsibility of the United States. We armed, trained, organized and set them up in Honduras. Now that the war is over, we have the responsibility to disband them."

The well-financed Contras have contributed to a black market economy and to an increase in crime in Honduras, Goldstein said. "They have taken a toll on the Honduran

people."

Honduras has asked that the Contra bases be moved out of the country, she said.

A U.S. State Department official said the Contras should not return to Nicaragua until "we can bring a situation where democracy is achieved in Nicaragua."

The United States is working with Honduras and other Central American countries to deal with "the threat that exists from Nicaragua," the official said.

But Hondurans have been voicing more frustration and resentment over U.S. influence in Honduran affairs, scholars said.

The U.S. embassy in Tegucigalpa was set on fire last year during several days of demonstrations. The protests erupted when a drug trafficker was extradited to the United States in an apparent circumvention of Honduran law.

"That led the Hondurans to wonder who was running their country," Fonte said.

The demonstrations drew participation from across the political spectrum, Fonte said. "That's where the sovereignty issue plays. Hondu-

rans were asking: 'Are we a real country or not?' That was the focal point of the anger."

Goldstein dismissed the demonstrators as students paid by drug dealers to protest. But she indicated Honduras would like more breathing space in its relations with the United States.

"Under the Reagan administration with Elliott Abrams (the Central American) countries were being told what to do," she said.

Honduras wants the Bush administration to continue Reagan's policy as a friendly ally but an ally "left alone to make their own democratic decisions and their own policy," Goldstein said.

The United States would benefit from shifting its policy from a military policy to a policy attending to basic human needs, Boyer said.

"In Latin America, it has been the United States that has been the brute on their soil — not the Soviets," he said. "There is a lot to be gained by working to foment policies of basic human needs. It is fostering better economic relations and better economic change."

Presidential candidates nominated in Paraguay

From Associated Press reports

ASUNCION, Paraguay — The Christian Democrat and Revolutionary Febrerista parties nominated presidential candidates Sunday, refusing to join other opposition parties in a coalition for the May 1 elections.

Their actions also ended speculation they might boycott the elections because the provisional government of Gen. Andres Rodriguez rejected proposals to postpone the elections and make major changes in the electoral laws.

At separate weekend conventions the Christian Democrats nominated Secundino Nunez, a former Roman Catholic priest, and the Febreristas named retired economist Fernando Nunez to run for the presidency.

The elections were called by the government of provisional President Rodriguez who led the Feb. 3 military coup that ousted President Alfredo Stroessner, an army general who ruled Paraguay for nearly 35 years.

Rodriguez, 65, is the candidate of the governing Colorado Party and is virtually certain of winning the election against the splintered opposition.

The Christian Democrats, Febreristas and Authentic Radical Liberal Party formed the National Accord alliance to oppose the Colorado Party.

The Authentic Radical Liberal Party is to hold its convention March 25-26, and if it decides to participate in the balloting it is expected to nominate former exile and longtime opposition leader Domingo Laino for president.

Laino addressed party rallies over the weekend and spoke of irregularities in voter registration. He also said there was the threat of a "great fraud" by the Colorados.

The National Accord had asked the provisional government to postpone the elections for at least two months, to extend voter registration, to allow coalitions and not just individual parties to back a single candidate, and to revoke the law that gives two-thirds of the legislative seats to the party that wins the most votes.

Rodriguez's government rejected the appeals to postpone elections or extend the voter registration period and ignored the other requests.

It did remove restrictions that barred the Christian Democrats and Authentic Radicals from participating and gave all legal parties access to the state-run media.

Sedundino Nunez, 68, told his Christian Democrats, "God has given us the circumstances, and the people are urging us to act. We have to take advantage of the political opening right now."

3 journalists killed in Salvadoran fray

From Associated Press reports

SAN SALVADOR, El Salvador — Two Salvadoran photographers and a Dutch television cameraman were shot and killed by security forces in violence surrounding Sunday's election for a new president.

The slayings brought to 15 the number of foreign and Salvadoran journalists killed while covering the 9-year-old civil war between leftist guerrillas and the U.S.-backed government.

Cornel Lagrouw, 30, of the Dutch television network IKON, a church broadcasting network, was killed in a gunfight Sunday between army troops and guerrillas in San Francisco Javier, a town in Usulután province about 70 miles east of San Salvador.

The two dead Salvadorans were identified as Roberto Navas, 30, a photographer who worked for the British news agency Reuters, and Mauricio Pineda, 26, of Channel 12 television.

Luis Galdamez, another Reuters photographer who was accompany-

ing Navas on a motorcycle, was wounded. The two were fired on by soldiers at a checkpoint Saturday night on the outskirts of San Salvador.

Lagrouw was standing next to guerrillas when he was struck in the chest by a bullet fired from an army position as troops moved in to retake the town, said journalists who were with him.

"He was pale but still alive," said photographer Bill Gentile of Newsweek who, with Arturo Robles of JB Photos and free-lance newsmen Scott Wallace, pulled Lagrouw out of the area and into a car to rush him to a hospital.

"I was cradling him. He was dying in my arms," Gentile said by phone from Usulután.

Defense Minister Gen. Eugenio Vides Casanova said Navas and Galdamez did not heed orders to stop at army checkpoints and added that soldiers at the checkpoints "were tense." He offered "condolences and most sincere apologies" to their families.

Pineda was with a mobile TV unit traveling from Morazan province to the coastal city of La Unión, 115 miles from the capital, when a soldier from the Arce battalion shot at the van, according to station spokesman William Figueroa.

The van was identified as a television vehicle and carried a white flag, Figueroa said, but was traveling in the pre-dawn darkness Sunday morning.

Under established protocol

respected by both army and guerrillas, reporters and photographers in El Salvador travel in vehicles marked "Press" or "TV" with white flags affixed to car doors.

Four Dutch TV journalists were killed on March 17, 1982, in the northern province of Chalatenango. The government said the four were slain during a firefight between rebels and army troops, but the Dutch government said it had evidence security forces were responsible.

In addition to the 15 killed, 13 journalists have been wounded during the war.

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