

## THE EFFECTS OF WAR

This build-up appears to go beyond the official US commitment to help its friends defend themselves against aggression. Indeed, the International Institute for Strategic Studies has suggested that the purpose of the expanded US presence in Honduras "has been to upgrade the military infrastructure . . . and lay the groundwork for rapid and efficient intervention in the area, should it be considered unavoidable."<sup>15</sup> Even if US forces do not invade Nicaragua, their continued presence in Honduras deters Nicaraguan forces from launching large cross-border raids against *contra* camps and serves to keep Nicaragua in a state of high mobilization.

The United States has also provided extensive support to the armed Nicaraguan opposition. Despite difficulties in securing congressional approval for support to the *contras*, the Administration has managed to provide over \$100 million in official assistance to the guerrillas between 1981 and 1985. The *contras* have also received training and extensive public relations support from US agencies. Finally, the CIA has taken an active role in the sabotage of Nicaraguan infrastructure, assisting the mining of three harbours and attacks on Nicaraguan oil facilities in 1983 and 1984. Nicaragua filed suit at the International Court of Justice on this matter, but on 6 April 1984, the Administration announced that the US would not recognize the Court's jurisdiction for two years in cases involving Central America. In October 1985 Washington terminated its adherence to the general compulsory jurisdiction of the ICJ, effectively extending the 1984 decision to similar cases which could arise in the future.

The conflicts between the forces of conservatism and the forces of radical change have had a profoundly disruptive impact on the societies of Central America. As indicated in Table 1, the regular forces and the paramilitary establishments in each country have been significantly expanded. Armed opposition forces in both El Salvador and Nicaragua have grown in size and in combat capability. Vast civil defence networks have been formed. New weapons systems for both counter-insurgency and conventional warfare have been introduced into the region. Even Costa Rica, a country that eliminated its army in 1949, has begun to build up and re-arm its paramilitary forces. In order to finance these build-ups, military expenditures have been increased to unprecedented levels in each country.

Over 55,000 people have died from the conflict in El Salvador since 1979. In Nicaragua, the war has resulted in 12,000 deaths since 1981, over and above the 35,000 people who died during the battles to overthrow the Somoza dictatorship. In Guatemala, reports indicate that over 70,000 people have fallen victim to political violence since 1978.<sup>16</sup> Repression and war have also provided a refugee problem of crisis proportions in the region.

These wars have also been highly counter-productive from a diplomatic standpoint. The US-led arms boycott and the embargo have driven Nicaragua towards a dependence on the socialist countries that it claims it wished to avoid. Soviet-bloc support has reduced the incentives for the FSLN to moderate its policies, just as US support for the

**TABLE 1** The Militarization of Central America (m = US \$ million; NA = not applicable)

		<i>El Salvador</i>	<i>Nicaragua</i>	<i>Honduras</i>	<i>Guatemala</i>	<i>Costa Rica</i>
<i>Armed Forces</i>	1978	7,130	7,100	14,200	14,270	NA
	1981	9,850	6,700	11,200	15,050	NA
	1985	41,650	62,850	23,000	31,700	NA
<i>Para-military</i>	1978	3,000	4,000	3,000	3,000	5,000
	1981	7,000	8,000	3,000	3,000	5,000
	1985	11,000	5,000	5,000	11,600	8,000
<i>Armed militia</i>	1985	70,000	40,000	NA	15,000	NA
<i>Defence Expenditures</i>	1977	34m	51m	30m	66m	12m
	1981	123m	158m	45m	70m	14m
	1984	480m	348m(1983)	90m	180m	20m

**Sources:** International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance 1978/79*, London, 1978; *ibid.* 1981, 1985. Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, *World Military Expenditures and Arms Transfers 1985*, Washington, 1985. Council on Hemispheric Affairs, *The Military Balance in Central America*, COHA, Washington, 1985.