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## Former Honduran Military Officers Under Investigation

by LADB Staff

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The Honduran military high command took the unusual step in November of admitting that former Armed Forces chiefs diverted public funds for personal use. Armed Forces spokesman Col. Carlos Andino Cobos told a news conference Nov. 7 that authorities were investigating the former chiefs for the misappropriation of some US\$8 million between 1986 and 1997. The US\$8 million is only a small part of the misappropriated funds, however.

Former comptroller general Vera Rubi Avila, who began the investigation, said last year that the military could not account for US\$100 million spent in the period 1985-1999 (see NotiCen, 2000-02-10). Audits of the military were not done until 1990 and after that the results of the audits were not made public. Andino said Armed Forces chiefs customarily had discretionary accounts they could use without having to submit to government audits. He also said the accounts were not secret since everyone knew of their existence, just as the president's special account was common knowledge. Comptroller General Giovanni Martinez said his office was conducting an audit of the last five chiefs to find out how they spent the money.

Some of the officers claimed they spent the money on intelligence operations covered by national-security secrecy rules. Gen. Daniel Lopez Carballo, head of the Estado Mayor Conjunto, has opened military archives to auditors. Andino said the high command was anxious to cooperate to keep the reputation of the Armed Forces free "of all the filth caused by previous administrations. Andino said that, under the civilian-controlled system President Carlos Flores set up, there are no longer any confidential accounts and the entire Armed Forces budget is managed by the Ministry of Defense under state administrative controls.

Under investigation are Gens. Walter Lopez Reyes (1984-1987), Humberto Regalado Hernandez (1987-1989), Arnulfo Cantarero (1990), Luis Alonso Discua Elvir (1990-1996), and Mario Hung Pacheco (1997-1999). Hung Pacheco served as the last military chief before the post was abolished in the process of placing the Armed Forces under civilian control (see NotiCen, 1999-02-11). Discua is thought to have misappropriated the most money during his time as Armed Forces chief.

Earlier this year, the government ethics department (Direccion de Probidad Administrativa) reported that Discua could not explain what he did with US\$54.18 million. He is also accused of illicit enrichment amounting to another US\$145,754 in military funds. In early November, the Corte Suprema de Justicia (CS) refused to issue an injunction to halt the investigation, opening the way for possible criminal charges. Discua was ordered out of the US in February for violating the terms of his US visa. His appointment was to a job at the UN in New York, but he lived in Miami (see NotiCen, 2001-03-01).

### *Judge fired for releasing officer*

In a related military matter, the CSJ fired Judge Eduardo Paz Mejia in Choluteca for freeing accused military officer Col. Emilio David Rodriguez Alvarado. Rodriguez was arrested in September for authorizing the entrance into Honduras of a van loaded with US\$190,000 in merchandise. The shipment entered Honduras from El Salvador bound for Panama. Police found the empty van at the headquarters of the Regimiento de Caballeria Blindada (RECABLIN) in Choluteca, which Rodriguez commanded. Paz Mejia dismissed the charges on Nov. 6 for "lack of evidence." Two others arrested at the same time were also set free. Three Salvadorans arrested on the same charges are still in custody. The CSJ found that Paz Mejia had not considered all the evidence or followed all necessary procedures in deciding to release Rodriguez.

The EFE news service reported that Paz Mejia had been bribed, but the military denied any knowledge of it. The attorney general is appealing the judge's ruling and has begun legal proceedings against Paz Mejia.

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