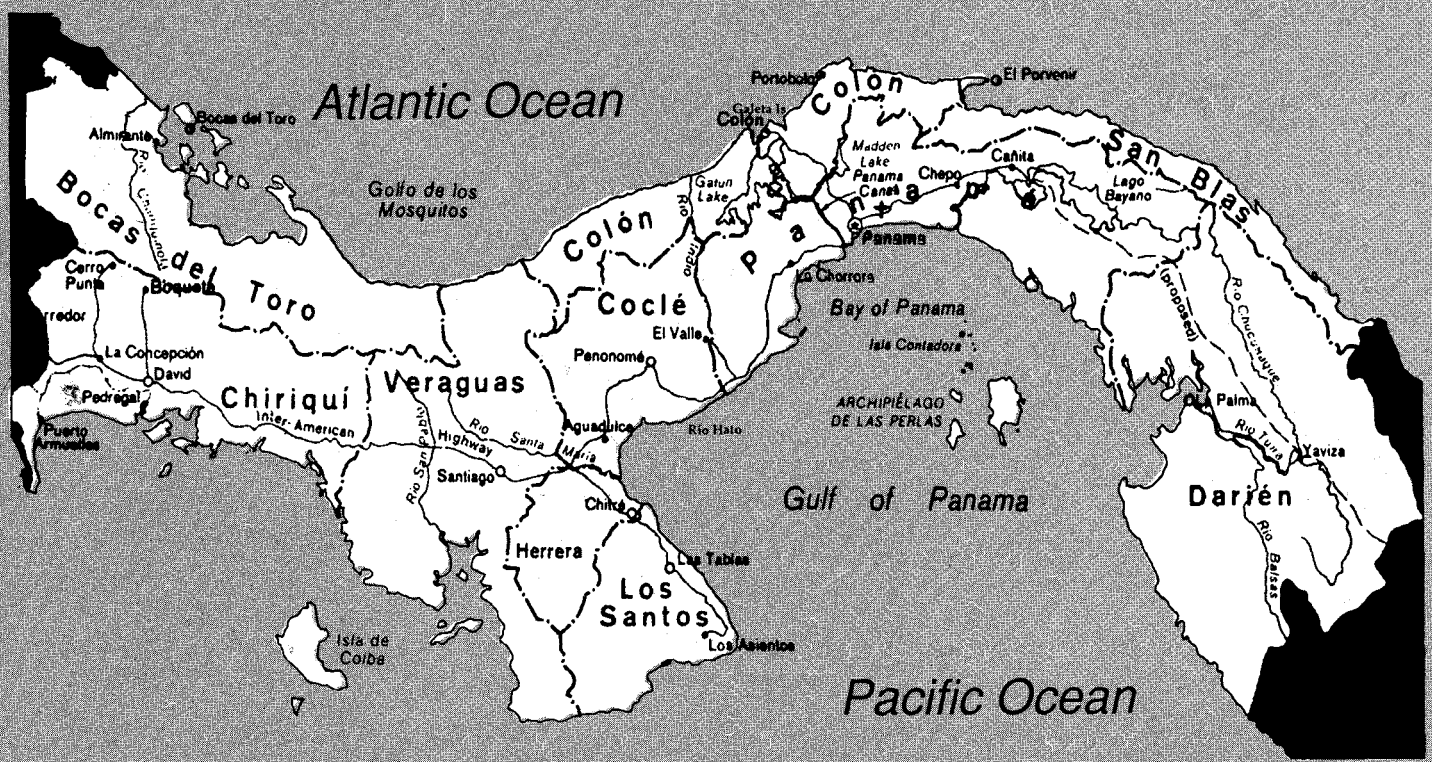
# IN THE AFTERMATH OF WAR

## US Support for Reconstruction and Nation-Building in Panama Following

# JUST CAUSE




**Richard H. Shultz, Jr.**

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# In the Aftermath of War

## *US Support for Reconstruction and Nation-Building in Panama Following Just Cause*

*by*

RICHARD H. SHULTZ, JR.

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# *Foreword*

In a more benign post–cold war international system, where no threat approaches that of the former Soviet Union, the rationale for the use of US military power cannot be based solely on the national interest. It will have to reflect concern with and support for such issues as self-determination, democratization, human rights, and economic development. The United States must have a postconflict reconstruction assistance policy that contributes to a positive consolidation of the situation and that promotes developments seen as contributing to stability and positive change. The use of force without a policy for the postconflict situation will be politically precarious.

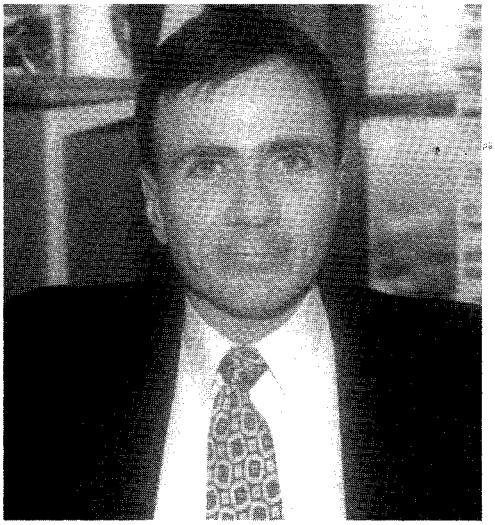
Additionally, in this new international security environment the employment of armed forces in missions outside of or short of war has become increasingly important and frequent. Several indicators suggest that these operations will continue to grow in prominence on the US national security agenda. What do these nontraditional operations encompass? The two that have received the most attention to date are peacekeeping and humanitarian assistance. Very recently, a third, peace enforcement, has been added to the list.

However, peacekeeping and peace enforcement only focus on the violence or combat that is taking place. Neither addresses the complex issue of what takes place after the termination of hostilities. Following peacekeeping and peace enforcement is another nontraditional use of the military: postconflict/postcrisis reconstruction assistance missions. In the future, the US is likely to find itself involved in the aftermath of crisis and conflict situations where it may or may not have been one of the initial belligerents but is part of a bilateral or multilateral effort to resolve the problem and assist in the reconstruction.

Professor Shultz addresses the need for a postconflict policy that takes into account all of these considerations. This study is an important contribution to policy analysis and planning. It should be read by civilian and military planners alike.

ROBERT M. JOHNSTON, Colonel, USAF
Director
Airpower Research Institute

## *About the Author*



**Dr Richard H. Shultz, Jr.**

Dr Richard H. Shultz, Jr., is director of the International Security Studies Program and associate professor of international politics at the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, Tufts University. Dr Shultz frequently lectures at US military academies and war colleges. He has been a research associate at the Consortium for the Study of Intelligence and a consultant to various US government agencies concerned with national security affairs. He has been a nonresident fellow of the Hoover Institution on War, Revolution, and Peace, and a recipient of an Earhart Foundation Research Fellowship and a United States Institute of Peace Research Fellowship. During 1988–89 he was a secretary of the Navy Senior Research Fellow and a member of the Strategy Department of the Naval War College. Dr Shultz is the author of *The Soviet Union and Revolutionary Warfare: Principles, Practices and Regional Comparisons* (1988), and has coauthored or edited 12 other books, including *Dezinformatsia: Active Measures in Soviet Strategy* (1984); *The Future of Air Power in the Aftermath of the Gulf War* (1991); *The United States Army: Challenges and Missions for the 1990s* (1991); *U.S. Defense Policy in an Era of Constrained Resources* (1990); *Special Operations in U.S. Strategy* (1984); and *Lessons from an Unconventional War: Reassessing U.S. Strategies for Future Conflicts* (1981). His articles have appeared in numerous professional journals, including *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Sciences*, *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, *Survival*, *Conflict*, *Harvard Journal of Law and Public Policy*, *World Affairs*, *Strategic Review*, *Journal of Peace Research*, *Journal of International Affairs*, *Polity*, *Western Political Quarterly*, and *The Journal of Politics*.

# *Preface*

Post-conflict policy has only recently been considered by the defense community. However, in Panama in 1989–90, the United States was programmatically and structurally ill-equipped for the situation that followed the fighting. Missing was an integrated and interagency strategy to support short-term conflict resolution and long-term reconstruction.

This study represents an attempt to preclude such a shortfall in the future. It presents a detailed assessment of contingency planning for and execution of the postconflict reconstruction policy implemented by the Department of Defense in Panama following Operation Just Cause. Hopefully, it will provide a framework for analysis and planning that will be of value to those who prepare for the use of military capabilities in post-conflict reconstruction operations, whether this follows interventions, as in Panama, or is a part of the aftermath of US involvement in peacekeeping or peace enforcement missions. Each of these situations will require close attention to the situation following conflict.

I would like to thank several individuals for their assistance in this study. First, from the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low-Intensity Conflict, Dr Alberto Coll, Dr Chris Lamb, and Col Dennis Barlow provided invaluable assistance and encouragement. Many doors were opened due to their backing. Throughout the study, I quote numerous officials who were involved in various aspects of the Panama policy following Just Cause. I would like to thank each for taking time from busy professional schedules to sit for long interviews with me. While the number is too large to note each of these officials, a special debt of gratitude is owed to Col Jack Pryor. These interviews were transcribed by Mrs Freda Kilgallen and edited by Mr Harald Breitenstein. Their professionalism in addressing each of these tasks was truly outstanding. The same is true of Mrs Roberta Breen, who prepared the manuscript for publication. Finally, I want to thank Col Ed Mann, chief, Doctrine Research Division, Airpower Research Institute, who encouraged me to publish the study with the Air University Press and Mr Preston Bryant, who provided outstanding editorial assistance.

RICHARD H. SHULTZ, JR.
Director
International Security Studies Program and
Associate Professor of International Politics
The Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy
Tufts University

# *Introduction*

What factors led to the decision to use force in Panama? President George Bush listed four reasons: to protect American citizens abroad, to defend democracy in Panama, to combat drug trafficking, and to protect the integrity of the Panama Canal treaties.[1] For Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) Chairman Colin Powell, six criteria had to be satisfied:

> Was there sufficient provocation? Powell thought yes. Has the PDF [Panamanian Defense Force] changed and gone out of control? Again yes. Would Blue Spoon [the military plan for intervention] resolve the problem? Yes. Would the plan minimize damage and casualties? Yes. Would it bring democracy? Yes. And public and press reaction? Probably positive.[2]

These statements coincide with four guidelines for using force in the aftermath of the cold war detailed in chapter 1. First, there was an identifiable threat to US interests on three counts. The killing of a US Marine officer on 16 December 1989 and the physical abuse of a Navy lieutenant and his wife had put Americans at risk. Noriega and the Panamanian Defense Force (PDF) appeared to be going out of control. By extension, this situation was seen as threatening the Panama Canal. PDF violence might put the canal at risk. Finally, there was Noriega's involvement in international drug trade, an increasingly important US national security issue.

However, the decision to intervene entailed more than the defense of US interests. It included the normative objective of supporting democratization in Panama. Noriega's nullification of the presidential election results of May 1989, and his use of "dignity battalions" to assault the winners, was a major setback for US policy in Panama and in the region. At a time when democracy was spreading throughout Latin America, an important policy objective of the Bush administration, Noriega remained a symbol of right-wing dictatorship. His removal was seen as contributing to the wave of democratization taking place on a global scale.

The decision to use force in Panama likewise satisfies our second criterion, which specifies that the political entity against which military power is directed must have lost credibility and be seen as acting outside the bounds of acceptable behavior. Noriega had little or no credibility, either in Panama or in the region. He was seen as acting outside the bounds of acceptable behavior in the "new world order." To put it bluntly, he was a heavy-handed thug, who trampled on democratic elections, beat up the successful candidates, and lavishly profited from his involvement in the drug trade. Clearly, he was out of step.

Operation Just Cause also appears to have met our third criterion—the use of force conformed to the principles of proportionality and discrimination. While the operation was based on General Powell's "doctrine of overwhelming force," which seeks to mass and employ superior firepower to guarantee victory, civilian damage and casualties were of great concern in the planning process.[3] This concern was reflected in the rules of engagement.

It is with respect to our fourth criterion—a follow-on policy that contributes to a positive consolidation of the situation and promotes stable, orderly change and development—that the Panama intervention encountered problems. This study will assess those aspects of US policy concerned with support for reconstruction and democratization (also called restoration) in the aftermath of Operation Just Cause.

The research approach taken to examine these issues included a review of the literature on contemporary Panamanian politics, with particular focus on praetorian rule. Declassified and other relevant US government documents were collected and reviewed. In-depth interviews were conducted with military and civilian personnel involved in planning and implementing the postconflict policy. (These included three commanders in chief of Southern Command and the US ambassador and chargé d'affaires, among other key officials.) Research trips to Panama were made in April 1990, March 1991, and September 1992. The research included extensive use of the Panamanian press and discussions with Panamanian officials. Finally, the secondary literature on Operation Just Cause was reviewed.

As noted above, this study assesses those aspects of US policy that addressed reconstruction, nation-building, and democratization in Panama following Operation Just Cause. Specifically, seven questions are examined:

1. In the late 1980s, what was the nature and degree of praetorian rule in Panama?
2. How thorough was the contingency planning for reconstruction and democratization in Panama?
3. What were the limitations in the contingency plans?
4. What were the unanticipated civil-military problems that unfolded at the time of Just Cause?
5. Why, and under what circumstances, was the Military Support Group (MSG), Southern Command's organization for assisting in nation-building and democratization, established?
6. How well did the MSG perform?
7. What lessons can we derive (from the Panama experience) that have future relevance?

Panama provides an example of what can occur when planning requirements are neglected. Destabilizing developments appeared, not foreseen in the contingency plan (Operation Blind Logic), that considerably weakened restoration efforts. Massive looting, a new Government of Panama (GOP) that was "hollow" and not ready to govern, an empty treasury, and a decaying societal infrastructure proved to be major obstacles. The Civil-Military Operations Task Force (CMOTF), which executed Operation Blind Logic, was unprepared for each. It likewise was not ready to address the security force issue. The CMOTF stood conceptually deficient, lacked a coherent organizational structure, and was short of personnel.

To address these postconflict obstacles, an ad hoc organization—the Military Support Group—was conceived. While it did not completely snatch victory out of the jaws of defeat, the MSG did save face for the United States. Conceptually, as this study

details, it had the right organizational elements—and it has future applications if postconflict situations are added to the national security agenda of the United States. The MSG should serve as a conceptual model for the development of doctrine, an area in need of serious attention within the Department of Defense (DOD).

However, the MSG was only part of what was needed. Postconflict assistance requires a civilian-military interagency response. As this study demonstrates, the civilian agencies of the US government were much less prepared, both conceptually and organizationally, and this undermined interagency organization. An important lesson of Panama is the need for an interagency mechanism that can plan for and respond to postconflict crises in an effective way. No such country team was in place in Panama; it should have been. This approach would, in turn, generate a working interagency group to prepare for future contingencies.

There are also crucial lessons to be derived from specific reconstruction activities of the MSG. Perhaps most important is how to assist in restructuring security forces. Any state that hopes to transition from an authoritarian or dictatorial regime to democracy will require assistance in reforming its military and security institutions. The reason is straightforward. These institutions are the instruments of coercive control. In Panama, this led to the complicated decision to establish a police force and eschew a military.

In the future, it is more likely that states seeking to transition from dictatorship will retain military institutions. The Panamanian approach is probably more the exception than the rule. If the US is to assist in such postconflict transitions, DOD must create advisory teams and programs to facilitate the institutionalization of our civil-military ethos into the host country's military organization. This approach goes well beyond the traditional programs that DOD currently maintains. Fundamental transformation requires a more direct and sustained effort of institution-building.

With respect to the infrastructure reconstruction process, the MSG demonstrated US commitment to Panama while US civilian agencies struggled to establish themselves. At a time when the GOP needed to give to the Panamanian people a sign that it was responding to their problems, the MSG helped to accomplish this. There are important lessons not only in the reconstruction programs but also in how the MSG carried them out under the auspices of the GOP. It encouraged the development of a decision-making and implementation process that involved the Panamanian government—local, province, and national levels—in the reconstruction process. What the MSG established is instructive in terms of US-host country relations. In fact, more broadly, this is true of the overall MSG-GOP liaison process. While unorthodox for the US government, it was in tune with the political and societal context of Panama.

Finally, with respect to psychological operations (PSYOPS), the MSG encountered not uncommon civilian agency biases. Conceptually, PSYOPS has an important contribution to make to postconflict reconstruction programs. This can be seen in the limited Psychological Support Element programs developed during its short tenure with the MSG. However, the larger lesson to be drawn is that postconflict reconstruction and nation-building necessitates the ability to communicate and in-

form. To constrain PSYOPS use, as in Panama, does not make sense. These and other lessons are described in this study. All have important implications for future US postconflict missions.

## Notes

1. "Fighting in Panama: Statements in Washington," *New York Times* (20 December 1989), A1.

2. Bob Woodward, *The Commanders* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1991), 171.

3. For a discussion of the planning process, see Thomas Donnelly, Margaret Roth, and Caleb Baker, *Operation Just Cause: The Storming of Panama* (New York: Maxwell Macmillan International, 1991).

## Chapter 1

# The Use of Force in the Aftermath of the Cold War

A decision by an American president to use military force is invariably difficult and complicated. The process is characterized by an intensive debate that generally goes beyond the hardheaded realist's requirement of defending the national interest. Rather, questions concerning ethics, morality, justice, and related democratic principles are frequently taken into consideration. The debate over how to respond to Iraq's invasion of Kuwait is a case in point. The same is true of the decision to intervene in Panama.

During the postwar period, it has been very difficult for US policymakers to adopt the Clausewitzian imperative that war "is simply a continuation of political intercourse, with the addition of other means."[1] Likewise, few have been willing to embrace Machiavelli's exhortation that a ruler "should therefore have no other aim or thought, nor take up any other thing for his study, but war and its organization and discipline, for that is the only art that is necessary to one who commands."[2] While not all would agree, the evidence suggests that, in several instances during the cold war, the justification for an American use of military force was influenced by normative factors outside the guidelines proposed by Clausewitz and Machiavelli.[3]

If this was the case during the cold war, a conflict that many saw as a dire threat to the survival of the United States, the decision to use military force will be determined even more by normative factors in a more benign post–cold war international environment. Indeed, the counsel of Aristotle may become a prerequisite: "the full performance of [the statesman] depends on a combination of prudence and moral virtue: virtue ensures the correctness of the end at which we aim, and prudence that of the means toward it."[4] We believe that such normative considerations will be important policy determinants in the "new world order." As this study will demonstrate, these considerations were part of the decision to use force and, more importantly, to support reconstruction and democratization in Panama in 1989–90.

Why should such normative prescriptions as supporting self-determination, democratization, human rights, and economic development influence a decision to use force? At least four post–cold war themes are contributing factors. First, there no longer exists a threat to the United States of such proportion that it could place our survival at risk. Consequently, the adage that we must "fight fire with fire" no longer holds.[5] While the defense of interests will remain central, it will not stand alone. Second, many believe

that the employment of military force has become rationally unthinkable in the developed world and, at some point in the near future, will cease to be a conceivable option in the third world as well.[6] While evidence exists to raise doubts about this proposition, it will be a constraining argument against any future US decision to use force.[7] Third, and closely related, is the opinion of many that the ability to translate military potential into active influence has lessened considerably with the emergence of a pluralistic and economically interdependent international system.[8] While economic interdependence is a fact, whether one of its consequences will be an end to the active influence of military power is questionable.[9] A fourth argument that will militate against the use of force in the future is that the US is in decline and should look inward to solve grave domestic problems rather than become involved in international conflicts that do not directly affect its well-being.[10]

If even some of the above propositions prove to be incorrect and, as others suggest, the emerging post–cold war international system is more complicated, more volatile, and less predictable—and is characterized by a host of security challenges—a US decision to use military force still will have to take these constraining forces into account. The use of force will need to be explained in terms of both meaningful self-interest and larger normative principles and values. The following general guidelines, briefly noted in the introduction, are proposed for this purpose:

1. In addition to countering a threat to an identifiable interest of the United States, the use of force will also have to foster some larger normative purpose. One example might be to promote the growth of free and democratic political institutions that enhance regional stability. A related situation could entail assistance in combating aggression and coercion directed against new and/or existing democratic institutions.
2. The state or political entity against which military force is directed must have both lost credibility and be seen as acting outside the bounds of acceptable international behavior. Iraq's invasion and occupation of Kuwait is an obvious but extreme example.
3. The use of force should conform with the principles of proportionality and discrimination. The former are based on existing standards set by the international law of war and on judgments of acceptable military practice. The latter refers to prohibitions against attacks on noncombatants and targets that have no military value.
4. Following the military action, the US should have a follow-on policy that contributes to a positive consolidation of the situation and that promotes stable and orderly change and development, as seen by both domestic and international audiences. Using force without attending to the postconflict situation will be politically precarious.

The US intervention in Panama was the first major use of force by the United States in the aftermath of the cold war. It provides an interesting case study against which to test the requirements proposed above for the use of

military power. Our attention will focus on the fourth guideline as we assess the effectiveness of American postconflict policy following Operation Just Cause.

The issues of postconflict policy and strategy have only recently begun to be addressed by the US foreign policy and defense communities. Looking back on the experience in Panama, it is evident that the US government was programmatically and structurally ill-equipped for the situations that followed the fighting. It lacked integrated and interagency political, economic, social, informational, and military policies and strategies to support short-term conflict resolution and longer-term stability and development. According to one recent report:

> Few leaders look forward to the third day of war, the day after the fighting stops. It is just as important to win the peace as it is to militarily defeat the enemy. . . . Conflict termination is an essential link between national security strategy, national military strategy, and post-conflict aims—the political effects desired. This holds for both war and measures short of war.[11]

The current initiative by the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low-Intensity Conflict (OASD[SO/LIC]) to outline a "policy for the environment short of war" likewise calls attention to these post–cold war requirements. Such a policy would emphasize "the selective pursuit of opportunities to enhance regional stability, defuse nascent crises, and support the growth of representative governments and market economies where possible." Successful implementation of this policy requires that civilian and military agencies of the US government be adept in four security mission areas, including postconflict activities.[12] As this study will demonstrate, such proficiency was missing in Panama in the days following the use of force.

## Notes

1. Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. and trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1976), 605.

2. Niccolo Machiavelli, *The Prince*, in *Great Political Thinkers: From Plato to the Present*, William Ebenstein, ed. (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1969), 291.

3. Cold war historian John Gaddis believes that consideration of such principles did not take place. Rather, a doctrine of what he terms *moral relativism* held sway. Gaddis asserts that American policymakers "in the end . . . came to the view . . . that in periods of mortal peril these standards [democratic principles] could not be allowed to stand in the way of whatever seemed required to defend the national interest." John Gaddis, "Morality and the Cold War," in *Ethics and International Relations*, Kenneth Thompson, ed. (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Books, 1985), 118. For other perspectives on the issue, see Bernard Brodie, *War and Politics* (New York: Macmillan, 1974); Robert J. Art and Kenneth N. Waltz, eds., *The Use of Force: Military Power and International Politics*, 3d ed. (New York: University Press of America, 1988); Richard Shultz, "Can Democratic Governments Use Military Force in the War Against Terrorism," *World Affairs* 148, no. 4 (1986).

4. Aristotle, *Ethics*, trans. J. A. K. Thomson (New York: Penguin Books, 1955), 222.

5. This argument was first made by Lt Gen James H. Doolittle in a July 1954 report to President Eisenhower. His recommendations were tough minded and action oriented: "It is

now clear that we are facing an implacable enemy whose avowed objective is world domination. . . . If the United States is to survive, long-standing American concepts of fair play must be reconsidered. We must . . . learn to subvert, sabotage and destroy our enemies by more clever, more sophisticated and more effective methods than those used against us." Contained in *The Central Intelligence Agency: History and Documents*, William M. Leary, ed. (Tuscaloosa, Ala.: University of Alabama Press, 1984), 143–45.

6. John Mueller, *Retreat from Doomsday: The Obsolescence of Major War* (New York: Basic Books, 1989). He bases his argument on the fact that modern warfare is no longer either romantic or an effective method for achieving the goals of statecraft. Simply put, it is not a rational choice. Rather, state power is shifting toward economic prowess and away from military robustness. While Mueller concentrates on the developed states, he perceives similar trends, in embryonic form, taking root in the third world.

7. For example, Eliot Cohen takes issue with the core arguments of those who believe that military power has lost its utility. He raises serious doubt about the assertion that modern weaponry, even nuclear ones, will have the same inhibiting effect on regional conflicts that they have had on the superpowers. New weapons, in his opinion, signify only that war will take new forms, not that it will cease to exist. Eliot Cohen, "The Future of Force and American Strategy," *The National Interest*, Fall 1990, 4–5.

8. See David P. Calleo, *Beyond American Hegemony: Future of the Western Alliance* (New York: Basic Books, 1989); and David P. Calleo et al., "The Dollar and the Defense of the West," *Foreign Affairs*, Spring 1988.

9. During the early 1970s, a growing number of international relations specialists postulated that the international system was experiencing a major change in the essence and structure of power. This change was brought about by the disintegration of superpower hegemony and the emergence of a multipolar, pluralistic, international regime. In this new structure, it was argued, the relations among nations were changing from one marked by conflicting national interests and independence to one characterized by economic interdependence, common interests, and transnational cooperation. With changes in the modes of conflict and the sources of friction, nonsecurity issues were growing in importance. The low politics of economics, resources, energy, and the environment were replacing the high politics of security and military power. This optimism, which predicted an accelerated advance in international political development toward a more peaceful and just world order, proved illusive. Military power and the use of force remained fundamental instruments of statecraft through the remainder of the 1970s and 1980s.

10. The decline of the US is open to challenge; nevertheless, a continuation of superpower activism will not be automatically accepted by the American electorate. The case for activism can be found in Samuel Huntington, "The United States—Decline or Renewal," *Foreign Affairs*, Spring 1988.

11. "Results of the Roundtable Discussion on Conflict Termination and Post-Conflict Activities" (Carlisle Barracks, Pa.: Army War College, Strategic Studies Institute, 21–22 July 1992), 1.

12. "Policy for the Environment Short of War," working draft (Washington, D.C.: OASD[SO/LIC]), 20 February 1992), 4.7I.

## Chapter 2

# Panama 1989
## *The Nature and Consequences of Praetorian Rule*

A reasonable starting point from which to plan for reconstruction and democratization in Panama is a clear understanding of what is to be replaced. A review of the Panamanian political setting before 1989 reveals that restoration of democracy was an inaccurate description of what was to take place following the dismantling of the Panamanian Defense Force (PDF) and the removal of Manuel Noriega. While the Panamanian government had been based on a constitutional framework and an electoral process, it would be erroneous to refer to a democratic legacy that could be restored.[1] Erroneous, that is, if one adopts Samuel Huntington's "minimal definition" of democracy as a political system where the "most powerful collective decision makers are selected through fair, honest, and periodic elections in which virtually all the adult population is eligible to vote."[2] This was not the case in Panama.

## Origins of Praetorianism

From 1903 through World War II, political power was concentrated in the hands of a few traditional upper-class families known as the rabiblancos. They had built an oligarchy composed primarily of old families of Spanish descent. They had developed and maintained strong ties of association and kinship.[3] In the aftermath of the war, things began to change as new forces sought to challenge the oligarchy's domination of Panamanian politics.

The most important of these challengers was the National Police Force and its commissioner, José Antonio Remon. Formed in 1904, the National Police Force was Panama's only official armed force for the next half century. Under Remon, the institution emerged as a political protagonist.

Remon, who came from the middle class, received a scholarship to attend the Mexican Military Academy following his graduation from Panama's elite National Institute. He graduated from the academy in 1931 and returned to Panama. According to Steve Ropp, "because few Panamanian police officers at that time had academy training of any sort, he entered the National Police as a captain. By 1947, he had become commandant of police."[4] From this

position, Remon converted the National Police into the National Guard, professionalized it, and employed the new institution as an instrument for wielding political power.

As National Police head, Remon frequently manipulated the political process. As Jan Knippers Black and Edmundo Flores note, "between 1948 and 1952 . . . [he] installed and removed presidents with unencumbered ease."[5] Remon also organized his own political base—the National Patriotic Coalition—and was elected president in 1952. It was at this point that the National Guard was established. The result was a paramilitary force that began to receive modernized training and equipment.

In 1955, President Remon, who both enriched himself and promoted economic and social reform as the head of state, was assassinated. However, his creation of the National Guard had laid the foundation for praetorianism in Panama.[6] Between 1955 and the 1968 military coup, the professionalization and growth of the National Guard continued. So did its involvement in politics.[7]

As the professionalization and militarization of the National Guard was taking place, the oligarchy returned to power. While it is beyond the scope of this study to review the 1955–68 period, suffice it to say that it was marked by several destabilizing currents. Those currents included manipulation of the electoral process, political maneuvering, competition among various political parties that were extensions of leading families, and rising nationalist opposition to US involvement in Panama.[8]

## The 1968 Coup and the Emergence of Omar Torrijos

The political crisis of 1968, which was marked by complex political maneuvers and machinations, resulted in the election of Arnulfo Arias, a legendary and controversial political figure.[9] Upon assuming office, Arias immediately announced changes in the leadership of the National Guard (to curtail its independence). This involved removing two of the most senior officers and appointing a new commander. The Guard, however, removed Arias from the presidency, established a provisional junta, and disbanded the National Assembly as well as all political parties. During 1969, different members of the junta maneuvered to take control. Omar Torrijos, commander of the National Guard, consolidated his power after defeating a coup attempt that sought to remove him. With this event began 20 years of praetorian rule in Panama.

To help the reader understand the extent of military control in Panama, Eric Nordlinger's typology of praetorianism will be utilized.[10] He identifies three types of military intervention in politics: moderators, guardians, and rulers. Each is then defined in terms of two variables: the extent of political power exercised and the political and economic objectives pursued.

According to this conceptual design, *praetorian moderators* "exercise a veto power over a varied range of governmental decisions and political disputes, without taking control of the government themselves."[11] While civilians hold formal power, any action is subject to military rejection. In terms of political and economic goals, moderators seek to maintain the status quo and prevent "any kind of important change in the distribution of economic rewards, ensuring political order and government stability."[12]

*Praetorian guardians* differ in that they exercise governmental power themselves. Nordlinger attributes this, in part, to increasing politicization of the armed forces. "When moderator-type actions are unsuccessful in bringing about desired outcomes—when the veto-type actions have to be repeated again and again—the officers conclude that the only remedy is to control the government themselves."[13] Once in command, guardians seek either to preserve the political and economic status quo or to make necessary adjustments. They are dictatorial in that political rights and liberties are curtailed or eliminated. Once the situation is in hand, guardians return to the barracks and reinstate formal political control to civilian government.

Finally, *praetorian rulers* "not only control the government but dominate the regime, sometimes attempting to control large slices of political, economic, and social life."[14] With respect to political and economic goals, these attempts are generally far-reaching and are seen as taking "considerable time to become securely rooted." This "necessitates regime dominance and an indefinite period of military rule."[15] Rulers will eliminate all power centers that might challenge their control and are much more dictatorial than their moderator and guardian counterparts. Some will seek to create a base of support in the population through mobilization and control from above.

What kind of praetorian system did Torrijos establish and Noriega perpetuate in Panama? To answer this question, the following issues will be briefly addressed: What was the nature of their rule? How did they advance the interests of the military? What impact did praetorianism have on other Panamanian political elements? How did it affect the larger economic and social context?

Once in control, Torrijos consolidated political power in his hands through a mix of repression and populism. He referred to his form of rule as a "dictatorship with a heart." In fact, for the 1968–78 period, all political parties were illegal—and the legislature was replaced in 1972 by a National Assembly of Community Representatives, the members of which were selected by the government. Torrijos justified these measures by citing pressing economic, political, and social needs that required extraordinary measures.

While civilian political parties and institutions were held in check, the National Guard continued to grow and increase its power and influence. Ropp notes:

> From 1968 until Torrijos's death in 1981, the National Guard continued the expansion, militarization, and professionalization that had begun under Remon in the late 1940s. Furthermore, dramatic changes took place in officer recruitment and training. During the 1950s and 1960s, most academy-trained officers entering the

National Guard were members of the lower-middle class who had received their military training in Mexico and other countries in Central America; Torrijos himself was schooled in El Salvador. During the 1970s, more junior officers attended South American academies, such as those in Brazil, Peru, Chile, Venezuela, and Argentina.[16]

Thus, the National Guard not only continued to develop as a praetorian institution but its officer corps was educated by some of Latin America's leading praetorians.[17] Indeed, the National Guard came to define one of its two major missions as internal security. Operationally, this came to mean any challenges by domestic political forces to the political power of the National Guard. Under this system, there was no civilian control, and the National Guard's command structure was highly centralized with the commander in chief (CINC) having very broad authority.

As was noted above, the impact of praetorian rule on other Panamanian political elements was considerable. All political parties were banned until 1978, as was the national legislature. Furthermore, the new constitution that was promulgated in 1972 gave "legal" standing to the political domination of Panama by General Torrijos and the National Guard.[18] During the mid-1970s, due to outside pressures, Torrijos began the process of "democratization."

In 1978, under the guise of reforming the 1972 constitution, political parties were legalized and Torrijos gave up his position as head of the government. The National Assembly elected Arístides Royo as president of Panama. In reality, this "democratization" was necessary to gain US support for the proposed canal treaties.[19] Political power remained in the hands of Torrijos and the National Guard. Presidential elections were set for 1984, and Torrijos created his own political party—the Democratic Revolutionary Party (PRD)—to prepare for them.

The PRD was seen by Torrijos as the culmination of building a popular base for his rule by forming alliances with those parts of Panamanian society that had been ignored by the oligarchy. To his credit, Torrijos did carry out some far-reaching social reforms. On the debit side, however, these reforms were accompanied by increasing government and National Guard corruption and personal enrichment.

To summarize, General Torrijos established praetorian rule in Panama between 1968 and 1978. His title of Maximum Leader of the Panamanian Revolution exemplifies this fact. So does the way in which he ruled Panama and built up the National Guard to ensure that this rule would continue. Although he moved from praetorian ruler to guardian status in 1978, the National Guard continued to dominate Panamanian politics.

## Noriega and the Panamanian Defense Force

The sudden death of General Torrijos (in an airplane crash on 31 July 1981) threw Panama into a succession crisis. The struggle was not between the

National Guard and civilian political parties but within the military itself. Out of this struggle for power, Manuel Antonio Noriega, a longtime protégé of Torrijos, emerged as dictator of Panama.[20]

Torrijos was succeeded at first by the chief of staff of the National Guard, Col Florencio Florez Aguilar, who quickly became a target of intrigue because of his willingness to allow President Royo to exercise more authority. According to one observer, he was seen as "too passive . . . too amenable to the civilian politicians who saw the transition to democracy as a contest for power with the National Guard." His passivity was seen as a threat to praetorian rule and the corporate interests of the military. "Florez declined to project himself as a national leader but seemed to epitomize the subordinate military officer."[21]

For three other powerful members of the National Guard—Executive Secretary of the General Staff Roberto Diaz Herrera, Chief of Staff Rubén Darío Paredes, and Assistant Chief of Staff for Intelligence Noriega—this was not acceptable. Florez had to go, as did Royo. Along with Assistant Chief of Staff for Operations Armando Contreras, they sent Florez to retirement in a bloodless coup.[22] Likewise, Royo was quickly dispatched as president. He was replaced by Vice President Ricardo de la Espriella, who immediately referred to the National Guard as a "partner in power."[23]

The remaining struggle to succeed Torrijos was between Paredes and Noriega, but it really was no contest. Noriega easily outmaneuvered Paredes and became a brigadier general in August 1983 and commander in chief of the National Guard.[24] Unlike Torrijos, whose power was rooted in a combination of populism, nationalism, corruption, and praetorianism, Noriega relied on control of the military, corruption, and repression.[25] To this end, he greatly expanded the military's power and control over all aspects of government.

The first step in this progression was to create the Panamanian Defense Force, an amalgamation of the national guard, the air force, the naval force, the canal defense force, the police force, the traffic department, the department of investigation, and the immigration department. He accomplished this by pressing the legislative assembly to approve a bill that mandated consolidation. Next, the officers and troops in military units were increased, equipment and training were upgraded, and missions were expanded.[26] Between 1978 and 1987, the PDF expanded from 8,700 to nearly 15,000. Beyond this, Noriega widened its influence and power through manipulation of the law and corruption. He also took steps to ensure control over the PDF through a network of his most trusted and well-placed followers.

Law 20, which created the PDF, assigned to the military a great deal of autonomy in determining internal procedures, requirements, and missions. The duties of the PDF commander in chief were broadened to include "preservation of the public order and social peace."[27] Law 20 built on the existing constitutional stipulation that "power emanates from the people, and is exercised by the government through a distribution of functions among the executive, legislative, and judicial branches in harmonic collaboration with the National Guard."[28] In effect, as Ricardo Arias Calderón noted, the PDF be-

came "the final arbiter in political life and government."[29] This was true in both law and practice.

Noriega also continued to expand the corporate interests of the military, a process that had begun under Torrijos. Senior PDF officers were engaged in a wide variety of legal and illegal business activities, of which the most lucrative was narcotics trafficking.[30] While the extent to which Noriega enriched himself is well known, the aftermath of Just Cause revealed that an extremely high percentage of the PDF's senior leaders had large bank accounts, property, and business interests worth many millions of dollars that could not be accounted for.[31]

By 1984, there was little doubt that Noriega and the PDF were in control. The presidential election of that year was to bear this out. The candidate the PDF selected and supported—Nicolas Ardito Barletta—defeated Arnulfo Arias, three-time president of Panama. There is little doubt that the election results were fixed. The irregularities were massive and blatant.[32] Then, less than a year later, Barletta stepped out of line and Noriega forced his resignation.[33] He was replaced by Vice President Eric Arturo Delvalle. Thus, because of military intervention, Panama had five presidents in less than four years.

In addition to using the stick against civilian opposition, Noriega used the carrot. This was the case when he was dealing with civilian government agencies. While certainly not new, Noriega-fostered corruption became extensive and endemic in public administration. Through this process, he brought civilian government agencies under his control. Corruption became a means of suborning civilian officials to Noriega and the PDF. The economic and social infrastructure was in disarray. As we shall see, this disarray had an unforeseen effect on the restoration process.

Finally, the Noriega regime was considerably more repressive than its predecessor. Within the PDF, special elements—most notably the First Public Order Company (Doberman)—were used to quell public opposition. Noriega also created local militias, known as "dignity battalions," to frighten and assault the political opposition. They carried out violent attacks on the victorious opposition in the May 1989 presidential election.[34]

To summarize, Noriega continued and refined the praetorian control of the political process that had begun under Torrijos. This control ensured that the PDF was "the final arbiter in political life and government." Noriega also bore responsibility for the deterioration of the social and economic structure. Corruption and repression flourished. In 1989, when popular opposition coalesced against him, he used force to crush it. It seemed clear that political opposition parties, on their own, could not bring about change through the electoral process. As praetorian guardians, Noriega and the PDF did not allow this to happen.

This was the political legacy with which those planning for democratic restoration and nation-building had to contend. Missing in Panama was a democratic tradition, a professional civil administration, a nonpoliticized military, and a civic culture. For two decades, Panama's experience was

marked by extralegal, corrupt, and increasingly repressive praetorian rule by the National Guard and the PDF.

## Notes

1. Panama had four constitutions between 1903 and 1989: 1904, 1941, 1946, and 1972. The 1972 constitution was amended by the Reform Acts of 1978 and the Constitutional Act of 1983. For a discussion, see Richard Millett, "Government and Politics," in *Panama: A Country Study*, ed. Sandra W. Meditz and Dennis M. Hanratty (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1989), 174–83.

2. Samuel P. Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century* (Norman, Okla.: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991), 7.

3. John Biesanz and Mavis Biesanz, *The People of Panama* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1955).

4. Steve Ropp, "National Security," in *Panama: A Country Study*, 221. Also see Steve C. Ropp, *Panamanian Politics: From Guarded Nation to National Guard* (Stanford, Calif.: Hoover Institution Press, 1982), 25–29.

5. Jan Knippers Black and Edmundo Flores, "Historical Setting," in *Panama: A Country Study*, 34.

6. Here we adopt Eric Nordlinger's definition of praetorianism as "a situation in which military officers are major or dominant political actors by virtue of their actual or threatened use of force. . . . Thus praetorianism (or military intervention) occurs when officers more or less overtly threaten to carry out a coup d'état unless certain demands are met, when they stage an unsuccessful coup, when a coup brings about or prevents the replacement of the government by another group of civilians, and, most importantly, when the officers themselves take control of the government." Eric A. Nordlinger, *Soldiers in Politics: Military Coups and Government* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1977), 2–3.

7. Ropp attributes this to the following factors. One, the legacy of Remon was continued by his successors, as the "total force strength reached 5,000 with an officer corps of 465; an increasing number of officers received academy training." Two, the National Guard benefited from US aid through the Mutual Security Act. "More Panamanian officers and enlisted personnel were trained at United States facilities in the Canal Zone, and military assistance increased dramatically in the 1960s." This was due, in part, to Castro's victory in Cuba. Ropp, "National Security," 221.

8. For a discussion of these developments see Ropp, *Panamanian Politics*; William Jordan, *Panama Odyssey* (Austin, Tex.: University of Texas Press, 1984); and Walter LaFeber, *The Panama Canal: The Crisis in Historical Perspective* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978).

9. For background on his fascinating political career, see J. Conte Porras, *Arnulfo Arias Madrid* (Panama: Litho-Impresora, S. A., 1980); Ropp, *Panamanian Politics*; and Millett.

10. Nordlinger. While there is a rich literature of praetorianism, Nordlinger presents one of the more conceptual treatments of the subject and attempts to establish general propositions that can be tested in specific case studies. Among the more standard general works are Claude E. Welch, Jr., and Arthur K. Smith, *Military Role and Rule* (North Scituate, Mass.: Duxbury Press, 1974); William R. Thompson, *The Grievances of Military Coup-Makers* (Beverly Hills, Calif.: Sage Publications, 1973); S. E. Finer, *The Man on Horseback: The Role of the Military in Politics* (New York: Praeger, 1962); Morris Janowitz, *The Military in the Political Development of New Nations* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964); and Amos Perlmutter, *The Military and Politics in Modern Times* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1977). In addition, there are numerous studies of praetorianism in specific countries and regions, including Latin America. A few interesting recent articles on the latter include: David Pion-Berlin, "Retreat to the Barracks: Recent Studies on Military Withdrawal from Power," in *Journal of Inter-American Studies and World Affairs*, Spring 1990, 137–45; Gabriella Marcella, "The Latin American Military, Low Intensity Conflict, and Democracy," in *Journal of Inter-American*

*Studies and World Affairs*, Spring 1990, 45–82; and Fernando Bustamante, "The Military in Latin America: Is the Retreat for Good?" *Bulletin of Peace Proposals*, no. 4 (Fall 1990): 371–84.

11. Nordlinger, 22.

12. Ibid.

13. Ibid., 23.

14. Ibid., 26.

15. Ibid.

16. Ropp, "National Security," 223–24.

17. For an interesting comparative analysis of praertorian institutions in Latin America, see Robert Wesson, ed., *The Latin American Military Institution* (New York: Praeger, 1986).

18. For an informed discussion of these events see Ropp, *Panamanian Politics*; and George Priestley, *Military Government and Popular Participation in Panama: The Torrijos Regime, 1968–75* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1976).

19. LaFeber.

20. As the head of intelligence for Torrijos, Noriega did the dirty work. Those unwilling to cooperate with Torrijos were harassed, arrested, or forced into exile. Noriega handled these matters. While it is fashionable to consider Torrijos a populist, and to a degree he was, there was also a repressive underside to his rule. To handle these matters he turned to Noriega, a loyal associate whom Torrijos is said to have referred to as "my gangster." R. M. Koster and Guillermo Sanchez, *In the Time of Tyrants: Panama: 1968–1990* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1990).

21. John Dinges, *Our Man in Panama: How General Noriega Used the United States and Made Millions in Drugs and Arms* (New York: Random House, 1990), 139.

22. Ibid., 139–40.

23. Black and Flores, 60.

24. For an account of how Noriega did this see Dinges, chap. 7.

25. For interesting insights and comparison of Torrijos and Noriega, see Ricardo Arias Calderón, "Panama: Disaster of Democracy," *Foreign Affairs*, Winter 1987/1988, 328–47. Also see Koster and Sanchez.

26. It should be noted that for other reasons this restructuring had been urged by the US Department of Defense. It was seen as necessary if Panama was to be able to defend the canal under the 1978 treaty agreements.

27. Ropp, "National Security," 225.

28. Ibid., 247.

29. Calderón, 335. He also notes that Noriega sought to reaffirm this status within the PDF itself: "Through meetings and seminars he barrages officers and troops with indoctrinating messages." This is not surprising, given Noriega's interest in psychological warfare. For insights into how he viewed this instrument of power, see Manuel Antonio Noriega, *Operaciones Psicologicas* (Panama: Panamanian Defense Force, G-2, 1975).

30. It is unclear when Noriega first became involved with narcotics trafficking. The US may have had evidence as early as 1971. By the early 1980s, it was well known that he directly facilitated the flow of drugs through Panama for the Medellín Cartel. Noriega likewise arranged for the laundering of drug profits in Panamanian banks and provided narco-fugitives sanctuary. He also was heavily involved in the covert transfer of arms to other governments and guerrilla movements. This became front-page news in June 1986 when an article by Seymour Hersh was published entitled "Panama Strongman Said to Trade in Drugs, Arms, and Illicit Money," *New York Times*, 12 June 1986.

31. According to Military Support Group (MSG) documents, 100 percent of all colonels and 83 percent of all lieutenant colonels were excluded from positions in the new Panamanian police force. Many were under arrest. According to the chief of staff of the MSG, this had to do with financial corruption. For example, he noted that in addition to regular pay, "every colonel received [$]10,000 a week in cash." This was only one way that "Noriega was corrupting the

society in a very purposeful, methodical way." Interview with the chief of staff of the Military Support Group, 20 January 1992.

32. Millett, 188–89.

33. The reasons behind this are complicated, but the key one seems to center on Barletta's attempt to conduct an open investigation of the brutal murder of the outspoken critic of Noriega, Dr Hugo Spadafora.

34. For an account, see Kevin Buckley, *Panama: The Whole Story* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1991), chaps. 10 and 11.

## Chapter 3

# Contingency Planning for Restoration

The events resulting in the use of force in Panama have been recounted in numerous publications.[1] They need not be revisited here. Suffice it to note that the following incidents, beginning in the summer of 1987, escalated the domestic political crisis in Panama and sharpened the confrontation between Noriega and the United States.

First came the revelations of Col Roberto Diaz Herrera. Having been forced into retirement, the former PDF chief of staff publicly charged that Noriega was heavily involved in narcotics trafficking and money laundering for the drug cartels; had rigged the 1984 election; had ordered the brutal murder of his outspoken critic, Dr Hugo Spadafora; and had even been behind the death of Torrijos.[2] This energized the recently established Civic Crusade for Justice and Democracy, a broad citizens' coalition of 26 organizations. The coalition called for a campaign of demonstrations and civil disobedience until Noriega resigned. He responded with violence.

This upheaval did not go unnoticed, and the international media gave it substantial attention. The impact on foreign governments, particularly that of the United States, was not negligible. Noriega's image suffered another major blow in February 1988 when two US grand juries indicted him on drug trafficking. These indictments fueled the demonstrations and drew battle lines between the Panamanian dictator and the Reagan administration.

For its part, the administration pressured President Eric Arturo Delvalle to fire Noriega as commander of the PDF. He did so on 25 February—and was subsequently removed from the presidency. The US responded with financial pressure that, by 15 March, resulted in Noriega's failure to pay government employees. A general strike and a bungled coup ensued. Formal sanctions were invoked by the US administration on 8 April, while it secretly offered to drop the drug indictments if Noriega would resign and depart from Panama. He rejected the inducement and further escalated PDF harassment of US military installations, personnel, and their dependents.

This situation gestated for the remainder of 1988. The next major confrontation resulted from the election that Noriega decided to allow on 7 May 1989. For reasons that are not completely clear, he failed to fix the results. The Civil Democratic Opposition Alliance of Guillermo Endara, Ricardo Arias Calderón, and Guillermo ("Billy") Ford was well in front when Noriega intervened and annulled the election. Demonstrations followed and the PDF crushed them, disregarding international media coverage. According to Gen Frederick F. Woerner, Jr., commander of US Southern Command (US-

CINCSO) at the time, "the elections were the last desperate hope. Nobody expected the opposition to win . . . but there was still hope that it might happen. It was a measure of the lack of viable policy options."[3]

## Genesis of Intervention

While General Woerner's statement reflects the crisis atmosphere of the time, US contingency planning for military intervention in Panama began well before this turning point. It commenced in November 1987, when General Woerner directed Maj Gen Bernard Loeffke, the commander of US Army South (USARSO), to begin a discussion of options for intervention in Panama.[4] The process was officially launched by a JCS planning order issued on 28 February 1988.[5]

Over the next 22 months came a series of plans, first code-named Operation Elaborate Maze and then renamed Operation Prayer Book. While each came to include a range of options, the plans subsumed under Prayer Book were divided into two separate and largely uncoordinated categories. One focused on the use of military force, the other on postconflict restoration. The former, termed Operation Blue Spoon and later Just Cause, was first planned by Southern Command's (SOUTHCOM) Directorate of Operations (SCJ-3) and later revised and implemented by the Joint Task Force-Panama (JTF-PM), with the XVIII Airborne Corps as the standing task force headquarters for contingency operations. The latter, which had three successive code names (operations Krystal Ball, Blind Logic, and Promote Liberty), was under the auspices of SOUTHCOM's Directorate of Policy, Plans, and Strategy (SCJ-5). As we shall see, this bifurcation of the planning process had serious, if unintended, consequences during implementation.

Krystal Ball was completed in August 1988, but Panama went to the back burner due to the US presidential campaign. In January and again in May 1989, Krystal Ball, under the new code name of Blind Logic, was taken through major reviews.[6] As was observed earlier, the events surrounding the May elections in Panama had a significant impact on American policymakers. This was reflected in the contingency planning process, which continued to follow the bifurcated approach noted above.

By the end of the summer a new USCINCSO, Gen Maxwell R. Thurman, had been designated. The crisis in Panama continued to escalate, and Thurman focused his attention on Blue Spoon—not on Blind Logic.[7] He notes that "I did not even spend five minutes on Blind Logic during my briefing as the incoming CINC in August." Once in Panama (on 29 September 1989), "the least of my problems at the time was Blind Logic. . . . We put together the campaign plan for Just Cause and probably did not spend enough time on the restoration."[8]

In fact, restoration was generally of secondary importance throughout most of the 22 months leading up to 20 December 1989. The effects of this can be

seen through a number of key problems that plagued restoration planning from start to finish. We will identify and discuss six specific obstacles. Then, the final restoration plan—Blind Logic—will be assessed.

## Planning Challenges and Obstructions

The first obstacle to effective planning was a lack of clarity over what restoration should encompass and could realistically hope to accomplish. The right issues were either not addressed at the SCJ-5 level or, if they were, were not incorporated into the plans. These issues included: What kind of democracy was possible in Panama? How long would it take to establish and secure? What were the major obstacles that had to be overcome? Would an operative civil government exist once the PDF was destroyed? What would replace the PDF? What was the state of the economic and social infrastructure? These and related questions apparently were not adequately addressed in Krystal Ball or Blind Logic.

In fact, they were not raised in a systematic manner until May 1990, when the Military Support Group completed its "Panama Strategy." That study began by assessing the difficulties the US faced in supporting democratization and nation-building in Panama following Just Cause. Nowhere in the document is there the assumption of a legacy of democracy. The problem was not identified as one of restoration. Rather, it noted that "there is no history of democracy in Panama, nor is there a point in Panamanian history when the functions of government were sustained on the basis of Panamanian revenues."[9] Furthermore, it cautioned that three contextual factors could cripple the process of democratization and nation-building: (1) limits on the extent to which Panama can be democratic and self-sufficient; (2) doubts about the degree of legitimacy the Endara government could achieve; (3) the chances of creating a police force out of elements of the PDF. With this as prologue, a strategy was proposed for US support of the transition to democracy.

There is little evidence to suggest that those planning for restoration either realistically understood or adequately addressed these historical and contextual issues. But how was that possible? One explanation was proposed by the former chief of the Policy and Strategy Division of SOUTHCOM's J-5: "The planning that began in 1988 was strictly contingency planning, it was operations planning, what the Army and Joint Staff call OPLANS. It was not done at the campaign level, it was not done at the strategy level."[10]

That comment is an important insight into what went wrong with contingency planning for restoration. Civil-military operations (CMO), the focus of SCJ-5 planners, were seen as a short-term proposition and not as part of a broader political-military strategy. It was assumed that, following a brief period (30 days), responsibility for supporting restoration would be trans-

ferred to the embassy. Moreover, planners also anticipated that there would be a functioning civilian government in place.

A broader approach would have evinced an understanding of the Panamanian context and of the political, cultural, economic, and social ramifications of Just Cause. Further, it would have established those post-intervention activities that SOUTHCOM could conduct as a part of an integrated political-military policy to support democratization and nation-building in Panama. In retrospect, General Thurman notes that "Blind Logic was not suitable for the reconstruction of Panama because it did not accurately assess the dimensions of the task. . . . [I]t was a plan based on the hope that life would quickly return to normal, people would go back to work, and schools would reopen. Unfortunately, this was a faulty premise." In fact, the opposite transpired. According to Thurman, "we ended up having to rebuild an entire government."[11]

If a broader political-military effort was required, should it have been the sole responsibility of the SCJ-5 to formulate the plan for it? The fact that it was seen so is a second obstacle that prevented the development of an effective postconflict design. The process was highly compartmented, and it excluded interagency drafting and coordination. The plan was restricted to the Department of Defense; in fact, several of the reserve civil affairs personnel who were brought into the planning cell to develop Krystal Ball and Blind Logic were not cleared to work at such a high level of secrecy. While this problem was being addressed, restoration planning remained the responsibility of the military.

The exclusion of civilian agencies was a major mistake. Earlier, we listed the kinds of issues and contextual knowledge required to develop an integrated political-military program of assistance. Such a program would necessarily involve the Department of State (DOS), the Agency for International Development, the Department of Justice (DOJ), and other civilian agencies. Assisting in democratization and nation-building is not the exclusive responsibility of the Department of Defense (DOD). In fact, DOD was treading heavily in civilian territory—where it had little expertise—to undertake what was essentially an interagency planning and implementation task.

Why was the process compartmented? The stock answer was the need to maintain security. According to General Woerner, "Everybody was concerned with the security dimension of this particular plan, because (a) it involved the invasion of friendly country; and (b) the very existence of the plan may have become a self-fulfilling prophesy. . . . Thus, the planning was quite limited by necessity and dealt only with those issues that the military could address unilaterally, without the coordination of the government departments."[12] A member of the joint staff at the time, who reviewed the plans and was knowledgeable about the process, stated it somewhat differently. According to him, the explanation from SOUTHCOM and the joint staff was "we do not share information with other US government entities because we cannot trust them to maintain operational security."[13]

While security is obviously a legitimate issue, the fact remains that excessive compartmentation prevented the kind of interagency planning that might have resulted in a postconflict design that addressed the critical political-military issues raised earlier. While interagency planning does not guarantee success, confining planning to DOD, as is born out by this study, is not a desirable alternative. As General Thurman observed, "It is a deficiency of a very tightly held plan that it does not get discussed in the governmental apparatus. This is where the post-conflict problem for Panama originated."[14]

A third obstacle was the aforementioned bifurcation of the planning process into war fighting and postconflict restoration. This bifurcation ensured that the former would receive much closer attention than the latter and that integration would suffer. The above comments of General Thurman underscore this truth. General Woerner, in part, concurred when he stated that integration "was the key. We recognized it at SOUTHCOM but we did not emphasize it enough."[15]

The fact is that, above the SCJ-5 level, bifurcation turned postconflict restoration planning into an afterthought. According to a former member of the J-5, there was some attempt at coordination under Woerner. However, with the change of command, "the XVIII Corps planners generally treated the SOUTHCOM staff [J-5] as irrelevant. Under the circumstances, there was little reason to be surprised about the extensive disconnects between SOUTHCOM and the Corps with respect to Blind Logic."[16]

What accounts for this development? In large part, it has to do with how the military perceives its raison d'être. The military defines itself, almost exclusively, as either deterring wars or fighting and winning them. Civil-military operations and those elements of the force structure that engage in them are not judged as being very important—and this has been an enduring aspect of US military culture. One case in point is Army opposition to counterinsurgency missions in Vietnam and elsewhere during the 1960s;[17] a second is the Army's aversion to the creation of the Special Operations Command (SOCOM) and Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low-Intensity Conflict in the 1980s.[18] General Thurman alluded to the military attitude when he described how the XVIII Corps, under his guidance as CINCSOUTHCOM, approached contingency planning for Just Cause:

> The warfighting elements are mainly interested in conflict termination as opposed to post–conflict restoration, which is admittedly a problem for us in the military establishment. If I had been the XVIII Corps commander, I might have very well said Blind Logic is going to be residual. . . . My task is to conduct the strike force operation and get out. I think the proclivity was to leave the fighting to the warfighter and the restoration to the people who were in country. SOUTHCOM should have been more attentive to the transition from one phase to the other, but I readily admit it was the last priority on my agenda at the time.[19]

Gen Carl W. Stiner also described the situation that way, observing that there was a great war-fighting plan but insufficient attention to postconflict strategy.[20]

One specialist in CMO, who served on the joint staff during the Panama crisis, put it more directly: "It was widely known that key elements of the Army hierarchy did not have a high opinion of its civil affairs component." He points out that members of the Army staff regularly "denigrated the Army's civil affairs (CA) capability" and questioned whether it could "perform well enough."[21] A lack of interest in CA, largely accounted for by the lack of initiative from the Army, appeared at the joint staff level during Just Cause. On three different occasions when it was recommended to senior leadership that we form a joint civil affairs committee, the response was "no" every time. "Allegedly, we had too many other, more important, things to do. The implication was the civil affairs just were not important."[22] As we shall see later, this was precisely at the time when several critical CMO problems were unfolding in Panama.

The fact that restoration was accorded a lower status can likewise be seen in the way personnel were selected to develop the plan and in the conditions under which they functioned. This was the fourth obstacle that inhibited effective planning. We proposed earlier that Panamanian history, political culture, and legacy of praetorian rule implied that the postconflict environment would be complicated and challenging. Therefore, an important prerequisite for effective planning was having personnel who grasped the setting.

The SCJ-5 had no such competence. According to General Woerner, "While we were engaged in planning for an invasion of Panama, we still had other continuing responsibilities throughout the hemisphere. Thus, we were not only lacking expertise but also manpower."[23] The civil affairs branch of the SCJ-5 had only four full-time Army Reserve officers,[24] and they were not specialists on Panama. Further, as Woerner noted, they had CA responsibilities throughout the region.

In light of this shortfall, the J-5 turned mainly to SOUTHCOM's Capstone reserve unit, the 361st CA Brigade. In terms of civil affairs experience in Panama, it seemed to be the appropriate choice. Since 1983, the 361st, a 137-man unit, had "manned a two-man cell fifty-two weeks out of the year rotating people in and overlapping on the weekend." They had been apportioned to SOUTHCOM to train for CA support in the region, and they conducted civic action exercises and seminars in theater.[25] Still, two questions remained: Was the mission beyond the competence of the 361st? Was the unit utilized in the most effective way?

The answer to the latter is "no." Personnel from five different CA units were invited to Panama in small teams and on a volunteer basis for tours of 31 days. The result was an incremental and disjointed approach to planning that was bereft of continuity. Here, compartmentation again reared its head; each member of the planning team was sworn to secrecy and thus unable to use the full expertise of the units they were representing. Also, each of the team leaders, generally a colonel, sought to put his own "spin" on Krystal Ball or Blind Logic. In other words, there were "too many cooks" in the planning process. This also raises questions about how seriously DOD and SOUTHCOM leaders took restoration.

Even if these obstacles had been overcome, did the CA reservists have the ability to design and implement a blueprint for democratization and nation-building? It does not appear so. Recall that this ability entailed a knowledge of the history, politics, and cultural context of Panama, as well as an understanding of the dynamics of democratization and nation-building. This combination was beyond the capabilities of small groups of reservists or, for that matter, any other part of the military. While CA units had skills to contribute, much of the required expertise had to come from elsewhere in both military and civilian parts of government. Whether it can be found today in the US government is a question we will return to later.

The lack of adequate contextual knowledge is reflected in the misunderstanding that planners displayed on such critical issues as the institutional and societal impact of 20 years of praetorian rule in Panama. This lack of contextual knowledge was a fifth obstacle to effective planning because praetorianism had seriously weakened the Panamanian political, social, and economic structure. Its removal would cause short- and long-term problems that should have been anticipated but were not, as generals Woerner and Thurman acknowledge.

In the case of Woerner, it appears that he understood the problem:

> In my mind it was imperative to destroy the PDF completely and to reestablish . . . a credible professional internal security force. This security, not defense, establishment had to be clearly subordinated to civilian rule. I felt the recruiting and training to build such an internal security force would take at least six months. I did not work this out, but it probably could have lasted up to a year. . . . I considered the PDF, and have not changed my opinion, the most corrupt military institution in the hemisphere. I saw no chance of reeducation. . . . The PDF had the skills and was extraordinarily effective in its public security missions, in its small unit operations and in its institutionalized corruption.[26]

Furthermore, Woerner assigned to the commander of US MILGROUP the task of designing the future security force. The goal was "to have a completed concept on the shelf detailing what the new security force would look like." Woerner "wanted this done before we invade. . . . I felt deeply about this dimension, but I did not pressure the MILGROUP commander enough."[27] Consequently, no such concept was available on 20 December 1989. When asked whether the 361st had the same understanding, General Woerner answered "No, I don't think so."[28]

According to General Thurman, the planning process under his command focused on destroying the PDF, "not on putting up a new government. I think one of the lessons is that we have not been good at implementing the post-conflict termination phase." He identifies this lack of attention as an institutional shortcoming. "We do not teach it in our school system, or include it in our doctrinal work."[29] Thus, for example, the extent to which PDF corruption permeated civilian organizations, governmental and nongovernmental, was not recognized: "The depth to which that penetration had occurred was not

well understood by us and it complicated the restoration of the government and hampered the formation of a cogent interagency postconflict resolution approach."[30]

Finally, the issue of what would replace the PDF was never resolved. Two questions were not answered: To what extent could members of the PDF be incorporated into the new security force? And would the replacement take the form of a military institution or a police institution? If the decision was to follow the Costa Rica model, who in the US government had the legal authority to advise and train a police force?

A sixth obstacle was encountered in determining who would execute restoration and under what command authority. Through most of the 22 months of planning, the assumption was that the SCJ-5 would serve as commander, civil-military operations task force (COMCMOTF). Even when the Joint Task Force-Panama was established, with the XVIII Airborne Corps as the standing task force headquarters for contingency operations, the SCJ-5 was retained as COMCMOTF in Blind Logic. It has been reported that, in May 1989, General Woerner decided to keep this in the plan because "the very sensitivity of the relationships and their political-military nature demanded that the COMCMOTF be a general officer on his staff and that the J-5 was most appropriate."[31]

This is an unusual command arrangement. Generally, planners are not given responsibility for execution. The J-5 is supposed to draw up the plans and issue the necessary instructions to the implementing agency. According to General Thurman, "The J-5 is a staff agency, headed by a staff officer. It simply does not have the communication or transportation services, nor does it have the necessary organizational fabric. Thus, it is a bad plan when the J-5 ends up commanding anything."[32] Be that as it may, both Krystal Ball and Blind Logic assumed that the J-5 would be COMCMOTF for execution. This assumption appears to be attributable to the low priority of postconflict planning. As we shall see, Thurman's counsel on this proved correct—the CMO plan broke down.

If the command structure was muddled, so was the question of which forces to use for restoration. A reserve unit call-up was proposed.

> The assumption that units would be used was predicated on the further assumption that in the event of execution the Presidential authority to call up individual members and units of the Selected Reserve involuntarily for up to 90 days would be exercised. Assuming that a Reserve call-up would be exercised made the planning for CMO significantly easier since units which trained in Panama would lead the effort.[33]

However, realizing that a call-up might not occur, the SCJ-5 planning cell also devised an alternative based on preselected volunteers who would come to Panama on a temporary tour of active duty. This was the way members of the planning cell had been deployed. Whether via a call-up or volunteers, the forces would come mainly from the 361st, with backup from other reserve units and the 96th Civil Affairs Battalion.

As we shall see, the reserve call-up never took place and the volunteer alternative ran into deployment and command problems. Planners hoped for the call-up but did not provide an effective alternative. Because of the uncertainty over what forces would be available for execution, as well as the low priority of postconflict planning, there was no attempt to rehearse Blind Logic—not even on a simulation basis. This was at the same time that General Thurman had ordered the XVIII Airborne Corps to frequently rehearse Blue Spoon.

## Blind Logic: A Reappraisal

An examination of the final version of Blind Logic reveals that several of the planning challenges and obstacles identified above were not overcome. For example, because planners lacked contextual knowledge, they misunderstood critical issues and failed to anticipate the kinds of disruptions that occurred following the defeat of the PDF.

The estimate of the situation that would likely follow military intervention was framed in such a broad way that it appeared to cover all possible contingencies:

> The execution of this operation will be conducted under one of three possible levels of social, economic, and governmental disruption. Although the three levels of disruption: serious, moderate, and minimal, are presented separately for clarity, they could occur simultaneously in different geographical areas, population centers, and by specific service or agency within the Republic of Panama.[34]

Unfortunately, the estimate failed to include the contingency that would actually cause the greatest disruption.

What were the characteristics of these potential forms of disruption? They ranged from the "non-functioning of essential social, economic and governmental services [caused by] violent military confrontation and operations . . . [and] substantial and widespread acts of sabotage and subversion" to "having basic social, economic and governmental services available, but at a decreased, limited level."[35] And who would be responsible for the disruptions? The following sources were identified: pro-Noriega/anti-US members of the PDF; paramilitary groupings composed mainly of the leftist faction of the Democratic Revolutionary Party (PRD); criminal elements (e.g., the narcotics cartels); and international terrorist organizations.

The problem with this kind of estimate is that it is too general to be useful. By predicting all possible scenarios, one places a difficult burden on contingency planners, since they have to design responses for each. However, the larger problem in this case is that it did not estimate the en masse collapse of the civilian agencies of government or the disruption that would result from looting. This postconflict situation was not estimated in Blind Logic. The situation, as we shall see, required a response the US was unprepared to perform.

Indeed, the civil-military operations planned for were short-term in scope and based on incorrect assumptions about the resiliency of the Government of Panama (GOP). According to the CMO mission statement in Blind Logic, "When directed by the NCA [National Command Authority], through CJCS, USCINCSO conducts civil-military operations in the Republic of Panama to protect U.S. lives and property, secure U.S. interests, restore law and order, and stabilize the situation until a government duly recognized by the U.S. government is installed."[36] As one reads further, it becomes evident that the planners assumed this process would occur in relatively short order and that democratic government would ensue.

> COMCMOTF establishes a Civil-Military administration (CMA) at the national level to the extent required to ensure basic services to the Panamanian people. Contacts are made with designated Panamanian leaders to ensure law and order is restored and maintained and that a democratic GOP is established.[37]

Furthermore, planners not only assumed that a democratic GOP would be up and running quickly, but that "long range efforts . . . to ensure a stable, democratic Panama" could be transferred to the US country team.[38] As was noted in the previous section, the restoration and creation of democratic government in Panama was not going to be an easy or a short-term process. Likewise, to expect the embassy to quickly pick up responsibility for supporting it, given that it was kept out of the planning process, was unrealistic at best.

With respect to what would replace the PDF, the options were left open. The COMCMOTF could "conduct reconstruction and training of military/police forces of the Republic of Panama."[39] According to the commander's intent, as stated in Blind Logic: "My intention is to be prepared to change, on order, the PDF as a military institution. For this to occur it must be reformed and retrained so as to remove its political role and permeation of the institutions of the Republic of Panama."[40] This could be undertaken as long as the replacement for the PDF took the form of a military institution. If it was to be transformed into a police force, then the following question had to be addressed. Did the US military have either the expertise or the legal authority to advise and train police? This issue was not addressed in Blind Logic.

Finally, in terms of command relationships, the SCJ-5 was still designated as COMCMOTF. His deputy was to be the commander of the 361st CA Brigade. Personnel for the CMOTF were to be drawn mainly from the functional teams of the 361st. No mention was made of the reserve call-up or alternatives to it.

**Notes**

1. Perhaps the most detailed account of both contingency planning and the operation itself is Thomas Donnelly, Margaret Roth, and Caleb Baker, *Operation Just Cause: The Storming of Panama* (New York: Maxwell Macmillan International, 1991). For broader treatments that focus on the political crisis, see Kevin Buckley, *Panama: The Whole Story* (New York: Simon

and Schuster, 1991); John Dinges, *Our Man in Panama: How General Noriega Used the United States and Made Millions in Drugs and Arms* (New York: Random House, 1990); and R. M. Koster and Guillermo Sanchez, *In the Time of Tyrants: Panama 1968–1990* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1990).

2. For an account of the murder of Dr Hugo Spadafora and the charges of Col Roberto Diaz Herrera, see Buckley.

3. Gen Frederick F. Woerner, Jr., Boston University, interview with author, 15 June 1992.

4. Donnelly, Roth, and Baker, 17.

5. John T. Fishel, *The Fog of Peace: Planning and Executing Restoration of Panama* (Carlisle Barracks, Pa.: Army War College, Strategic Studies Institute, 15 April 1992), 7. Colonel Fishel was deputy chief of the Public Force Liaison Division of the Military Support Group. His study provides an interesting and thoughtful insider's perspective. He was interviewed by the author as part of the field research for this study.

6. Ibid., 17–19.

7. While not of concern in this study, Thurman's decision to radically change Blue Spoon from an intervention based on a deliberate buildup of forces in Panama to a rapidly implemented surprise strike from outside, employing overwhelming combat power, is an interesting one from which important lessons can be drawn. See Donnelly, Roth, and Baker.

8. Gen Maxwell R. Thurman, Arlington, Va., interview with author, 29 May 1992.

9. Military Support Group, "Panama Strategy" (Working paper, Headquarters Southern Command, Republic of Panama, May 1990), 3.

10. Lt Col John T. Fishel, National Defense University, Fort Lesley J. McNair, Washington, D.C., interview with author, 12 May 1992.

11. Thurman interview.

12. Woerner interview.

13. Lt Col Dennis Barlow, The Pentagon, Office of Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low-Intensity Conflict, interview with author, 18 June 1992.

14. Thurman interview.

15. Woerner interview.

16. Fishel, 21.

17. There is a rich literature on how the US Army first rejected counterinsurgency doctrine during the Vietnam War, and in the aftermath of the war supported the downsizing of special operations forces for low-intensity conflict (LIC). See Andrew F. Krepinevich, Jr., *The Army and Vietnam* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988); Richard Hunt and Richard Shultz, *Lessons from an Unconventional War* (New York: Pergamon, 1981); and Douglas Kinnard, *The War Managers* (Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 1977). With respect to Army planning in the 1980s, see Richard H. Shultz and Robert L. Pfaltzgraff, eds., *The United States Army: Challenges and Missions for the 1990s* (Lexington, Mass.: Lexington Books, 1992).

18. See Richard Shultz, "Low Intensity Conflict: Future Challenges and Lessons from the Reagan Years," *Survival*, July/August 1989, 359–76.

19. Thurman interview.

20. Gen Carl W. Stiner, Tufts University, Bedford, Mass., interview with author, 5 February 1992.

21. Barlow interview.

22. Ibid.

23. Woerner interview.

24. Fishel, 8.

25. Fishel interview.

26. Woerner interview.

27. Ibid.

28. Ibid.

29. Thurman interview.

30. Ibid.

31. Fishel, 18.

32. Thurman interview.

33. Fishel, 14.
34. USCINCSO OpOrd (Operations Order) 6-88, to execute Blind Logic, 2. (Declassified)
35. Ibid., 1–2.
36. Ibid., 4.
37. Ibid.
38. Ibid., 5.
39. Ibid.
40. Ibid., 6–7.

## Chapter 4

# Just Cause and the Breakdown of Blind Logic

On 20 December 1989, Operation Just Cause was executed. Overall, the war-fighting plan went extremely well and the PDF was quickly neutralized as a military force. For such a complex operation, described by JCS Operations Director Lt Gen Thomas Kelly as having "a lot of moving parts," there were few significant complications.[1] The same cannot be said for Blind Logic.

In addition to the conceptual problems in Blind Logic, the following developments contributed to an ad hoc and inadequate restoration policy on the part of the United States. As a result of these limitations, the Military Support Group was conceived.

In the days immediately preceding 20 December, the command responsibility was disrupted. On 12 December, General Thurman assigned the Blind Logic mission to USARSO. His rationale for doing so was straightforward: "The J-5 is supposed to draw up plans and issue instructions to the implementing agency. In this case USARSO was to implement the plans because it is the residual American force on the spot."[2]

While this made sense, the chief of staff of USARSO had reservations about Blind Logic. Apparently, he advocated a coordinated interagency response and believed the military could not do it alone.[3] Discussions ensued between the SCJ-5 staff and the USARSO staff over how to work out a transfer. When the final version of Blind Logic went to the JCS for approval on 20 December, the SCJ-5 no longer had the mission. On the same day, General Thurman ordered the J-5 to execute Blind Logic. The reasoning was that the J-5 was all that was available to him and that several serious, largely unanticipated, civil-military problems had emerged. Thurman provides the following explanation:

> How did the J-5 get wrapped up in all of this? . . . On December 20, 1989, the day Just Cause took place . . . we needed to assist the big three [Endara, Arias Calderón, and Ford] in setting up the government. We really did not do our homework very well. One of the difficulties resulted from the looting. . . . There was chaos in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in the Ministry of Education, and other Panamanian government agencies. In the late afternoon of December 20, I ordered the J-5, BG Ben Gann, and his staff to go to Bushnell, the Deputy Chief of Mission (DCM). I made the decision because the embassy staff had been reduced to forty three people. . . . I was fighting the war and gave SOUTHCOM's J-5 intact to Bushnell in order to give him the manpower to work with various ministries. . . . I also made the reservists, who reported to us after Christmas, available to the embassy in order to expedite the process of setting up the government. That is how

> the J-5 evolved from a planning agency to an operations agency. . . . It is a bad plan when the J-5 ends up commanding anything. . . . If you ask me why I did not catch all of this. . . . I can only say that my primary focus was Just Cause.[4]

Thurman's explanation singles out part of the problem. While he is right in arguing that a planning agency should not have an operational mission, this problem went unnoticed in Blind Logic until the last minute. Restoration was an afterthought that only became important when several unanticipated but serious civil-military problems emerged. And by then it was late in the day. Recall that JCS did not sign off on Blind Logic until the day the US intervened, which partially explains why CMO went poorly.

It also points to other reasons for the breakdown. Not only did senior commanders in SOUTHCOM and JCS not consider Blind Logic important, but three destabilizing developments that followed the dismantling of the PDF were not foreseen. Each considerably weakened restoration efforts.

The first development was massive looting, which, as noted earlier, was not anticipated and which had serious economic consequences. According to one account, "these looters did more damage to the economy than all the economic sanctions. They emptied department stores, supermarkets, pharmacies, boutiques, fast-food shops, and whatever could be entered easily. The looting, which U.S. troops watched, cost $1 billion, according to the Panama City Chamber of Commerce."[5] When other metropolitan centers are included, the amount "of losses ranged from $1 billion to $2 billion."[6] These losses could have been avoided.

The second development was that the new Panamanian government was a "hollow force." Although the US installed the "big three," they inherited a civilian government that was corrupt and dysfunctional. A plan stipulated that a democratic GOP would be up and running quickly; just the opposite was the case, as the CMOTF found out when it was assigned to the GOP ministries. In the first place, many members of civilian government agencies were themselves busy looting.

> During the course of the looting, people not only looted storefronts, they also looted government offices. This was a surprising turn. We expected that most of the people in the civil service would report to their offices and take charge of all government property, provided they had been anti-Noriega. Unfortunately, many of the people in the various cabinet offices were Noriega cronies. Subsequently, those offices were looted in retribution, just like the stores.[7]

The depth of civil government corruption "was not well understood by us," in Thurman's retrospective view, and "it complicated the restoration of the government and hampered the formation of a cogent post-conflict resolution approach."[8] Could it have been otherwise? It was no secret that corruption had reached a new height under Noriega. He orchestrated a pattern of clientelism that extended deep into the civilian government agencies, the banks, and the business community. This corruption was going to complicate restoration, and it should have been understood and addressed. Instead, General Gann and his CMOTF "behaved as if they expected the new government to be functional, or nearly so, with cabinet ministers reporting in on a daily basis."[9]

The third development was that the new Panamanian government inherited a treasury that was nearly empty and a decaying societal infrastructure that had suffered from years of neglect. When the Deputy Chief of Mission (DCM), John Bushnell, began to work with the various Panamanian ministries, he found that "they had exhausted inventories." He attributes this, in large part, to the corruption of the Noriega government.[10] Again, the depth of this problem should not have been a surprise. During Noriega's rule, Panama's economic debt reached $6.2 billion, one of the highest (per capita) in the world. Unemployment was above 35 percent.[11] Further, the societal infrastructure of roads, schools, hospitals and clinics, social services, and so on was in a serious state of neglect and disrepair.

To solve these and other difficulties, Operation Blind Logic required the early activation of five civil affairs reserve units (approximately 600 personnel). Army doctrine, as well as the plans themselves, called for the senior theater apportioned reserve unit, the 361st CA Brigade, to command the other CA units; a hierarchy and control arrangement would have obviated much of the ad hoc organization which was to dog the CMOTF throughout the operation. The Joint Staff Current Operations Division was well aware of the requirement for these reserve units and, throughout the autumn of 1989, considered their activation a key provision of Blind Logic.

General Thurman officially requested these units as his preferred option, but also included a "last-resort option" of CA volunteers. It was this option that the joint staff accepted on the morning of the invasion; any thought of requesting a presidential call-up was quickly dismissed. Instead, the Army was directed to provide up to 200 CA volunteer reservists. Within hours, the Army had created a selection, processing, and deployment system at Fort Bragg, North Carolina. This group of volunteers became known as the Civil-Military Operations Task Force.

Beyond these stated difficulties, the CMOTF proved to be unprepared to reshape the security forces, lacked a coherent organizational structure, and found itself short of personnel as the crisis unfolded. Each of these developments contributed to the breakdown of the postconflict policy of the United States.

When the new Panamanian government decided to establish a police force out of the remnants of the PDF, the CMOTF was not staffed to address this mission. Maj Gen Marc Cisneros, the head of USARSO, had to set up an ad hoc organization—the US Force Liaison Group (USFLG)—to advise, train, and equip the police. The USFLG could do this within the context of Just Cause to help the Panamanian police respond to the collapse of law and order. Once this was over, however, US law would prohibit the military from training foreign police.

The Civil-Military Operations Task Force that was created out of the body of reservists was formed under the auspices of the J-5 but was given very little guidance. Since the group was not defined as a military unit, inordinate administrative problems beset its members. Receiving mail, procuring logistical support, and recommending awards became major challenges. The Army

also decided against sending a reserve general officer to take command of the CMOTF, thus compounding the "Who's in charge?" syndrome. The result was that while nominally the 361st commander was in charge of the CMOTF, he and five other US Army Reserve (USAR) colonels divvied up the pie. At one point, the junior members of the CMOTF referred to the various command structures within the organization as "Dueling Headquarters." CMOTF morale was low and the organization was dysfunctional. However, the individuals selected for duty proved to be top-rate. Highly skilled professionals of the CMOTF were assigned to support counterparts in 12 of the 16 government ministries. As advisors to the government of Panama, these reservists helped restore basic sanitation and health services, reestablished correctional facilities, reestablished customs and immigration procedures; jump-started the economy with funds confiscated from casinos, conducted site surveys for all schools in Panama City, produced a national agriculture plan, supervised the reopening of a sugarcane plant, conducted health clinics in Colón and David, planned the reconstruction of water and sewer systems, and produced scores of assessments for follow-on projects. In spite of the heroic efforts of CMOTF teams, however, it became evident that the mission required even more capabilities and a firmer sense of direction.

The CMOTF has been described as a hodgepodge organization that lacked unity. The head of the Military Support Group, which was established to bring organizational coherence to the restoration efforts, found when he arrived in Panama that the CMOTF structure "had not been thought through all the way."[12] This was apparent to General Cisneros, who not only established the USFLG but provided other USARSO resources to help the CMOTF in its efforts to revive the Panamanian government. While the CMOTF was doing some good things, like providing assistance to the GOP ministries, it needed a more formal and expanded structure. The MSG was shaped to address these deficiencies.

The CMOTF seems to have been doomed from the initial decision of the JCS to reject the reserve call-up and opt for the use of reserve volunteers. Why did this happen? One reason given by General Thurman is that the reserve call-up process has "deficiencies rooted in the laws for getting reservists on active duty," which make it very difficult to employ reserves in a flexible manner.[13]

At least one other reason for why there was no reserve call-up has been advanced. According to one member of the joint staff, both the chief of staff of the Army and the director of operations for the JCS opposed the call-up. In the case of the latter, the reason given was the aforementioned bias that civil affairs was not capable or important.[14]

Whatever the reason, the reserve issue was sidestepped until the problems appeared. Then, General Thurman's "last-resort" request for reserve volunteers was approved. While there was no shortage of reservists who came forward, their transportation to Panama did not go smoothly. According to one officer involved in this process, "even though the reserve headquarters had validated their mission, no effort was made to deploy them immediately.

We had to find room for small groups on MAC flights which meant that they trickled into Panama one by one."[15] This deployment procedure only added to the problems facing the CMOTF.

## Notes

1. Thomas Donnelly, Margaret Roth, and Caleb Baker, *Operation Just Cause: The Storming of Panama* (New York: Maxwell Macmillan International, 1991), 79.
2. Gen Maxwell R. Thurman, Arlington, Va., interview with author, 29 May 1992.
3. John T. Fishel, *The Fog of Peace: Planning and Executing Restoration of Panama* (Carlisle Barracks, Pa.: Army War College, Strategic Studies Institute, 15 April 1992), 7, 28. Colonel Fishel was deputy chief of the Public Force Liaison Division of the Military Support Group. His study provides an interesting and thoughtful insider's perspective. He was interviewed by the author as part of the field research for this study.
4. Thurman interview.
5. For an account, see Kevin Buckley, *Panama: The Whole Story* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1991), chaps. 10 and 11.
6. Eusebio Mujal-Leon and Christopher Bruneau, "Foreign Assistance and Reconstruction Efforts," in *Conflict Resolution and Democratization in Panama*, ed. Eva Loser (Washington, D.C.: The Center for Strategic and International Studies, 1992), 61.
7. Thurman interview.
8. Ibid.
9. Fishel, 33.
10. John Bushnell, New York, interview with author, 22 June 1992.
11. Irving Louis Horowitz, "Panama: National Shadow without Political Substance," in *Conflict Resolution and Democratization in Panama*, 76.
12. Col James Steele, Dominican Republic, telephone interview with author, 29 June 1992.
13. Thurman interview.
14. For further discussion on this issue, see Grant Willis, "Panama: Did Politics Railroad Reserve Call-up?" *Army Times*, 11 June 1990, 3, 20–21.
15. Lt Col Dennis Barlow, The Pentagon, Office of Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low-Intensity Conflict, interview with author, 18 June 1992.

# Chapter 5

# The Military Support Group

Designed to overcome this plethora of conceptual and execution obstacles, the Military Support Group (MSG) was activated on 17 January 1990. It was an ad hoc creation, conceived out of crisis to "conduct nation building operations to ensure that democracy, internationally recognized standards of justice, and professional public services are established and institutionalized in Panama."[1] We will examine the MSG's origins, personnel, organizational structure, and strategy and evaluate its performance.

## Origins of the Military Support Group

Interestingly, the idea for a new organization to assist in restoration did not come from US Southern Command (USSOUTHCOM), JTF-PM, or the CMOTF. The initiative was that of the US Special Operations Command (USSOCOM). Its PSYOPS and CA Directorate (J-9) had been tasked by Gen James Lindsay, the commander in chief (CINC) USSOCOM, to be prepared to support the regional unified commands, including USSOUTHCOM. As the Panama operation unfolded, Lindsay and members of the J-9 concluded that the restoration plan being executed "was not built around what was needed to be done in order to transition from war to peace . . . [T]he transition was not planned as well as it should have been."[2]

Lindsay contacted General Thurman five days into Just Cause, requesting permission to conduct an in-country assessment of CMO activities and propose possible organizational alternatives. This made sense, given the congressional mandate of the then recently created USSOCOM. According to a member of his staff, Lindsay felt that "if there was no adequate preparation or plan for transition it may come back on him."[3] Thurman agreed to the request, and on 25 December, Lindsay sent one of his senior CA specialists, Col Harold Youmans, to Panama.

Based on discussions with members of the SCJ-5, USARSO, CMOTF, 4th Psychological Operations (PSYOPS) Group, 96th Civil Affairs Battalion, and SOCSO, Youmans produced the memorandum for commander in chief, US Southern Command (CINCSOUTH) that provided the foundation for the Military Support Group.[4] It was based on the assumption that "rebuilding Panama will be a difficult task." In fact, the memorandum stated that if the MSG was given the full range of potential nation-building tasks, it "will be

hard pressed to meet [these] many demands."[5] Moreover, it contained no illusions about the ability of the Panamanian government to be up and running in a short period of time.

The memorandum called for a flexible organizational structure that could expand or contract, depending on the degree of involvement of the Department of State (DOS) and other US civilian agencies, and on the time it would take for the GOP infrastructure to emerge and take over these activities. Given the state of the embassy and the fact that the DOS had been cut out of the planing process, it became apparent that the USMSG could end up with responsibility for "the establishment of stable democratic and economic institutions in Panama. The mission of the USMSG is to facilitate the USG's [US government] ability to assist the growth of these institutions."[6]

The memorandum placed the hodgepodge of organizations involved in various aspects of restoration under one organization. These organizations included CA and PSYOPS elements from the JTF-PM-, the CMOTF-, SOCSO-, and USARSO-directed combat/combat service support units (including medical, transportation, military police, and engineer elements). These would be subsumed under the MSG, which consisted of the following subunits: special operations, civil affairs, psychological operations, and combat/combat service support.

The report went to SOUTHCOM's J-3, Brig Gen William Hartzog, who had taken part in the review and agreed with the concept. Apparently, he decided on the name Military Support Group.[7] The memorandum served as the basis for the MSG. One interesting question is, why did the MSG emerge as an ad hoc creation conceived out of crisis? Why not include SOCOM in the planning of Blind Logic? After all, SOCOM is a supporting command that was established, in part, for these kinds of situations. It could provide not only the forces but planning expertise. When asked why SOCOM was not included, General Thurman responded:

> That would be nice, but it is not the way the U.S. military does business. The CINC is responsible for the planning of the operation in his AOR [area of responsibility]. The CINC can call Lindsay for suggestions, but it is structurally impossible to integrate another command in a planning/advisory role. Theoretically, you could but it is not practiced because the planning staffs of CINCSOUTHCOM should be able to handle the planning and support forces that are only brought in on the operational side.[8]

Unfortunately, as this study demonstrates, General Thurman's planning staffs were not "able to handle the planning," and the end result was the previously discussed ad hoc and inadequate restoration policy.

## Personnel and Structure

Once the concept was accepted, a commander for the MSG had to be selected. The SOCOM memorandum recommended a brigadier general with

CMO and Latin American experience. Thurman selected Col James Steele. He had been selected for promotion to brigadier general, served in El Salvador as the commander of the US MILGROUP, and was a Latin American specialist. Fluent in Spanish, Steele had a reputation for getting things done. His tasking from Thurman was straightforward: "He wanted me to make it [MSG] a reality. At this stage the organization already existed, which, for the most part, I deemed to be good."[9]

Steele selected Col Jack Pryor as his chief of staff. Pryor had been assigned to the president and the two vice presidents of Panama since Just Cause was executed.

> The same day Operation Just Cause took place, General Thurman called me into his office and told me that I was to work for the government of Panama. I was to report to the president and the two vice presidents who were in a safe house at Fort Clayton. General Thurman ordered me to take off my uniform and to put on civilian attire. He told me that I was to be . . . the liaison between the Panamanian government and our embassy. It was my mission to become an insider, a trusted insider.[10]

While Pryor's involvement became controversial, as we will discuss below, he also knew how to get things done, and he quickly developed a close working relationship with the big three. According to Steele:

> When we established the MSG, we assumed responsibility for [the CMOTF's] activities and personnel. The most useful of its people was Pryor. He had worked at the presidential palace before my arrival. In fact, when I found out the role he had played, I asked him to become my deputy. . . . The importance of personal relationships is characteristic of Latin America, and for most third world countries. It transcends the national interest in many cases. The role that Jack Pryor . . . played during Just Cause, particularly in January, proved to be invaluable for the MSG later on.[11]

While Steele was able to recruit some other talented officers to head elements of the MSG, personnel remained a continuing problem. This was due to the fact that he wanted the organization to be a joint activity. And, Steele notes, "that was a mistake, because only the Army had committed itself to the staffing of the MSG. By reducing the Army portion to 50 or 60 percent, the MSG ended up as an understaffed organization."[12]

Furthermore, the MSG had to deal with the constant turnover of reservists on short tours. While it had its share of active duty personnel, the MSG was quite dependent on the reserves. Because there had been no call-up, tours of duty were 31 days for these volunteers. Additionally, as Fishel points out, this "did not permit the composite unit to build any kind of integrity nor establish sufficient continuity of support."[13] Steele concurs and adds, "the MSG's civil affairs people had a real turnover problem. They were very good at some things, but you have to evaluate just how competent such an organization can be."[14]

Structurally, the MSG followed the recommendations in the SOCOM memorandum. It contained a J-1 (Manpower and Personnel Directorate) through J-5 staff of approximately 40 members. According to Colonel Steele, "I had problems with all these staff elements."[15] In fact, each element had to

be developed over time. For example, at first there was no J-1. Once established, the J-1 had to maintain an effective administrative competence and continuity because of the large turnover of personnel due to the MSG's reliance on reserves. However, the J-1 itself was staffed by reservists, which restricted the effectiveness of the personnel section. "This was one of the most difficult areas, because the MSG had a tremendous turnover of people, particularly when we brought in reservists. . . . This required a good administrator . . . and trying to staff this section with civilians [reservists] was difficult."[16]

The J-2 (Intelligence Directorate) also had early problems. The MSG had personnel scattered across Panama, which provided the ability to collect a significant amount of intelligence. However, initially the J-2 was short on personnel and lacked a conceptual framework for collection. Once the CINC became aware of the kind of intelligence that could be provided, the J-2 was expanded and refocused. According to Colonel Pryor, "The J-2 had seven people, plus the analysts, and the Special Forces who worked in their cell. We had C-Teams and A-Teams. We had quite a number of collectors and some analysis capability. We found our analysis was more accurate than others. We knew what Panama looked like."[17] Still, the intelligence collected was not always utilized as effectively as it might have been.

The J-3 (Operations Directorate) was a critical element because it had oversight of the planning and execution of the MSG's day-to-day operations. This included, most importantly, joint patrols with the Panamanian police force. These joint patrols were an important part of the effort to convert the PDF into a civilian police. Eventually, the head of the J-3 was an Army foreign area officer (FAO) who had served in El Salvador as the MILGROUP's operations officer.

The J-4 was in charge of logistics, including all the foreign military sales (FMS) cases. This included such things as procuring equipment for the Panamanian police and moving supplies and equipment where they were needed. According to Steele, this could be complicated, given the legal requirements.

> Initially, we had problems with the J-4, because some of its personnel was [sic] not competent enough. The J-4 was involved in a lot of projects and we needed people who were not only competent but also very attentive to detail, because there were a number of restrictions on these activities. We did not encounter these restrictions at the outset, during Just Cause, but rather when we entered the Promote Liberty phase. At this point the MSG had to observe the stipulations of the Foreign Assistance Act. Thus, we were not able to supply and train the Panamanian police without a legislative mandate. Under emergency legislation, however, we were allowed to use existing military assistance funds, which had been suspended in 1988, to purchase police equipment. It was a challenging effort to buy police cars, radios, uniforms, etc. We worked closely with the controller general and the Panamanian government.[18]

This is but one example of the complicated nature of the MSG's political-military activities.

This complexity also had an impact on the J-5. Staffed by civil-military specialists, it had responsibility for the nation-building programs and coordinating these activities with the Panamanian government. Pryor described the J-5, which was headed by an Army FAO who had been raised in Panama as "the real workhorses of the MSG. . . . They formulated the plans and coordinated the input of all the players supporting nation-building." This effort included the Army Corps of Engineers. Furthermore, the J-5 "went to the sites with the Panamanian ministers and coordinated the national effort with local governments."[19]

Beyond these staff elements, the MSG was composed of the following divisions: public force liaison, civil affairs, military police (MP), PSYOPS, and special forces. Functionally, they were involved in three tasks: establish a Panamanian security force; reconstruct the infrastructure; and provide information programs to marshal support for the GOP and influence the attitudes of the police.

The Public Force Liaison Division (PFLD) was the US Force Liaison Group (USFLG), which had been established because the CMOTF was not prepared to create a security force out of PDF elements. Recall that the USFLG mission was to advise, train, and equip this new security entity. To this end, it deployed teams throughout Panama and also developed a transition training course. The latter consisted of a 20-hour program for police trainers, who would use what they learned as the basis for the rudimentary training of all former members of the PDF accepted into the security force. US Army Reservists, who in civilian life were career police officers, helped develop the course.

While transferring the mission to the MSG was uncomplicated, execution proved to be just the opposite, because US law prohibits the armed services from training foreign police (specified in section 660 of the Foreign Assistance Act). As we shall see, US training of the Panamanian police was placed under the auspices of the administration of the Justice Program. However, whether the MSG could continue to support this effort at the operational level had to be determined. The result was a complicated arrangement whereby a US civilian element—the International Criminal Investigative Training Assistance Program (ICITAP)—was assigned responsibility for training, while the MSG/PFLD would monitor the operational activities of the police through joint patrols. In other words, a policy was adopted that separated training from operations and assigned responsibilities to different agencies, one civilian and the other military. This generated problems, as we will detail later.

The MPs were a part of the teams deployed by the PFLD throughout Panama. Initially, the MP brigade was under the command of JTF-PM during Just Cause. Its primary duties were protecting US facilities and maintaining law and order following Just Cause. When the USFLG was established to assist the GOP in creating a police force, the MPs were deployed to the urban and rural areas of Panama. In addition to conducting joint patrols with the police, according to one member of the USFLG, they "assisted the

PNP [Popular Nationalist Party] in developing a number of policing techniques and procedures including training."[20] Once section 660 of the Foreign Assistance Act was invoked, all training had to end; but patrolling with the police continued throughout MSG's existence.

The number of MPs involved fluctuated, with a high of approximately 300 in the spring of 1990. The number progressively declined as the MSG approached its termination date. In addition to MPs, reservists were assigned to the joint patrols. At any given time, between 30 and 50 were employed, generally on 31-day active duty tours. According to Colonel Pryor, this gave "each of the MSG field teams a built-in police expertise," because in civilian life these reservists were police officers.[21]

The other US element of the joint patrols was drawn from the Special Forces (SF). They were assigned to all the urban and rural precincts of Panama during Just Cause, "with responsibility for almost anything that was done in the name of the new government."[22] In addition to their work with the police, the Special Forces were assigned "an intelligence collection and civil-military mission." The former provided a significant part of the raw data processed and analyzed by the J-2, while the latter "helped the J5 to set up the meetings with local Panamanian government officials to make sure everybody knew what was going on [in terms of rural infrastructure repair]." According to Pryor, "the MSG's Special Forces component did all the civil affairs work that could be expected in our nation-building programs."[23]

In sum, the MSG deployed a combination of MPs, Special Forces, and reservists (civilian policemen or reserve components [RC]) on joint patrols with the Panamanian police throughout the country. According to MSG documents, their mission was "to conduct joint patrols as well as to observe, record, and monitor the Panamanian law enforcement agencies and report both successes and failures."[24] As we will document below, DOD lawyers concluded that this arrangement did not violate section 660. To conduct joint patrols, the MSG established a Metropolitan Area Police Liaison Element (MAPLE) for Panama City and Colón, and a Rural Area Police Liaison Element (RAPLE) to oversee the countryside of Panama. At its height, US personnel for joint patrols reached the 600 level. By the early summer, it was reduced to 145 SF personnel, 200 MPs, and 30 reservists.[25]

The MSG also had a civil affairs division that employed engineers and medical personnel to support infrastructure reconstruction and nation-building projects. Initially, under the CMOTF, civil affairs personnel were assigned to each of the GOP ministries. They assisted ministries to reopen schools and health clinics and to restore the public transportation system. Under the MSG, their mission was expanded to include deploying engineering and medical units into the rural areas of Panama to begin rebuilding an infrastructure that was in a serious state of disrepair. This was classic Army civic action.

> The immediate problem was one of showing that the GOP was working. It had to be demonstrated that something was happening right away. Part of that was starting to build an infrastructure so that the Panamanians could take over as soon

> as possible. We made sure that the Panamanians made an investment in everything we did, even if it was just sweat. We started off repairing health clinics, schools, and existing farm-to-market roads. We were not building anything new. What we did was maintainence of existing infrastructure. . . . We coordinated everything we did with the ministries. . . . We worked at the national, province, and local level.[26]

Engineering units were critical to this mission, and the MSG was able to employ the 356th Corps of Engineers for infrastructure repair projects. The 356th is a heavy organization that has both vertical and horizontal capabilities. The MSG also brought in reserve engineering units, mainly from the National Guard, to augment the 356th.[27]

Finally, the MSG had a PSYOPS division during the first half of 1990. Originally part of Just Cause, elements of the 4th Psychological Operations Group were assigned to the MSG to conduct positive PSYOPS missions; enhance the prestige of the GOP among the Panamanian people; assist in turning the police into a motivated, effective, professional force, respectful of human rights, dedicated to law and order, and subordinated to civilian democratic control; and boost popular support for the police.

The embassy, and in particular the ambassador, viewed these activities as controversial. Indeed, this was a sensitive area, as the MSG chief of staff observed, "PSYOPS are a very risky game. . . . We knew the risks. We reviewed everything very carefully and coordinated it with the embassy."[28] Not, however, to the satisfaction of Ambassador Deane Hinton. In fact, the PSYOPS campaign conducted by the MSG came close to the line in terms of whether it was within the bounds of military responsibility.

## Military Support Group Tasking and the Panama Strategy

There was no integrated strategy for supporting nation-building and democratization in Panama following Just Cause. In fact, contingency planning, due to compartmentation, excluded the possibility. Further, during the period between 20 December 1989 and activation of the MSG on 17 January 1990, no such strategy was conceptualized. There were a few interagency meetings, but nothing transpired. According to one official that attended:

> I recall attending at least two interagency meetings involving 18 USG agencies in January. I was very frustrated at that time, not because they seemed unwilling to participate, but because very little happened. Thinking back on it, they may have felt that they had been left out of the game until it was too late. From their perspective, they were justifiably irritated, and may not have wanted to get involved after the military had already created its own little mess. I could understand that attitude. . . . Unfortunately, nothing came of these meetings.[29]

The same was true in Panama, as the CMOTF was overwhelmed by the civil-military problems described earlier, and the embassy was in disarray.

When he took command of the MSG, Colonel Steele found little interagency involvement in restoration, let alone an integrated strategy.[30]

The absence of an integrated country team strategy was due, as the chargé d'affaires explained, to the fact that "we did not have a staff at the embassy to do much of that. . . . It took a very long time to get a staff, because unlike the military, the State Department has to go through a process of requesting volunteers, advertising, and so forth."[31] This inability to respond to the crisis, as Ambassador Hinton notes, left little choice but to rely on the military to take the lead in restoration. However, it was Hinton's goal to bring that military lead to an end as soon as possible. He believed that it was a contradiction to have the US military in the forefront of supporting democratization, the creation of civil government, and nation-building.[32]

As a result of these structural problems in the US government, the MSG was tasked in its mission statement to "conduct nation-building operations to ensure that democracy, international standards of justice and professional public services are established in Panama." This was a broad mandate for a military organization. Indeed, in the view of the MSG commander, it was more applicable to an integrated country team, of which the military would be one element. However, because "the embassy was not functional," the MSG "played the role of the country team."[33] In February 1990, General Thurman also assigned it the task of devising a Panama strategy or, more accurately, a country team plan.

> The guidance called for the clear statement of objectives and supporting objectives, how they were to be achieved, by what organization, and how much it would cost to achieve each objective. Moreover, the MSG specifically was not limited to developing only the military portion of the plan but also the role other government agencies were to play. Finally, the MSG was to derive the strategic objectives for Panama from the ambassador's message stating his goals and objectives.[34]

Like its mission statement, this tasking took the MSG into uncharted waters.

The Panama strategy was defined as "an integrated U.S. government strategy . . . [that] addresses the Ambassador's goals, USSOUTHCOM's supporting objectives, the capabilities required to achieve those goals and objectives, and the funding necessary to affect them."[35] As an interagency plan, it was to be coordinated with the appropriate US agencies and the Panamanian government. Thus, although a military creation, the planners sought interagency unity in the effort.

In devising the strategy, the MSG placed it within the context of the Bush administration's policy of encouraging democratic development in the Latin American region. Further, the MSG sought to make it consistent with one of the original reasons for intervention—the defense of democracy in Panama. Two overriding goals were proposed: "a stable and democratic government in Panama supportive of US interest" and "lasting reform and subordination of the Panamanian police force to legitimate civil authority."[36]

Those who were developing the strategy understood that there were constraints on achieving these goals because there was no legacy of democracy: "there is no history of democracy in Panama, nor is there a point in Panamanian history when the functions of government were sustained on the basis of Panamanian revenues."[37] Consequently, planners believed that extensive government reform would take some time to transpire, thus slowing the pace of democratization. Questions were raised about "how much legitimacy the Endara government [could] hope to achieve," and the extent to which the US should commit to it. They recommended treating it as a "caretaker during . . . democratic transition."[38] Finally, concern was expressed about the extent to which the police would shed the PDF legacy.

These questions were realistic, and they reflected a contextual understanding not found in the contingency planning for restoration. Other parts of the document were less realistic. For example, MSG planners sought to target US support to encourage a particular form of democracy in Panama:

> The objective is to ensure a consolidation of political powers that supports a multiparty system and provides free elections. . . . The strategy is to support a consolidation of power in the middle class across several parties and prevent brokering by the economic elites and the disenfranchised elements like the PRD.[39]

The extent to which this was realistic in Panama, given its history, demographics, and political culture, was not addressed. Rather, a three-phase program of support, extending to 1999, was proposed. For each period, US nation-building assistance was focused on security, political and economic development, and counternarcotics.

While it is beyond our scope to assess these phases in detail, a selective review will provide insight into the constraints on them. The focus will be on the security, political, and economic development aspects of the strategy. Phase one—consolidation of democracy—covered 1990 and was tantamount to the one-year charter of the MSG. In terms of security, the objective was to establish a security force (out of the old PDF) that was professionally trained and subordinated to civilian democratic governance. To achieve this, the strategy simply reaffirmed what had been set in motion. ICITAP, with MSG support, would assist the Panamanian Ministry of Justice in this endeavor.[40]

Support for political development in phase one was to consist of helping the Panamanians to learn democratic practices "at the grass roots level" as well as "from the top down."

> The first step in attaining this objective would be to establish the U.S. Peace Corps in Panama emphasizing community development. In conjunction, the USAID [US Agency for International Development] program of small grants for community development needs to be activated and publicized. US military exercises . . . must be conducted in coordination with local appointed authorities and the populace through town meetings (a Latin American tradition known as cabildos abiertos). In the interior, RC and SF personnel must work to foster communication between local and civil authorities and the PNP.[41]

How feasible were these proposals? Were they realistic for Panama? Was USAID and the Peace Corps equipped and ready to undertake such efforts on a countrywide scale? Such questions were not addressed. Moreover, during 1990 there was no evidence that such programs were initiated.

Basic infrastructure repair for 1990 was to focus on "high priority targets including health facilities, schools, roads, railroads, ports, utilities, and the agricultural base." Economic aid would be employed to "jumpstart the economy with a massive infusion." While USAID was assigned the lead in supporting infrastructure repair, it was barely present in Panama during 1990. Most of what did take place, as we will detail below, was carried out by the MSG. There was no massive infusion of aid in 1990, although it was promised.

Phases two and three of the strategy consisted of some sketchy ideas about how to help Panama stabilize and sustain democracy by the end of the century. The proposals appear to be prefaced on the assumption that the US would stay engaged and committed. How realistic was this? The planners did not address the question, but merely proposed some rather grandiose and hastily drawn suggestions—particularly in the third phase, which extends to 1999. In the areas of security and political development the US will continue to sustain police force professionalism, monitor civil liberties and human rights, monitor and support public confidence in democratic institutions at the grass roots, and maintain the US partnership with GOP agencies.[42]

In terms of economic aid, MSG planners assumed the US would maintain support to strengthen the Panamanian economy. "USAID will take the lead with programs to sustain and expand GOP capabilities and services. US military activity will support this [through continued] maintenance and repair of roads and facilities."[43]

What can be concluded about this effort to develop an integrated country team plan for Panamanian democratization and nation-building? First, it was necessary if the US hoped to reap the potential benefits of eliminating Noriega and the PDF. As we proposed in the introduction, the use of force has to be accompanied by concern with what takes place after the shooting stops. Second, the document gave focus to what had to take place in 1990 to support the security force and basic infrastructure repair.

Problems with the Panama strategy occur when the time frame is extended to 1999 and the goals include designing the appropriate model of democracy for Panama. In terms of long-range planning, the proposals are sketchy and underdeveloped and based on uncertain political and bureaucratic assumptions. Moreover, if the US is to develop a policy to support a particular model of democracy in another country, an interagency process has to be devised and expertise will be required. At present, neither of these exists in any organized way in the bureaucracy.

Put simply, undertaking these broader political and developmental objectives was beyond the expertise of those who designed the Panama strategy.

To be sure, FAOs and civil affairs specialists from the military have a role to play—but neither in the lead nor to the exclusion of civilian agencies. If, as the documents assert, the Panama strategy was coordinated with the appropriate US government agencies, that fact only supports our contention that the USG was unprepared for such exercises.

**Notes**

1. The missions and organizational structure of the MSG are outlined in a document entitled, "US Military Support Group Panama: Envision the Future . . . Then Make It Happen," Headquarters Southern Command (April 1990).
2. Col Harold Youmans, Special Operations Command, MacDill AFB, Fla., telephone interview with author, 26 August 1992.
3. Ibid.
4. Memorandum for commander in chief, US Southern Command, Col Harold Youmans, subject: Need for a Training and Support Organization, 8 January 1990.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
7. John T. Fishel, *The Fog of Peace: Planning and Executing the Restoration of Panama* (Carlisle Barracks, Pa.: Army War College, Strategic Studies Institute, 1992), 7. Colonel Fishel was deputy chief of the Public Force Liaison Division of the Military Support Group. His study provides an interesting and thoughtful insider's perspective. He was interviewed by the author as part of the field research for this study.
8. Gen Maxwell R. Thurman, Arlington, Va., interview with author, 29 May 1992.
9. Col James Steele, Dominican Republic, telephone interview with author, 29 June 1992.
10. Col Jack Pryor, US Army Management Engineering College, Rock Island Arsenal, Ill., interview with author, 20–21 January 1992.
11. Steele interview.
12. Ibid.
13. Fishel, 61.
14. Steele interview.
15. Ibid.
16. Ibid.
17. Pryor interview. Pryor asserts that they produced a report predicting the December 1990 coup attempt, but that it was ignored. Additionally, the J-2 could have provided intelligence on the operational patterns of the drug traffickers, along with their networks. However, this capability was not utilized.
18. Steele interview.
19. Pryor interview.
20. Fishel, 47.
21. Pryor interview.
22. Fishel, 47.
23. Pryor interview.
24. Memorandum, Headquarters Southern Command, USMSG, for Rick Lang, ICITAP, subject: Joint Patrols, 5 July 1990.
25. Ibid.
26. Pryor interview.
27. Ibid.
28. Ibid.
29. Lt Col Dennis Barlow, The Pentagon, Office of Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low-Intensity Conflict, interview with author, 18 June 1992.
30. Steele interview.
31. John Bushnell, New York, interview with author, 22 June 1992.

32. Ambassador Deane Hinton, Panama, interview with author, 24 September 1992.
33. Steele interview.
34. Fishel, 51.
35. US Military Support Group, "Panama Strategy," working document (Headquarters Southern Command, May 1990), 12.
36. Ibid., 1–2.
37. Ibid., 3.
38. Ibid., 4–5.
39. Ibid., 7.
40. Ibid., 24–27.
41. Ibid., 27.
42. Ibid., 35.
43. Ibid., 36.

# Chapter 6

# Assessment and Evaluation

How effective was the Military Support Group? What were its strengths and weaknesses? Were its shortcomings due to MSG limitations, or were they the result of larger problems with US policy? To answer these and related questions, our assessment and evaluation is divided into 5 parts: (1) creating a Panamanian security force, (2) infrastructure reconstruction and nation-building, (3) psychological operations, (4) liaison with the Government of Panama, and (5) interagency coordination.

## Creating a Panamanian Security Force

In the contingency plan for restoration in Panama (Blind Logic), it was never determined what kind of security force would replace the Panamanian Defense Force. Rather, several options were identified, including the one eventually selected by the GOP. In the days immediately following the beginning of Just Cause, this issue became critical due to the breakdown of law and order. With the elimination of the PDF, SOUTHCOM found itself responsible for law enforcement functions. The situation also presented the newly inaugurated Endara government with an immediate crisis. Once the US military operation was completed, the government would have to take responsibility for maintaining law and order.

In consultation with US authorities, Endara, Arias Calderón, and Ford opted for the creation of a police force. They saw the Panamanian situation as analogous to that of Costa Rica. A standing army was not necessary. Furthermore, in order to build democracy, it was essential to expunge all vestiges of praetorian rule. The PDF had to go. However, they sought to accomplish this exorcism in an unconventional way. The new security force would rise out of the remnants of the defunct PDF. The decision to adopt this approach was not an easy one.

> There was a great debate over what should be done. What do you do with the old PDF members? Do you put them all in jail? How do you start a new police force to establish law and order? Endara, Arias Calderón, and Ford struggled with these questions. . . . The decision was made that the country had to heal. The bad ones were to be put in jail. The rest of the old PDF was to be converted into a police force. The weeding out process would continue over time but [they] were opposed to revolutionary change and chose the evolutionary path.[1]

In addition to "healing," there was a more practical reason for the decision. The GOP believed that "it could not afford to disenfranchise 10 or 15 thousand ex-PDF members, whose only skills consisted of beating up people and pulling triggers, because this group would have presented a direct threat to them."[2]

What were the chances of converting those skilled in "beating up people and pulling triggers" into policemen subordinated to democratic government and respectful of international standards of justice and human rights? It was not going to be easy. According to General Thurman:

> Changing attitudes was an enormously difficult task, and a lot of attitudes never got changed. Those people who could not adjust were released as time went by. They [GOP] did this as opposed to trying to build a completely new force during a period of chaos. I do not think we did a particularly good job of anticipating this outcome.[3]

Whether it was the right alternative is still debated. The GOP argued that it was the prudent choice. Others believed it was Byzantine logic "to put PDF thugs into your security force in order to solve potential security and unemployment problems."[4] Among Panamanians, doubts remain over the wisdom of the decision.

Once the choice was made, for the US the issue became how to assist the GOP in carrying it out. Was this a mission for the American military? Did it have both the expertise and legal authority to train a civilian security force? With respect to the former, the creation of the US Force Liasion Group suggests that SOUTHCOM felt it could accomplish the mission. Recall that the USFLG was tasked to advise, train, and equip the new police force. When questioned whether this was beyond the capacity of the US armed services, General Thurman answered:

> I think you underrate the nature of the Military Police. The MP knows how to operate a police force. We had the 16th MP Group in Panama. An installation like Fort Bragg has one hundred thousand people located on the post. So understanding police functions is something well known to the MPs. . . . MPs are policemen, they are trained to be policemen. MPs know how to arrest you, pull you over if you are DWI, stop rioting, stop looting, etc.[5]

Still, there are differences between MPs and civilian police. An expert in domestic law enforcement offered the following basic distinction: "The US military does not understand police-community relations in terms of the cop on the beat, who develops a network of contacts, so they can work together." A civilian police force has to be "fully integrated into society," a circumstance that is not within DOD's purview.[6] The head of the MSG concurred: "It sounds logical . . . I agree with this argument." However, it "pits the practical against the theoretical. . . . Either the military would do it [in Panama] or it would not get done."[7] In January 1990, there were few alternatives.

There also was a legal issue. Under section 660 of the Foreign Assistance Act, the US military is prohibited from training foreign police. However, this restriction can be waived if a formal request is made to the Congress and the Congress votes to allow it. During Just Cause, section 660 did not apply

because the US was involved in a military operation. Consequently, the mission was given to the USFLG. When the MSG was activated on 17 January 1990, police training was assigned to it. Since the military operation had not been officially terminated, the transfer was legal. However, it could only be temporary unless a waiver of section 660 was forthcoming. It was not.

As was noted earlier, the military became fully engaged in the process at this time. It created the 20-hour course to provide basic instruction in "police ethics, community relations, criminal law, the role of force, reporting, patrolling, arrest procedures, traffic enforcement, crowd control, weapons familiarization, and first aid." The course was given to "selected personnel from each major police unit in Panama City and the provinces, who then returned and acted as instructors for the rest of the police force."[8]

US military personnel were likewise involved in the vetting of the former members of the PDF, a process that eventually eliminated all colonels, 83 percent of the lieutenant colonels, 38 percent of the majors, 31 percent of the captains, and 19 percent of the lieutenants.[9] Finally, the USFLG and then the MSG conducted joint patrols with members of the police. The objective was to establish "an effective means of reinforcing newly established procedures of conduct by the Panamanian Police Force."[10] This was a necessity, given the PDF legacy of doing whatever it wished vis-à-vis the population.

With the official termination of Just Cause at the end of January 1990, the legal question could no longer be put off. Congress forced the issue by passing the Urgent Assistance to Democracy in Panama Act on 7 February 1990. It renewed the section 660 prohibition on military training of the Panamanian police. However, even before the legislation was passed, the State Department in Washington and Ambassador Hinton in Panama sought to end military involvement with the police.

Hinton's reasoning was straightforward and logical. He did not believe that the US military was the right institution to build a civilian security force in an emerging democracy.[11] While this position is perfectly reasonable, where was the expertise to be found? The training of foreign police had become a very contentious subject for the Congress back in the mid-1970s. Earlier, during the Kennedy administration, an Office of Public Safety was established within the Agency for International Development (AID) to improve the administration, organization, and methods of foreign police forces. An International Police Academy was also established in Washington to provide advanced instruction for senior police officials. Both programs were part of Kennedy's counterinsurgency policies.

In 1974, Congress closed down the Public Safety program and the International Police Academy due to allegations that they had become closely associated with and supportive of some of the most repressive police organizations in Latin America and elsewhere. The allegations included either participating in or condoning the use of torture against political dissidents. According to Charles Maechling, "While these charges were never substantiated, there is no doubt that in modernizing foreign police forces while failing to insist on rigorous standards of criminal justice and civil liber-

ties, the United States was guilty of creating efficient instruments of repression where none had existed before."[12] Apparently, given the political climate of the mid-1970s, unproven allegations were sufficient—US involvement with foreign police was terminated.

In 1985, the Department of State requested that Congress provide a limited waiver of section 660 of the Foreign Assistance Act. Congress amended section 534(b)(3) to authorize the president to support "programs to enhance investigative capabilities, conducted under judicial or prosecutor control." This resulted in the Department of State requesting that the Department of Justice assist in establishing and managing such programs. In January 1986, the International Criminal Investigative Training Assistance Program (ICITAP) was established by the US Deputy Attorney General.[13]

Because of the legacy of the Office of Public Safety, strict limitations were placed on ICITAP. It could not provide lethal equipment. Nor could it provide assistance that related to such police techniques as arrests, use of force, or other general policing skills. What it could do was assist in the development of investigative and forensic functions, academic curricula and instruction for law enforcement, and administrative and management capabilities as they relate to career advancement, personnel evaluation, and internal discipline.

The Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs provides guidance to ICITAP and, in conjunction with the Department of Justice, develops the annual program and budget. It was through this office of the State Department that ICITAP received the mission of training the Panamanian police force. Michael Kozak, the principal deputy assistant secretary of state for Inter-American Affairs, appears to have been the moving force behind the decision, according to David Kriskovich, head of ICITAP.

> I visited Panama in the first week of January 1990. Mike Kozak, who was essentially my boss at the Department of State . . . asked me to come to Panama while he was there. He had dealt with Panama for the past five or six years. He had a hard time convincing Bushnell that ICITAP was the right organization for the job. Bushnell knew nothing about us. ICITAP had never been in Panama. The DOD did not know who we were, at least SOUTHCOM did not. . . . Thus, I had to convince a lot of people, with Mike Kozak's assistance, that ICITAP was the right institution for the job.[14]

This convincing included the Congress, which amended the Foreign Assistance Act to give ICITAP authority to provide training for the security force in civilian law enforcement techniques. According to Kriskovich, "the State Department presented the proposal to Congress."[15] More accurately, State Department officials lobbied Congress. The result was a significant broadening of ICITAP's authority.

In Panama, according to Colonel Steele, "Ambassador Hinton was enthusiastic about ICITAP." And why not? After all, ICITAP "was established to train police forces." It would eliminate the need for military involvement. "So, why shouldn't ICITAP do it?"[16] The fact that ICITAP had never under-

taken a mission even close to what was involved in Panama appears to have been downplayed. Its personnel could learn while doing.

Were they ready, in terms of programs and personnel, to train a police force of approximately 12,000, most of which were former members of the PDF? The answer is "no." Prior to Panama, ICITAP's efforts were small. They generally consisted of conducting short-term courses and workshops for functioning police departments, mainly in investigative training, police-judicial cooperation, police ethics, forensic skills, child abuse, management, and nonlethal equipment.[17] Because its staff was small, ICITAP relied on consultants—mainly retired FBI agents—to implement these short-term programs in Latin America. It had never attempted to establish and train an entirely new security force department.

An interesting compromise was worked out between SOUTHCOM and the embassy over the Panamanian police issue. General Thurman, who was concerned with maintaining law and order in Panama, had doubts about ICITAP:

> The way I understood it, ICITAP had been established to provide training and assistance to already operating police departments, which is quite different from what had to be done in Panama, where a police department and attitudes had to be built from scratch. ICITAP did not have the manpower, resources, or lesson plans. ICITAP was ill-prepared to set up a new police structure.[18]

Likewise, the embassy, and in particular Bushnell, became somewhat less than sanguine about how quickly ICITAP could take over the mission. "Time was of the essence. But the key factor was ICITAP's ability to mobilize. . . . ICITAP was not really geared up and surely did not have the personnel that the MSG did."[19]

Ambassador Hinton, who initially had wanted to make the transition from the MSG to ICITAP as quickly as possible, had to backtrack. There was little choice in the matter. A compromise was reached whereby ICITAP would be responsible for training the security force and assisting them to "develop new policies, methods and procedures that will transition them from a military mode to a civilian police mode." The MSG would continue with the joint patrols to "monitor and report on the practical implementation of the ICITAP program."[20] In this arrangement, ICITAP had the lead and the MSG was in a supporting role. Further, as the ICITAP program expanded, the MSG role was to recede. The Military Support Group was scheduled to stand down on 17 January 1991.

How well did this arrangement work in 1990? ICITAP's challenge was to create a programmatic and personnel infrastructure for a mission it had never before performed. This took much longer, both in terms of organization and innovation, than was anticipated. ICITAP was a small and new institution with a congressionally limited mandate; Panama, with a praetorian legacy extending back two decades, was a big problem.

During 1990, the ICITAP staff in Panama took time to set up the program and remained relatively small. Only two full-time professional positions were assigned to Panama, but these professionals could draw on a large number of

consultants. The ICITAP staff expanded in 1990, according to their end-of-year *Panama Program Description and Budget*, to "consist of a Project Director, a Training Manager, a Technical Assistance Manager, a Procurement Manager, a Training Coordinator, a Technical Assistance Coordinator, and a Secretary. With the exception of the Procurement Manager, all full-time staff will be based in Panama City."[21] While it has become somewhat larger since 1990, ICITAP's professional staff in Panama remained small in 1991–92.[22]

To supplement the professional staff in Panama, ICITAP used its own consulting firm, Miranda Associates, to "station personnel in Panama on a full-time basis to manage office and classroom facilities in support of ICITAP activities and to provide supplies and equipment." They also had administrative authority for the consultants who directed many of ICITAP's workshops, courses, and seminars. According to Kriskovich, "approximately 50 retired FBI agents [were retained] to do training and technical assistance."[23]

The size of the ICITAP effort generated criticism from the CINCSOUTHCOM. Members of the MSG likewise had doubts: "ICITAP might have had as many as seven people in country when I departed [in 1991]. How do you transform the old PDF with that amount of people?"[24] They also raised questions about ICITAP's cultural understanding of Panama and its staff's willingness to develop close relationships with their Panamanian counterparts.

Several members of the MSG, including its commanding officer, were Latin American foreign area officers (FAO) with experience in the region. They believed that knowledge of and affinity for the countries of the region were essential for operating effectively. The MSG took such an approach. According to Colonel Steele:

> MSG personnel spent a lot of time with the government. . . . The MSG and the Panamanian government weathered demonstrations and crises together. Personal relationships were forged in this environment. . . . I spent a lot of time in the office of the chief of police. We brought in police cars, police-type equipment, and tried to remove the legacy of the PDF. . . . In other words, the MSG was very active, whereas ICITAP was not. I gave ICITAP an office in the police headquarters. In fact, I offered to share my office with the head of ICITAP. It would have been a logical place for ICITAP to set up an office, but ICITAP chose not to. Instead, ICITAP worked out of the Marriott Hotel. The policemen never went to this office.[25]

While some members of ICITAP had regional experience and spoke Spanish, ICITAP was not comparable to the MSG. Why should it be? After all, ICITAP's previous programs were of a short-term and technical nature. They never represented themselves as the civilian counterparts of US Army FAOs. Forming the kinds of bonds that the MSG did was outside ICITAP's standard operating procedures. However, given the mission involved, the kind of background and expertise that MSG personnel had would have been helpful. When working with foreign nationals, it is essential that one's approach be based on a cultural and political understanding of contextual dynamics.

Professional organizations, whether civilian or military, develop and standardize functional operating procedures. When given a task, they draw on

these existing methods. This is the way bureaucracy works, even small and relatively new ones. Initially, ICITAP approached the training of the Panamanian security force by drawing on its past experience, which consisted of workshops, courses, and seminars in the various police-related subjects identified earlier. Most of the instructors were retired FBI agents, but professionals from state and local police agencies as well as other federal agencies participated when their special expertise was required.[26]

ICITAP's early efforts in Panama followed standard operating procedures. According to Kriskovich, "We did not have a new concept on the shelf. However, we had a lot of experience in smaller projects, such as building an office of professional responsibility, and working with police academies to improve curricula. Putting all these pieces together, we knew we could have an impact."[27] To what extent did they have an effect, relying on existing programs? Were they reaching a police force of more than 10,000, many of whom were former members of the PDF, "whose only skills consisted of beating up people and pulling triggers"?

Critics of ICITAP believe the answer is that its initial impact was minimal, the reason being that ICITAP's approach did not get at the crux of the problem. In previous programs in the region, ICITAP did not have to change attitudes on a mass scale or convince the client to adopt a professional police model. In other words, ICITAP was used to providing instruction to policemen who thought of themselves as policemen.

In 1990, this was not how the Panamanian police perceived itself. Colonel Steele described the situation:

> Given the decision to incorporate the remnants of the PDF into the new national police, it was necessary to recognize that certain mind sets came with them. They had been officers and soldiers, and within the new police force they would become policemen. . . . ICITAP needed to find ways to infuse civilian values . . . so as to break down the military mind set. . . . Otherwise the police force would turn into an institution which was merely waiting for the gringos to leave, so it can go back to being an army, back to the old way.[28]

During its first year in Panama, ICITAP was reaching only a small part of the police force with a curriculum that, while important, did not address the larger problem.[29] It did not get at the legacy of praetorianism that had infused the PDF. How could ICITAP do that, questioned its critics, when it did not deploy personnel to the urban and rural precincts to work with the police on a daily basis? "We tried to push ICITAP in the direction of deploying its people throughout the country to work in every precinct and province." However, they "could not comprehend operating on this scale."[30] Was it fair to expect ICITAP to be able to do so, on a countrywide basis, during 1990? ICITAP had never conducted a program of this size or focus before, and it showed.

On the other hand, and to its credit, ICITAP began during 1990, to develop programs that could, over the long term, address these initial shortcomings. Three initiatives stand out. First was the transition course for all former members of the PDF. The goal was to provide 120 hours of instruction, by

ICITAP-trained police instructors, in "the role and function of the police, police professionalism, service to the public, conflict resolution, interviewing, report writing, preventive patrolling procedures, crime scene protection, techniques and mechanics of arrest, human rights and the appropriate use of force, and firearms safety."[31] This course, as well as other ICITAP training programs, stressed incorporating concern with human rights and ethical conduct.

ICITAP hoped to have 5,000 policemen complete the course in 1991. According to a recent report, virtually all of the former PDF had gone through the transition course by September 1992.[32] The extent to which this training has resulted in cosmetic or real attitudinal change is difficult to measure. ICITAP officials in Panama believe it has, and point to the low rate of police misbehavior that could be characterized as analogous to the PDF.[33] As we will see, others have serious doubts. The subject is still hotly debated in Panama.

The second initiative was the creation of a police academy. Its goal was the "long-term institutionalization of basic and continuing educational development . . . and maintenance of professional standards throughout the National Police."[34] Through the academy, Panama would eventually develop a cadre of officers not tainted by the past. It would take time, but even ICITAP's strongest critics believe this initiative is the key to a future that is free of praetorianism.

Finally, ICITAP sought to address the problems of corruption, bribery, abuse of power, violation of human rights, and related criminal acts. These were the raison d'être of the PDF. The solution was to institutionalize within the national police, as well as in the Ministry of Government and Justice, the Office of the Attorney General, and the Judicial Technical Police, an Office of Professional Responsibility. This likewise was a good idea. If properly implemented, these organs could "curb human rights abuses and other misconduct and improve performance."[35]

In sum, through such initiatives, ICITAP began to develop long-term solutions to praetorianism. While it is fair to criticize some of its initial efforts as off the mark, it was, in the American tradition, learning while doing. However, in 1990 there was the immediate problem of a new police force, 90-plus percent of which was made up of former PDF members. It was this predicament that necessitated the continuing involvement of the MSG with the police through the joint patrols.

While the embassy would have preferred otherwise, there was little choice in the matter. In retrospect, the ambassador believes the joint patrols were successful.[36] In fact, the embassy in Panama requested that DOD continue to provide this support after ICITAP received training authority.[37] Was the continuation of this MSG activity within the parameters of section 660? The issue was addressed at an "OASD/ISA hosted meeting of DOS, DOJ, and DOD representatives on 8 March 1990." They concluded that MSG personnel could stay involved "if their mission is operational and not primarily to conduct

training."[38] Both the joint patrols and the presence of MSG representatives at each police precinct were construed as liaison and operational activities, not training.

The distinction between operational and training duties appears to be more one of semantics than of actuality, however. Indeed, this was candidly admitted in the directive sent to Panama:

> It is important that reservists with law enforcement backgrounds, and our Special Forces personnel, do not insert themselves into this process on an ad hoc basis. . . . [T]hey may monitor and report on the practical implementation of the ICITAP program, but not train.
>
> It is recognized that a certain amount of DOD operational activity may result in the inevitable "training" of the Panamanian police as the practical result of joint patrols, precinct house administration, and other law enforcement functions. . . . Such "on the job training" by "osmosis" as the result of U.S. personnel exhibiting model police practices and behavior in the course of carrying out their official duties is not, repeat, not precluded . . . so long as it is incidental to the DOD mission.[39]

While the distinction may be ambiguous, the practical results were not. The MSG actions addressed a serious limitation in ICITAP's 1990 program. On the one hand, as Colonel Pryor notes, the joint patrols provided the Panamanian population "with a sense of security because presumably the U.S. would not allow the police force to violate the law."[40] The population had no illusions about the new police. They were still the PDF, just dressed in new uniforms and without the boots. Having a US presence was meaningful to the Panamanians.

Beyond security, the joint patrols could set examples of correct behavior and provide to the "new Panamanian police somebody to talk to when advice was needed."[41] This was important, as Bushnell pointed out: a soldier who also is a cop "is a tremendous resource." They could "go out in the precincts and make the precincts work."[42] Kriskovich concurred: the joint patrols "kept the peace and an eye on the former PDF members. They provided a lot of information and we learned from them."[43] Still, this was only a temporary solution and no substitute for a systematic program of institution-building.

While the 1990 compromise seemed like an exemplary, if temporary, quick fix to a policy issue that the US was neither bureaucratically nor programmatically prepared to address, there were problems with it due to ICITAP-MSG friction. Each organization considered itself best suited for the mission, and the resulting tension placed constraints on the overall performance.[44]

To summarize, during 1990 the MSG made an important, if limited, contribution to establishing a new security force institution in Panama. It was constrained by both the law and the requirements of the mission. Following the end of military operations, the MSG could only play a supporting role. It is generally agreed that it did so in a very effective way. However, once the decision was made to create a civilian police force, the US military could not be the lead agency.

This created a conundrum for US policy in Panama. None of its civilian agencies maintained the programmatic and personnel infrastructure necessary to create a civilian security force. While ICITAP was selected to take the lead, it had never before attempted something of this magnitude and complexity. It was understaffed and programmatically unprepared. Rick Lang, the ICITAP project director in Panama since June 1990, observed that at the end of 1990, ICITAP's involvement was "still at a very rudimentary level."[45] To its credit, ICITAP sought to develop in 1990, and began to implement during 1991–92, the kinds of initiatives that could assist the GOP to establish a professional police institution consistent with democracy.

With respect to 1990, the year ended with the police issue still very much in doubt, as the 4–5 December 1990 police mutiny or attempted coup demonstrated. The former director general of the police, Col Eduardo Herrera Hassan, broke out of jail and, aided by former PDF officers, took control of police headquarters. The GOP had to request US military involvement to restore order. The Panamanian police force was either unwilling or unable to do so. In the opinion of Gen George Joulwan, CINCSOUTHCOM at the time, MSG presence and involvement "helped prevent the insurrection from escalating into something greater."[46]

While beyond the scope of this study, we would note that the police force remains a question mark today. According to former head of police Ebrahim Asvat, ICITAP "was not prepared . . . I think the Panamanian problem was much more complex than what they as an organization were able to do. . . . I just do not understand the US ambassador's decision to use ICITAP for training the Panamanian police force."[47] Originally scheduled to finish in 1992, ICITAP now estimates that it will take until 1995 to complete the process of establishing a professional police institution in Panama. The police force has had six chiefs during its brief existence, and this is only one of several continuing problems facing the institution. ICITAP's 1992 annual project report identified a number of others, including "a lack of credibility with the community, low salaries . . . which affect morale and the ability to attract and retain quality personnel, and limited resources which impact on all levels of police performance."[48]

As a result, the police have been the target of sharp criticism in Panama. Some charge that the institution is rife with incompetence. This reproach was amplified following the police debacle during President Bush's visit in June 1992. Others believed the police continue to harbor old PDF attitudes as well as connections to secret associations of former PDF officers, and that a coup is still possible. Recent public opinion polls reveal that 64 percent of all Panamanians distrust the police, while only 26 percent express confidence in them.[49] Thus, it appears that the goal of ensuring public security in Panama through a civilian police force that is competently led, professionally trained and organized, and adequately equipped remains to be realized.

## Infrastructure Reconstruction and Nation-Building

According to its mission statement, the MSG was to "conduct nation-building operations" in Panama. In reality, it would be more appropriate to describe what took place under its auspices in 1990 as infrastructure reconstruction. According to the MSG chief of staff, the focus was on "repairing health clinics, schools, and existing farm-to-market roads. . . . What we did was maintain existing infrastructure."[50] This was no nominal task, however; recall that, under Noriega, the countryside had been almost completely neglected.

As we noted earlier, MSG reconstruction projects were not part of an integrated US program. The civilian agencies were not prepared for this in 1990. Moreover, resources for such an effort were not forthcoming from the US government when the MSG began reconstruction activities. The aid bill that would have provided financial assistance languished in Congress: President Bush had pledged to request $1 billion in foreign aid for Panama; in May 1990, Congress allocated $420 million; by the beginning of 1991, only $100 million had actually been provided.[51]

In lieu of an integrated US plan, and the resources to support nation-building, the MSG initiated a modest program of infrastructure reconstruction. This effort could not hope to fill the void created by US unpreparedness, of course. Rather, as one member of the MSG put it, the reconstruction projects were more like a "dike to keep the floodgates of chaos from overrunning Panama. . . . The hope was to keep the country from collapsing."[52]

In spite of their modest dimensions, these MSG projects were important for at least three reasons. First, they began to address a serious problem; that is, the countryside was in bad condition. Second, the 1990 program led to annual engineer training exercises in Panama that bring units to the country to conduct infrastructure reconstruction. Third, there was an important symbolic aspect to these efforts. As we will describe below, the MSG established a decision-making process whereby the selection and implementation of reconstruction projects was under the direction of the GOP. This process signaled to the Panamanian people that the new government was functioning—and it "demonstrated that something important was happening, under GOP auspices, right away."[53]

To begin infrastructure reconstruction, the MSG had to gain access to engineering and related assets and establish an effective decision-making and implementing process between itself and the GOP. With respect to the former, active and reserve engineering units were essential. Because the MSG was an ad hoc organization, it had to acquire personnel and equipment from other units. This caused obvious problems and resentment. However, the place of the MSG in the chain of command was unusual. Officially, it was to report to the JTF-PM, which was under the command of Gen Carl W. Stiner. Once Just Cause officially ended, it reported to US Army South and General Cisneros. However, because of its mission, the MSG also reported

directly to CINCSOUTHCOM. In fact, during the first several months of its existence, the senior leadership of the MSG briefed General Thurman on a daily basis.[54]

Because of the CINC's interest in the MSG and its access to him, the MSG was able to acquire the assets needed for its reconstruction projects. This included the 536th Engineer Battalion.[55] Additionally, the MSG got support from National Guard engineering units. Apparently, the National Guard Bureau took the initiative in offering assistance; in any event, these engineering units were integrated directly with the 536th.[56] This was also true of medical and dental units. In sum, the MSG was able to gain access to the resources necessary for beginning a limited program of rural reconstruction.

The next step was to involve the Panamanian government in the selection and implementation of the projects. According to the MSG commander, the goal was "to set up a model to coordinate these projects . . . [and] make sure that the Panamanian government gets credit at the local, province, and national level."[57] Unfortunately, coordination among local, province, and national level officials had been absent in Panama for years. It had to be reinvigorated.

The MSG encouraged coordination by requiring that every reconstruction project be coordinated between the MSG and the appropriate GOP ministry. For example, if the Ministry of Education presented a list of schools it would like the MSG to repair, the MSG identified the resources required while ministry representatives took the proposal to the appropriate province officials and then to the local level for their input. When consensus was reached, the project would be initiated.

The MSG purpose was to encourage active and visible GOP roles in reconstruction at all levels of government. The government also had to put resources into the projects, even if it was only labor. While it took time, this process did evolve. According to the MSG J-5: "There developed constant communication between representatives of the government of Panama on the project sites in the hinterland and their respective ministries. Through the ministries this feedback went into the cabinet stimulating decision making on a daily basis."[58] Of course, the new government could take the credit for reconstruction and demonstrate to the population that it was active and involved.

The MSG served as the catalyst to stimulate this process. It worked through the GOP to "nurture a decision-making process, policy implementation, communication, and coordination within the Panamanian bureaucracy. . . . In this way the MSG stimulated basic, lateral and vertical decision making."[59] Furthermore, the Panamanian government was able to give to its people a visible sign that it was trying to respond to their needs.

What was the extent of these reconstruction projects? Two major engineering exercises were conducted in 1990, as were a number of smaller actions. The first, Fuertes Caminos 90, took place from April through August in the western six provinces. The mission included repairing 50 schools, 14 clinics, 70 kilometers (km) of roads, 17 bridges, and 10 other projects. During

September–December, a second exercise, Cosecha Amistad 90, was undertaken in the provinces of Darien and San Blas. This smaller program repaired another 19 schools, 7 clinics, and 22 kms of roads.[60]

These projects were limited in scope, particularly given the extent of rural deterioration. Nevertheless, they were important in two respects. First, the exercises began the process of reconstruction and the Panamanian government was integrated into it. The MSG charted how these projects were reported in the Panamanian media: "We essentially had three categories: favorable, neutral, and negative . . . [A]ll of the press was favorable. We received tremendous publicity. . . . Every night there was a television spot about it."[61] This was important to the embryonic Panamanian government.

Second, the 1990 exercises established an annual program that brings engineering units to Panama to train by implementing rural reconstruction projects. For example, in the 1991 exercises, Army and National Guard engineers repaired 91 schools, 42 clinics, 7 bridges, and 151 kms of roads and participated in 20 other projects. In 1992, 61 schools, 29 clinics, 12 roads, and 16 bridges were repaired. In addition, 169 well pumps were installed.[62] One of the goals of these annual programs is to promote infrastructure development within Panama.

In sum, while the MSG was not precisely involved in nation-building, it helped the Panamanian government to begin the recovery process. While the embassy and civilian agencies of the government were just returning to Panama, the MSG was demonstrating US commitment to the country. It also nurtured the GOP decision-making process. Finally, the 1990 engineer exercises have become routine; they now take place on an annual basis.

## Psychological Operations

During the first five months of its one-year mandate, the MSG included a Psychological Operations Support Element. That element's mission was to "plan, coordinate, and execute PSYOPS and PSYOPS-related actions designed to support nation-building, with a high priority on the National Police."[63] In March 1990, this part of the MSG was composed of 48 specialists from the 8th Battalion of the 4th PSYOPS Group. In April, it was reduced to 18. On 7 June 1991, it was ordered to depart from Panama.

Why was the PSYOPS Support Element (PSE) the first part of the MSG to stand down, and why so early? The specific reasons are difficult to ascertain. What is clear is that the ambassador wanted it out of the country as quickly as possible. Based on previous experiences he had a negative view of psychological operations in general, and saw no place for them in Panama. According to the ambassador the MSG "had this PSYOPS operation . . . and I told Steele very early on that I do not like PSYOPS. As you plan to phase out [the MSG], you phase out PSYOPS as a high priority."[64] According to other senior embassy officials, most notably John Bushnell, the reason had to do

more with specific aspects of the PSYOPS campaign, particularly those activities aimed at enhancing the internal prestige of the GOP among the Panamanian people. Bushnell believed that this was beyond the mandate of military psychological operations.[65]

Whether the reason for the decision to order the PSE out of Panama resulted from explicit objections to specific actions or from the ambassador's general distrust of PSYOPS remains unclear. There appears to have been no discussion surrounding the decision at the time. The embassy simply chose to exercise its authority and that was the end of it.

Did PSYOPS have a place in the Military Support Group? What were the specific campaign objectives? Were they beyond the purview of military PSYOPS? Did the PSYOPS Support Element exceed its mandate? The following were specified as campaign objectives:

1. Make the PNP a motivated, effective, professional police force, dedicated to law and order, respectful of human rights, and subordinated to democratic government control.
2. Enhance popular support and respect for the PNP.
3. Enhance the internal respect of the GOP.
4. Neutralize disinformation and hostile propaganda directed against the GOP, PNP, the population of Panama, and the United States.
5. Enhance the image of the US in Panama and in the region.
6. On order, support counternarcotics efforts by the US and GOP.[66]

Of these, according to the commander of the PSE, the emphasis was placed on the first three. There was negligible hostile propaganda or disinformation to counter, and little time for the last two objectives.[67] How were these first three objectives approached, and were the products and activities initiated permissible?

The first objective appears to be within the boundaries of military PSYOPS. It likewise was consistent with one of the main tasks of the MSG—to support the International Criminal Investigative Training Assistance Program in its efforts to establish a civilian security force under the authority of elected officials. How did PSYOPS fit into this endeavor? Recall that one of the major challenges facing ICITAP was to convert former members of the PDF into civilian policemen subordinated to democratic government control. According to Lt Col Jeffery Jones, head of the PSYOPS Support Element: "The problem was the transition . . . you had to change the attitude of the policemen themselves, you have to teach them a set of rules by which they should live and work."[68] Here is where PSYOPS had an important contribution to make. After all, the easy part was dressing the former PDF members in police uniforms. On the other hand, training them to think and act in ways respectful of human rights and democratic government was exceedingly challenging.

The goal was to reinforce the training by ICITAP, most importantly in the transition course for former PDF members. The PSYOPS products were to focus on encouraging the policemen to act in accordance with those rules and

responsibilities taught in ICITAP courses. In effect, this entailed directing a range of positive PSYOPS programs toward the police to induce attitude and performance change.

These products could take several forms, including face-to-face communication, printed messages, and radio and television spots. For example, one printed item given to every policemen was the "Ten Commandments." These consisted of a basic set of rules that all were to abide by. There were awards and certificates to recognize proper behavior and achievement. Slogans, such as "Take No Bribes" and "True Courage," were adapted to posters for use in precinct buildings. Finally, there was a plan for a police newspaper.

To have a meaningful effect, these PSYOPS products had to be coordinated with, and had to directly support, ICITAP's various training programs. While attempts at coordination did take place, according to Jones, "it did not work as well as it should have. We interfaced with ICITAP periodically but probably not routinely."[69] While the PSE was prepared to develop specific products for ICITAP's training programs, ICITAP's efforts were only in an embryonic stage.

In light of the above, how effective could these PSYOPS support programs really be? It took 20 years for the PDF to develop a praetorian outlook. It is doubtful that, in the few short months during which the PSYOPS Support Element was in existence, any meaningful inroads were made into altering that outlook. While the concepts and actual projects developed appear to be appropriate and innovative, the implementation must be long-term. There was no opportunity for this in Panama.

The second campaign objective focused on gaining popular support for the police among the Panamanian people. To this end, "The full spectrum of PSYOPS products [were to be utilized] to establish trust and confidence, and to encourage active cooperation and collaboration."[70] This would entail publicizing police improvements and successes, commitment to reform, acceptance of new rules of behavior, and discipline. In sum, what the PSE planned to develop was a "public relations program" based on evidence that supported the messages to be propagated.[71]

PSYOPS products designed to support the public relations program were either completed or in the development stage during the spring of 1990. These included television spots that stressed police acceptance of a new mission to serve the Panamanian people. One interesting example of this was a video entitled "La Nueva Policia National," in which the police were depicted as committed to the mission of serving the interests of the population. Other TV videos focused on police-initiated community interaction programs and steps being taken to earn respect.[72]

To be sure, many government agencies in democracies, and certainly those in the United States, maintain public relations or public affairs offices. This is true for police departments at the federal, state, and local levels. That the Panamanian police would establish one is of no surprise, especially given the image it inherited from the PDF. That it would seek to present itself to the Panamanian people as the antithesis of the old PDF was a necessity.

The question here is whether or not the PSE could assist the Panamanian government in doing so. At first sight, this seems to be a gray area with no clear answer. Probably, a legal interpretation was necessary. Section 660 makes it clear that the MSG could not train the police. Presumedly, this included instruction in PSYOPS and in public relations methods and techniques aimed at building a positive image for the police. However, these restrictions on training were waived for ICITAP. Since the MSG was tasked to support ICITAP, it is plausible to conclude that this waiver could encompass assistance in developing a PSYOPS program to "establish trust and confidence" in the police among the Panamanian people. Of course, these should be "positive" PSYOPS products (and not deception or disinformation), and they should be based on evidence that supports the message of the campaign. Moreover, ICITAP would have lead responsibility.

Finally, in terms of prohibition, the third PSYOPS campaign objective—to enhance the internal respect of the GOP—seems to be clearly outside the scope of military PSYOPS. However, an examination of what this entailed in Panama raises some interesting questions.

For example, some of the products were narrowly focused and linked directly to the MSG's rural reconstruction activities. Recall that the MSG sought to integrate the GOP into this process so that it could take credit for reconstruction and demonstrate to the population that it was active and involved. The PSE saw as one of its missions assisting those GOP ministries involved in reconstruction. For example, it developed posters, pamphlets, and leaflets to assist the Ministry of Health in its campaign to prevent the spread of dengue fever, a dangerous tropical disease.[73] When the Ministry of Education distributed desks, books, and related supplies to schools in rural areas, the PSE would produce a video for a news spot to be used by the GOP.[74] More broadly, the PSE covered US/GOP reconstruction efforts, particularly Fuertes Caminos, in print and in video, throughout the country. Did these activities exceed the bounds of military PSYOPS, or were they within the mission statement of the MSG?

While these examples may raise questions about whether or not the third PSYOPS campaign objective lies outside the scope of the PSE, others seem less problematic. For instance, the PSE produced videos that aimed directly at building legitimacy for the Endara, Arias Calderón, and Ford government. While this was obviously necessary and a normal function for any democratically elected government, it carried the PSE directly into the arena of partisan politics—an arena that is beyond the bounds of military PSYOPS. Of course, it is plausible to argue that the same is true of the print and video materials developed to propagate the achievements of GOP ministries or US/GOP reconstruction efforts.

In sum, the issue was one of boundaries. In peacetime activities, such as the reconstruction efforts in Operation Promote Liberty, communications and information are important support activities. Military PSYOPS units can perform these tasks. Of course, limits and boundaries must be established. Unfortunately, no discussion of these boundaries seems to have taken place

with respect to PSE support of the MSG's nation-building mission. Rather, the embassy simply chose to exercise its authority and that was the end of the PSE.

This was unfortunate because the PSE provided crucial communication and information support. Some of the examples cited above are illustrative. However, no attempt was made to establish what was and what was not within the boundaries of military PSYOPS, or to follow up after the groundwork was laid.

## Military Support Group Liaison with the Panamanian Government

Throughout this study, reference has been made to the relationship between the MSG leadership and the Panamanian government of Endara, Arias Calderón, and Ford. This relationship involved a liaison arrangement that can only be characterized as both special and, for the two Army colonels who headed the MSG, highly unusual. According to the MSG commander, they were "involved in activities in which the military does not normally deal."[75] He cites the following example as illustrative:

> We were in the presidential palace on a daily basis for meetings with the president. I spent approximately three hours every day with the first vice president, Arias Calderón. We discussed all sorts of issues relating to his roles as vice president and minister of justice, which put him in charge of dealing with the police issues. It certainly was not a normal relationship.[76]

This was an unusual situation. How did it come about? At least three reasons appear to account for it. First, the relationship was forged during the crisis that followed Just Cause. The new Panamanian leadership found itself installed as a government that was both under siege and without personnel and resources. In January, physical threats were still very high for the president and the two vice presidents. Colonel Pryor gives the following example: "I can remember when we were under attack at the National Police headquarters for two-and-a-half hours. I was physically protecting Arias Calderón from flying glass and ricocheting bullets. [By] providing them with personal protection, you build trust and commitment."[77] It is not surprising that when Pryor became MSG chief of staff, he would have access to the Panamanian leadership. As Steele notes, "A lot of confidence was built up early on, which was not easily replaced by the normal embassy-host government relationship."[78]

A second reason for the MSG-GOP special relationship has to do with resources. The Panamanian government, as noted previously, inherited an infrastructure that was in serious disrepair and a treasury that was empty. The GOP needed assistance and the MSG had access to resources. The MSG could initiate the reconstruction program and do so relatively quickly. Consequently, the new government came to rely on the MSG for resources.

Finally, and related to this second reason, was the "can do" attitude of the military. General Thurman explained it this way:

> The MSG had an unusual arrangement with the Panamanian government because the government was not a government, it was trying to be a government. The only people who could get something done were the people in the MSG. The government did not know how to move something, how to take care of refugees, how to restore electricity.[79]

The fact that the MSG approached its mission aggressively was attractive to the Panamanian leadership.[80]

As a result of these three factors, the MSG-GOP relationship developed in ways that were unorthodox. US Army colonels are not supposed to become advisors to foreign heads of state and when it happened in Panama it disturbed the US Embassy—the MSG had crossed over into its territory. This occurred because of the extensive and close interaction between the MSG and the GOP. Colonel Pryor notes that they worked together "to solve very real problems within the country twenty hours a day, seven days a week. . . . We had midnight meetings with Endara, Arias Calderón, and Ford. . . . On these occasions we sat down and mapped out how to put the government together based on the constitution and what was needed to make it function."[81] The extent of the relationship is best captured in the following account by Pryor:

> Jim Steele and I used to have breakfast with President Endara every Wednesday. Usually Rubin Carlos [comptroller] and we discussed strategies for what we were doing in the countryside. We consulted the president and got his approval for various MSG projects. This was bothering the embassy. . . . Jim and I suggested to Endara to invite the ambassador. So he invited the ambassador and deputy chief of mission. . . . Everytime we needed to see the president . . . we cleared it with the embassy to see if anyone had a problem with what we were doing. . . . As time went by, it became harder for us to get embassy clearance, even though the Panamanian leadership did not like that the embassy was putting up roadblocks for the MSG. . . . It was clear that he did not want us involved anymore. We were at the end of our one year life cycle. . . . I stopped going to the breakfasts with the president. . . . Nevertheless, from that point on until we went out of business, the president continued to set my place at breakfast.[82]

When the MSG stood down in January 1991, colonels Steele and Pryor were personally decorated by the senior leadership of the GOP for their service to Panama.

There were obvious benefits to this arrangement in terms of advancing the reconstruction effort following Just Cause, even though it was not done "by the book." But was it appropriate, or did it go too far off course? Ambassador Hinton stated that "they were too closely involved . . . [it] was just too much."[83] Nevertheless, he also felt that the MSG had made a contribution to the situation. Was the MSG too intimately involved with the Panamanian government, as the ambassador asserts? It is a difficult question to answer.

From a practical point of view, the MSG-GOP arrangement helped to stimulate the reconstruction process. It filled the gap that resulted from poor contingency planning and the lack of an integrated country team strategy. Although its accomplishments were limited, they gave the GOP reason to

have confidence in the US commitment to Panama. This confidence building was necessary, especially given the doubts caused by the fact that the promised foreign aid was stalled in Congress.

Even in light of these advantages, however, this special relationship had its drawbacks. Perhaps the most serious one was the perception created by having the military of the United States in the forefront of nation-building and democratization in a Latin American country. In spite of all the positive and important things the MSG accomplished, through Latin American lenses the military is a peculiar instrument to be in the lead in building civilian democracy. Of course, the one-year mandate of the MSG did curtail this perception.

## Interagency Coordination

Interagency planning and coordination were missing in the post–Just Cause restoration policy of the United States. Two reasons account for this failure to coordinate. First, the Department of Defense compartmented the planning process and excluded those civilian agencies that should have been involved in the planning for restoration. There is no justification for this exclusion. The security argument is simply unacceptable. Postconflict situations are political-military in scope; to exclude the civilian agencies just does not make any sense. We agree with Ambassador Hinton:

> The excuse here was security, you could not trust those guys, and those other departments and up to the last minute there was just a handful of people in state who had the vaguest idea of what was coming. That is the excuse. I think it was inexcusable, government has to be able to trust people. Somebody should have informed the other parts of the government that there was X probability of a military action, put aside some people, and done some planning for what to do and be ready to follow up if it happens. I had no clue at all, arrived here with a disorganized embassy staff, no AID at all, a few local employees. . . . No resources and a mandate to fix things. . . . I think their [DOD] planning and the way they did things was mistaken in some respects.[84]

The fact that the contingency planning process is not defendable, however, does not excuse a second reason for inadequate interagency coordination. Once involved, the civilian agencies revealed that they were neither conceptually nor organizationally prepared for the kind of situation that followed Just Cause. Perhaps the most glaring example of this was the inability of the embassy to establish a reasonable timetable for the initiation of a country team structure and program for supporting restoration.

When asked in the fall of 1992 to reflect back on why it took so long to establish a country team structure, Ambassador Hinton replied that "it is something I'm wondering if we have now." He went on to observe that these kinds of situations are the ones that "we do not do very often." Consequently, he found it difficult to build a staff in Panama that understood and was in tune with the mission. "We had a very high turnover in the embassy staff.

16. Steele interview.

17. US Department of State Bureau of Public Affairs, *Criminal Justice and Democracy in the Western Hemisphere.*

18. Thurman interview.

19. John Bushnell, New York, interview with author, 22 June 1992.

20. Joint Staff Action Processing Form, "Status of the USAR Police Support to Panama," March 1990 (in author's possession). The purpose of this document and the accompanying message to SOUTHCOM and the embassy was to answer a question by the J-3 of SOUTHCOM pertaining to the legal status of USAR support to police operations in Panama.

21. Offices of ICITAP, *Panama Program Description and Budget*, annual report, 1991, 6.

22. Rick Lang, Panama, interview with author, 23 September 1992. Since the summer of 1990, Rick Lang has served as ICITAP project director in Panama. According to him, the size of the ICITAP staff in Panama since 1990 has remained about the same as that which he inherited when he arrived.

23. Kriskovich interview.

24. Pryor interview.

25. Steele interview. Initially, ICITAP did use the Marriott Hotel as its base and held some of its courses and seminars there. However, during 1990, it moved to offices at the US Embassy.

26. US Department of State Bureau of Public Affairs, *Criminal Justice and Democracy in the Western Hemisphere.*

27. Kriskovich interview.

28. Steele interview.

29. ICITAP, *Panama Program Description and Budget*, 8–12.

30. Ibid., 10.

31. ICITAP, *Panama Program Description and Budget*, 8–9.

32. Shirley Christian, "Panama's New Police Force under Fire," *New York Times*, 1 September 1992, A10.

33. Lang interview.

34. ICITAP, *Panama Program Description and Budget*, 18.

35. Ibid., 16–17.

36. Hinton interview.

37. Joint Staff Action Processing Form, "Status of the USAR Police Support to Panama."

38. Ibid.

39. Ibid.

40. Pryor interview.

41. Ibid.

42. Bushnell interview.

43. Kriskovich interview.

44. Several sources of tension were identified by members of both organizations. First, as Colonel Steele notes, "the MSG's reserve policemen and special forces, who lived in police quarters and worked at night, resented that ICITAP operated in an academic environment, and did not really understand the streets" (Steele interview). ICITAP was seen as unwilling to roll up its sleeves and get involved at the working level. For ICITAP, the strong personal relationships the MSG formed with the senior GOP leadership, according to Kriskovich, made access difficult for his organization. "Colonel Pryor carried a radio . . . which linked him exclusively to Vice President Arias Calderón. . . . How do I convince Arias Calderón . . . that I am supposed to save the law enforcement infrastructure in his country. . . . I never had that kind of access, and I resented it" (Kriskovich interview). The fact that the MSG had access to significantly more resources likewise led to friction. According to Steele, "MSG became the equipment provider, whereas ICITAP made it clear that it was not about to do that. . . . [B]y providing equipment you gain a tremendous amount of influence." The consequence was "when something needed [to be] done, the government turned to the MSG" (Steele interview). This created resentment not only at ICITAP but also with its backers in the embassy. General Thurman stated, "There were long and heated debates" between the MSG, ICITAP, and the embassy. "I had to go back

to Washington and make several visits to the Justice Department to expedite the process" (Thurman interview).

45. Lang interview.

46. Gen George Joulwan, Panama, interview with author, 23 September 1992.

47. Ebrahim Asvat, interview with author, 21 November 1992.

48. Offices of ICITAP, *ICITAP Panama Project: FY 1992 Program Description and Budget*, annual report, 7.

49. *Foreign Broadcast Information Service, Daily Report—Latin America*, 14 May 1992, 23.

50. Pryor interview.

51. Agency for International Development, *US Economic Assistance to Panama* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 8 January 1991), 1.

52. William Coy, Tysons Corner, Va., interview with author, 14 April 1992.

53. Pryor interview.

54. Ibid.

55. Col Ed Bush, Panama, interview with author, 24 September 1992, 1.

56. Ibid.

57. Steele interview.

58. Coy interview.

59. Ibid.

60. US Army Corps of Engineers, "Overview of Engineer Exercises in Panama for General Gordon R. Sullivan," 16 February 1992 (in author's possession).

61. Steele interview.

62. US Army Corps of Engineers, "Overview of Engineer Exercises in Panama for General Gordon R. Sullivan."

63. Headquarters Southern Command, Military Support Group, *PSYOP Support to Promote Liberty: Stability Operations*, 2. This MSG document outlines the PSYOP assets, tools, campaign objectives, and projects initiated during the first part of 1991.

64. Hinton interview.

65. Bushnell interview.

66. Military Support Group, *PSYOP Support to Promote Liberty: Stability Operations*, 6.

67. Lt Col Jeffery Jones, National Security Council Staff Office, Washington, D.C., interview with author, 14 April 1992.

68. Ibid.

69. Ibid.

70. Military Support Group, *PSYOP Support to Promote Liberty: Stability Operations*, 9.

71. Ibid.

72. Ibid., 10.

73. Lt Col Jeffery Jones, "Psychological Operations and Nation-Building in Panama: Operation Promote Liberty" (no date), 3 (in author's possession).

74. Jones interview.

75. Steele interview.

76. Ibid.

77. Pryor interview.

78. Steele interview.

79. Thurman interview.

80. The author was able to observe this interaction firsthand during his first visit to Panama in April 1990. This involved sitting in on meetings between the leadership of the MSG and senior Panamanian government officials, including President Endara.

81. Pryor interview.

82. Ibid.

83. Hinton interview.

84. Ibid.

85. Ibid.

86. Thurman interview.

87. Joulwan interview.

## Chapter 7

# Lessons Learned and Future Relevance

Is it necessary for the United States to develop policy and strategies for postconflict situations? At least two recent developments suggest that it is. The first was identified in the introduction. It was proposed that in the more benign post–cold war international environment, a US decision to use military force will have to be explained and justified in terms of both defending a particular national interest and promoting larger normative principles or values. Specifically, we asserted that the US will require a follow-on policy that contributes to a positive consolidation of the situation and that promotes developments seen by domestic and international audiences as contributing to stability, positive change, and development. The use of force without attention to the postconflict situation will be politically problematic.

A second reason has to do with the fact that the United States will face a number of new issues and challenges in the aftermath of the cold war. For the Department of Defense, this is likely to encompass missions that are not traditional war-fighting ones as well as ones that result from the use of force. With respect to the former, the US may find itself involved in peacekeeping, peace enforcement, and postconflict situations where it was not one of the belligerents but is part of a multilateral effort to resolve a conflict. Indeed, these missions are likely to receive increased consideration as regional security and stability ascend in importance on the national security agenda of the United States.

In light of these post–cold war developments, several lessons drawn from the Panama case study have relevance to the future. At the most general level, the first is the need to recognize postconflict situations as important and complex missions for the Department of Defense. This was clearly not discerned in Panama. The US did not have, at the time of Operation Just Cause, a policy for the period following the use of force. While consideration is now being given to this issue in DOD, the Gulf War suggests that more must be done.

Recognition of this deficiency is reflected in the attention paid to forward presence missions in the 1992 *National Military Strategy of the United States*. It states that "in addition to traditional activities . . . in the new security environment, our military forces may be called upon to execute less traditional operations."[1] Unfortunately, it defines these new missions narrowly as counternarcotics and humanitarian assistance. This suggests that, while moving in the right direction, DOD has yet to develop a comprehensive "Policy for the Environment Short of War," as outlined in the OASD(SO/LIC) initia-

ıive.[6] Indeed, OASD(SO/LIC) and USSOCOM have important roles to play in the development of policy and strategy for these kinds of situations.

Beyond this generic lesson, there are several more specific ones to be derived from the Panama experience in terms of planning and executing postconflict support for reconstruction and democratization. In terms of contingency planning, one must begin with a clear understanding of both the immediate situation and the historical and cultural context of the territory involved. This will drive the focus of the postconflict reconstruction effort. Such an understanding was missing in the case of Panama.

Postconflict planning called for the restoration of democracy in Panama. A review of the Panamanian political setting prior to 20 December 1989 reveals that the concept of restoration was an erroneous basis for what was to take place following the destruction of the Panamanian Defense Force and the removal of Noriega. There was no legacy of democracy to be restored. In fact, just the opposite was the case. From 1903 to 1968, political power was concentrated in the hands of a few upper-class families. They formed an oligarchy that ruled Panama.

Following World War II, new forces began to emerge and challenge the oligarchy. The most important new force was the National Police Force, which became the National Guard and then the PDF. In 1968, the PDF established a provisional junta. This was the beginning of 20 years of praetorian rule in Panama. Under Noriega, the PDF dominated all power centers that might challenge its control of political, economic, and social life in Panama. The authority and autonomy of the military was confirmed in the Panamanian constitution and in "Law 20." The latter assigned to the PDF responsibility for "preservation of the public order and social peace," which amounted to a legal blank check. The PDF became the "final arbiter in the political life and government" of Panama.

Noriega also continued to expand the corporate interest of the military, providing officers the opportunity to enrich themselves through both legal and illegal business activities. Additionally, he fostered corruption within the civilian government agencies and the business community. Corruption became a means of suborning civilian institutions to the PDF. The threat and use of brute force was its counterpart. Beyond refining praetorian control, a process begun by Torrijos, PDF rule resulted in the neglect and deterioration of Panama's economic and social infrastructure.

An accurate assessment of the historical and cultural context as well as the immediate situation in Panama would have reflected these facts. An understanding of the facts would have served as the basis for a realistic postconflict reconstruction effort. Such understanding was missing in the planning process that resulted in Blind Logic.

However, this defect was only one of several in the contingency planning process. A second was the fact that the senior SOUTHCOM leadership paid little attention to postconflict planning. Recall General Thurman's comments: "I did not spend five minutes on Blind Logic during my briefing as incoming CINC in August [1989]." Once in Panama, "the least of my problems at the

time was Blind Logic." This view was not confined to the CINC—it permeated the military institution. It set the tone and created obstacles that undermined the entire process in several ways.

Because Blind Logic was of secondary importance, there is no evidence that senior officials raised any doubts about several aspects of the final product. In retrospect, General Thurman observed that "Blind Logic was not suitable for the reconstruction of Panama because it did not accurately assess the dimensions of the task." He was correct; Blind Logic did not evidence an understanding of the Panamanian context and the political, cultural, economic, and social ramifications of 20 years of praetorian rule. It lacked a realistic assessment of what reconstruction should encompass and could hope to accomplish. Obviously, in the future, senior officials have to be more interested.

A third problem with the planning process was compartmentation. From the very beginning, for "security" reasons, the plan was restricted to DOD. The exclusion of civilian agencies was a big mistake. Their involvement was essential, given the issues involved and the contextual knowledge required to develop an integrated political-military reconstruction program. Assisting in democratization and nation-building is hardly the exclusive responsibility of the military. The services do not have the expertise for all that is involved. An interagency approach is critical to effective contingency planning and is a prerequisite for future situations.

A fourth difficulty was that Panama contingency planning in DOD was bifurcated. War fighting and postconflict restoration were separated, thus ensuring that the former would receive more attention than the latter and that the integration of the two would suffer. This separation allowed the Pentagon to play to its strength and interest—deterring wars or fighting and winning wars. In fact, bifurcation turned postconflict planning above the SCJ-5 level into an afterthought. This should not happen in the future. How military force is used has a direct impact on the kind of situation that follows the shooting.

Fifth, compartmentation and bifurcation had a direct effect on determining who was selected to do the planning for restoration. It also affected the conditions under which they functioned. The kind of expertise that was necessary did not exist within the SCJ-5, the unit assigned the task. In light of this, SCJ-5 turned to SOUTHCOM's Capstone Reserve unit, the 361st Civil Affairs Brigade. While the SCJ-5 had civil affairs experience in Panama, the task of designing a blueprint for reconstruction support was beyond their expertise. On top of this, the conditions under which they worked were hardly conducive to effective contingency planning. The use of volunteers on short tours of duty resulted in an incremental and disjointed approach.

Sixth, the process not only resulted in a plan that both misunderstood critical issues and proposed an insufficient course of action, but that also was flawed in terms of how it was to be executed. Through 22 months of contingency planning, the assumption was that SCJ-5 would serve as commander of the civil-military operations task force. Not only is this an unconventional

arrangement—planners are not commanders—but the fact that it was overlooked serves as a testament to the low priority of postconflict planning in DOD.

To summarize, there are several lessons to be drawn from the Panama experience that should guide future contingency planning for postconflict situations. Unfortunately, most of them fall into the category of things to be avoided: One, do not allow senior DOD officials to ignore planning for postconflict situations; such planning will be critical in the new international environment. Two, do not allow the planning process to be compartmented within DOD; postconflict situations have to be planned in a civilian-military interagency setting. Three, do not bifurcate the process within DOD into war fighting and postconflict compartments; bifurcation is a prescription for ignoring the latter. Four, do not assign the task within DOD to those who lack an understanding of the situation and the historical and cultural context; make use of the expertise that exists. Five, do not limit resources, particularly personnel, that are necessary for effective planning. Six, do not fail to review, review, and review the product.

Panama is an example of what can occur when these requirements are neglected. The execution of Blind Logic went poorly. At the last minute, the senior leadership discovered that execution was assigned to a planning staff. An attempt to correct that situation failed, and the SCJ-5 executed the plan. SCJ-5 was not prepared for what transpired. In addition to command problems, other flaws appeared. Destabilizing developments that were not foreseen weakened the restoration efforts. Massive looting, a new GOP that was "hollow" and not ready to govern, an empty treasury, and a societal infrastructure in a state of serious disrepair, all proved to be major obstacles to reconstruction and democratization. The CMOTF was unprepared for each. It likewise was not ready to address the security force issue. In the face of these major but unanticipated problems, the CMOTF stood conceptually deficient, lacked a coherent organizational structure, and was short of personnel. Postconflict restoration was not considered very important before 20 December 1989; these were the consequences.

To address these postconflict obstacles, an ad hoc organization—the Military Support Group—was conceived. While it did not completely snatch victory out of the jaws of defeat, the MSG did save face for the United States. Conceptually, it had the right elements. Based on the SOCOM memorandum, it consisted of a J-1 through J-5 staff and the following divisions: Public Force Liaison, Military Police, PSYOPS, Civil Affairs, and Special Forces.

The MSG is a case study of how to devise the military component of a postconflict response on an ad hoc basis. However, it has future applications as an organizational concept if, as we have argued, postconflict situations will be a part of the national security agenda of the United States. The MSG concept can be expanded or contracted, depending on what is required. It can and should serve as a conceptual model for planning and developing doctrine—an area in need of serious attention. While the MSG was successful, a preplanned and structured organization makes much more sense. Such

an organization requires closer consideration within both the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) and JCS. There are conceptual and structural lessons to be learned from the MSG that can help the military better prepare for future situations.

However, the MSG was only part of what was needed in Panama. Postconflict assistance requires a civilian-military interagency response. As this study demonstrates, the civilian agencies of the US government were much less prepared, conceptually and organizationally, than the military. Once in Panama, they were very slow to address the reconstruction issues. This was especially true of the State Department, AID, and Department of Justice. It took entirely too long to establish an integrated country team. According to Ambassador Hinton, it may not exist even today. This is unacceptable. Concern with postconflict planning and interagency organization should be incorporated into US national strategy. An important lesson of Panama is the need for an interagency mechanism that can plan for and respond to postconflict crises in an effective way. Including this issue in the national strategy will make the importance of these kinds of situations more visible. This greater visibility should, in turn, generate a working interagency group tasked with preparing for future contingencies through the use of simulations and other management tools. OASD(SO/LIC) should take the lead in promoting this initiative.

This interagency group could drive the development of an integrated strategy for postconflict scenarios. The MSG's attempt to devise an integrated strategy for supporting reconstruction and democratization in Panama was in the right direction but was insufficient. While the strategy gave focus to what occurred in 1990, problems arose with its projections to 1999 in terms of political development, security force, and basic infrastructure repair. These proposals were sketchy and underdeveloped, and were based on a US government political commitment that was uncertain as well as a bureaucratic expertise that was nonexistent.

Developing such a strategy requires an interagency process for planning and implementation. Expertise is also necessary in the various aspects of reconstruction. At the time of Blind Logic, neither existed in any organized manner in the US government. It remains yet to be established.

There are other crucial lessons to be derived from specific reconstruction activities of the MSG. Perhaps the most important is how to assist in restructuring security forces. Any state that hopes to make the transition from an authoritarian or dictatorial structure to one based on democracy must reform the military and security institutions. The reason is that these instruments of authoritarian control operate above the rule of law.

To build democracy in Panama, it was necessary to expunge all vestiges of praetorian rule and replace the PDF with a security force subordinated to a democratically elected government and respectful of the law. It was not difficult to destroy the PDF; Operation Just Cause made short work of it. However, when it came to providing the expertise and programs required for establishing a national police force, the US was not prepared. While the

military could lend support to such an effort, it was beyond DOD's expertise to direct it.

However, the organization selected for the mission—International Criminal Investigative Training Assistance Program—likewise was unprepared. It did not have the programs and personnel necessary to establish a police force of approximately 12,000, most of whom were former members of the PDF. If ICITAP is given such a mission in the future, it will know a great deal more and will have experience and programs that it did not have when it began the Panama project.

It is more likely, however, that states seeking to transition from dictatorship in the aftermath of internal conflict will plan to maintain military institutions. Threats from outside their borders will remain important problems to contend with. The selection of the Costa Rican option, which may have been appropriate for Panama, will be more the exception than the rule. If the US is to be involved in such postconflict transitions, it will require DOD advisory teams and programs whose concept of operations includes assisting in the institutionalization of the civil-military ethos of democracy in host countries' military organizations.

This concept goes well beyond the traditional DOD programs that are designed to indirectly nurture such change. For example, military-to-military contracts, joint exercises, security assistance, and internal defense and development programs are all useful and can support the concept proposed here, but they are not sufficient to the task. Fundamental change requires a more direct and sustained effort of institution-building. If the US is to be involved in postconflict situations, this kind of DOD capability is essential. The skills, expertise, and programs required to support such efforts do not currently exist, although at least one interesting initiative has been proposed by the US National Guard. Within DOD, the OASD(SO/LIC) should take the lead in promoting this initiative.

The MSG was able to assist the Panamanian government as it began the reconstruction process. While the US civilian agencies struggled to establish themselves in Panama, the MSG demonstrated US commitment to the country. At a time when the GOP needed to give to the Panamanian people a sign that it was responding to their needs, the MSG helped accomplish this. Furthermore, the 1990 engineering programs were routinized and continue today.

There are important lessons not only in these reconstruction programs but in how the MSG carried them out under the auspices of the GOP. The MSG sought to stay in the background and encouraged the development of a decision-making and implementation process that involved the Panamanian government—local, province, and national levels. Such an approach had been missing in Panama for years. What the MSG established is instructive in terms of US-host country relations.

In fact, more broadly, this is true of the overall MSG-GOP liaison process. While there were drawbacks to what we have called a special relationship, it did reflect an understanding of the Panamanian culture. While perhaps unor-

thodox for the US government, it was in tune with the political and societal context in which the MSG had to operate. In many parts of the developing world, not just in Central America, this is the most effective way to accomplish US objectives. However, many parts of the foreign policy and national security bureaucracy do not see such close relations as their cup of tea.

Finally, psychological operations have a place within an MSG construct. Unfortunately, in Panama PSYOPS encountered not uncommon civilian agency attitudes and biases. An objective examination of what took place demonstrates that PSYOPS has a contribution to make to postconflict reconstruction programs. Communications and information are important assets, and military PSYOPS units have the skills and expertise to perform these tasks. This can be seen in the limited PSYOPS products developed during its short tenure with the MSG. However, the larger lesson is that such postconflict activities require the ability to communicate and inform. To exclude PSYOPS does not make sense.

**Notes**

1. Gen Colin S. Powell, chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, *National Military Strategy of the United States* (Washington, D.C.: Department of Defense, January 1992), 14.

2. "Policy for the Environment Short of War," working draft (Washington, D.C.: 20 January 1992), 4.7.

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