

@CHAPTER = HONDURAS

The Bush administration placed little emphasis on human rights in its relations with Honduras, a major recipient of U.S. military and economic assistance and a country with a troubling human rights record. Apart from the annual *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices*, State Department officials were unable to cite a single instance in which the Bush administration issued a statement on human rights in Honduras.

Vice President Dan Quayle visited Honduras on June 13, where he met with then-President José Azcona, then-U.S. Ambassador Everett Briggs, and leaders of the anti-Sandinista insurgents, the *contras*, based in Honduras. But according to the State Department desk officer for Honduras, Quayle did not discuss human rights. Instead, Quayle's meetings focused on the fate of the *contras*, and the U.S. effort to unite its regional allies against the governments of Panama and Nicaragua. This practice recalled that of the Reagan administration, which consistently sacrificed human rights concerns in Honduras to the maintenance of warm relations with the Honduran military, its strategic ally against Managua. Among the human rights issues in 1989 that Washington should have raised with its close ally were several cases of disappearances attributed to the military, including the November disappearance of two Salvadoran refugees from the Colomoncagua refugee camp who are believed to have been detained by Honduran soldiers. Cases of torture by the military were also reported in 1989, and a string of political assassinations remain unsolved, including two in July in which military involvement is suspected.

We are particularly concerned by the Bush administration's failure to lend support to the Inter-American Court of Human Rights, the judicial arm of the Organization of American States ("OAS"), which has undertaken its first adversarial proceedings in three cases against Honduras for the disappearance of four individuals in the early 1980s. In a July 1988 decision, the Court found Honduras in violation of the American Convention on Human Rights for the 1981 disappearance of Angel Manfredo Velásquez Rodríguez. In January 1989, the Court again held Honduras responsible, this time for the 1982 disappearance of Saúl Godínez. A March 1989 decision found insufficient evidence to hold Honduras responsible for the disappearance of two Costa Rican citizens. In July, the Court ordered Honduras to pay damages to the families of Velásquez and Godínez. The October deadline for payment was disregarded by Honduras, which has expressed extreme reluctance to comply. When the matter was about to be raised at the OAS General Assembly, Honduras announced that its president had submitted a bill to the Honduran legislature to appropriate the necessary funds. By year's end, however, Honduras had still not complied with the Court's order for payment, nor with its obligation (also spelled out in the Court's judgments) to investigate the disappearances and disclose the findings to the relatives of Godínez and Velásquez.

Throughout the proceedings, which opened in 1986, U.S. officials acted as apologists for Honduras rather than as defenders of the nascent Inter-American judicial system. In their *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices*, the Bush and Reagan administrations disparaged the Court and its decisions, while seeking to shield Honduras from blame. In a May 1989 panel discussion sponsored by the Association of the Bar of the City of New York, an official of the State Department's Bureau of Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs reiterated this criticism, arguing that Honduras was unfairly singled out by the Court.

The credibility of the Inter-American judicial system depends on the successful completion of the case against Honduras. By making statements that tend to excuse Honduras, the Bush administration gives ammunition to the most recalcitrant elements of the Honduran government, who have advocated an illegal

withdrawal of Honduras from the proceedings. Instead, the administration should pronounce its support for the Inter-American legal system and strongly urge its ally to comply with the Court's orders.

For fiscal year 1990, the State Department has requested \$60 million in military aid for Honduras, along with \$1.2 million for military training, \$87 million in economic support funds (balance-of-payments support), and \$59 million in development and food aid. In addition, Honduras continues to receive police aid under the Department of Justice's ICITAP program for criminal-investigations training.

This substantial aid commitment grants Washington considerable leverage as well as responsibility to press for an end to human rights violations by the Honduran military. There is no indication that this responsibility is being shouldered by the Bush administration.