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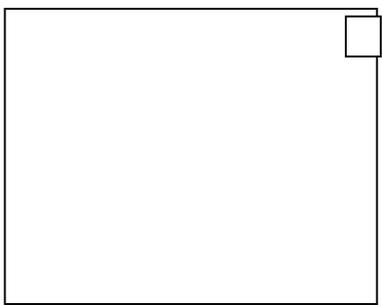
# Latin America Review (U)

23 July 1993

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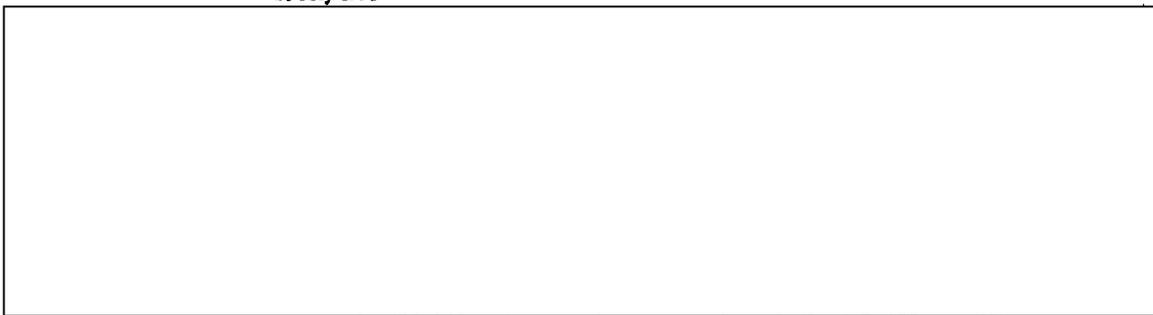
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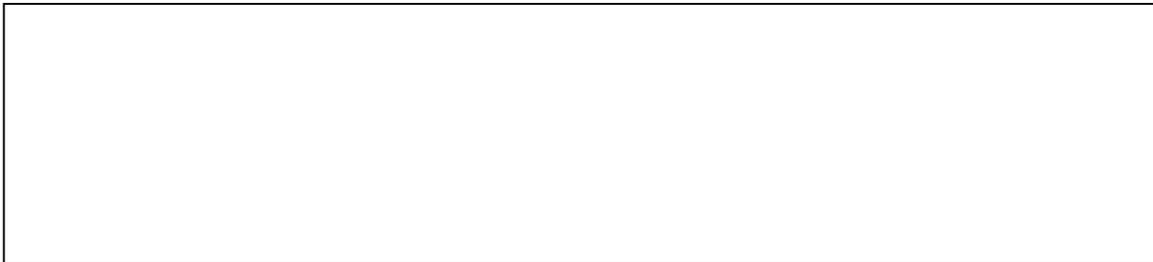
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**Guatemala: President De Leon and the Military**

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President De Leon Cerpio is unlikely to jeopardize a currently good working relationship with the armed forces, but civil-military tensions could grow over issues such as his earlier demands that officers guilty of human rights abuses be prosecuted.



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### Guatemala: President De Leon and the Military [redacted]

Civil-military relations in Guatemala have come to a new crossroads with the arrival in office of President Ramiro De Leon Carpio. Former President Serrano's seizure of extraconstitutional powers and the dissolution of Congress and the Supreme Court on 25 May was tacitly supported by many top officers in the military, including the Minister of Defense. In the face of strong domestic and international disapproval of the "autocoup," however, and discontent among midlevel and junior officers, the high command withdrew its support. The Guatemalan Congress ended the crisis by refusing to recognize Vice President Espina as Serrano's successor and electing De Leon, Guatemala's human rights ombudsman, to serve out the remainder of Serrano's term until January 1996. [redacted]

#### Initial Support for the New President

Despite De Leon's previous criticism of the military's policies, the new Commander in Chief appears to have garnered the respect and the deference of his officers, at least for the near term. As a prominent human rights advocate, De Leon was a vocal critic of the military; he sought ways to end the armed forces' immunity and to prosecute officers implicated in serious abuses of authority. Since assuming office, the new President appears to have shelved some of his harsher rhetoric against the military in order to establish positive relations with the armed forces. [redacted]

Other reporting suggests that De Leon helped dispel military unease with Defense Minister General Garcia for backing Serrano by appointing Garcia's next-in-line, General Perussina, as Defense Minister. Only two weeks later, however, De Leon responded to junior and mid-level officer complaints about Perussina's own support of Serrano and replaced him with the next senior officer, General Enriquez, a moderate. [redacted]

For now, the officer corps is backing Guatemala's new administration, [redacted] senior officers believe De Leon is a good choice for president because

his excellent international reputation may enable him to force concessions from the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Union (URNG) insurgents and end the 32-year-old civil war. [redacted] Other high-ranking officers feel that De Leon's past attacks on the military will reinforce the President's strong credibility with Guatemala's foreign critics and diminish sympathy for the rebels. [redacted]

#### Potential Civil-Military Pitfalls

Despite initial backing from the officer corps, a variety of issues could complicate De Leon's task as Commander in Chief. For example, De Leon is likely to be under considerable public pressure to enforce his earlier demands as human rights ombudsman that officers guilty of abuses be prosecuted. Failure to follow through may incur the wrath of his liberal civilian constituency, especially in the human rights community. On the other hand, the perception among officers that De Leon is bowing to pressure from the left—or the international community—to make peace with the URNG could cause conflicts with hardliners, especially if peace talks point to a purge of abusive officers. [redacted]

#### Outlook and Implications

De Leon is pragmatic and is unlikely to jeopardize a currently good working relationship with the armed forces by pushing for dramatic military reform. The President will, in our judgment, work to ensure military support and avoid taking actions that would offend the officer corps. Nonetheless, De Leon has proven himself to be committed to improving the military's human rights record and is likely to push the military to take

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action against abusers in its ranks. De Leon views US and international aid as important to strengthening military support for his regime and will probably lobby for the reinstatement of US military assistance that has been suspended since December 1990 [redacted]

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