

García, Viviana (2015). *Military forces, democracy and post-conflict: the experiences of El Salvador and Guatemala*. In: Vargas, A. and García, V. (Ed). *Security and defense in the transition from war to peace: reflections and perspectives*. Bogotá: National University of Colombia

The objective is to carry out a descriptive analysis that considers the military question both in the democratic transition and in the peace and post-conflict process in El Salvador and Guatemala.

It gathers civic-military reflections and the military counterclaim; general considerations on the democratic transition and the end of the armed conflict in Central America; the armed forces in the double transition: El Salvador and Guatemala; and the lessons for the Colombian case.

At the end of the 20th century, Central America was the scene of major political transformations based on two fundamental processes: the transition to democratic regimes and the transition from war to peace. Paradoxically, in the 1980s, as the democratic transition began, a high point was reached in the internal armed conflicts in Nicaragua, El Salvador and Guatemala, which also had an impact on the bilateral relationship between several of them and in the region as a whole. The dynamics and scope of democratization was conditioned by war, so that the consolidation of democracy could only be achieved in the post-conflict framework.

In the late 1970s, it was pointed out that military coups were a constant in Latin America, which could be considered normal or regular in the political process in the region. El Salvador and Guatemala are a clear testimony to that sad reality. However, in the following two decades this fact was transformed from the depoliticization of the military and the achievement of military subordination to the civil power are the two fundamental achievements in the process of transition to democracy in these two countries.

In any case, in El Salvador and Guatemala the military had the ability to retain many of their privileges and privileges. In Guatemala more than in El Salvador and, after the withdrawal of the military from the political arena and the center of state power, the indifference on the part of civilians towards the institution became the preservation of a wide sphere of autonomy. Added to the above is the use of the Armed Forces for internal security tasks, within the framework of the growth of crime, urban violence and organized crime. Therefore, the debt of the transition to democracy in the countries of El Salvador and Guatemala is full civil control over the Armed Forces and the configuration of civil-military relations, in accordance with democratic standards and respect for Human Rights. The lesson left by the experience of El Salvador and Guatemala in the processes of transition to democracy after an armed conflict is the increase in violence and the emergence of criminal groups. A reform of the Public Force must not be accelerated and improvised, since it must take into account territorial problems, security needs and the times and stages of that reform.