military camps in the border zone with Guinea-Bissau under the pretext of support for a democratically elected government challenged by an illegal internal rebellion. The external security setting of the conflict in the southern Ziguinchor region, therefore, has been important, while the capacity of the MFDC to sustain the armed struggle depends on its capacity to maintain external linkages based on illegal smuggling activities.

In the case of Niger it is obvious that instability in neighboring countries has been rampant for a long period. Niger forcibly sided with the federal government of Nigeria during the Biafra crisis, as the majority of its citizens were Hausa who maintained strong cultural and economic ties with their siblings across the border in Northern Nigeria. Furthermore, land-locked Niger depended very strongly on the Nigerian economy for import and export. After the great drought in 1973-74 many nomads were forced in exile, notably to Algeria and Libya. Libya had become a regional security liability when President Khadaffi openly claimed mineral rich parts of Niger and Chad. In turn this motivated a military coup in Niger which played down Libyan territorial claims. Subsequently, diplomatic ties were interrupted for a while. The Tamajaq rebellion broke out as a consequence of the failure to take genuine grievances into account and was triggered by the unfulfilled promises and humiliations in the aftermath of their forced repatriation from neighboring Algeria and Libya. The changing fortunes of the various warlords in Chad and the discovery of oil reserves in the Lake Chad area led the Tubu community into rebellion against the state of Niger in 1995. Despite a proliferation of conflicts throughout the post independence period, in the case of Niger there seems to be less direct interaction between the developments in the regional security setting and internal conflict.

During the period immediately preceding the civil war with Biafra there were no significant conflicts in the surrounding countries of Nigeria. Despite internal political divisions Cameroon remained stable. Niger's first government faced the Sawaba rebellions in 1964, but this conflict was motivated by ideology and showed no resemblance with the secessionist drive of the Igbo's. Finally, a border conflict between erstwhile Dahomey and Niger did not lead to armed conflict between both protagonists. After 1970 Nigeria did not lapse into other internal conflicts despite the deterioration of the regional security setting. Within the ECOWAS inspired regional intervention force ECOMOG it came to play a dominant role, despite structural internal imbalances and the continuation of a non-democratic military government in power.

Finally, Ghana was surrounded by countries that maintained internal peace for a long period. Only neighboring Togo provided a nuisance factor for Ghana, through the Ewe inspired rebellion. Togo experienced protracted political conflict from the end of the 1980s onward between president Eyadema and the political opposition. During Nkrumah's reign it was Ghana itself with its strong Pan-Africanist and socialist ideology that interfered in regional affairs. It was Nkrumah who backed the Sawaba invasion into Niger. The internal political rumblings in Burkina Faso did not affect Ghana's internal situation, although present-day relations between their respective leaders continue to be hostile as Thomas Sankara, personal friend of Ghana's strongmen Jerry Rawlings, was murdered by his successor Blaise Compaore during the military coup of 1987.

Conclusions

In general the regional security setting has been undergoing substantial change since the epoch of de-colonization. The 1960-1980 period was relatively quiet with few inter- and intrastate conflicts, but the latter period has witnessed a proliferation of internal conflicts

throughout the region. From this overview four different 'types' of conflict can be derived. Firstly, interstate conflicts over disputed border areas. Secondly, disputes over the nature of the state, i. e. the protest against one-party states and military rule and the quest for democracy. Thirdly, disputes over the internal distribution of state resources between various ethnic groups and feelings of perceived or real selective deprivation of specific groups within states. Fourthly, conflicts for the political power nexus and the state apparatus itself between contending political elite groups.

From a perspective of potential external influence on the dynamics and proliferation of the aforementioned conflicts we turn to an overview of major players in the sub-region. France has been and remains by far the most influential external power in the West African Region. France has interfered in the internal politics of most of its client Francophone states, and even beyond, as the Biafra crises demonstrates. Prior to this conflict France created the OCRS ("Organisation Commune des Régions Sahariennes") in order to maintain possession of important mineral resources in the central Sahara desert. This belated effort to consolidate colonial interests was abandoned in 1964, but underscores the strategic importance of this region. The role of England has been subtler and seems to fade away gradually as time goes by. The role of the former Soviet Union has always focused on financial and military aid to friendly states in the region, and disappeared after its decline as a major power in the late 1980s. The interstate conflicts are partly a result of colonial state formation and arbitrary delineation of boundaries ("Ille de L'été" dispute between Niger and Benin, the recurrent skirmishes between Mali and Burkina, the border conflict between Mauritania and Senegal, the clashes between Nigeria and Cameroon over the Bakasi peninsula and finally the controversy over off-shore resources between Senegal and Guinea Bissau). The category of internal struggle for equal and unbiased resource distribution (in the broad sense of the term) between distinct ethno-linguistic communities within states also harbors side effects of the colonial legacy. The specific composition of states with regard to cultural groups implies predetermined post-colonial power relations between them. However, the post-colonial history of the West African states has demonstrated an apparent inability or unwillingness of political elite groups in power to alter imbalances in order to overcome such conflict-prone characteristics within existing states. The internal power struggles between contending elites can be related to the former conflicts feeding on discontent over state policies of co-optation and marginalization. The three conflict cases in our research sample can be situated in the category of internal distribution of resources, eventually leading to secessionist tendencies.

3.3 Central America

3.3.1 The political and military dimension

State-formation and pluralism
The Central American region has enjoyed a long history of independence, and in this regard stands out from the other regions under investigation. Problems of state formation, as they are to be found in the South Asian and West African countries, are consequently almost absent. Moreover, since the region consists of relatively homogeneous societies, it does not have to face pluralism. Two exceptions, however, need to be mentioned: the Miskitos in Nicaragua and the Mayas in Guatemala. Both groups have long remained outside mainstream politics. The centralist policies of the Sandinist government in Nicaragua, for instance, did not take note of the multiethnic character of the Atlantic region. The attempt to force the Miskitos into the mold of the revolution, and to impose organizational models that were not in line with

their culture, had the effect of alienating the Miskitos from the state, and indeed motivating them to join the Contras. The exclusion of the Mayas from mainstream politics seems even more remarkable since they form an absolute majority in society. They were living under trying conditions, which even worsened when state policies expelled them from their traditional lands. The 1970s revolution quickly spread to Maya regions, and their worsening economic conditions turned them into an easy target for mobilization. For the first time in Guatemalan history the issue of Maya representation appeared on the political agenda.

In general, we may conclude that the problem of creating states out of plural societies applies to the countries in Central America only to a very limited extent. The region is not confronted with problems of secessionist groups, nor are the inhabitants of the Central American countries questioning the concept of the state. Nevertheless, the history of Central America as of the Second World War is conflict ridden, with violent armed conflicts in almost all countries. The explanation for these conflicts consequently needs to be found in other areas. Here, we will look at institutional capacity, ideology, and democratization.

Institutional capacity and democratization

It is somewhat remarkable to notice that, despite their long history of independence, the Central American countries have not been successful in developing into strong states, Costa Rica being an exception in this regard. Moreover, that country has not experienced any violent conflict since 1948. Also Honduras succeeded in preventing conflict. Guatemala, El Salvador and Nicaragua while operating under comparable socioeconomic conditions as the Costa Rican and Honduran states, on the contrary had to face severe violent conflicts. The concepts of institutional capacity, ideology and democratization seem to hold some clues for explaining this deviancy, since these conflict-ridden countries have some features in common. The main common characteristic is a strong bond between the military and the economic elite at the national decision-making level, best described as military-economic oligarchies. While focusing on protecting elite interests, the exclusionary policies towards large sections of the population resulted in the creation of a typically authoritarian and exclusionary state. The Center and the redistribution of the state's resources were dominated by the oligarchy, and the oligarchy's only means to command loyalty from the rest of society were the use of fear, force and coercion.

The most extreme case in this regard is Guatemala. After the 'revolutionary' period of Arevalo and Arbenz (1944-54), the military intervened to 'save' the country from communism, and the whole government machinery was geared towards fighting communism. Guatemala was thus transformed into a 'counterinsurgency state'. In the process of reaching the aim of annihilating communism however, the military were mainly defending the interests of the economic elite, and indeed became part of it. As they became more and more involved in economic activities they not only ruled the state, but increasingly also started to own the state. An interesting observation in this regard is that as the military turned into an economic actor, they became more interested in a solution of the conflict. Their aim of fighting communism, however, was never abandoned.

The political involvement of the military in Guatemala, however, has not been very successful, and has had a detrimental effect on the institutional capacity of the state. Their rule became increasingly corrupt, as they started to act as predators on the state's resources and were no longer able to control all acts of violence of paramilitary groups. In fact, the political model of a military oligarchy ruling the country and controlling all facets of society failed completely. This not only indicates that institutional capacity based upon fear, violence and

coercion cannot hold, but also that a state that does not provide a structure for development, cannot command loyalty. Now that the conflict in Guatemala has ended, the state has entered a new stage. The introduction of democratic politics might bring problems of a new kind for the Central American region. The Mayas, often referred to as a minority, are in fact a majority but they have not yet manifested themselves as such. Due to internal divisions it is still unclear whether they will be able to do so in the future. But if they do, this will certainly create a landslide in the political landscape of Guatemala. It still remains to be seen if the *ladino* minority that up until now has ruled the country will accept such a development.

Direct involvement of the military in politics was not the case in Nicaragua before the Sandinist revolution. During the Somoza dynasty the military were subordinate to the political elite, which mainly consisted of a single family having succeeded in obtaining a 'primus inter pares' position of dynastic dimensions. Their rule was based on personal power, and they systematically concentrated political power in the Center where they asserted total personal control over formal political structures. Formal institutions like Parliament were disempowered, and a system of checks and balances, consequently, was completely lacking. While creating a situation in which their power was more or less absolute, the Somoza's could nevertheless not function without the assistance of other members of the elite. Co-optation together with a subordinated military – often in the role of private army to the family – for a long time seemed to guarantee the 'strength' of the state and its capacity to command loyalty.

The Sandinist revolution, resulting in the overthrow of the Somoza dynasty, implied a 180-degree shift in ideological outlook, as well as in the structuring of the state. The military dimension took the form of a Sandinist Peoples Army, which in close cooperation with the government structure, came to serve one central goal: the protection of the revolution. For some time the state was able to command loyalty, but in the longer run the limited space for political opposition undermined the legitimacy of the Sandinists. Again, opposition to the regime was forced to voice its discontent through the use of violent means.

The Nicaraguan case thus seems to hold "lessons" with regard to the necessity of power sharing. The Somoza dynasty obviously failed to apply any of these mechanisms. They fully relied on coercion and a system of co-optation. The limitation of this system became apparent in the last phase of the Somoza dynasty, when the abuse of power and the corruption also started to affect sectors of the economic elite. The attempt by the Somoza dynasty to obtain absolute power resulted in the loss of support from sections of the elite that instead joined the opposition forces. Together with the Sandinists the 'bourgeois' groups of society formed a multi-class front that succeeded in overthrowing the Somoza dynasty. The Sandinist regime as well has neglected some of the important lessons learned from the Somoza period, and embarked on exclusionary policies. All government and societal structures were related to the ideology of the FSLN, and thus to the party and its leaders. And although the Sandinists tried to transform the state into a structure for development, the opposite goal was attained because of its unwillingness to reach consensus with others. The system of FSLN favoritism and exclusion of the economic elite of the country proved to be a fundamental mistake, since it created a new opposition (former partners in the struggle to topple the Somoza dynasty) that embarked on an armed struggle for change (the Contras). In addition, these developments had a negative effect on the capacity of the state and finally undermined the legitimacy of the Sandinists, as became apparent during the elections of 1990, when the opposition defeated the FSLN.

In the case of El Salvador the alliance of military and the economic elite also confronted a mainly Marxist-Leninist opposition of guerrilla groups. As in the other countries these groups came into being as a result of the limited space for democratic political participation and the exclusionary character of the economy. The widespread support for the guerrilla's was a clear demonstration of the lack of legitimacy of the state. In an attempt to survive, the Salvadoran regime adopted a policy of co-optation, but this approach proved insufficient in the long run. The unwillingness of the Center to make reforms of any kind resulted in civil war. The response of the state, violent repression, undermined its legitimacy even further. As it became evident that a military defeat of either of the parties was impossible, both parties accepted a compromise to end the conflict. This compromise was laid down in the peace accords of 1994, which boiled down to the acceptance of the idea that political reforms were necessary, and had to form the basis of further improvement of the socioeconomic situation. In general, the compromise and the peace accord seem to indicate that, if parties are indeed inclined to accept and apply the mechanisms of power sharing, the likelihood of conflict diminishes. During the 1994 elections in El Salvador the former guerrilla movement participated as an official political party.

Contrary to the above-mentioned countries, Honduras and Costa Rica did not experience civil war during the period under investigation. As regards the military and their role in politics, Costa Rica is the odd man out in the region. As of the ending of the 1948 Civil War, the country no longer disposes of an army. This is remarkable in a region where all countries were confronted with armed resistance of some kind, or with situations in which the military could promote themselves as defenders of the country and its Constitution. Costa Rica never needed any instruments of violence to deal with its internal politics or to implement policies. This already indicates that Costa Rica can be characterized as consensus based community with a legitimate Center that was able to command loyalty, i.e. a strong state. Part of its strong state character can be related to the outcome of the Civil War. One of the outcomes of the Civil War was the acceptance of democratic elections and their outcomes as a legitimate mechanism for the transfer of power. At another level it was agreed that the state had to be modernized, as well as to become a structure for development of the country. This was possible through state interventionism in the economy and in society. There was general acceptance of the state's leading by all sections of society (from the economic elites to the poorer parts of the population). The leading role of the state stabilized the political system. On the political plane extremist parties were prohibited. In the case of Costa Rica this implied the prohibition of the Communist Party. Its prohibition in itself is nothing special in the Central American context – communist parties were prohibited all over the Isthmus (except during the Sandinist period in Nicaragua). What is interesting, however, is the fact that contrary to the other countries the Costa Rican communists did not transform into a large, violent resistance movement. It should however be noted that the government incorporated several of the ideas of the Communist Party in its policies, which may have contributed to the low profile of communist ideology in Costa Rican society.

Whereas the Costa Rican case could be explained by the success of its democratic and compromise-oriented approach, Honduras had no democratic but an exclusionary political system that was controlled by the military. The military's role in politics was laid down in the Constitution of 1957, which in fact placed the military above politics as protectors of the country and its Constitution. Despite the legalization of military intervention in politics the armed forces did not embark upon the type of violent repressive politics as was the case in the other countries, although they did undertake several counterinsurgency campaigns the scale was less severe. The explanation of this more benign character of the military is also to be

found in the absence of a large-scale violent or rebellious opposition. This resulted from the Center's handling of Honduras' most crucial political issue: land reform. In contrast to the countries where violent opposition did occur, Honduras embarked on a policy of small and instrumental reform. This implied just enough reform to temporarily satisfy the opposition, but insufficient to alarm the landed elite. At the same time the Center embarked on a policy of repression of extremists, to demonstrate that they would not accept any revolutionary developments. However, the military gradually seemed to have become aware of the limits of this two-track approach. They consequently started to open up the political system, thus making a return to civilian rule possible. The perspective of civilian rule and the willingness of the military to accept a return to democratic politics probably also have contributed to curbing extremist groups. The return to democratic politics was a slow process, and fits perfectly in the 'escape valve' approach of the military-economic elite: always giving in when necessary, but not too much. The transition to democratic politics, however, had its price: to forget about the past and not investigate the role of the military. The military also made clear that they would not accept interference in *their* affairs. This indicates that even though a state has attained the right to rule democratically, and there are a consensus-based community and a capability to extract resources and provide services, the issue of civilian control over the military is not yet solved.

Conclusions

Concluding it can be said that lack of legitimacy of the political center was the main problem in the Central American countries. The cases we investigated make clear that in order to command loyalty and obtain legitimacy, states not only need to provide certain services, but have to grant access to the decision-making level (Costa Rica) and resource allocation (Costa Rica and Honduras) as well. Of the states we investigated, Costa Rica performed best on all accounts. Honduras had a policy of 'escape valves' and instrumental reform. The limits of this policy of engineered reform, however, concern the strong position of the military in society. The Nicaraguan state still has to deal with a double heritage: the remnants of Somoza and the Sandinist period. The country still confronts the risk of a relapse into the old pattern of violent politics. The same applies to Guatemala, where the future of the state is ambiguous as long as the position of the Mayas has not crystallized and the position of the armed forces remains unclear.

3.3.2 The socioeconomic dimension

Structural factors

In Central America income inequality is a pervasive characteristic of the entire region. As most of the economically active population depends on agriculture for a livelihood, access to land is of overriding importance. With a birds eye perspective on the socioeconomic dimension of intrastate violence, unequal access to land stands out as the single most important factor. In the entire region the unequal distribution of agricultural land is a common feature. The elite landholding groups of European descent control a disproportionate amount of the agricultural lands, as well as commerce and services. Land titles or ownership of land are pivotal to measure inequality in the five countries. Different governments, be it civil or military, have made attempts to change the uneven distribution of land. Most of these efforts were halfhearted at best. During the Sandinist period a vast program of agrarian reform was implemented affecting some 30% of all farmland. When the Sandinists were voted out of power in 1990 the successor government slowly redressed the balance by privatizing state enterprises, thus largely undoing the previous reform.

The region is dominated by an export-oriented agricultural model of the economy. Huge estates, mostly owned by either foreign companies or national land owning elites, produce either coffee or tropical fruits such as bananas and pine apples, for export purposes. This fragile lop-sided economy depends on the availability of a large rural working force. After the Cuban crises new opportunities were created as cotton and sugar became important new products, next to cattle raising. This in turn led to the creation of new economic elites who joined the ranks of the landed elite. Simultaneously, a process of industrialization started culminating in the creation of a regional common market that was dissolved after the short inter-state war between El Salvador and Honduras. Honduras and Nicaragua stand out as basically agricultural countries, where large foreign companies exerted substantial influence over local affairs. El Salvador has a strongly developed domestic industrial sector, Guatemala and Costa Rica ranking somewhere in between these countries.

Poverty, inequality, state policies and dynamics of differentiation
Differences in the distribution and access to agricultural land lie at the basis of socioeconomic inequality between population groups in the region. These patterns have persisted over time and have even deteriorated under the cumulative impact of demographic growth and changes in the agricultural economy during the last decades, such as the introduction of sugar cane and cotton and the spread of extensive cattle ranching. These developments exacerbated existing patterns of land distribution to the detriment of the small-holder segment of the population. Furthermore, erstwhile communal lands were occupied by powerful landed elite groups, as was the case in Honduras and Nicaragua. In Nicaragua small-holder peasants even were evicted from their lands with the tacit support of the Somoza regime. Traditionally small-holders and land-less peasants were used as a labor reserve for the prevailing agro-export economy but peasants were forced into abandoning land and to migrate to urban areas as labor reserve for the nascent import substitution industry in the 1960s. This was caused by the scaling-up of agricultural production methods, demographic pressure on the countryside and the introduction of extensive cattle breeding on reclaimed 'selva', thus limiting spontaneous settlement by landless peasants on such lands.

During the Somoza regime in Nicaragua and in Guatemala no serious attempts at land reform have been undertaken. In El Salvador, Honduras and in Nicaragua during the Sandinist regime land reform was taken up as a policy and implemented to some extent. In both El Salvador and Honduras the most productive land such as the major coffee plantations, were left out. Only in Nicaragua a certain amount of private productive land previously belonging to the dominant elite was confiscated by the state and turned into collective farms. Overall, existing patterns of land distribution have remained the same, thus perpetuating the underlying structural inequality between a small group of landed elite and a vast majority of small-holders and land less laborers.

Population pressure as a separate factor is particularly relevant to the case of El Salvador, and needs to be taken into account when analyzing the intrastate war between El Salvador and Honduras. In El Salvador the so-called agricultural frontier has reached the outer limits of the state territory. Many peasants were more or less forced to migrate to adjoining Honduras where land was still abundant. When recession hit Honduras and land reform was halted public discontent was channeled towards these migrant peasants. They were selectively targeted by Honduran security forces and militias (Macha Brava), and were thus serving as a scapegoat to avoid more structural agricultural reforms. In the other countries in the region

population densities are much lower, providing political regimes with safety valve options as regards land distribution. Here land clearing in hitherto uncultivated areas remains possible.

As regards social service provision to the population by central governments Costa Rica stands out as the sole example of continuous and substantial public investment. This feature sets Costa Rica apart from the other countries in the region. In the other four countries public expenditures on education consistently fell far behind minimum requirements, resulting in low enrolment rates for primary and secondary education, notably to the detriment of rural areas, indigenous groups and women. The provision of health care shows a similar pattern. Simultaneously, a trend aiming at cost recovery has gradually emerged under the impact of externally imposed austerity programs leading to a further loss of service delivery or purchasing power among poor segments of the population. If the level of services and the degree of access to public social services are indicative of government performance, and if positive trends contribute to an improvement of the quality of life for poorer segments of society, the current trends may well lead to increased tensions and eventually to social conflict in the region.

Apart from the Sandinist period in Nicaragua there is no evidence to support a linear relationship between decline in economic growth and violent conflict or the reverse. However,, relative economic deprivation of specific sub-groups of the elite seem to have provoked violent opposition towards specific governments. During the Somoza period the newly emerging economic elite, springing from the agricultural diversification in the 1960s (cotton, sugar cane and cattle raising) initially were co-opted into the political system but subsequently marginalized to some extent. This infuriated members of this group and led to mobilizing them into the broad resistance movement against the Somoza clan. Later this very group joined the Contra ranks when venues for capital accumulation were blocked and participation in the newly established mixed economy model was refused to them.

The cultural cleavages between the various layers in local society have been taken for granted and therefore tend to be under-estimated as a potential cause of violent conflict. Many events such as the so-called "Great Matanza' in El Salvador (1932) and counter- insurgency in the Guatemalan highlands in the early 1980s testify to the ongoing violent repression of indigenous peoples in the region. Racism has been a salient feature in the various states of Central America. The conflict histories of these states and the prevailing socioeconomic stratification clearly indicate the subservient position of indigenous peoples. In general three distinct groups can be identified with regard to distinctions in race. The term 'criollos' refers to the elite, white Central Americans of European descent, 'mestizos' refers to a racial mix of Europeans with either indigenous Indians or Africans, mostly descendants of slaves. Lastly, the term indigenous refers to descendants of the original Indian population. The term 'ladino' indicates a person who is hispanicized to the extent of speaking Spanish, wearing western dress and has a strong cultural connotation. In all countries there is a very keen awareness of the social position of a person strongly depending on the degree of racial mixture and descent. In some countries the indigenous element has virtually been exterminated (Costa Rica and Honduras), in others assimilated into the mestizo peasantry (El Salvador), or marginalized (Nicaragua and notably Guatemala). In Guatemala the indigenous Indian population accounts for over half of the total population, in Nicaragua this percentage stands at roughly 4%. In all countries beside Guatemala, the indigenous form very small minorities. The contrast between 'criollos' and 'mestizos' is all pervasive in the five countries. Nicaragua has experienced conflict on the basis of racial distinction to some extent during the Sandinist period as the Misquito Indians opposed the forced collectivization of farms and joined the Contra movement. The main cleavage in Central American societies is based on juxtaposition of

class and race, as differences in land possession coincide to a great extent with racial differences. The question of racial identity in relation to violent conflict is highly relevant for the sub region.

From a spatial point of view our analysis focuses on the different agro-ecological zones in the region. With the exception of El Salvador all countries have three distinct zones. The pacific coastal areas, the central highlands and the Atlantic coastal plains all have distinct features in terms of population composition, dominant production methods, patterns of land distribution, historic developments of center-periphery relations and climatic characteristics. The importance of the spatial cleavage between the various zones in relation to violent conflict lies in the fact that certain structural relations between these zones have impacted upon the propensity towards conflict. The Atlantic coast for instance has long remained a peripheral region, in which most of the foreign-owned fruit plantations are located and where many minority population groups reside. The fight for control over this zone initially took place between the Spanish and the British and subsequently between the ruling 'criollo' elite and the black Caribbean and indigenous population groups. The plantation economy evolving in this zone, after 'criollo' domination was established, was based on economic extraction, from which the benefits accrued to foreign companies in close alliance with the political 'criollo' elite. This fundamental characteristic has led to strong resentment among population groups in this zone, invariably contesting central government involvement and demanding more local resource control and more equitable distribution.

3.3.3 The external dimension

Military aspects

In the political-military realm we distinguish three major tendencies in the recent history of the Central American region. Firstly, the impact of the Cold War has been enormous and the role played by the United States looms large over the political landscape of the sub region. Nevertheless, the Soviet Union has also actively supported a number of countries opposing US policies to the region. Secondly, the different countries in the region itself at various points in time have intervened actively in the affairs of their neighbors. Thirdly, international organizations such as the OAS, as well as coalitions of countries in the region (Contadora) and regional peace initiatives leading to the Esquipulas agreements have impacted upon the course of political disputes in the sub-region. In the socioeconomic realm we distinguish between bilateral economic aid from external powers to individual countries (notably the United States) and the role of private multinational companies. Furthermore, the impact of the short-lived Central American Common Market on interstate relations will be described.

The history of the sub region shows an almost continuous range of highly volatile political events until the late 1980s, when de-escalation set in. Events must be viewed in the overall context of superpower rivalry and interpreted as a prolonged history of political turmoil. However, specific moments in time deserve focused attention, such as the counter-revolution in Guatemala (1954), the Cuban Revolution (1959), the Cuban missile crises (1962), the invasion of the Dominican Republic (1965), the 'Soccer War' between Honduras and El Salvador (1969) and the overthrow of Somoza regime (1979). As a result of the overthrow of the Arbenz government in Guatemala in 1954 many reform-oriented politicians and their supporters were marginalized politically. Widespread indignation on the role played by the US was voiced. The Cuban Revolution inspired many armed revolutionary movements in surrounding countries, notably in Nicaragua and Guatemala, and resulted in an upsurge of

armed confrontations. The Cuban missile crises reinforced the predominance of the US and its exclusive hold on the region, as reconfirmed by the invasion in the Dominican Republic. The war between Honduras and El Salvador in 1969 halted the regional economic integration process and highlighted the importance of the ongoing interstate rivalry regarding unresolved border issues. Finally the overthrow of the Somoza regime heralded another wave of Cold War conflict and within the neighboring countries tensions mounted.

The post World War II period, commonly referred to as the Cold War reinforced the skewed power balance between the United States and the relatively small states on the Isthmus. The United States already played a major political role in the region prior to the Second World War as the relationship to notably Cuba, Nicaragua and Panama demonstrated. After the Spanish-American war the hegemony of the US was clearly established. The external military intervention in Nicaragua, as early as 1909, shaped the public image of an aggressive dominant super power versus small client states. Throughout the contemporary history the US remained the single most important external actor in the region. The US exerted almost exclusive control on political developments. Direct intervention took place in Panama (1989), indirect and covert action in Guatemala (1954), Nicaragua (as of 1979), El Salvador (military support of the regime against the armed guerilla movement as of the 1980s) and Honduras (serving as a base for the Contra movement in the 1980s). The US furthermore exerted considerable diplomatic pressure on international actors such as the OAS, successfully in 1954 (Guatemala) and a failure in the case of the FSLN (Nicaragua 1979). As a result the US were widely perceived as a dominant external agent who pursued its proper agenda, propping up domestic political actors who favored the political status quo and the existing political economy (agro-export model). The Soviet Union was able to intervene effectively only in the case of Cuba, as this country was virtually excluded from the region by the American political and economic blockade. The Soviet-American contradictions re-emerged when the Sandinists acceded to power in Nicaragua in 1979.

Military support to specific regimes has been a continuous feature of US policy in the region. Nicaragua stands out as an important cornerstone for US policy within the framework of the anticommunist counterinsurgency policy known as the National Security Doctrine. The Somoza regime and its military wing, the Guardia Nacional, received financial support and training by military experts throughout the post war period. Between 1941 and 1976 total official military assistance amounted to $ 20 million, an amount superior to that given to any other Central American country, except Guatemala. In Guatemala US military assistance was given in the period 1950-1975. In addition, the technical assistance by US military missions contributed to the regimes' repressive capacity. The election of President Carter in 1976 hallmarks the beginning of a significant policy change towards Central America, notably Nicaragua and Guatemala, when economic support is denied as a result of non-compliance with Carter's Human Rights policies. In the aftermath of the Sandinist victory in 1979 and the election of Reagan in 1980 military aid to the region increases dramatically. Military aid to El Salvador was relatively insignificant until the early 1980s when the FDR-FMLN stepped up its military actions, culminating in the year 1985 ($136 million). The Reagan administration backed up the reformist policies initiated by the Duarte government. This trend is confirmed by military assistance given to Honduras during the same period. From 1981 onward direct military assistance is consistently high. Even demilitarized Costa Rica received military assistance during these years. Therefore, with the notable exception of Guatemala, the other countries in Central America received a substantial amount of direct military assistance after the Nicaraguan Revolution. With regard to Guatemala the US did not support the military regime openly during the early 1980s. With the exception of the interlude of the Carter

administration the US have consistently given significant military support to the various countries in order to counter revolutionary movements. The Soviet Union has provided military assistance to both Cuba and later to Nicaragua. The interstate relationships during this period were largely shaped by the logic of superpower rivalry, although some countries promoted their proper geo-strategic agendas simultaneously.

However, tension exists also between the various individual countries due to the question of disputed border areas and migratory movements. There was also interference in intrastate conflicts in neighboring countries. In 1948 the Figueres democratic revolution received support from the Arbenz administration in Guatemala, but was challenged by dictator Somoza of neighboring Nicaragua. During the Sandinist Revolution in Nicaragua the Cubans and eventually the Costaricans sided with the insurgents, whereas the US backed the Somoza regime. In El Salvador the Sandinists and other left-wing guerilla movements supported the FMLN, whereas the US backed the military government. In Nicaragua the US, through the Contra movement and with support of the Honduran regime, fought the Sandinist government, supported by the Soviet Union and its allies.

The Soccer War in 1969 was partly due to the question of the demarcation of international borders between the Central American states. Most of these issues stem the from the post-colonial era of state formation. As a matter of fact all countries in the region have border disputes among one another. Between Honduras and El Salvador these disputed lands on the so-called Bolsanes played an important triggering role in the soccer war, apart from the migration issue. The skewed distribution of land and lack of alternative employment opportunities in El Salvador led to massive out-migration of poor, landless peasants to Honduras, where labor was needed for the banana companies. When land became scarce in Honduras, the migrant community quickly became a scapegoat. Vigilante groups violently ousted Salvadorans, leading to tensions with El Salvador. No adequate action was taken to diffuse the situation and war broke out.

The OAS has been a controversial organization as it has served as a diplomatic platform for the promotion of US strategic interests for a long period. During the political crises, in which it intervened, it took the OAS simply too much time to respond adequately. Although investigating sub-committees sometimes analyzed the situation correctly, they failed to apply appropriate sanctions to the party at fault. This was clearly the case during the soccer war. The Subcommittee on Human Rights concluded that Honduras used a disproportionate amount of violence against Salvadoran migrants, but failed to force Honduras to reverse its policies. The OAS always tried to act in an even-handed manner but failed to single out aggressors in the process, allowing invading states to withdraw without suffering a diplomatic backlash.

The Contadora initiative was an attempt of the regional powers to stem the tide of US diplomatic hegemony. The initiative tried to promote the legitimacy of the Sandinist regime. Although its efforts failed, the initiative reinforced the self-confidence of the states involved and altered the political landscape. The Arias initiative led to the Esquipulas peace agreement (1987) and paved the way to reach a peace agreement on the Sandinist-Contra war in Nicaragua. This was facilitated by a decrease in super-power rivalry.

Economic aspects

With regard to the external economic factor it is crucial to understand the dual nature of US policy in the region. Economic support went hand in hand with military support and followed the Cold War logic to a great extent. In general, economic aid far outstripped military aid. In

the early 1980s the financial capital flows from the US to individual countries reached their peak. El Salvador received nearly half a billion dollars in economic aid in 1985 alone. Whereas previously economic as well as military aid comprised modest financial contributions donated to friendly regimes, the tendency altered when the Reagan administration was in power in the US. Both El Salvador and Nicaragua relied heavily on external support from the US and the COMECON-community respectively, fuelling allegations that both regimes were mere puppet regimes for the superpowers. US economic support must be seen in conjunction with private corporate economic interests in the region. In Honduras, Nicaragua and Guatemala American fruit companies played an important role in the various conflicts. The crises in Guatemala cannot be understood without taking into account the role played by the international fruit companies. These companies pressured Arbenz to stop even modest reform since this went against their interest. When Arbenz expropriated some banana lands the companies charged an exorbitant compensation, frustrating the regime's capacity to implement agrarian reform. In Honduras the banana companies have continuously played an important role in domestic politics. They have resisted agrarian reform in collaboration with the oligarchy, fuelled xenophobic feelings towards the Salvadoran immigrant community prior to the 'soccer war', bribed military men and politicians in order to avoid taxation and even set up anti communist labor movements such as ORIT to counter the formation of more extremist labor movements.

The Central American Common Market became a temporary success, although industrialized countries such as El Salvador and Guatemala profited more than others which fuelled resentment, especially between Honduras and El Salvador. An economic analysis of the working of the CACM has demonstrated that the Honduran criticism on the regional market arrangement was largely misplaced. In fact the CACM provided a larger internal regional market for domestic industrial and agricultural products but comparative advantages and higher surplus value of some products gave substance to the criticisms voiced. Unfortunately the ultimate failure of the regional economic integration forced each individual country in the sub region again to compete individually on the international market. This reinforced the predominant agro-export model and the traditional oligarchic elite groups associated with them, and has probably forestalled economic change and innovation.

Conclusions
Whereas the 1960s and 1970s can be viewed as a period during which the Cold War was fought mainly on an ideological level, with limited military and economic support from the superpowers, the Sandinist Revolution started a period of all-out proxy war in the sub region. In general, political and military interference by outside powers coincides with the internal conflicts. Most of the external support, notably from the US, was a response to intrastate conflicts that had already emerged The structural causes of conflict, rooted in the highly skewed distribution of land and the exclusive character of the prevailing political culture, was complemented by this external factor.