

Militarization, Central America and the U.S. Role

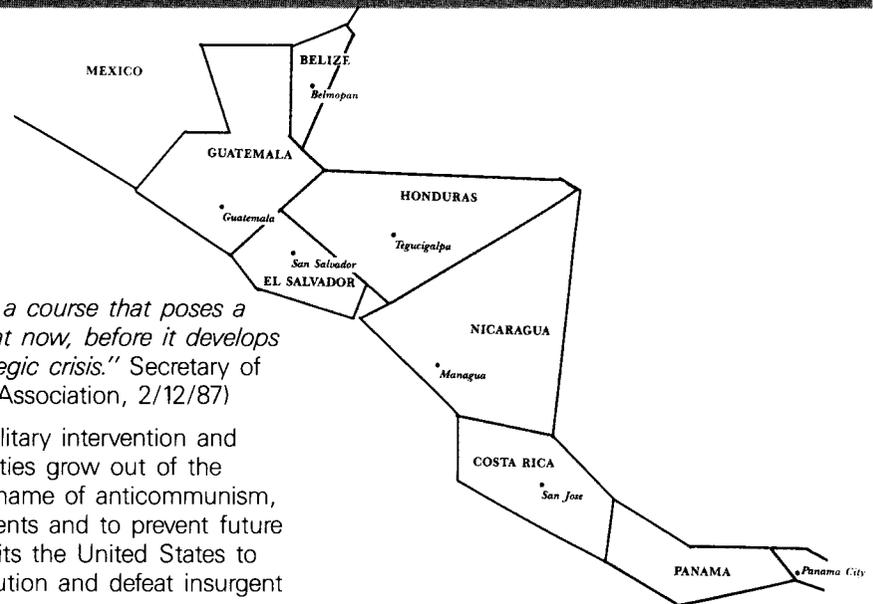
NARMIC
AMERICAN FRIENDS
SERVICE COMMITTEE



*Mourners at the funeral
of victims of a contra attack*

Witness for Peace

Militarization, Central America and the U.S. Role



"(T)he commandantes in Nicaragua are bent on a course that poses a threat to our security...Unless we meet this threat now, before it develops further, we may, within a few years, face a strategic crisis." Secretary of State George Schultz (before the American Bar Association, 2/12/87)

The 1980s have seen a sharp increase in U.S. military intervention and covert programs in Central America. These activities grow out of the Reagan Doctrine, a foreign policy which, in the name of anticommunism, is designed to "roll back" revolutionary governments and to prevent future revolutions. In Central America this policy commits the United States to actions designed to reverse the Nicaraguan revolution and defeat insurgent movements in other countries.

U.S. policy makers speak of Central America in three key ways: first, they emphasize that the region has strategic importance, as it is in the "backyard" of the United States; second, they claim that "vital" U.S. interests are threatened by the Soviet Union, Cuba and now Nicaragua; and third, they describe the goal of U.S. policy as installation of and support for elected, "democratic" governments.

Militarization, Central America and the U.S. Role shows the building up of local military and police forces, the strengthening of the U.S. military presence in the region, and the creation of a contra (counterrevolutionary) army. The rationale for these activities is based upon the false premise of a "communist threat." Militarization, in fact, frequently undercuts elected governments and democratic institutions, doing nothing to address the economic and political injustices suffered by the majority of Central Americans. Finally, U.S. militarization has undermined diplomatic efforts in the region which would have promoted the real national security interests of the United States in peace and stability.

The extensive U.S. involvement in Central America brings vital war and peace decisions before the U.S. public. At first portrayed as a quick and easy solution to a crisis, U.S. intervention is proving to be a long-term commitment with far-reaching implications both for the Central American nations and for the United States. The prolonged use of force raises the spectre of "another Vietnam"—decades of U.S. engagement ending in the destruction of the land and economy of the countries in the region and untold Central American and U.S. lives.

A vastly expanded U.S. military and CIA presence has increased the number of U.S. troops and U.S. bases of operation in Central America, and placed U.S. personnel in strategic roles directing the war against the Salvadoran guerillas and the contra war against Nicaragua. Through programs of military assistance, intelligence sharing, police aid and military exercises the United States has trained, armed and strengthened the capacity of local security forces in El Salvador, Honduras, and Costa Rica.

Simultaneously, Reagan administration officials, the CIA and private U.S. groups created channels of support for the contra forces fighting to overthrow the elected government of Nicaragua; the U.S. Congress has approved funds for the contras as well. Military maneuvers have turned the region into a permanent theater for U.S. military operations. Diplomatic, economic, social, psychological and political pressures, along with military force, add up to what the Pentagon calls a "low intensity" intervention, which so far has avoided involving large numbers of U.S. troops in direct combat.

Over a hundred thousand Central Americans have, however, died, while over two million more have been forced from their homes—displaced within their own countries or seeking refuge in other countries. Local economies, suffering already in 1980 from a drop in prices for their exports, high prices for vital imports, worldwide recession, and spiralling debt, have been further ground down by warfare. Civilian governments, newly elected following decades of military rule, are frequently hamstrung by powerful military forces that remain in control of political power. Guatemala's president, Vinicio Cerezo, for example, admits that most of the power in his country remains in the hands of the military. In his country, as in El Salvador, the elected government has been unable to bring to justice those responsible for the murder or disappearance of tens of thousands of citizens during the years of open military rule. In both countries the apparatus of repression remains intact; and though the number of abuses has been reduced, the threat of a renewed reign of terror is stifling.

U.S. policy in Central America has not only undercut the development of democratic societies, but has also frequently been carried out in ways that compromise democracy here in the United States. Unable to secure quick congressional approval for rapid expansion of U.S. military force in the area, the Reagan administration initiated in 1983 a Pentagon-funded program of near-continuous military exercises, costing hundreds of millions of dollars. Tens of thousands of U.S. troops have gone to Honduras, which has become the logistical base of U.S. operations in the region; they have built or upgraded a network of airfields, bases, and troop and intelligence gathering facilities. The General Accounting Office (GAO), a congressional watchdog agency, reported that the "exercise-related construction has been used to support a continuous U.S. military presence." A spokesman for Rep. William V. Alexander Jr. (D-Ark.), who requested the GAO investigation, concluded from the study that "... the Defense Department is continuing to fund its Honduran operations in a manner outside that which is prescribed by law. The way they've manipulated the figures to make it appear legitimate is amazing." (*Washington Post*, 2/21/86.)

In 1987 the nature of U.S. funding for the contras and the extent to which U.S. policy was being conducted through private, secret and illegal means was brought to light. In seeking ways to continue its support for the contras at a time when Congress had prohibited assistance, the administration has tried to sidestep legal prohibitions and constitutional processes.

U.S. policy in Central America should concern all U.S. citizens. Billions of U.S. tax dollars pay the costs of U.S. intervention while tens of thousands of young people in the military and military reserves are being sent to the region. Military exercises have laid the groundwork for invasion, should U.S. policy makers choose that option. The U.S. military presence creates the potential for combat by U.S. troops, whether or not that is the intention of any specific mission. Already in spring 1986 and again in the fall, U.S. troops on exercises in the region were commanded to ferry Honduran troops to the border with Nicaragua, bringing them close to the battle between contra and Nicaraguan troops. In spring 1987 U.S. troops on exercises in Honduras were used to transport Guatemalan troops to areas of conflict in that country. Several U.S. military personnel have been killed in El Salvador and Honduras. Such instances could become a pretext for escalating the conflict, which could engage hundreds of thousands of U.S. troops in combat.

The history of U.S. relations with Latin America has included many instances of the use of force, "gunboat diplomacy," to protect U.S. property or political interests throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Twentieth Century U.S. Military and Covert Intervention in Central America.

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| 1903 | U.S. troops sent to Honduras to protect the U.S. consulate and shipping facilities. |
| 1905 | U.S. Marines land at Puerto Cortes, Honduras |
| 1907 | U.S. troops sent to Honduras during a war between Honduras and Nicaragua |
| 1909 | U.S.-backed overthrow of Zelaya in Nicaragua |
| 1910 | U.S. troops land in Honduras |
| 1912 | U.S. troops briefly occupy Puerto Cortes, Honduras to prevent government seizure of a U.S.-owned railroad |
| 1912-1925 | U.S. Marines occupy Nicaragua during an attempted revolution and maintain stability afterwards |
| 1919 | U.S. troops sent to Honduras during an attempted revolution |
| 1920 | U.S. troops sent to Guatemala during fighting between unionists and government of Guatemala |
| 1924 | U.S. Marines land in Honduras to protect U.S. interests during election hostilities |
| 1925 | U.S. troops sent to Honduras to protect foreigners during political upheaval |
| 1926-1933 | U.S. Marines occupy Nicaragua and set up National Guard under Anastasio Somoza, whose family ruled until the 1979 revolution |
| 1932 | U.S. warships stand by during massacre of 30,000 Salvadoran peasants |
| 1954 | CIA-backed overthrow of elected Guatemalan government |

source: Departments of State and Defense

Waging War on Nicaragua

When all rhetoric is stripped away, U.S. policy has sponsored war against Nicaragua. Various rationales have been used to justify this policy: first, to stop the flow of arms to the Salvadoran guerillas; second, to prevent Nicaragua from becoming a Soviet base; and third, to force Nicaragua to negotiate with the contras, thus guaranteeing democracy in Nicaragua. Of these claims the first two do not hold up under scrutiny and the third is counterproductive to its stated purpose of supporting democracy.

The claim that a major flow of arms and supplies goes from Nicaragua to the rebels in El Salvador has been discredited time and again. In February 1981 the State Department published a white paper entitled *Communist Interference in El Salvador*, which claimed to present "definitive evidence of the clandestine military support given by the Soviet Union, Cuba, and their Communist allies to Marxist-Leninist guerillas now fighting to overthrow the established government of El Salvador." The paper describes Salvadoran Communist Party leader Shafik Handal's travels to Soviet-bloc countries in search of support for the rebel forces. A June 1981 article in the *Wall Street Journal* quoted the paper's principal author, Jon Glassman of the State Department, as admitting that parts of it were "misleading" and "overembellished," and that its preparation involved "mistakes" and "guessing." Most important, the documents on which the White Paper was based actually demonstrated that Handal was **unsuccessful** in obtaining weapons and other aid from the U.S.S.R. and its allies.

Former CIA analyst David MacMichael has provided an insider's account of what our government actually knows about the alleged arms traffic. In late 1980 and January 1981 there were concrete indications of arms shipments from Nicaraguan territory to El Salvador; since February 1981 there has been no evidence of an arms flow.

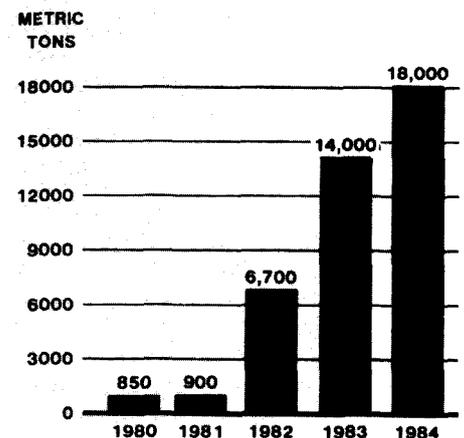
It is at this point that the arms-flow evidence simply disappears. That's interesting from an intelligence point of view, because we had evidence over a period of time of all the sort of things that you expect to happen if there is a flow: a truck is captured, an airplane crashes....Then it stopped.

The World Court, a body of the United Nations, in its June 27, 1986 ruling on Nicaragua's suit charging U.S. aggression, agreed with MacMichael's conclusion:

(B)etween July 1977...and the early months of 1981, an intermittent flow of arms was routed via the territory of Nicaragua to the armed opposition in El Salvador. The Court was not, however, satisfied that assistance has reached the Salvadoran armed opposition on a scale of any significance since the early months of 1981, or that the Government of Nicaragua was responsible for the flow of arms at either period.

The second claim, that Nicaragua is becoming a Soviet base, is also without foundation. During its first two years in power the new Nicaraguan government tried to obtain military equipment from the West, especially the United States. The U.S. government frustrated Nicaragua's efforts to get arms not only from the United States, but eventually from any other western source as well. Since 1983 the Soviet Union and its allies have been Nicaragua's major source for weapons, aircraft and other military supplies.

SOVIET-BLOC MILITARY DELIVERIES TO NICARAGUA



source: Departments of State and Defense

Nicaragua did not receive large amounts of Soviet-bloc military equipment until 1982, after the U.S.-sponsored contra war was well under way.

Once having established a Nicaragua-Soviet connection, U.S. policy makers point to an imagined threat—the future creation of Soviet military bases in Nicaragua and/or the use of the Punta Huete airfield near Managua by Soviet or Soviet-bloc aircraft. Nicaraguan leaders have insisted that their non-aligned foreign policy excludes all foreign bases. The Nicaraguan government realizes that Soviet bases would be magnets for U.S. attack, rather than a protection. As a signatory to the Treaty of Tlateloco, which establishes most of Latin America as a nuclear-free zone, Nicaragua is already committed to rejecting any nuclear weapons on its territory. Moreover, during the Contadora negotiations (a peace process initiated by Mexico, Venezuela, Colombia and Panama) Nicaragua had agreed to a proposal that would ban foreign bases in any country in the region.

Finally, U.S. policy is supposed to bring about democracy inside Nicaragua. President Reagan says the nation is a “totalitarian dungeon” and refers to Nicaragua’s 1984 elections as a “Soviet-style sham.” In contrast, he refers to the contras as “freedom fighters.”

Nicaragua is an impoverished country of three million people, left in a desperate condition when the U.S.-supported Somoza dictatorship was defeated in 1979. Since the revolution the government has created programs to redress decades of social injustice in areas such as health care, women’s rights, education and land reform. Outside observers found that Nicaragua’s national elections in 1984 were honestly run and a major step toward democracy, despite U.S. attempts to undermine the electoral process. The U.S.-based Latin American Studies Association reported:

The range of options available to the Nicaraguan voter on most issues was broad, but it would have been even broader if the U.S. government had not succeeded in persuading or pressuring key opposition leaders to boycott or withdraw from the elections. We found that the behavior of U.S. officials during the six months preceding the elections was clearly interventionist, apparently designed to delegitimize the Nicaraguan electoral process by making sure that the FSLN (Sandinista National Liberation Front) had no externally credible opposition to run against.

Social and economic programs in Nicaragua have been targets of the contra war and many have been curtailed. The destruction of agricultural resources, the diversion of productive capabilities to military buildup, and the U.S. embargo, as well as inexperience and mismanagement, have led to shortages and rationing. While national policy is openly debated inside Nicaragua, those who support the contras have been kept from participating in these political processes as the contra war has continued. Through its sponsorship of the contra war the United States has directly contributed to limiting, rather than expanding, freedom of expression inside Nicaragua.

Contra tactics hardly represent democratic ideals. The ultimate hypocrisy of U.S. policy is the assertion that greater democracy would ensue if the Nicaraguan government would negotiate a power-sharing relationship with them. The independent human rights group America’s Watch has found that contras “routinely attacked civilian populations. Their forces kidnap, torture, and murder health workers, teachers and other government employees.” In fact, the activities of the contras precisely fit the definition of international terrorism used by the U.S. State Department:

When evaluating the actions of the Nicaraguan government, it is useful to remember the experience of and standards observed by our own nation during the Civil War.

On September 15, 1863, President Abraham Lincoln issued a proclamation suspending the writ of habeas corpus throughout the nation: the military was empowered to censor, arrest, and imprison soldiers and civilians without charging them or bringing them to trial for the duration of the war.

The law was directed against spies, deserters, and prisoners of war, but also the vague category of those “aiding and abetting the enemy.” Figures for political arrests (those not alleged to be involved in espionage or sabotage) ranged somewhere between 13,500 and 38,000. As many as 300 newspapers were suppressed. Missouri Congressman William A. Hall was held for denouncing the president. The editor of the Newark Evening Journal stood before a military commission because he criticized the draft in print. The military strictly controlled freedom of speech, restricted trade, and arbitrarily banished citizens in border areas.

source: *The War for the Union*, Alan Nevins, as cited by Joshua Markel, *Phila. Daily News*, 9/29/86.

Terrorism is premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against noncombatant targets by subnational groups or clandestine state agents. International terrorism is terrorism involving citizens or territory of more than one country.

U.S. Backing for the Contra War

The contra forces were created by the CIA and Argentine military personnel out of the remnants of former dictator Somoza's National Guard. From the time the covert war was approved by President Reagan in 1981 until funds were cut off by the Congress in 1984, the United States provided \$80 million to arm and train some 12,000 contras, who operated from bases in Honduras and Costa Rica, making repeated attacks into Nicaragua. Contrary to the assertion by U.S. officials that Nicaragua was a threat to its neighbors, the opposite was the case: Nicaragua's neighbors were often complicit with activities to overthrow the Nicaraguan government.

During the earliest years of the contra war the CIA was directly responsible for developing leadership, training platoon and squad leaders, and specialists in explosives, communication and underwater demolition. The CIA also taught the contras to operate a small fleet of aircraft provided by the CIA and to make attacks on Nicaragua's ports with small armed speed-boats, called piranhas. In November 1984, a one-year old CIA training manual, *Psych-Operations in Guerilla War*, was exposed by the U.S. press after several thousand copies had been distributed to the contras. The manual instructs the contras in political assassination, the creation of martyrs and hiring of criminals, among other things. The manual was the brain-child of a Vietnam-era CIA agent working in Honduras and was apparently based on U.S. Army and CIA field manuals from the Vietnam war era. It appeared to violate a 1981 executive order banning political assassination.

The CIA hired Latin American mercenaries in October 1983 to attack oil storage facilities at the Nicaraguan port of Corinto. In spring, 1984, mines were placed in three key Nicaraguan ports—Sandino, Corinto, and El Bluff—under the direction of the CIA, which then told the contras to claim credit for the actions. A dozen ships were damaged, including ships of the Soviet Union, Japan and the Netherlands. When Nicaragua brought its case against the mining before the World Court, the United States rejected the court's jurisdiction.

Outraged by the mining of Nicaragua's harbors and the publication of the CIA training manual, Congress cut off assistance to the contras in fall 1985. While military aid was supposedly cut off by Congress the executive branch developed a network of private U.S. groups which supplied the contras with funds for weapons and military equipment. The efforts of these groups, as well as contributions made by several third countries, were orchestrated by CIA Director William Casey, National Security Council member Lt. Col. Oliver North and State Department official Elliott Abrams. Military and embassy personnel in Central America assisted in the supply operations, ensuring access to warehouses and airfields in El Salvador, Honduras and Costa Rica. The administration kept up its pressure on Congress and by summer 1985 Congress had approved \$27 million for the contras, this time for "nonlethal" aid which was packaged as "humanitarian assistance"; a prohibition against providing intelligence information, military training or weapons was to have continued.

In October 1986 the Congress reversed itself and approved \$100 million in aid to the contras, \$70 million of it in military assistance. With approval of these funds the contras also gained access to another \$400 million through the CIA. U.S. military and CIA instructors began an extensive training program. By spring 1987 1200-1400 contras had been trained in Honduras and the United States as field commanders, instructors and medics and 200 others as demolition experts and saboteurs. The most comprehensive training was conducted by the U.S. Army Special Forces at Eglin Air Force Base, Florida. The CIA seized direction of the war, providing the contras with precise intelligence on dams, bridges, electrical substations, port facilities and other targets inside Nicaragua. CIA advisers began working full time in contra camps, overseeing training of new recruits, communications and logistics.

The administration planned to return to Congress for an additional \$100 million or more for 1988, despite quarrels within the leadership of the contra forces, their lack of military success, their continuing record of human rights abuses, and the media exposure of administration support for the contras at a time when Congress had prohibited such assistance.

The Military Buildup in Honduras and the Caribbean

The covert war has not been the only instrument of military force used against Nicaragua. Equally important is the threat of invasion presented by the U.S. military buildup in the region. Beginning in 1983 the nature of the U.S. military presence in Central America and the Caribbean changed radically. Honduras became the logistical center of U.S. military operations in Central America and a 1000-person Joint Task Force (Army, Navy, Air Force) was installed to oversee U.S. operations. A continuous program of military exercises included a regular patrol by four to twenty ships of the U.S. Navy. U.S. base facilities were upgraded in Key West (Florida), Puerto Rico, Panama, and Guantanamo Bay (Cuba). The threat was underlined by the 1983 invasion of Grenada. The U.S. Southern Command (SOUTHCOM) in Panama was upgraded to a post of four-star rank.

According to records kept by the Honduras Documentation Center, between 1981 and the end of 1986 60,000 U.S. soldiers, including reserves and members of the National Guard, had been cycled through Honduras in an unbroken sequence of 52 military exercises. Additional U.S. troops have participated in exercises in Panama, Costa Rica and Belize. In 1987 General John Galvin of SOUTHCOM announced that by 1988 the exercise program would be expanded to twice as many nations as in recent years.

The military exercises in Central America and the Caribbean Sea focused on practicing rapid deployment and regionwide war scenarios, while the exercises in Honduras, and to a lesser degree other countries in Central America, focused on coordination among the U.S. services and local military forces, as well as construction, counterinsurgency training and civic action. At times military exercises in the Caribbean Sea overlapped with exercises in Honduras, as in spring 1987, when a total of 50,000 U.S. troops were in the region. The exercises gave troops experience in military maneuvers, including naval interdiction, aerial targeting, parachute drops, artillery and anti-armor exercises, airlifts and marine amphibious landings. Large numbers of U.S. troops got acquainted with local conditions and military personnel. In Honduras they built or improved eight airstrips, con-

structed roads, dug wells and tank traps, erected radar stations, piers, barracks and other troop facilities. Weapons and equipment used during exercises were often left behind to find their way to Honduran military arsenals and the contras.

Active-duty troops, reservists and National Guard came from bases all over the United States, from units stationed at SOUTHCOM, and from Puerto Rico, to take part in the military exercises. The "training" of the state National Guard in Honduras became a subject of debate in the United States. National Guard spokesperson Major John Smith defended their deployment: "It's a part of the total readiness picture. We're doing...a disservice to our soldiers if we leave them unprepared to fight." (*USA Today*, 2/11/86) Governors from a handful of states refused to allow their guard units to participate in training in Honduras, while a few others said they would refuse permission if their units were called up, or would review each call-up on a case-by-case basis. Congress responded by passing the Montgomery Amendment, over the unanimous objection of the National Governors' Association, revising the provision that National Guard units could not be ordered to the maximum 15 days of annual active duty without the consent of the state governor in peacetime. Some governors felt their citizen soldiers were being placed in situations that could easily become dangerous, risking their lives, while others felt training the National Guard in Honduras was a subterfuge to evade public debate over large-scale troop deployment to the region. In 1986 9000 National Guard members from 43 states and territories trained in Central America,—of these, 5300 National Guard from 18 states in Honduras. In winter 1987 Governor Rudy Perpich of Minnesota filed suit contesting the new legislation; officials of ten other states joined the suit.

The exercise program not only was controversial in the United States, but also was often resented by Central Americans. Many Hondurans felt the civic action program—the delivery of food, clothing, and medicine—was for show and not addressed to their country's deep-rooted poverty. Honduran peasants sometimes found themselves abruptly evicted from their land when the United States decided to build a road, airfield, or other military facility. Discos, bars, brothels and begging flourished in the towns near U.S. troop installations.

U.S. Military Assistance Programs

Following the Vietnam War U.S. military strategists adopted the Nixon Doctrine, a policy of building up local militaries in countries allied with U.S. interests, to avoid bogging down U.S. troops in another prolonged war. In Central America U.S. military assistance programs began climbing rapidly after the 1979 revolution in Nicaragua. The United States has supplied and trained local forces in Honduras, El Salvador and Costa Rica. Since coming to office the Reagan administration has tried to restore military assistance to Guatemala, cut off in fiscal year (FY) 1977 when Guatemala refused to comply with U.S. human rights legislation and rejected U.S. assistance. The United States had been Guatemala's primary supplier until then. Between FY 1977 and FY 1985 Guatemala was able to purchase some military equipment, weapons and training through cash and commercial deals. In FY 1986, following presidential elections in Guatemala, Congress restored "nonlethal" military assistance.

Training programs have been an integral part of the U.S. military assistance program, taking place in each country, as well as at U.S. military schools in the region and the United States. In some cases training has been provided to local police forces.

"(T)he Pentagon insists that the Honduras deployments are for training, not operations. But the Pentagon always calls it training when the Guard goes overseas. This is a bureaucratic word game: Guard units in 'training' have taken part in the air strike against Libya and the liberation (sic) of Grenada. Whether you approve of these missions or not, you can't help noticing an operational flavor about them."

Governor Bruce Babbitt, (*NYT*, 9/16/86)

"The federal law seizes a fundamental constitutional right of the states to control the training exercises of their National Guard units. I believe the courts should restore such state authority except in times of war."

Vermont Governor Madeline Kunin, (*The Christian Science Monitor*, 2/20/87)

U.S. weapons, military equipment and training programs ensure the compatibility of local militaries with the U.S. armed forces and with other U.S.-supplied forces in the region. Training programs are especially important in strengthening ties between the U.S. military and recipients of aid programs. Local militaries are often dependent on the United States, giving U.S. policymakers undue influence over the domestic and foreign policies of the countries. Contradicting the stated aim of U.S. policy to build democratic governments, military assistance often bypasses civilian authorities, strengthening those forces that have been among the greatest violators of human rights and democratic practices.

Honduras

"It would be extremely difficult to defend U.S. interests in Central America without the cooperation of Honduras." (Congressional Presentation for Security Assistance Programs, FY 1986)

The United States has greatly bolstered the Honduran armed forces. In addition to supplying howitzers, M-16 rifles and other weaponry, communications gear, trucks, other ground vehicles, and personnel equipment ranging from boots to parachutes, the United States strengthened the Honduran air fleet with Huey helicopters and A-37 attack and O-2 reconnaissance planes. The Honduran air force had been the best equipped in the region even before 1980. In March 1987 the administration announced its intention to send to Honduras 12 F-5E advanced jet fighters, the most sophisticated yet in Central America.

Training for the Honduran army was second only to that provided to El Salvador. U.S. military personnel as well as the CIA have been deeply involved. Along with a Special Forces unit from Fort Bragg, in strict secrecy the CIA trained a Honduran "anti-terrorist" unit in an operation code-named "Operation Quail Shooter." A *New York Times* article by James LeMoyne implicated the CIA in human rights abuses in Honduras: "The Central Intelligence Agency aided Honduran security forces that it knew were responsible for having killed a number of people they detained for political reasons between 1981 and 1984." A similar accusation was made in testimony before the Senate Intelligence Committee and individual members of Congress by Honduran Major Ricardo Zuniga Morazan, who was killed not long after his visit to the United States. Zuniga alleged that Honduran intelligence agents and members of the U.S.-backed Nicaragua Democratic Front (the largest contra group) had kidnapped, tortured and often killed suspected opponents with the knowledge of U.S. intelligence officers.

Many human rights abuses took place while General Gustavo Alvarez Martinez, known for his anti-communist zeal and support for U.S. policy, was commander-in-chief of the Honduran armed forces. In March 1984 a coup within the military sent him into exile. When the Reagan administration announced its intention to proceed with the sale of F-5Es to Honduras it was revealed that Alvarez had been on the Department of Defense's payroll as a consultant, receiving \$50,000 over two years. Human rights abuses and intimidation have not stopped in Honduras: human rights activists, clerics, professionals, student, union, peace and peasant leadership have received threats—offices, cars and homes of activists have been bombed and machine gunned. There has never been a full accounting of past abuses and killings and kidnappings still occur.

U.S. Military Assistance

(money for weapons, military equipment and military training)

El Salvador	1980	\$ 6.0 million
	1986	\$122.0 million

Honduras	1980	\$ 4.0 million
	1986	\$ 81.2 million

(includes \$20 million authorized by the President as emergency aid)

Guatemala	1980	\$ 0.0
	1986	\$ 5.3 million

Costa Rica	1980	\$ 0.0
	1986	\$ 2.6 million

(Costa Rica abolished its army in 1949 and replaced it with Civil and Rural Guards. The United States provides military assistance to Costa Rica under the rationale that its guards perform military functions.)

source: U.S. State Department

Local Forces in Countries Receiving U.S. Military Assistance

While military assistance programs were expanding, local forces (army, navy, air force and paramilitary under military command) grew in size.

El Salvador	1979-80	9,930
	1985-86	59,650

Honduras	1979-80	14,300
	1985-86	21,600

Guatemala	1979-80	20,960
	1985-86	58,300

Costa Rica	1979-80	5,000
	1985-86	11,500

source: International Institute for Strategic Studies and *NYT*, 4/19/87

Extra Aid to Honduras—Paying for the Contras

The use of Honduran territory for launching attacks against Nicaragua compromises the Honduran government, which maintains diplomatic relations with Nicaragua. The presence of the contra forces has split Honduras politically. Until the November 1985 election of Honduran President Jose Azcona their presence within the country was officially denied.

In winter 1987 Honduras announced that an agreement had been reached with the United States that the contras were to return to Nicaragua. This announcement came as growing numbers of Honduran peasants, and coffee growers, many of them refugees within their own country, were publicly denouncing pillage, rape and displacement by contra forces along the border with Nicaragua. Though it is reported that the majority of contra forces have infiltrated Nicaragua, their intelligence, medical and logistical centers remain in Honduras.

As controversy about the presence of the contras has grown within Honduras the United States has responded by increasing U.S. assistance at critical moments. For example, when Nicaraguan troops attacked contra bases inside Honduras in 1986, the president authorized an emergency shipment of \$20 million in military aid to Honduras. In spring 1987 when the administration was under attack in Washington, Honduras feared it might be abandoned with 10-20,000 armed contras on its border; the administration promised nearly \$100 million in new aircraft.

“There is always the implicit threat here that the army will overthrow you one day. They don’t overthrow us because it’s not in their interest right now and because the United States has told them not to. But what the United States is basically doing here is paying our army not to have a coup. Who knows what will happen when you are no longer here to stop them?”

*Honduran government official (NYT, 4/19/87)

*Central Americans will frequently not permit identification because of danger to their lives.

Costa Rica and Guatemala—Pressure to Abandon Neutrality

Both Costa Rica and Guatemala have declared their neutrality toward the conflicts in the region, pledging to avoid direct military involvement or support for military solutions. Each has pressed at different times for a peaceful regional settlement. Yet both countries have been pressured by the United States to involve themselves in regional militarization and support for the contra war.

Costa Rica: Training for Costa Rica’s civil and rural guard began in earnest in 1982. Hundreds of guardsmen went to U.S. military schools in the region. In spring 1985, following a border incident with Nicaragua, U.S. Special Forces were dispatched to Costa Rica to provide additional training. That same spring saw an infusion of U.S. aircraft, weapons and military related equipment: helicopters, light observation planes, M-16 rifles, rocket launchers, machine guns, anti-tank weapons, mortars, and ammunition. By the mid-1980s Costa Rica’s 8000-member guard, which had consisted of political appointees who changed after the elections every four years, was turning into a professional military force. Military exercises, civic action, and port calls by U.S. war ships were all established facts.

As in Honduras, the CIA was entrenched in Costa Rica through programs of support for the contras. Though primarily based in Honduras, the contras had a southern front in Costa Rica. To help establish a receptive environment in Costa Rica for the contras, the CIA made contacts with government officials and local guardsmen to arrange drop-off points for

supplies and bases from which the contras could launch attacks and to which they could retreat. CIA influence was said to extend as high as the offices of the Costa Rican Ministry of Security and the Department of Intelligence and Security. In 1987 the U.S. ambassador to Costa Rica, Lewis A. Tambs, unexpectedly resigned when it was reported that he and the CIA station chief in Costa Rica had secretly aided the contras at the time when Congress had banned such activities. Tambs testified that he had been following orders from Washington.

For the most part the Costa Rican government had looked the other way when contras set up camps and carried out operations against Nicaragua from their territory. However, with the election of President Oscar Arias in 1986, neutrality became a focal point of Costa Rican foreign policy. Ever since his presidential campaign a host of U.S. officials from the State Department, CIA, National Security Council and Pentagon, have tried to persuade Arias to permit contra activities in Costa Rica and abandon neutrality. In 1987 the Tower Commission investigating the connection between the contras and arms sales to Iran revealed that a clandestine airfield that Arias had ordered shut down had continued to be used after the United States promised that it would not. Arias sent a letter of protest to Washington, reaffirming Costa Rica's policy of unarmed neutrality "formed in the past, restressed recently and...wouldn't allow exceptions." (*Tico Times*, 3/20/87) Arias also warned contra leaders who have been granted political exile in Costa Rica that they would be expelled if they engaged in any political activities in Costa Rica related to the armed conflict inside Nicaragua.

Guatemala: When Vinicio Cerezo was elected president of Guatemala in January 1986 he inherited a policy of active neutrality. Cerezo invigorated this policy, promoting himself as a diplomatic facilitator within the region. As a result of his efforts the Nicaraguans have, on occasion, been brought into discussions on negotiated solutions from which they might otherwise have been excluded.

As in the case with Costa Rica, there is evidence of U.S. pressure on Guatemala to alter its position of neutrality. When Washington's special envoy Philip Habib visited Guatemala in November 1986 local diplomats observed: "There is a clear pattern of escalation of pressures. This time it was obviously more serious than last, and who knows how much more the government can take." (*Neutrality in the Foreign Policy of Costa Rica and Guatemala: The Possibilities and Limits*, 12/86, AFSC Latin America and Caribbean Programs) The neutrality policy is not unanimously accepted within Guatemala. Some military officers have collaborated with private landowners in efforts to support the contras, allegedly providing locations for training and serving as a conduit for supplies. The Tower Commission investigation revealed that the Guatemalan military had provided assistance to the contras as far back as 1980, but that the involvement became

Police Aid to Central America

In 1974 the U.S. Congress passed legislation ending U.S. aid to foreign police. The administration has negated the spirit of this prohibition and initiated legislation which would reverse it in Central America. According to a bi-partisan research group of Congress, "The last U.S. attempt to aid and reform foreign police (from its inception in 1962 until Congress ended it in 1974) often resulted in U.S. aid being used to strengthen rather than reform police who abused human rights; and, though intended to strengthen democracy and the rule of law, in fact contributed to political instability and lingering anti-Americanism."

El Salvador—

Anti-Terrorism Aid (ATA)— enacted by Congress in 1983 to combat international terrorism through specialized training such as bomb disposal and hostage rescue. The Salvadoran package provides generalized police training to combat domestic terrorism (sic). In 1986 ATA programs trained 76 Salvadoran police of the rank of sergeant and above, including 18 of the most senior officers.

Administration of Justice (regional)— funds approved by Congress in this category were to be restricted to police under civilian control. Salvadoran police who are military officers and under the military chain of command, including the Chief of Police Col. Lopez Nuila, have participated.

Aid to "Military" Police

Since 1982 the Department of Defense has trained and equipped 2,800 Salvadoran police under the rationale that they perform military duties, not police functions.

"660 (d)" Police Aid

In 1985 a two year amendment was made to the prohibition on police aid, permitting aid to Salvadoran police. In FY 1986 \$3 million provided 100 vehicles, 300 radios and U.S.-supervised training to 1,400 police.

Guatemala

Administration of Justice (regional); ATA

Honduras—

Administration of Justice (regional); ATA

source: *Police Aid to Central America: Yesterday's Lessons, Today's Choices*, Arms Control and Foreign Policy Caucus, 8/13/86

greater in 1983 under the rule of Brig. General Oscar Humberto Mejia Victores. In March 1985, according to the commission report, there was a memo from Lt. Col. Oliver North recommending an increase in aid to Guatemala because of their help for the contras, including falsifying certificates in the fall of 1985 to show arms deliveries to Guatemala, not to the contras. The Reagan administration shortly afterwards recommended an increase in U.S. military and economic assistance to Guatemala.

President Cerezo himself admits that Guatemala probably gets less U.S. assistance now than other countries in the region because of his adherence to "active neutrality." The cat-and-mouse game between the United States and Guatemala continues: Cerezo permitted a school for contra political training to open in Guatemala in March 1987 and opened up closer military-to-military relations with his request that U.S. troops ferry Guatemalan troops to a conflict area in May. He returned from a visit to the United States in June still officially committed to his neutrality policy; but according to an article in *The New York Times*, "Some members of Congress said they believed that President Reagan had told Mr. Cerezo that Guatemala would get \$3 million more in military aid this year in part because of small signals that the Guatemalan President might be more cooperative with Washington's contra policy."

The War in El Salvador

In 1977, El Salvador, like Guatemala, rejected U.S. military aid rather than be subject to human rights evaluations. Jolted by the Nicaraguan revolution in 1979, however, the Carter administration restored military assistance in 1980 to El Salvador, despite the fact that human rights abuses were far worse than when the aid had been halted. From that time on, the U.S. commitment to the Salvadoran military has been unwavering.

Between 1980 and 1982 popular organizations, coalitions of peasant, labor and professional groups struggling for land and economic reform, and their fair share of political power, were decimated by the military and military-related groups. ORDEN, a right wing paramilitary organization, and ANESAL, the Salvadoran military intelligence agency, both of which the CIA and other U.S. agencies had helped to set up in the 1960s, were instrumental in the campaign of terror. In 1980 alone approximately 10,000 civilians were murdered.

Largely as a result of the official campaign of terror, many gave up hope of a peaceful solution in El Salvador and turned to the guerilla groups, which had united to form the FMLN (Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front). Others went into exile, where they carried on the activities of the FDR (Revolutionary Democratic Front), the political coalition linked with the FMLN. Independent newspapers and radio stations were forced to close leaving a government monopoly on the media. Beginning in 1981 the focus of the war in El Salvador shifted to the countryside.

In the past seven years the United States has spent over \$600 million modernizing the Salvadoran military, turning it into one of the best equipped and trained counterinsurgency forces in the region, with U.S. weapons, aircraft, ammunition, personnel supplies, vehicular transportation and communications gear. U.S. training has reformed fighting techniques from those of a conventional military to those needed in a classic guerilla war. U.S.-supplied intelligence from overflights originating in Honduras and Panama help the army detect guerilla activity.

"There is a kind of fight between Cerezo and the army. Cerezo is reluctant to develop a military collaboration with the United States because it could jeopardize his active neutrality policy, but he is facing a lot of social problems and has to give the army something so it will stay happy and quiet. It is still inconceivable to do anything in this country without the army."

*European diplomat in Guatemala (NYT, 5/13/87)

Journalists in Central America are often refused the right to identify diplomats especially if their opinion is contrary to the official one.

U.S. military advisers and CIA personnel on the ground have been intimately involved with the daily conduct of the war. A purely military solution has been altered to a U.S.-designed military/political counterinsurgency strategy: bombings and groundsweeps in rural areas to "clear" away guerillas; civic action programs and psychological operations to create sympathy for the government and distrust of the guerillas; civil defense to incorporate the civilian population in the military effort and signal their allegiance to government and military forces. Police aid is supposed to control guerilla activity in urban areas.

The killing of over 62,000 Salvadorans and uprooting of nearly a fifth of the population, has brought El Salvador no closer to a solution to the war. The government of Jose Napoleon Duarte, dependent on U.S. backing, has grown weaker, not stronger, since the 1984 Presidential elections. The Duarte government grows increasingly isolated from its base of support as it fails to implement economic reform, bring justice to those who have suffered abuse, or lay the groundwork for peace. The majority in El Salvador grow poorer: unemployment and underemployment runs at 50%; the Gross Domestic Product for 1985 was 20% below that of 1978; real per capita income has sunk to levels of 20 years ago. The private sector sends money abroad, resists paying taxes to help for the war and shuns new investments in the country. A Gallup Poll in March 1987 showed no preference among 65% of the voting age population for Duarte's Christian Democratic party or any other existing political option.

In spite of the improved capabilities of the Salvadoran military, the FMLN remains a potent military force, able to survive intense bombings, search and destroy sweeps, and dislocation of its popular base. As labor and peasant coalitions, church-related groups, small business and professional groups have renewed demands on the government for their economic rights, the FMLN has been able to parallel with a show of force, attacking military and economic targets. They have proved themselves an organization which must be a part of any future settlement in El Salvador.

The Salvadoran military, in turn, has grown wary of its elected partner in government, blaming the Duarte administration for the political and social chaos. Increasingly, the Salvadoran armed forces are assuming civilian functions. In June 1986 the Salvadoran armed forces announced United to Reconstruct, the military's development project for the countryside, subsequently adopted as the government's program, funded largely by the United States. The military assumed the role of arbiter between the government and the private sector when the government attempted to institute a tax that would have drawn on private sector resources. When the church mediated conditions for continuation of dialogue for peace between the Salvadoran government and the FDR-FMLN, the Salvadoran military nullified the arrangements by occupying the town in which the dialogue was to take place.

In no other country in Central America has the United States invested so heavily as in El Salvador. In his February address before the American Bar Association Secretary of State Schultz declared: "El Salvador shows what can be accomplished if we lend our support to those who struggle for freedom." Yet it is U.S. aid that has been instrumental to the continuation of the war and to the preservation of the economic, social and political injustices that are at the root of the conflict.

"I would say that the biggest long term threat to civilian government in El Salvador is the army, not the guerillas."

Senior Western diplomat in El Salvador (NYT, 4/19/87)

Militarization, Central America and the U.S. Role was prepared by NARMIC, the research and resource unit of the Peace Education Division of the American Friends Service Committee. NARMIC has been producing resources on the arms race, intervention and U.S. military policy for the past seventeen years. NARMIC's research draws on its data base of defense industry publications, government reports, corporate files, newsclips, interviews, and reports and journals published abroad. Since 1981 NARMIC has published numerous pamphlets, articles, and op-eds on U.S. military policy and presence in Central America, as well as produced an Academy Award winning documentary. NARMIC staff: Gene Baxter, Thomas Conrad, Eva Gold (project coordinator), and David Goodman.

The American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) is a Quaker organization supported by individuals who care about peace, social justice and humanitarian service. Its work is based on a profound Quaker belief in the dignity and worth of every person, and faith in the power of non-violence to bring about change. AFSC has had staff in Central America since the early 1960s. It has participated in many fact-finding missions and spoken with government and military officials as well as leaders of the popular organizations. AFSC supports local self-help and development projects, and provides humanitarian assistance to victims of the conflict. In the United States AFSC helps Central American refugees become self-sufficient and protects them from deportation, and provides educational resources about the U.S. role in the region.

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